

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ROBERT R. WALLS
Carpenter's Mate, Navy, World War II.

1996

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Walls, Robert R., (1914-) Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Walls, who lived in Lodi (Wisconsin) before WWII, discusses his service as a Carpenter's Mate in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific theatre during World War II. Walls was already enlisted in the medical corps of the Ohio National Guard when Pearl Harbor was attacked. He decided to enlist in the Navy and hitchhiked to Cleveland (Ohio). Walls talks about being inducted as a Carpenter's Mate Third Class before beginning his training at Great Lakes in Chicago (Illinois). He describes the swimming, calisthenics, and marching as well as his limited interaction with homosexuals and Blacks. After basic training, Walls was put into the Amphibious Corps at Camp Bradford (Virginia), before being stationed on the USS Wisconsin out of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania). He describes his first reactions to the Wisconsin, working with the evaporators, and the training evolutions the ship went through in relation to damage control. Walls touches upon the spoiled food they consumed, suicides, conducting burials at sea, and the daily living conditions of the men. He talks about his combat experiences in Leyte Gulf, the South China Sea, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and Hokkaido, Japan. He elaborates on his meetings with the Japanese people, feelings towards the Japanese, and his encounters with American POWs. Lastly, Walls mentions his love for the Navy, and his involvement in the VFW and the American Battleship Association.

Biographical Sketch

Walls (1914-) was a Carpenter's Mate in the Navy, serving in the Pacific theatre during WWII. He participated in the Iwo Jima and Okinawa campaigns, joined the Reserves in 1946 and retired after 32 years of service.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996

Transcribed by Rose Palachek, 2004.

Transcription edited by Damon R. Bach & John J. McNally, 2006.

Interview Transcript

MARK: Okay, today's date is July 23, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veteran's Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Robert Walls, of Mansfield, Ohio, who served aboard the U.S.S. Wisconsin during the Second World War. Good morning and thanks for taking some time out of your day to talk to me.

ROBERT: I'm glad to talk to you, Mark.

MARK: Good. Why don't we start at the top. Why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941?

ROBERT: Okay. In 1914, I was born in Creston, Ohio, that's in Bedina County. Then in 1922, we moved to Lodi and then my dad was working for the Standard Oil Company with a team of eight Percheron horses delivering gasoline throughout the countryside you know, because there was very few homes that had electricity at that time, in the twenties. Most of them had kerosene lamps and so forth and there was hardly any electricity or appliances at all. Then we moved to Ashland Ohio in 1927. He was a bulk manager there and I remember in 1927 staying up all night, listening to the radio, the barrio radio about Wendy, crossing the Atlantic alone in his airplane called the "Spirit of St. Louis." Then before the war then I was working at A.L. Garber Publishing Company over there in Ashland and we had heard that Germany had invaded Poland there in 1939. Then when the attack on Pearl Harbor came in 1941, that was early in the afternoon and I heard it on the radio since there was no TV at that time. Before all of this happened, in 1932, I joined the Ohio National Guard in the Medical Corps.

MARK: For what reason?

ROBERT: We couldn't find a job. They paid \$21 a month in the army and we went to Camp Prairie up here along Lake Erie every year. Carry huge packs on our backs you know, and eating out of our mess gear and shaving out of it, living in pup tents. We got \$15 for those two weeks. But anyway, getting back to Pearl Harbor that Sunday we heard on the radio and President Roosevelt got on there and announced that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and that we were entering into a world war.

MARK: And what was your reaction to that?

ROBERT: Oh boy. Well my dad told me right away, You got to go Robert, because you know [laughing] you've been in the Army and you're single and all that and you gotta go, so I expected to get my draft notice, and I did. In 1942 I got my draft notice and rather than go back into the Army, I had a taste of that experience with

those packs you know and wearing OD's and all that stuff. I hitchhiked to Cleveland, I didn't have a car and I hitchhiked to Cleveland to see if I could join the Navy. They said, "Well where are you working?" I said, "I'm working at a big publishing company," and they said, "Well we don't need printers but we could use any other rate." I said, "I'm a cabinetmaker; could you use a carpenter's mate?" And they says, "Yeah, we could use a carpenter's mate, you get two references and bring them back up here and we'll see what happens." Well I got my main training teacher and a place where I had made some cabinets for firestone, went back up to Cleveland and they enlisted me then as a Carpenter's Mate Third Class in the Navy. It was in the winter time and we got on a train and we went to Great Lakes Illinois, outside of Chicago, the big training building.

MARK: What sort of training did you do exactly?

ROBERT: Well, there was a lot of training at that time. There is a lot of marching, a lot of calisthenics, swimming, and just preparing you for, well we had the musciclot hammocks, and we had to learn to lace those hammocks up and unlace them, and you did that. During the day you learned how to tie knots. You learned a lot of things about being in the event of going aboard a ship. So then you got up real early in the morning and used discipline very heavily. There was no smoking in there, I tell ya one night, some guy snook in the clothes drying room and got a cigarette some way or another and smoked it. Our whole company, 1974 is our company number, we had to get out on our practically our bear feet and March that night for about an hour out there in the cold wintery night. So that shows ya what you, you paid the penalty, if one man made a mistake, the whole company paid for it. It made you have a lot of discipline and recognition for each other.

MARK: Now I went to basic training about 40 years after you did.

ROBERT: Did you?

MARK: Yeah, well, