

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
JULIUS BELLIN

US Navy Armed Guard, World War II – Pacific Theater

2011

OH  
1504

**OH  
1504**

**Bellin, Julius** (1918- ). Oral History Interview, 2011.

User Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 60 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 WAV. (ca. 60 min.)

**Abstract:**

Julius Bellin, born in Nokomis, Illinois, discusses his experience in the Navy Armed Guard during World War II, primarily stationed in the Pacific. After discussing Bellin's current good health and habits, Bellin describes his background, attending Catholic school, high school, and then working with his father on the family's dairy and as a houseman for a wealthy woman. Bellin discusses enlisting in the Navy Reserve in St. Louis in late 1941, attending the Great Lakes Naval Training Center (Illinois) for basic training, and volunteering to be a part of the first Navy Armed Guard. Bellin mentions his travels to New Guinea, Treasure Island, Hawaii, Australia, and other Pacific islands. Bellin mentions being on the ships *Mahi Mahi*, the *Michael Casey*, then *Alencon* [??], and the *John A. Johnson*. Bellin discusses his experience on the *John A. Johnson* extensively as a Gunner's Mate when the ship was hit by a Japanese submarine's torpedo on October 29, 1944. Bellin describes what it was like right after the strike, losing a friend, saving two sailors, and the recovery time. Bellin was discharged shortly after in June 1945. He discusses his feelings of being discharged and moving on from the war. Bellin touches on his personal life after the war, working for a soda factory and then for Western Electric in Cicero, Illinois, until his retirement in 1983. Bellin spends the remainder of the interview talking about his medals, his enjoyment of the Navy, and being a part of veterans' organization. Bellin discusses his experience with the Honor Flight to Washington D.C., getting to see the World War II Memorial and the Arlington National Cemetery, and receiving letters from students.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Julius Bellin was born in Nokomis, Illinois in 1918. After high school, Bellin worked on a dairy farm and then as a houseman until he enlisted in the Navy Reserve in 1941. After basic training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, Bellin served in the Navy Armed Guard for the duration of the war. Bellin survived the sinking of his ship, the *John A. Johnson* in 1944, and was then discharged in June 1945. He worked at a soda factory and then Western Electric in Cicero, Illinois, until his retirement in 1983. He is involved with various veterans' organizations and lives in southern Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Gerald J. Lewis, 2011.

Transcribed by Linda Weynand, 2014.

Edited and Abstracted by Dana Gerber, 2014.

## Interview Transcript:

Lewis: Now this is an interview with Mr. Julius Bellin, that's B-e-l-l-i-n, who served with the US Navy Armed Guard unit during World War Two in the Pacific. The interview is being conducted at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison, Wisconsin on December 21st, 2011. The interviewer is Gerald J. Lewis, L-e-w-i-s, and I'm Julius's neighbor. So Julius, can you for the record describe yourself? Who is Julius?

Bellin: Well, I'm 93 years old now and still in good health, and I'm working at it. Hopefully I can live to 100 years old.

Lewis: Or more.

Bellin: Or more, and if I don't make it at least I tried.

Lewis: Well, that's good, that's good. You keep busy, don't you?

Bellin: Yes, I keep very busy. I'm an active person.

Lewis: You do a lot of traveling.

Bellin: I do a lot of traveling. If I can walk up the stairs I walk up the stairs; I don't take elevators. I do that for my exercise.

Lewis: Okay. And you exercise pretty much every day.

Bellin: Everyday I exercise quite a bit. I get on a treadmill at 2.5 miles an hour for thirty-five minutes.

Lewis: Okay. And you're pretty good about your meals, too, because you—

Bellin: I watch my meals; I'm careful what I eat. I eat two meals a day: lunch is coffee and maybe some fruit.

Lewis: Well, that'll keep you going a long time. And your background has been Italian?

Bellin: Yeah.

Lewis: So you had a Mediterranean diet, which is very healthy—

Bellin: Yes. I use a lot of olive oil, drink a little wine. I have one or two drinks every night before I go to sleep. I don't drink in the daytime, just the nighttime. In daytime I never watch television; I got the radio on. I love

the music; I'm a music lover. So at nighttime it's time for the TV. That's when I watch TV. I go to bed about eleven o'clock. I get up sometime eight, nine o'clock the next morning. I'm a good sleeper.

