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00:00:00,320 --> 00:00:04,110

We're recording the interview of Harold Wright.
This interview is being conducted by Adrian

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00:00:04,110 --> 00:00:08,759

Hill from the Wright State University Veteran
Voices Project. Also in attendance are Jeremy

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00:00:08,759 --> 00:00:14,429

Dobbins and Jonathan Wright. The interview is
being recorded at the Wright's residence in

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00:00:14,429 --> 00:00:21,630

Yellow Springs, Ohio. It is noon, on December
9, 2014. Alright Harold, when and where were

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00:00:21,630 --> 00:00:29,021

you born? I was born in Dayton, Ohio, June
6, 1931. Okay, who were your parents and what

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00:00:29,021 --> 00:00:35,600

were their occupations? Oh, my parents were
Paul and Mary Wright. They both came from

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00:00:35,600 --> 00:00:41,420

Ohio Appalachia. My dad was a third generation
coal miner and after the mines closed he moved

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00:00:41,420 --> 00:00:47,489

to Dayton and became a carpenter. My mother
was raised on a tobacco farm down in southern

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00:00:47,489 --> 00:00:55,370

Ohio and they met on a hunting trip. My dad
loved to hunt rabbits and heard there were rabbits

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00:00:55,370 --> 00:00:59,650

on her farm, so he went there and knocked
on her door, and the prettiest girl he ever

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00:00:59,650 --> 00:01:05,530

saw in his life came and answered so, he hunted
there a lot. They got married and I was born

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00:01:05,530 --> 00:01:10,890
in Dayton. Ok. Um, did either of, neither
of them served in the military, correct? Did

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00:01:10,890 --> 00:01:16,300
either of them serve in the military? Oh,
no. My dad never served in the military, my

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00:01:16,300 --> 00:01:21,229
mother didn't serve, no. I had uncles who
served in the military but that was it. Ok.

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00:01:21,229 --> 00:01:25,869
Do you have any siblings? I have a brother,
a younger brother. Okay, did he serve in the

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00:01:25,869 --> 00:01:30,850
military? Uh, yes, he's seven years younger
than I and he was in the Air Force Reserve.

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00:01:30,850 --> 00:01:39,490
Ok. For a number of years. Ok. Um, so what
were you doing before you entered the military?

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00:01:39,490 --> 00:01:47,700
Mmm, I a, decided to go to college after high
school but I was going to major in engineering

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00:01:47,700 --> 00:01:51,700
and I realized I would not be a very good
engineer, mathematics and things were really

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00:01:51,700 --> 00:01:57,509
hard for me. So after one year I dropped out
but I was just about ready to be drafted so

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00:01:57,509 --> 00:02:05,259
I worked in construction work for about a
year or so, kind of waiting for the draft

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00:02:05,259 --> 00:02:11,640
and when my number just about came up I decided

I was going to join something. So I went down

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00:02:11,640 --> 00:02:16,710

to join the Air Force, and Dayton being an Air Force town, everybody was going to the

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00:02:16,710 --> 00:02:22,940

Air Force, so they were closed. I thought about the Marine Corps, one of my buddies

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00:02:22,940 --> 00:02:27,110

went to the Marine Corps, but I thought uh, I don't want to go to the Marine Corps, I think I'll do

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00:02:27,110 --> 00:02:35,410

something a little easier than that so I joined the Navy then. Okay. And is there a reason

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00:02:35,410 --> 00:02:39,630

you picked it besides you didn't want to do the Marines, was there a reason you picked

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00:02:39,630 --> 00:02:47,350

the Navy? Oh, I really have an adventuresome spirit, I wanted to see, I, I, often say I joined the

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00:02:47,350 --> 00:02:52,650

Navy to see the world, that exactly was one of my motivation for it, I figured I could

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00:02:52,650 --> 00:02:57,870

travel a lot and get out of Dayton, Ohio, I did want to get out of Dayton, Ohio. Yeah,

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00:02:57,870 --> 00:03:03,800

and you did get to do that? Yeah, I did get to do that. Okay. Now you said you enlisted

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00:03:03,800 --> 00:03:08,840

but you were getting ready to be drafted, so they contacted you some way and told you

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00:03:08,840 --> 00:03:13,450

were going to get drafted? Oh we could tell
by the numbers, the numbers there you could

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00:03:13,450 --> 00:03:19,350
read them in the newspaper and find out it
was getting real close and so my high school

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00:03:19,350 --> 00:03:23,310
buddies and I were always checking the newspaper
to see how close we were getting, it would

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00:03:23,310 --> 00:03:31,780
depend on our age, and so a couple of us were
getting real close and so yeah we talked it

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00:03:31,780 --> 00:03:36,470
over and said let's go join the Navy, and
so I joined the Navy with a good buddy of

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00:03:36,470 --> 00:03:42,570
mine. Yeah, Phil Bolinger. Okay. We're still
in touch. We go to class reunions together

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00:03:42,570 --> 00:03:52,730
and still talk about the Navy. Okay. So can
you kind of describe to me what it was like

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00:03:52,730 --> 00:03:57,650
when you departed for basic training? When
I went to basic training, yeah. The process

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00:03:57,650 --> 00:04:03,870
of maybe getting there and adjusting to that.
Yeah. One of the main things of concern was

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00:04:03,870 --> 00:04:14,650
getting your hair cut. Haircuts, some of
us had, had, yeah, had hair. A lot of grease

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00:04:14,650 --> 00:04:21,100
on our hair and stuff like that so we heard
about it all the way we went there. And ah,

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00:04:21,100 --> 00:04:29,930
anyway, in going to boot camp, we went to
the physical, and ah had all these different

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00:04:29,930 --> 00:04:37,000
things tests and so forth we had, and I found
out I thought I would get into maybe I was

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00:04:37,000 --> 00:04:40,440
really interested in airplanes at the time
and I really thought that I might get into

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00:04:40,440 --> 00:04:46,370
a Navy pilot program, but during the first
physical they said I was color blind and I