Lewis: Good for you. That means you've got a clear conscience.

Bellin: That's right. I clear my mind; I don't let nothing bother me when I go to sleep.

Lewis: Good for you. Well, Julius, tell me about your background and your life circumstances in southern Illinois before military service--before you went into the Navy.

Bellin: I was born in town in central Illinois in 1918. The hometown is Nokomis, Illinois.

Lewis: Any special day you were born on?

Bellin: I was born on the fourth of July and everybody helped me celebrate my birthday. [laughs]

Lewis: Nationwide. [laughs]

Bellin: Nationwide celebration.

Lewis: Yeah, that's wonderful.

Bellin: Life when I was young was a little difficult. We had no electric. We had to wait; priority was first. So we finally got electric. I had to walk a mile and a half to school everyday. And there was no excuse why you couldn't get there. I went to a Catholic school and it was nothing to get a paddling. You'd done something, you got a paddling for it.

Lewis: It was good for you. [laughs]

Bellin: Yes, it was good. It straightened people out. Then if you didn't hold a pencil right when you wrote, a Sister would come along and hit you on the knuckles.

Lewis: I remember those days, too. Okay. Good for you.

Bellin: Then went to high school. And then I helped my father; we had a dairy and we had fifty hives of bees. That was hard work. And then a little later I worked for a wealthy lady as houseman and chauffeur. And then I then decided--I heard on the radio that there's a place in St. Louis where you could join the service and you could take your pick what you wanted to

join. So I went over to St. Louis and I talked to the Army, Marines, Navy, Coast Guard and I decided that I wanted to join the Navy Armed Guard – or the Navy Reserve for the duration of the emergency or four years. Went for my training and went to Great Lakes. I finished my training and went home for seven days. The day I was supposed to return back to Great Lakes the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor so the next morning when we went out for training they asked for volunteers for the Armed Guard. Nobody volunteered 'cause they didn't know what it was. So the whole Battalion was Armed Guard. Now the Armed Guard is--we, uh, run the guns on the freighters, tankers and troop carriers. In the Pacific you went on your own. We went to Australia; took us thirty-six days to go to Australia. I was in New Guinea and a lot of the islands in the Pacific. We brought a load of war materiel to Pearl Harbor in January sometime.

Lewis: In January of 1942?

Bellin: 1942, yes.

Lewis: Julius, can you back up just a little bit. You enlisted; you were not drafted?

Bellin: Yes, I enlisted.

Lewis: Where did you enter the service?

Bellin: St. Louis.

Lewis: St. Louis. And then you went where?

Bellin: I went to Great Lakes from St. Louis. As soon as we got enough for a trainload then the whole trainload went to Great Lakes.

Lewis: Tell me for the record: Great Lakes Naval Training Center is in--?

Bellin: Illinois.

Lewis: Glenview? Is that Glenview, technically?

Bellin: It's a place they call Great Lakes.

Lewis: Right, but the nearest town is what I'm wondering. Seems to me it's near Glenview.

Bellin: Yeah, it's close to it.

Lewis: Do you have any stories about your induction--the physical induction when you got to Great Lakes?

Bellin: Well, the first thing we had to do is get a haircut. We got all our hair cut off. And then they issued our clothes. Every morning at reveille--we had to get up at a certain time; I forgot what—

Lewis: Early.

Bellin: Early in the morning. But twice a week we had pork and beans for breakfast.

Lewis: Wow.

Bellin: And it was good.

Lewis: Every morning?

Bellin: Twice a week. Then we got one week of kitchen duty. That was, you had to get up at three o'clock in the morning.

Lewis: And peel potatoes.

Bellin: Yeah, we had to peel potatoes. Everybody had a job: cleanup. Then we went for a training and couldn't go to bed before a certain time.

Lewis: Yep. Okay. Can you tell me about your basic training? Your basic training, of course, was, uh, at Great Lakes.

Bellin: Basic training was--they trained you. I got the shots that they give you and then I got a temperature so they put me in the hospital. When I come out I went to a different regiment so I was a little bit more advanced on some of the other Navy personnel. So the Company Commander was in the front and I was in the back. When he would give an order I would listen to him and I'd give an order. So one day the wind was blowing toward him; I didn't hear what he said and I said the opposite thing, and they come back there and they give me a kick in the hind end. [laughs] I tried to explain to him and he says, "I don't want to hear no excuse." But they trained us nice.

Lewis: That's good. That's good. Can you describe how big was--what was happening at Great Lakes Training Center at that time? Was it fairly busy or fairly quiet?

Bellin: No, it was a busy place, it was a busy place. Whenever they get about a trainload of Navy fellows—

Lewis: Recruits.

Bellin: Recruits that were coming in every day.

Lewis: What were you trained for during that--?

Bellin: Well, we were trained for, um -- well, to listen to orders, to obey them.

Lewis: Okay, basic.

Bellin: Basic. And then we were shipped to San Diego to a destroyer base. We got there one night about six o'clock and three o'clock we were called out. Somewhere they thought they spotted a submarine out there. I was in Gun Crew Sixty-Nine so they called three gun crews to go on a destroyer to look for the submarine. I got sick right away. I got seasick right away; but that was no excuse.

Lewis: But this is after basic.

Bellin: After basic, yeah.

Lewis: How long were you in basic, from what month or year to what month, basically?

Bellin: I think it was six weeks.

Lewis: Six weeks?

Bellin: I think it was six weeks.

Lewis: Okay. And that woulda been from --?

Bellin: Yeah, it was six weeks.

Lewis: From what time? From what date?

Bellin: October seventh, '41 'til somewhere around about the twelfth of December.

Lewis: Did you go home? Did you go home for Christmas? Did they give you leave?

Bellin: Yeah. As soon as we finished our training we got a week home. The last day I was home, that's when they bombed Pearl Harbor.

Lewis: Wow. That was December seventh.

Bellin: December seventh, yeah.

Lewis: How did you feel about that?

Bellin: Well, when my brother told me I thought he was just kidding me. Then I listened to the radio and sure enough that's what happened. I can't go back until tonight because we got one train stopped there every day--small town--so I had to wait for that train.

Lewis: But you didn't have to go back on an emergency basis. You went back--the way you were going to back anyway.

Bellin: Yeah, the way I was going to go back anyway.

Lewis: Okay. When you were in basic--or what did they call it?

Bellin: Boot camp.

Lewis: Boot camp. When you were in boot camp did you have any instructors or buddies that you remember from that period of time at Great Lakes?

Bellin: Uh, no, no.

Lewis: Okay. Any recreation? What did you do for recreation--or did you have any? Maybe you didn't have any recreation.

Bellin: No, I tell you what: you were busy. You had no time for it. You had to wash clothes. In the evening you had a little time for yourself but not too much time.

Lewis: You must have had some weapons training.

Bellin: Well, yeah, we had rifle drill and then we had gas drill for mustard gas.

Lewis: What kind of rifles would they give you at that point?

Bellin: I think it was the Springfield rifle.

Lewis: Bolt action.

Bellin: Bolt action, yeah. I had no training for the National, uh, for the Armed Guard. Now, later on, soon as they had enough recruits for the ships then they had to go to school for six weeks for training for the Armed Guard. But I had enough. What I learned was through reading and listened to people--listened to shipmates.

Lewis: Tell me about your first assignment--your duty station.



Bellin: Well, the first assignment when I was on a destroyer, I was on a .30 caliber machine gun.

Lewis: Mm-hm, okay.

Bellin: Then we got stuck--we took a convoy to Seattle, Washington and then on the way back we got a call that a ship was sunk somewhere off the California coast and we were the closest destroyer so we went over there and we dropped a lot of depth charges, but they had sunk it. They had Army or Navy planes flew over and they sank it--

Lewis: Really?

Bellin: But we finished it off. We finished that submarine off by dropping depth charges.

Lewis: Were there any survivors?

Bellin: No, no survivors.

Lewis: So, Japanese sub?

Bellin: Yeah.

Lewis: Wow. So you got into things pretty quick. What would the date of that been?

Bellin: That--the third part of January.

Lewis: So January of 1942.

Bellin: But usually--I found out later that the Japanese didn't want to send too many submarines over here because it was too far from Japan and they had a big refuel somewhere.

Lewis: Right. Yeah, exactly. So how did you feel when you first saw that whole incident? There must have been a lot of explosions, and loud.