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00:04:46,370 --> 00:04:53,310
didn't know I was color blind and my buddy
Phil says you better pass this test you're

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00:04:53,310 --> 00:05:01,000
already joined up. So anyway, we went to the
physical on our bus, went to Great Lakes Training

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00:05:01,000 --> 00:05:05,810
Center. And, yeah, you went into this room
and you had to take off all your clothes that

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00:05:05,810 --> 00:05:11,080
was the first thing, put 'em in a box and
any jewelry you had, a wrist watch or anything

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00:05:11,080 --> 00:05:16,230
you had to put it in a box and then you had
to put a label on it and they sent that home,

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00:05:16,230 --> 00:05:22,560
you're standing there buck naked waiting for
your life in the Navy. And they issued us

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00:05:22,560 --> 00:05:31,420
uniforms and we finally got that haircut.
But, before I went in, I got a real buzz hair

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00:05:31,420 --> 00:05:37,100
cut anyway we called 'em butch haircuts at
the time. So anyway I was already a skinhead by the

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00:05:37,100 --> 00:05:44,870
time I went into the Navy so. But anyway it
was, then the, then the boot camp. Um, it

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00:05:44,870 --> 00:05:50,510
was we learned to march, we carried rifles,
we, we did a whole bunch of stuff we were

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00:05:50,510 --> 00:05:57,180
supposed to do in boot camp. Can you describe
the, maybe the emotions that were going through

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00:05:57,180 --> 00:06:00,090
your mind, what you were thinking as you were
going through that process, you know you were

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00:06:00,090 --> 00:06:04,530
leaving home to go to with the Navy. Yeah,
there's a certain amount of homesickness but

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00:06:04,530 --> 00:06:10,120
I had a girlfriend I left in college when
I dropped out of college I still continued

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00:06:10,120 --> 00:06:16,889
seeing this young woman up at Bowling Green
State University and uh, yeah, I was just

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00:06:16,889 --> 00:06:23,280
wondering when I'd see her, and I remember
writing so real, some lovesick kind of letters,

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00:06:23,280 --> 00:06:31,180
poetry, oh God I was getting real mushy. She
wrote me a Dear John anyway, she wasn't going

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00:06:31,180 --> 00:06:39,700
to wait four years. Okay. So do you recall
any of your I guess your drill instructors,

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00:06:39,700 --> 00:06:44,180

your drill instructors, your drill sergeants, do you recall any of them from basic training. Oh, yeah, yeah. I remember

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00:06:44,180 --> 00:06:52,300

I had a picture of one of 'em here recently, I can't find it right now but yeah ah they

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00:06:52,300 --> 00:07:00,570

ah, yeah, what did we call 'em in the Navy? It wasn't drill instructor, it was, uh, they

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00:07:00,570 --> 00:07:07,080

were Chief Petty Officers anyway, and so uh, yeah they'd get us out and do marching and

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00:07:07,080 --> 00:07:18,020

stuff and uh bossed us around a lot. Had all kinds of rules and regulations. But it wasn't,

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00:07:18,020 --> 00:07:22,450

compared to the Marine Corps and stuff like that I heard stories from my friends it was

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00:07:22,450 --> 00:07:27,240

pretty rough, the Navy I don't think was too bad. My friend Phil he was chewing chewing

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00:07:27,240 --> 00:07:33,290

gum one time, and uh, he was standing in line and he wasn't supposed to be chewing chewing

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00:07:33,290 --> 00:07:40,590

gum so he came over, this uh, drill instructor came over and had him spit it out in his hand,

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00:07:40,590 --> 00:07:46,430

and he spit it out in his hand, and he had it rub it in his hair. That was the lesson

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00:07:46,430 --> 00:07:52,030

that we don't chew chewing gum. Even now,

all these years later, every time I see my

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00:07:52,030 --> 00:07:59,810

buddy Phil, he talks about the time that he got that chewing gum rubbed in his hair. Okay,

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00:07:59,810 --> 00:08:06,370

um, did you receive any specialized training, so after basic what was the next step? I wanted

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00:08:06,370 --> 00:08:12,919

to but somehow, uh, I didn't get any, and my friend Phil went off to a different mechanic

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00:08:12,919 --> 00:08:17,540

school, airplane mechanic school and stuff like that, but I didn't, and I was really,

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00:08:17,540 --> 00:08:27,060

really disappointed. Uh, they had me mess cooking for uh, I don't know, a couple of

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00:08:27,060 --> 00:08:32,310

months and while I was mess cooking I was feeling pretty miserable I was wondering about

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00:08:32,310 --> 00:08:39,930

if this Navy thing was for me. But anyways they sent me to New Orleans, uh, and uh, so

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00:08:39,930 --> 00:08:44,540

when I got to New Orleans, they had to find something for me to do in the Navy and the

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00:08:44,540 --> 00:08:51,830

option was truck driver or typist, and I was always interested in writing something, so

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00:08:51,830 --> 00:08:56,140

I thought learning to type would be a good thing, so I volunteered for the typing. Well

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00:08:56,140 --> 00:09:01,710

we had this guy came in to teach us typing.
We had this old big old standard typewriters,

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00:09:01,710 --> 00:09:09,140

we had, and he told us where to put our hands,
then he used the foulest language that I had

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00:09:09,140 --> 00:09:15,130

ever heard, you know he just began to curse
and we had to type it. I, I learned to spell

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00:09:15,130 --> 00:09:20,580

four-letter words better than anybody, it
was an amazing experience. So they made me

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00:09:20,580 --> 00:09:29,740

a uh, a typist in the Navy, well, it was a
mistake. I'm kind of dyslexic anyway. Then

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00:09:29,740 --> 00:09:36,270

they got an order from headquarters of the 8th
Naval District downtown New Orleans, they

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00:09:36,270 --> 00:09:41,300

wanted a clean-cut sailor who could type sent
over to work in the office, so that's what

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00:09:41,300 --> 00:09:46,460

I did, I went over there to work in the office,
but I realized uh that uh the typing they