Bellin: Oh, yeah. You see when they drop a depth charge you hear a kind of a dead sound and then all at once the top of the water turns white and then all at once you hear the explosion and it blows the water pretty high.

Lewis: Yeah, I bet. I bet. Any memorable people from that incident?

Bellin: No.

Lewis: Okay. Any other stories about what was happening at that time?

Bellin: No, um--

Lewis: Did you come from San Diego when you were going north?

Bellin: Well, yeah. That's what they brought us in. Then after that they were building up Treasure Island. Treasure Island is that island in the San Francisco Bay. When I got there two of us would walk through the buildings and see that there was no fire started or nobody in there that would do some damage because they were building that up for the Navy Armed Guard. And so our job was--one fella had the gun and the flashlight and the other fella, uh, he carried the fireplug wrench just in case there was a fire somewhere. There was not too many Navy personnel on there. Then we went to Hawaii to Pearl Harbor. And then after that we came back and we loaded up and we went to Australia. When I come back Treasure Island was all built up--the biggest mess hall in the world.

Lewis: Wow. But that trip was on a US Navy ship; it was not a merchant ship.

Bellin: A merchant ship.

Lewis: Oh, it was a--?

Bellin: Well, the freighters that I went to Australia were freighters. Took us thirty-six days to get there.

Lewis: Oh, okay. What would they carry? What was the load, the cargo?

Bellin: Well, they carried--every time we went out we took at least a thousand tons of ammunition and then we carried everything, also a full deck load.

Lewis: On deck.

Bellin: And our top speed was eight and a half knots.

Lewis: Not too fast.

Bellin: No, not too fast.

Lewis: Can you describe any further--other assignments or duty stations after that, after the Australia trip?

Bellin: Well, every time I'd come in--every year we'd get a chance to go home: one week at home, one week for travelin'. We got two weeks off. Then

we'd get on different ships. I was on the *Mahi Mahi*, the *Michael Casey*, the *Alencon* [??], and then I was on the *John A. Johnson*.

Lewis: And the *Johnson* was the last one.

Bellin: Was the last ship, yeah.

Lewis: We'll get into that one. Before the *Johnson*, did you have any experiences that really stand out in your mind now? Or any memorable people that you met on those trips?

Bellin: No.

Lewis: That was fairly quiet?

Bellin: Mm-hm.

Lewis: Okay. Let's go back. Can you—well, let's go back. Where did you pick up the *Johnson*? No, the *John*, the *John A. Johnson*.

Bellin: Yeah. Well, at dock in San Francisco.

Lewis: San Francisco, okay.

Bellin: And then I had a gun crew. You know they charged a gun crew to take them to--we had to go to Oakland but we were in San Francisco. It was my duty to make sure I got them all to the ship.

Lewis: How many people in the gun crew?

Bellin: We had twenty-eight.

Lewis: Twenty-eight?

Bellin: Yeah.

Lewis: How did you get to be the head of the gun crew?

Bellin: Because I was a Gunner's Mate. Then we had a Lieutenant when we got to the ship; then we had a Lieutenant.

Lewis: Okay, yeah.

Bellin: But uh, that part of [??] the ship I had a gun crew and it was up to me--if we had fire at that the enemy then it was up to me to pick out the target

and the elevation and the deflection. That's either the height or, uh, sideways.

Lewis: Sideways. So did you do that, what they call bracketing? You kind of put a shell over it and a shell under it and then kind of hit in the middle.

Bellin: Well, the way we done it was one shot over, one shot under and then from there we should know where we're at. But we gotta get those off real fast.

Lewis: So it was just by sight.

Bellin: Yeah.

Lewis: No radar.

Bellin: No, no radar.

Lewis: So how long were you out on the *Johnson* from Treasure Island?

Bellin: I would say we were out about four days.

Lewis: Four days. Okay. What happened then?

Bellin: We lost a life raft; wave hit the side of the ship and tore a life raft off. Then they decided, half hour later, they decided to go back and get it and then they decided no, we would send a message out that night--radio message out saying we had lost a life raft just in case some ship would see it they would think that we got sunk.

Lewis: You were headed to Hawaii on that trip.

Bellin: Yeah, but then we were--we were heading there, but whether we were going to go further we don't know. But we traveled alone.

Lewis: So you were not in a convoy.

Bellin: No, we traveled alone.

Lewis: What were the conditions like for travel? Were they pretty strict--radio silence or lights?

Bellin: They says that they hadn't spotted any submarines in that area and it was safe to have running lights on. I don't know if they have running lights on or not. But now the sub that sank us was a large sub. There was four submarines built by the Japanese--large so they could go a little bit further

distance. I got a lot of literature on them submarines. But the submarine that sank us, it's laying on the bottom over in the Philippine Islands.

Lewis: It is? Okay.

Bellin: Now how they knew that they got her, I don't know, but I got the literature on it that they did sink it.

Lewis: Okay. So what was the date of that—when you—sunk?

Bellin: The date that we got hit was the night before Halloween.

Lewis: Oh. Okay. October thirtieth? On the thirtieth of--end of October?

Bellin: On the twenty-ninth.

Lewis: The twenty-ninth. Okay. 1944?

Bellin: 1944.

Lewis: What happened that night after the explosions?

Bellin: Well, it was getting dark. I loved my sleep so about 8:30 or nine o'clock I decided to go take a shower and shave. All at once I heard a big explosion and a lot of steam flying. I looked. We had the portholes open and I could see the engine room and I seen a lot of steam coming out of the engine room and I thought the engine room blew up.

Lewis: What time was this?

Bellin: I would say 8:30, nine o'clock. It was getting dark.

Lewis: At night.

Bellin: So I thought the engine room blew up so I just put on a pair of pants and a shirt and I run outside. I run out of the room and somebody said, "We got hit by a torpedo." So then I seen some mates coming out of the rooms so I ordered them up to the guns right away. And so, uh, one Navy Seaman, he says, "I seen something go by and it missed." The second torpedo missed us.

Lewis: It missed you.

Bellin: If it would have hit I wouldn't be here today because when we got hit by a torpedo, it knocked you down. You can't--it'll just knock you down. So the part where I was on, it started listing real bad and I knew what was

gonna happen because it was told to me that the submarine might surface and get on the side where we can't use the guns. And that's what happened. So I ordered my fellas to abandon ship, my mates to abandon ship. I went down to get--to go down from our gun station. I tripped the raft and it hung up. And I had a knife on my life jacket so I cut it and then it got in the water. And one fellow was sitting on the rail and I told him to jump and he wouldn't jump so I pushed him off.

Lewis: Okay.

Bellin: We almost got--when the ship broke it twisted in two. The two parts almost come together almost we got caught in between there. And lucky we got out just in time when it come together. And uh, and then we got out of there, we got on the life raft. We were on that life raft and we got away from the ship because when the ship goes down it's going to pull us down. And so we got a little ways away but then they started machine-gunning us. It was dark. And I jumped off--we all jumped off the life raft. The trick to that is to stay underwater as long as you can. And this way—and then finally I got back on the life raft and the submarine right close by. I tried to get a hold of this friend of mine but we were all covered with oil and he slipped out of my hand and he got cut up by the submarine propeller. That haunted me for quite some time. I used to have bad nightmares about it.

Lewis: Sure. And that's understandable.

Bellin: My children and family and friends and neighbors knew nothing about my Navy career. I just didn't want to talk about it. There was a publisher in New York heard about me and he asked me if I wouldn't write a story. So I told my daughter--I showed her the letter. And so, um, she says, "Let's write it." So she helped me write it. I finally told them. That's the first time they knew anything about it because I kept everything to myself.

Lewis: And that's not unusual for veterans to do that.

Bellin: I think most veterans don't want to talk about it.

Lewis: That might not be healthy psychologically.

Bellin: It's not healthy to hold it in--best to get it out. Well, for one thing I couldn't talk about it. It just hurt me so bad, I just couldn't talk about it.

Lewis: But I think you've done a lot of healing since--

Bellin: But now I can talk about it and it doesn't bother me.

Lewis: No, good.

Bellin: I used to have a lot of nightmares where we were called out to look for a submarine. I kept saying to myself, "One of these days I'm not going to be lucky; we're going to get hit." I've had quite a few of those dreams.

Lewis: Even now?

Bellin: No, lately I haven't had any but at the start there this hurt quite often.