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00:09:46,460 --> 00:09:53,310

had me do was beyond my ability and so uh
I wasn't going to spend four years being a

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00:09:53,310 --> 00:10:07,990

typist of personnel (inaudible), so I applied
for a uh, uh a uh transfer. And so I asked

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00:10:07,990 --> 00:10:12,960

them to, I wrote a letter to the Department
of Navy saying please send me to the construction

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00:10:12,960 --> 00:10:17,960
battalion, I have a construction background,
I already know basic surveying and stuff so

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00:10:17,960 --> 00:10:22,980
if you'd send me to surveying school I'd be
very happy. And everybody laughed and said

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00:10:22,980 --> 00:10:28,630
their not gonna, their not gonna pay any attention
to that, they ain't never do that, but they

101
00:10:28,630 --> 00:10:35,010
did, they approved it and I was sent to Port
Hueneme, California, to surveyors school and

102
00:10:35,010 --> 00:10:46,730
that was my training, and so after that, then
uh, it came time to make assignments and uh

103
00:10:46,730 --> 00:10:52,710
the war was really kicking up over in Korea
at that time, and I began to see where they

104
00:10:52,710 --> 00:10:55,580
were sending us. They were sending us to Guam,
they were sending us to Japan, they were sending

105
00:10:55,580 --> 00:11:02,010
to Europe and that's the point I thought,
if I'm going to be in the Navy and there's

106
00:11:02,010 --> 00:11:12,200
a war going on, I'd like to at least see it,
maybe if I were a surveyor, I'd be in Korea,

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00:11:12,200 --> 00:11:19,160
uh probably making roads and things, so I
went over to volunteer. I said, uh, are the

108
00:11:19,160 --> 00:11:22,960
orders cut for the surveyors yet? And they
said, yeah there cut. And I said, well where

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00:11:22,960 --> 00:11:27,910

are you sending me? And they said we're sending you to Japan, Iwakuni Japan. I said can you

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00:11:27,910 --> 00:11:34,130

change that? Can you send me to Korea instead? Uh, that's really unusual, no we can't do

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00:11:34,130 --> 00:11:39,240

that, they're already cut, you're going to Japan. I thought, going to Japan? We already

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00:11:39,240 --> 00:11:46,310

fought those people in the war, I don't know why we're going to Japan, and that was uh,

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00:11:46,310 --> 00:11:51,300

so anyway I spent the rest of my enlistment in Japan as a surveyor. But there wasn't much

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00:11:51,300 --> 00:11:58,581

surveying to do, we made a map of the base and walked around a little bit and then one

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00:11:58,581 --> 00:12:04,780

thing led to another. I was stationed to an Air Force base and they were transferring

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00:12:04,780 --> 00:12:11,290

the Air Force base to a Naval base, and all these different offices and so forth were

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00:12:11,290 --> 00:12:19,170

being transferred over to Navy control, and so all my friends were getting jobs in motor

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00:12:19,170 --> 00:12:28,240

pool and typing shop or some place, and uh, I realized that nobody had applied for the

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00:12:28,240 --> 00:12:34,660

library, and I like to read books, so I went in and asked the Commanding Officer, I said,

120
00:12:34,660 --> 00:12:41,490
has anybody spoken for the library yet? The
library! I forgot about the library! You know

121
00:12:41,490 --> 00:12:46,340
anything about libraries? I said, well I like
to read books, yeah, I know the dewey decimal

122
00:12:46,340 --> 00:12:50,970
system and things like that, and he said,
we'll get in touch with you in a day or two.

123
00:12:50,970 --> 00:12:55,331
So they made me Chief Librarian of the library, for Iwakuni and that was
my job for the rest of the time I

124
00:12:55,331 --> 00:13:02,560
was there. While I was in the library, while
I was in Japan, I fell in love with Japan

125
00:13:02,560 --> 00:13:10,380
and the Japanese language, with all these
books I discovered Japanese poetry. And, I

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00:13:10,380 --> 00:13:15,480
uh, discovered a lot of things in Japan, and
I really began to learn the language pretty

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00:13:15,480 --> 00:13:21,420
seriously and so uh by the time I got out
I knew exactly what I wanted to do. That was

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00:13:21,420 --> 00:13:30,730
to study Japanese language and literature,
and uh, collect uh folk tales and uh translate

129
00:13:30,730 --> 00:13:37,450
poetry and all that's what I've done with
my life. I taught at Antioch for 33 years

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00:13:37,450 --> 00:13:44,870
Japanese. Okay, so let's see, when you were

in Japan, uh, the Korean War was going on,

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00:13:44,870 --> 00:13:49,980

correct? Yes. Okay, so was there any, did that affect you guys there at all in any ways?

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00:13:49,980 --> 00:13:56,810

Well, we got busy because uh, we were one of the bases that was uh, uh, sending supplies

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00:13:56,810 --> 00:14:05,010

to Korea. So, we, well at first they were having sea planes. These sea planes would

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00:14:05,010 --> 00:14:12,480

fly over load 'em up with all kinds of equipment and send it to Korea, and so they had these

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00:14:12,480 --> 00:14:18,310

sea planes and we had this bay there that the sea planes would come in, land on the

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00:14:18,310 --> 00:14:22,649

water, and then they would hook a big cable to them, and drag them up to the hangars.