Lewis: Now, the Japanese commander--did he attack from the surface do you think?

Bellin: Yeah. Then they shot in our ship. They hit underneath the gun tub [??] and the gun and everything was knocked off, but we weren't on there. And then the ship is starting to go down. We had to stay away from there because it would--kind of pull us down a little bit.

Lewis: What kind of machine gun--how heavy? Was that a heavy machine gun? Light machine gun?

Bellin: We had a three inch fifty--that's a big--well, it's not a big gun. It's three inches round--three inches across and fifty calibers.

Lewis: Fifty calibers? Oh, yeah. Fifty calibers. Okay. So it's heavy. It's a heavy caliber.

Bellin: 3"/50 they called it. 3"/50, yeah. And it's enough to blow--if you hit something it's enough to blow a pretty good-sized hole. If you use an armor-piercing shell you can blow a pretty good-sized hole.

Lewis: So some of the sailors were killed by the machine gun fire?

Bellin: Yeah, yeah. Two of the fellows I saved one time--I was on the life raft and I could hear them hollering, "Guns!" So I went out and I told them, "One hand hold on to my leg and paddle." And, uh, I--we swam back to the life raft. But later--I don't know if they could swim or what but later I heard them hollering but they were at a distance and the submarine was over there close by them and I think the submarine had picked them up and this Captain of this submarine was, later I found out, he was known to handcuff you and make you kneel and then behead you. I'm glad he's resting on the bottom of the ocean.

Lewis: Do you remember his name? His name?

Bellin: No, no.

Lewis: You couldn't track from the records?

Bellin: No, no, I don't know his name. I got the name of the submarine somewhere.

Lewis: What was the name of the submarine?

Bellin: I don't know. I got it in one of these papers. Somebody sent it to me. I don't know where I got it--Navy Department or somebody--but they give me a little history of that submarine.

Lewis: What happened to him? Wasn't there something that happened to him, the Captain? Was he caught?

Bellin: He's down in the submarine. He's down resting on the bottom of the ocean.

Lewis: In the Philippines?

Bellin: In the Philippines. There was four submarines of that type built.

Lewis: This isn't the type that had the plane? They build one that had a seaplane.

Bellin: Yeah. This one was built to have a seaplane on it.

Lewis: Yeah, that was big.

Bellin: I don't know how it was attached or anything like that but it was noted for that.

Lewis: There was a little bubble compartment on deck.

Bellin: I don't know how it was but there were four of them built that way.

Lewis: Okay. Um. Can you tell me your discharge? What happened after you got back? [both talking at once]

Bellin: Well, after they picked us up--they picked us up the next day right before it got dark. And we were all covered with oil, and so I went to take a shower and they said, "No, just get in bed." I said, "I got oil all over me." They said, "No, just get in bed." We all got some kind of shot to settle us down, or what. They give me a shot and it didn't bother me. They come around and they said, "Aren't you sleeping yet?" I said, "No." They said, "Well, I'll give you another one." So they give me another one. Then he come back around and he says, "Aren't you sleeping yet?" I said, "No." He says, "I can't give you any more. Eventually it'll take hold." And next thing I knew I was in San Francisco. How long I was out I don't know.



Lewis: So it did take hold.

Bellin: Yeah. About the other fellows I don't know. They all got a shot; they all got one.

Lewis: How long were you in San Francisco then? Was that in a hospital setting?

Bellin: No, then we were in San Francisco, then we had to give the story. Everybody had the story about what happened and the Navy wanted to find out from everybody what happened.

Lewis: Like a debriefing.

Bellin: And then this way they could figure out something. So then everybody had to go to the hospital. We were in the hospital for three days for check-up. Then they decided to send some of us to Santa Cruz, California to rest up. So we had a good time over there at a luxury hotel we stayed at. They had good meals. But they sent us there for thirty days to rest. Then I got out of there and then they're trying to figure out, uh, since I'm in the Reserve and the war is going to be over with very shortly--and they decided to send me up to Great Lakes.

Lewis: Back to Great Lakes.

Bellin: Yeah. Some of the—well, most of the fellows got discharged. If they were in the Reserve they got discharged because the war was getting over with and they had enough Armed Guard. And since we were in there from the start when they first got the—started the Armed Guard we were the first they started letting us out. And so, uh, I actually didn't want to get out—

[Music plays, perhaps a cell phone ring]

Lewis: This is--just a minute.