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00:14:22,649 --> 00:14:28,920

Well they wanted to make a bigger sea plane ramp and so while I was, it was before I got

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00:14:28,920 --> 00:14:37,351

the library job, I, they made me an inspector on the uh, on the uh, on the uh sea plane

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00:14:37,351 --> 00:14:43,980

ramp project. The sea plane ramp was about as big as a football field, okay, that went

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00:14:43,980 --> 00:14:53,660

down from the hangar all the way down rather deep into the ocean. And, so uh, when they

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00:14:53,660 --> 00:15:00,930

would land there at low tide, high tide, they could drag the planes up there. Well I was the inspector,

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00:15:00,930 --> 00:15:06,550

a Japanese construction company was building the sea plane ramp, and I was the American

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00:15:06,550 --> 00:15:12,390

representative. I had to make sure they were building it to specifications and following

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00:15:12,390 --> 00:15:20,270

the blueprint. That was my job, I could do that. And so uh, but when it was over, um,

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00:15:20,270 --> 00:15:29,440

I went in to sign a report, and the uh, lieutenant, what was his name, anyway, he said, did you

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00:15:29,440 --> 00:15:36,490

inspect the bottom of the grease (inaudible), the sea plane ramp? I said, the part that

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00:15:36,490 --> 00:15:42,430

goes down into the ocean? While I was on the boat I looked down there. He said, I will

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00:15:42,430 --> 00:15:48,600

not sign this report until you tell me that you personally inspected the bottom of that

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00:15:48,600 --> 00:15:56,240

ramp. I was, God, it was December, I said I'm not going to get a mask and swim down there it

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00:15:56,240 --> 00:16:03,040

was pretty cold, so I went back and explained that I couldn't file my report until the,

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00:16:03,040 --> 00:16:12,770

until the uh, uh I inspected the ramp. We'll let you borrow one of our deep sea diver suits.

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00:16:12,770 --> 00:16:21,180
Now these suits here, you've seen 'em in movies,
a big ol' helmet with air hoses coming out

153
00:16:21,180 --> 00:16:29,779
of the top, a little glass right there, so
they squeezed me into one of these deep sea

154
00:16:29,779 --> 00:16:41,839
diver suits, and told me to jump off the side
of the boat. I was terrified. The air to it

155
00:16:41,839 --> 00:16:50,170
was being pumped by two old ladies with a
hand pump. Okay, there's a hose going down

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00:16:50,170 --> 00:16:54,570
this little pump there and they're pumping
away. And I said,

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00:16:54,570 --> 00:16:58,910
(something in Japanese) hey, don't forget
to pump I told the old ladies, I was getting

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00:16:58,910 --> 00:17:02,550
pretty good at Japanese at the time too. Anyway
they sent me down. I told them there's a valve

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00:17:02,550 --> 00:17:12,139
on the side of the head, okay, and when I
press the valve the air will go out of my

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00:17:12,139 --> 00:17:17,339
suit and I can sink, and if I want to come
back up, I don't touch the valve and it will

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00:17:17,339 --> 00:17:25,299
fill up with air and I'll come back up again.
I said okay that'll work. Well after much

162
00:17:25,299 --> 00:17:33,770
hesitation, I jumped off the side of the boat
and I kept falling, boom boom, I kept falling,

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00:17:33,770 --> 00:17:39,840

falling, falling and falling, and I hit bottom of the ramp, flat on my back, I mean I had

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00:17:39,840 --> 00:17:45,350

all these lead weights and so forth to get me down to the bottom there, so I was lying

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00:17:45,350 --> 00:17:51,799

there, and the valve was stuck, okay. The air kept going out, I couldn't build up enough

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00:17:51,799 --> 00:17:57,390

air to stand up again. And while I was laying there in total panic, and I kept thinking,

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00:17:57,390 --> 00:18:03,629

I'll be the last casualty of World War II, something's wrong with this ramp, they're

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00:18:03,629 --> 00:18:11,100

trying to kill me, I know that these Japanese that they shouldn't be trusted, I was laying

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00:18:11,100 --> 00:18:16,450

there, and just then I looked out through this, through this peephole of this suit,

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00:18:16,450 --> 00:18:24,919

and I saw a gigantic thing that looked like a monster out there, and realized it was another

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00:18:24,919 --> 00:18:28,629

diver and I didn't realize that everything was magnified under the water. Everything

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00:18:28,629 --> 00:18:34,169

was twice the size. And so this big guy came over there, he had a hand that looked like

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00:18:34,169 --> 00:18:41,730

a ham under the water, and he came over and started beating me on the side of the head,

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00:18:41,730 --> 00:18:47,190

BAM! BAM! BAM! I thought he's trying to kill me. Something's really wrong with this ramp,

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00:18:47,190 --> 00:18:50,790

they don't want me to see it. Well he knew it was a defective suit and he was pretty

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00:18:50,790 --> 00:18:59,440

soon it got unstuck, and then that gracious old sea diver grabbed me by the hand and led

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00:18:59,440 --> 00:19:07,389

me around like a little kid in a park with his daddy looking at the bottom of the ramp

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00:19:07,389 --> 00:19:12,034

until we got all around and I did my final measurements and was able to pass the thing....yeah.

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00:19:12,034 --> 00:19:22,490

So you got it done. Got done except when I went back to talk to the guy, he said, did

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00:19:22,490 --> 00:19:30,919

you check the slopes on the side? Oh, the slope on the side is supposed to be 45 degrees

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00:19:30,919 --> 00:19:37,269

with rubble, gravel, no, I didn't get that far, I said. Get your ass back down there!

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00:19:37,269 --> 00:19:45,779

So I had to go back again. Was that a little easier going the second time? The second time

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00:19:45,779 --> 00:19:51,440

I went down it was really kind of terrifying. Um, cause I was walking around the outside

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00:19:51,440 --> 00:19:56,789

of the ramp and so forth, and I found a big

hole and I didn't know what was in that hole,

185

00:19:56,789 --> 00:20:02,799

so but I kind of floated out over it and I was just curious as to what was in that hole,

186

00:20:02,799 --> 00:20:09,340

so I was just going to tap the uh, the uh the valve on the sea diver, and when I tapped

187

00:20:09,340 --> 00:20:13,110

it, it went (sound) and I went down again, and I went all the ways it was like an elevator

188

00:20:13,110 --> 00:20:19,509

shaft down there. It was just a hole that they had dug for gravel and stuff I guess,

189

00:20:19,509 --> 00:20:26,669

but anyway, when I got down in there, I decided to uh, just not do anything and let the air

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00:20:26,669 --> 00:20:34,120

build up so I could come back up again. And when I came up, when I came up, I smelled

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00:20:34,120 --> 00:20:43,929

something really, really strange. Something familiar. Um, and I realized after a while,

192

00:20:43,929 --> 00:20:52,149

it was smoke. There I was, down in a hole in the bottom of an ocean smelling smoke,

193

00:20:52,149 --> 00:21:00,139

and I thought what? And the only thing that I could imagine at the time, that the boat

194

00:21:00,139 --> 00:21:06,760

was on fire. Okay, if the boat was on fire, then the old ladies would jump off to save

195

00:21:06,760 --> 00:21:12,100

themselves and they wouldn't be pumping anymore
and I'd be, I'd be the last casualty of World

196

00:21:12,100 --> 00:21:19,090

War II. I thought oh my God, this is terrible.
Uh, so I waited. It was really burning my

197

00:21:19,090 --> 00:21:25,479

eyes, there really was smoke, it was really
burning my eyes. And uh, I waited until the

198

00:21:25,479 --> 00:21:32,840

suit built up with the air and smoke, until
I could pop out, and I signaled for them to

199

00:21:32,840 --> 00:21:34,929

drag me in, and when they dragged me in I
said (something in Japanese) It's a fire,

200

00:21:34,929 --> 00:21:43,830

it's smoke! Smoke? They looked at me like
what are you talking about. And then pretty

201

00:21:43,830 --> 00:21:49,279

soon they started laughing and they realized
what had happened. It was lunch time for them

202

00:21:49,279 --> 00:21:55,220

and they decided to make themselves some tea
for uh, for uh, for their lunch, and they

203

00:21:55,220 --> 00:22:00,470

had a little hibachi pot burning charcoal,
and it was sitting right beside the pump,

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00:22:00,470 --> 00:22:05,389

and the wind was blowing the smoke into the
pump and it was pumping it directly into,

205

00:22:05,389 --> 00:22:12,889

I really was smelling smoke, but the boat
wasn't on fire. But I finished that report

206

00:22:12,889 --> 00:22:19,010
and I got out of there and after that I finally
got a job in the library, and I was glad.

207
00:22:19,010 --> 00:22:23,559
So you never had to do that again? Did I ever
want to do that again, go down? Did you ever

208
00:22:23,559 --> 00:22:30,190
have to do that again? No, no, no that job
was over, and the sea plane ramp was approved

209
00:22:30,190 --> 00:22:44,850
and they started sending all those sea planes
over to Korea then full of supplies. OK. So what

210
00:22:44,850 --> 00:22:50,700
were your duties as a, you said you were a
Chief Librarian? Hmm mmm, yeah. So what were

211
00:22:50,700 --> 00:22:54,570
your duties there? What were my duties. Oh
it wasn't much. I had about five people working

212
00:22:54,570 --> 00:23:01,820
for me. Had two people that worked the front
desk, had a janitor, had somebody else that

213
00:23:01,820 --> 00:23:07,810
cataloged books and stuff like that, they
were all Japanese. And my job was to make

214
00:23:07,810 --> 00:23:15,399
sure it was run. The uh, it came under the
uh, division, or the department or whatever

215
00:23:15,399 --> 00:23:26,229
they call them in the Navy, of special services.
And uh the uh, young Ensign that was in charge

216
00:23:26,229 --> 00:23:36,619
of me, uh, of special services, had two projects
under his control. One was the library and

217

00:23:36,619 --> 00:23:41,889
one was the gym. This guy was a jock and all
he wanted to do was stay over at the gym and

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00:23:41,889 --> 00:23:47,020
play basketball with with his buddies over
there. So he was over there playing and he

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00:23:47,020 --> 00:23:52,279
came over to the library one day and he stood
at the door, and he just stood there and said,

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00:23:52,279 --> 00:23:57,679
I don't want to hear any trouble over here
at all. He said, as long as there's no trouble

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00:23:57,679 --> 00:24:04,899
I'll leave you alone. I said, alright and
I never saw him again in terms of an official

222

00:24:04,899 --> 00:24:11,169
thing. I had him sign my passes and things
like that. We were, we were good buddies but

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00:24:11,169 --> 00:24:20,090
anyway. My duties were basically um, ordered
books, check out books, but what I really

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00:24:20,090 --> 00:24:27,970
did was study Japanese. I mean I had plenty
of time being in the there in the library

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00:24:27,970 --> 00:24:32,289
every day, and almost every night, I was in
town, okay, I was out speaking Japanese, and

226

00:24:32,289 --> 00:24:39,269
I love to drink sake, I admit I love to drink
sake. So I was out in the little sake shops

227

00:24:39,269 --> 00:24:48,919
a lot, learning Japanese, talking to Japanese
people and I would spend a lot of time traveling

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00:24:48,919 --> 00:24:54,760

whenever I had any time off through Japan exploring, historical sites, talking to people,

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00:24:54,760 --> 00:25:01,080

having fun, drinking sake, and that was basically what I did because

230

00:25:01,080 --> 00:25:08,679

most of it my career there. Okay. Did you, when you were talking to the local population

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00:25:08,679 --> 00:25:14,480

of that area, did you, you know, did anything with maybe since it was only what ten years

232

00:25:14,480 --> 00:25:19,539

after World War II, right? I got there about six years after post-war, umm, mmm....so was

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00:25:19,539 --> 00:25:25,119

there any of that could you sense any of that maybe or any kinds of discussions or any kind

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00:25:25,119 --> 00:25:32,679

of feelings? Yeah, yeah, oh yeah a lot. Uh, one of the things that impressed me very much

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00:25:32,679 --> 00:25:38,899

was that how grateful they were to the American occupation, uh, because it was, I read and

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00:25:38,899 --> 00:25:44,649

it seemed to be true because I heard it firsthand, it was the uh, they were so frightened at

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00:25:44,649 --> 00:25:48,710

the end of World War II that the Americans would come in and just really punish them

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00:25:48,710 --> 00:25:54,669

for you know, Pearl Harbor and all that, which was just a couple of days ago. Uh, they were