Bellin: Okay.

Lewis: What was the date? What date are you talking about now?

Bellin: I got out June the twenty-first of '45.

Lewis: '45.

Bellin: Yeah. Because they knew the war was going to be over shortly and they figured as long as I was in the Reserve they'd let us out. Most of the fellows that were on that ship got discharged.

Lewis: Where did you go? You came back home?

Bellin: I got my discharge at Great Lakes and then I went home. And then I got a job at working for this wealthy lady as a houseman and chauffeur.

Lewis: How did you feel when you got your discharge?

Bellin: I felt a little odd. I felt that I should have stayed in a little longer. They told me it's only a matter of time the war is going to be over with so they're starting to discharge some of the sailors, so. They said they had enough Armed Guard. Armed Guard: They had to go to training for six weeks of the Armed Guard, but we didn't have any. We didn't get trained because—

Lewis: Going by the seat of your pants.

Bellin: Because we were the first to get into the Armed Guard.

Lewis: Yeah. You were the blueprint. You set the bar.

Bellin: Yeah. But it was nice; I enjoyed it.

Lewis: I wanted to ask: on your training for the Navy, what kind of swimming, swimming ability, lifesaving ability did they--?

Bellin: No, we didn't get no training for that. I still say we had some fellows that didn't know how to swim.

Lewis: Wow.

Bellin: Yeah. I think the two that I saved one time, I don't think they knew how to swim.

Lewis: Wow.

Bellin: They needed us right away and so I still say that's why they cut our training short. The ones that went in to the Armed Guard later on, they all got six weeks of training.

Lewis: Did you have any physical problems at the time of discharge or just before or recently after that?

Bellin: No.

Lewis: So you were in pretty good shape.

Bellin: Well, I was getting a lot of upset stomachs but I got that straightened out.

Lewis: Okay. No burns? You were not burned?

Bellin: No, no, no.

Lewis: Okay. Overall then you came out pretty—

Bellin: Yeah, I come out--I'm the lucky one that come out all right.

Lewis: And, uh, let's see. What was your homecoming like when you got back to Nokomis?

Bellin: Went out and celebrated, had a couple of drinks, and that was it.

Lewis: Who'd you celebrate with?

Bellin: My friends. Well, my friends I had left. I mean, it wasn't too many left because when I joined, it seems like they had taken quite a few of my friends. That's the reason I joined; I figured I'm not going to be the last one going in and I'll take the branch of service that I want. And then with the idea good or bad I'm going to like it. And I still say I done the right thing.

Lewis: Okay. So what did you do after you left the service?

Bellin: Well, I worked for this wealthy lady as a houseman and chauffeur. I used to clean house for her, dust, vacuum. I was a houseman and chauffeur and helped out with the garden.

Lewis: But then you moved to Chicago or Cicero?

Bellin: Oh, wait. That was--wait a minute. No, this was all before I went into the service. After I got out of the service--when I was in the service my brother-in-law was working for a fellow that had a soda factory.

Lewis: In Cicero.

Bellin: And his daughter was writing about thirty Army fellows but nobody in the Navy. So my brother-in-law says, "She wants you to write a letter first to her because then you're the first one." Then finally I came home on leave and then I stopped to see my sister in Cicero. Then I went and had a date with her. Then next time I saw her we got engaged. Then after I got out of the service that's when I started working for her father in the soda factory: hard work.

Lewis: Wow. Okay. And then after that though you had another job--

Bellin: Then my father-in-law's son died and I didn't want the business so he sold it to some fellows and I worked for them for five years until they moved the business. Then I went and worked for Western Electric.

Lewis: When you retired, did you retire from Western Electric?

Bellin: When I retired, I retired in '83 from Western Electric.

Lewis: Do you have any medals or citations? Did you find the medals?

Bellin: I've got the medals someplace at home. I can't find them but they're in there someplace. I just put them in the wrong place. But I'll find them.

Lewis: Do you remember how many medals you have--and ribbons--total?

Bellin: Well, at that time I got five, at that time. But I'm pretty sure I'm entitled to more.

Lewis: Now you're up to fourteen. [Bellin laughs] Some of those are commemorative.

Bellin: Those they didn't have them at that time.

Lewis: No, they might not have. But they're for people that served in a certain time. Fourteen medals you have. Did you have any injuries then, or disability compensation?

Bellin: No.

Lewis: Do you still continue any friendships with people from the service, from the Navy?

Bellin: I contacted—well, one fellow from Seattle; we write, communicate every year but so far this year I haven't heard from him so I don't know if he's living or not. But that's the only I know that's living from the last ship I was on.

Lewis: Okay. Were you involved in any veterans' organizations?

Bellin: I belong to the Armed Guard and then I belong to the American Legion, VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars]. But as far as the Armed Guard, we tried to find members. And as far as anybody that's been on a ship with me, they can't find anybody.

Lewis: Tell me a little about the Honor Flight. The year before last, I think, you went to Washington, D.C.

Bellin: Yeah, I was on the Honor Flight. I registered in Illinois. In the meantime I moved to Wisconsin so I got a call one time that I'm going. So I went to Midway--I flew out of Midway. We got over there and we had a little breakfast. Then they had Andrews Sisters impersonators. And I met the Andrews Sisters in the RKO Golden Gate Theater in San Francisco when I was in the service.

Lewis: The real Andrews Sisters.

Bellin: Yeah, the real ones. So it was nice to see the impersonators. [Lewis laughs] Every one of us had a guide and they took pictures for us. We went to Washington and then we were greeted over by a lot of people.

Lewis: That's a long day.

Bellin: Yeah. And then we went to quite a few places: Arlington National Cemetery and—

Lewis: The World War II Memorial?

Bellin: Oh, that was beautiful. That World War II Memorial was beautiful. We saw that. And then we went I think it was Baltimore to get on the plane to fly back to Chicago and we were greeted by a lot of people over there. We had a box lunch. Then we got on the plane, went back to Chicago. Oh, the plane as it come in to Washington, they had two fire trucks on each side squirting water and we went underneath. Then they had the same thing in Midway Airport. When we landed over there I was the first to get off and led the group. We were met by a lot of people. We had the Navy Band and Navy personnel. Unbelievable, the people there--greeting you, giving you candy and gum and stuff like that.

Lewis: You got a lot of letters.

Bellin: Oh, then I got a lot of--I must have got five hundred letters from the school kids thanking me for fighting for them so they could have a safe place to play, go to school, and not worry about being prosecuted. I got at least five hundred letters. Some of those--you read, it was a little touching. It made you feel like you were important.

Lewis: You bet. Well, looking back, how do you feel about your military and your war experiences? What has it meant to your life?

Bellin: Well, I tell you what. It's a good experience. And I enjoyed it. I made up my mind that if I joined I gotta like it. It was difficult at times. I got sick quite a few times; when the water got a little rough I got sick. I was on a destroyer: they roll a lot and you get sick very easy. But they have no mercy on you. [Lewis laughs] Daytime you worked; nighttime maybe you got four or five hours sleep, that's it.

Lewis: Would you do it all again? The same one way, knowing what you know now?

Bellin: I think I would, yes.

Lewis: Would you recommend the Navy now to young people looking for a career?

Bellin: Oh, yes, and I'm glad I joined the Navy. It was a great experience for me. I learned a lot. It's something that had to be done.

Lewis: Yes it did.

Bellin: I'm glad that I served this country.

Lewis: Let's see. Is there anything special--what would you want people who listen to this interview to know? Is there anything you'd like them to know about your experience and what you went through?

Bellin: Well, the thing is, what I've learned is if you listen to some of the sailors, seamen--because we had Merchant Marines; they'd run the ship and we took care of the fighting--so if you listened to them they got a lot of good stories and helpful things that will help you and maybe save your life. I listened to them and I'll tell you what. It did save my life. If I didn't listen to them or didn't know about it I wouldn't be here today. So I have to thank them too.

Lewis: Well, I'm sure a lot of people thank you; we thank you too.

Bellin: I appreciate that.

Lewis: Okay. Well, this is Gerald Lewis and we are wrapping it up now for the interview with Mr. Julius Bellin. So that'll be it for today. Thank you so much.

Bellin: Okay. Thank you for listening.

**[END OF INTERVIEW]**