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00:25:54,669 --> 00:26:01,269

so afraid because of some kind of a brutal treatment because that's probably what the

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00:26:01,269 --> 00:26:06,669

Japanese would have done if we'd treated them pretty brutally. But the Americans came in,

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00:26:06,669 --> 00:26:15,929

uh, very friendly, bringing food, they brought all these supplies, uh, oh they were starving,

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00:26:15,929 --> 00:26:22,340

they would tell me how much they were starving during World War II. I later went back and

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00:26:22,340 --> 00:26:27,859

did a 50 year interview, interviewing a lot of the women who survived the bombings of

244

00:26:27,859 --> 00:26:34,669

World War II and after my Japanese had got a lot better and could hear those stories

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00:26:34,669 --> 00:26:42,039

firsthand. But anyway, those people were terrified, but the Americans came in and there was rumors

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00:26:42,039 --> 00:26:47,379

about the Americans you know. Uh, one woman told me she heard that the Americans had big

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00:26:47,379 --> 00:26:54,379

eyes, and they had big noses and they're really, really scary. She was standing by the street

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00:26:54,379 --> 00:26:59,259

one time and here came a Jeep and she knew it was Americans and she looked at them, indeed

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00:26:59,259 --> 00:27:07,739

had big eyes, and big noses, and she realized

later that they had gas masks on. But it was

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00:27:07,739 --> 00:27:14,269

like, she was just a little kid. She thought it was like some aliens had come, alien invaders.

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00:27:14,269 --> 00:27:19,249

But you know, always even businessmen you know, later on very successful Japanese

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00:27:19,249 --> 00:27:26,830

businessmen and so forth, they remember being little kids in the streets of the major cities

253

00:27:26,830 --> 00:27:34,380

of when the occupation came and they learned how to bum chewing gum, candy, and the Americans

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00:27:34,380 --> 00:27:43,509

were giving that, so it was a very positive thing. So, the Japanese that I talked to at

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00:27:43,509 --> 00:27:50,669

the time really began to blame the Japanese and the Japanese government and Japanese military

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00:27:50,669 --> 00:27:58,740

for you know, the uh the uh, their suffering during World War II and uh there wasn't much

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00:27:58,740 --> 00:28:03,129

blame for the American. It was a different thing when we would talk about the atomic

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00:28:03,129 --> 00:28:07,979

bomb, okay, cause I was stationed not too far from Hiroshima and so I knew a number

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00:28:07,979 --> 00:28:15,860

of people there who had who were survivors of the uh, of the Hiroshima bombing, and that's a different

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00:28:15,860 --> 00:28:22,130

story. You know, the, basically the attitude was, Japan was already defeated, they were

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00:28:22,130 --> 00:28:29,099
already giving up, they were already totally there was no need to come in and uh and bomb

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00:28:29,099 --> 00:28:34,849
Hiroshima and Nagasaki with those terrible bombs, that was basically the attitude a lot

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00:28:34,849 --> 00:28:44,340
of us have and I still have myself. Okay. So when you were over there, whether it be

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00:28:44,340 --> 00:28:50,759
with the local population or with your fellow servicemen and women did you, did you make

265

00:28:50,759 --> 00:28:57,840
any good friendships during your time in Japan? Uh, yes but because I was so interested in

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00:28:57,840 --> 00:29:05,729
Japan and so forth and uh was really unique with that, they uh, most of the buddies that

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00:29:05,729 --> 00:29:13,059
I made uh were really anxious to get home and get out of the service, get over with

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00:29:13,059 --> 00:29:22,399
it and get back to their civilian life, where I had felt like I found a new home. I wanted

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00:29:22,399 --> 00:29:32,679
to live in Japan and in fact when it came time for me to get discharged, uh, I really

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00:29:32,679 --> 00:29:39,010
didn't want to go back to Dayton, Ohio, I wanted to live in Japan. And, I went into

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00:29:39,010 --> 00:29:45,519
the Commanding Officer and I said is there
any way that I can get, get discharged in

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00:29:45,519 --> 00:29:55,110
Japan and he said, well that's a very unusual
request but I will look into it, and so I

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00:29:55,110 --> 00:30:00,859
thanked him, but I made a fatal mistake, I
made a fatal mistake instead of saluting him,

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00:30:00,859 --> 00:30:07,019
which was proper, I bowed to him. He said,
damn it Wright you've been over here too long

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00:30:07,019 --> 00:30:12,739
as it is. We're sending you home. And so I
was discharge in San Francisco but I went

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00:30:12,739 --> 00:30:18,489
back to Dayton, worked in construction work
for a summer, saved my money, bought a uh,

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00:30:18,489 --> 00:30:24,149
bought a uh, ship ticket back to Japan, so
that's ended that off, I went back to Japan

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00:30:24,149 --> 00:30:29,549
and I was going to live there, but anyway
one thing led to another and I ended up in

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00:30:29,549 --> 00:30:36,929
Hawaii instead but that was alright. Uh, so
anyway, uh the friends that I made in the

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00:30:36,929 --> 00:30:46,080
military, I don't think we even kept in touch
after that. I think I was just a little too

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00:30:46,080 --> 00:30:53,399
weird for them. Okay. So after, after being
discharged, and you're back, you know you're

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00:30:53,399 --> 00:30:57,340
coming back home, what, did you find that
adjustment hard going from that you know,

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00:30:57,340 --> 00:31:03,869
daily routine of the military to kind of being
on your own again? Well, I don't know, my

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00:31:03,869 --> 00:31:10,279
job was being a librarian in Japan, I had
all the freedom I wanted because my, you know,

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00:31:10,279 --> 00:31:17,259
my officers over me didn't much care what
I did so I, and the people I worked for were

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00:31:17,259 --> 00:31:21,559
uh very lenient about whether I was there
or not so sometimes I'd take off for two or

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00:31:21,559 --> 00:31:27,929
three days and they would always say, he just
stepped out, so I didn't have to go mustard,

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00:31:27,929 --> 00:31:36,080
I had it good. So transition for me uh but
going back to Ohio and working construction

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00:31:36,080 --> 00:31:47,200
work, um, was really harder than when I was
in the military to tell you the truth. Yeah,

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00:31:47,200 --> 00:31:56,059
the uh. No, I'm very grateful to the military,
the Navy for, for uh giving me the opportunity

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00:31:56,059 --> 00:32:01,379
to do something else and the GI Bill arrived
which let me have an education cause that's

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00:32:01,379 --> 00:32:06,860
what I used. I really wanted to get in college,
I didn't want work at construction work anymore,

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00:32:06,860 --> 00:32:14,520

so the transition from a librarian sitting all the time, reading books, to college student

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00:32:14,520 --> 00:32:24,729

spending a lot of time reading books wasn't that difficult for me. Okay. Okay. Did you,

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00:32:24,729 --> 00:32:29,659

so where did you uh, go to school? Like when and where did you go to school? After the

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00:32:29,659 --> 00:32:38,190

Navy? Yes. Oh yeah. Well as I say, as soon as I got discharged, in 1955, I uh took a

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00:32:38,190 --> 00:32:45,879

freighter, I got a freighter ticket back to Japan, and I was really, I knew I could use

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00:32:45,879 --> 00:32:52,830

my GI Bill of Rights even in Japan. So I decided to go back to Japan and go to a Japanese University,

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00:32:52,830 --> 00:32:59,259

and uh, so but when I got there I went to a couple of universities where I thought I

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00:32:59,259 --> 00:33:06,279

could, I had written to say I'd like to study here and they were not sure about that. But

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00:33:06,279 --> 00:33:12,729

anyway they told me I had the wrong kind of visa. I needed a student visa. And the only

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00:33:12,729 --> 00:33:18,760

way I could get a student visa was to leave the country and then come back as a student

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00:33:18,760 --> 00:33:24,129

after I applied and went through the whole

formality of that and I could barely afford

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00:33:24,129 --> 00:33:30,620

to get to Japan one time. In fact, when it came down to buy a round trip ticket, which

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00:33:30,620 --> 00:33:38,330

was required, I bought it only back to Honolulu. Okay, that was cheaper, because I had in the

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00:33:38,330 --> 00:33:42,779

back of my mind, if it doesn't work out in Japan, I always go to Hawaii I could probably

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00:33:42,779 --> 00:33:49,639

live there. And I went to, I went to our college guide local college guide or something like

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00:33:49,639 --> 00:33:55,129

that, to find out where I could study Japanese and here is Hawaii was one of the places that

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00:33:55,129 --> 00:34:03,139

I could study Japanese. So from, after spending uh, a number of months, maybe a winter in

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00:34:03,139 --> 00:34:09,320

Japan, it was kind of cold and miserable and I didn't have any income at all, uh, I uh

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00:34:09,320 --> 00:34:17,040

got on a ship and went to Honolulu. And when I arrived in Honolulu I just went straight

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00:34:17,040 --> 00:34:25,350

to the University of Hawaii and enrolled. I'd written to them and they had accepted me as

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00:34:25,350 --> 00:34:34,659

a transfer student. And so uh, so, when I got there, I was just going to study Japanese

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00:34:34,659 --> 00:34:38,530

as much as possible and that's what I did,
I stayed there for the next five years studying

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00:34:38,530 --> 00:34:50,669

Japanese and even got a BA and a Masters degree.

Uh, but, I got there it was before statehood, okay, it was

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00:34:50,669 --> 00:34:59,210

a long time ago, and uh, the uh tuition was
very cheap. They didn't charge out of state

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00:34:59,210 --> 00:35:03,970

tuition. Now you poor guys I know how much
you have to pay. But they didn't charge me,

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00:35:03,970 --> 00:35:12,590

I think I paid only \$90 a semester to go to
school at the University of Hawaii. The GI Bill

319

00:35:12,590 --> 00:35:21,560

covered that? hmm? Did the GI Bill cover that?

Oh yeah, yeah. Uh, the uh, I think I got \$135

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00:35:21,560 --> 00:35:28,540

a month, at the time. Actually I had married
at the time, I married a Japanese woman at

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00:35:28,540 --> 00:35:33,630

the time and brought her back with me and
my oldest daughter was born in Hawaii at that

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00:35:33,630 --> 00:35:39,970

time. But uh because I was married, I got
\$135 a month, yeah, a single man got a uh

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00:35:39,970 --> 00:35:50,731

a single vet got a uh uh \$110 a month. But
that, that more than covered it, I think.

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00:35:50,731 --> 00:35:59,990

I got a part-time job in a supermarket but
it it paid for my piddle money. Okay. Um,

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00:35:59,990 --> 00:36:06,390
so, we'll kind of go into some reflections
here, is there anything else about your military

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00:36:06,390 --> 00:36:11,580
or your civilian transitioning back to civilian
life that you wanted to go over, anything

327

00:36:11,580 --> 00:36:16,960
else that you think we missed that's kind
of important that we should have covered?

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00:36:16,960 --> 00:36:26,760
Mmmm, no with me it was just a matter of it
being extremely grateful that uh, uh, the

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00:36:26,760 --> 00:36:34,040
one that I didn't have to go to see combat
in Korea as I once thought I'd be adventurous

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00:36:34,040 --> 00:36:41,640
enough to do and so forth. The fact that many
of my classmates, friends from home and so

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00:36:41,640 --> 00:36:45,820
forth, did go combat and not all of them lived
through the experience is something I live

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00:36:45,820 --> 00:36:54,530
with, so it is just an overwhelming feeling
of gratitude that I was able to get out of

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00:36:54,530 --> 00:37:02,540
Dayton, Ohio, which was one of my goals, and
working at construction work was one of my

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00:37:02,540 --> 00:37:10,080
goals, find a whole other career, and end
up being, you know, an academic living in a nice

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00:37:10,080 --> 00:37:16,511
little town like Yellow Springs and teaching
Japanese for all these years. Oh, it's a feeling

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00:37:16,511 --> 00:37:29,110
of gratitude that things could have been much
different so uh, yeah, it's its yeah, you

337

00:37:29,110 --> 00:37:41,400
think about the people that weren't so lucky
makes me feel very good, grateful. Okay. So

338

00:37:41,400 --> 00:37:46,630
what kind of life lessons do you think you
learned from your time in the military? What

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00:37:46,630 --> 00:37:50,970
kind of lessons did I learn? Yeah. You know
like lessons, life lessons that helped you

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00:37:50,970 --> 00:37:58,390
you know maybe later on down the road? Well
the fact to know that I could survive in a

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00:37:58,390 --> 00:38:06,990
very rigid uh institution like that you know
and learn to obey orders, and march, and do

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00:38:06,990 --> 00:38:12,110
all those things, it was just the idea that
I can actually do that, I wasn't sure that

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00:38:12,110 --> 00:38:20,250
I would be able to do that you know, cause
I've always been kind of weird, hated authority,

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00:38:20,250 --> 00:38:25,700
and so forth. To know that I could do that,
I could do that if I choose to do that, and

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00:38:25,700 --> 00:38:35,300
I did it you know. I got along well with officers
and stuff. The uh uh, I didn't, I wasn't a

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00:38:35,300 --> 00:38:41,410
disciplinary case, I was just kind of weird,
see what the boundaries are and what was expected

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00:38:41,410 --> 00:38:47,090

and I'd kind of go off and do my own thing
as much as possible. So learning to cope like

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00:38:47,090 --> 00:38:54,010

that was was was a good experience for me
and uh learning a whole new culture, and a

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00:38:54,010 --> 00:39:01,900

whole new language, learning a whole new group
of people, uh, yeah, it was pretty broadening.

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00:39:01,900 --> 00:39:07,210

That was one of the main things, it wasn't
the military so much but it was what the military

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00:39:07,210 --> 00:39:17,210

put me through to let me experience these
other things. Okay. Has your uh, how was your

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00:39:17,210 --> 00:39:24,170

military experience, your personal experience
effected your view of the military overall?

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00:39:24,170 --> 00:39:37,880

Uh. I got confused about the military especially
when I remember, see I started teaching at

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00:39:37,880 --> 00:39:43,140

Ohio State originally in the 60's, I remember
getting on the Vietnam as a result of these

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00:39:43,140 --> 00:39:48,830

protests you know against the war, against
the draft, people burning draft cards and

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00:39:48,830 --> 00:39:56,140

things like that. And I could agree with that,
yeah, I don't know why we were in the Vietnam,

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00:39:56,140 --> 00:40:02,520

I didn't know why we were in Korea actually.

Uh, yeah, I can see World War II why they

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00:40:02,520 --> 00:40:06,440

were fighting the Japanese a little bit more clear than anything else happened since that,

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00:40:06,440 --> 00:40:12,520

I can just, there's an amount of confusion about you know, what the government is telling

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00:40:12,520 --> 00:40:22,840

us about world conditions at the time and uh, sending people out to do this kind of

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00:40:22,840 --> 00:40:29,850

fighting has always been very confusing for me. But from my own experiences I knew that

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00:40:29,850 --> 00:40:39,850

the military was the thing that got me out of Dayton, Ohio. I love Dayton, Ohio now.

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00:40:39,850 --> 00:40:46,850

It's a great place to live, this whole area, Ohio. I I I was sure I was never coming to

364

00:40:46,850 --> 00:40:52,770

Ohio but the military got me out of Ohio and got my eyes open to all different bigger world

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00:40:52,770 --> 00:41:00,090

out there and that's I've been grateful. But about the military I wonder if because the

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00:41:00,090 --> 00:41:09,720

draft was ended, its a lot of people that I think could probably benefit by military

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00:41:09,720 --> 00:41:17,850

experiences to get them out of their rut at home. And uh, whether enough people just join

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00:41:17,850 --> 00:41:26,850

up to do that is one way of doing it, uh but,
the draft kind of forced us to do it and uh,

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00:41:26,850 --> 00:41:32,380

so I have mixed feelings about a draft even.
And, it was a very democratic kind of thing.

370

00:41:32,380 --> 00:41:42,540

I don't know who joins up now and it seems
like people that uh, well, maybe it's not

371

00:41:42,540 --> 00:41:52,510

as equal as it used to be. I don't, I'm confused
by it obviously but uh, I don't, I didn't

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00:41:52,510 --> 00:42:00,280

come out of the military thinking it was all
bad thing nor all good thing. It helped me.

373

00:42:00,280 --> 00:42:06,270

Okay. So is there anything else maybe, this
is going to the Library of Congress, maybe

374

00:42:06,270 --> 00:42:10,580

anything that you wanted to leave for maybe
somebody who will view this in the future,

375

00:42:10,580 --> 00:42:16,760

any kind of message you'd like to leave for
anybody? Uh, a message to whom? Whoever, a

376

00:42:16,760 --> 00:42:22,580

future viewer of this because it is going
to the Library of Congress. Oh. So somebody

377

00:42:22,580 --> 00:42:30,310

who might look at this? Yeah. Uh, yeah probably
so even if you don't believe in war, or you

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00:42:30,310 --> 00:42:38,290

don't believe the underlining things of the war,
uh, you could always use the experience of

379

00:42:38,290 --> 00:42:49,090
the military to grow along your own personal
lines somehow, you can find your own way of even within

380
00:42:49,090 --> 00:42:55,510
the military and again, if you don't have
an opportunity for an education, the GI Bill

381
00:42:55,510 --> 00:43:00,860
of Rights is really wonderful. Okay, anything
else that you wanted to add that you feel

382
00:43:00,860 --> 00:43:15,350
we've missed? Did I forget anything? Not anything
important that I can think of. It felt pretty

383
00:43:15,350 --> 00:43:20,260
complete to me. Okay. Well, thank you for
doing this interview and thank you for your

384
00:43:20,260 --> 00:43:20,760
service. Okay.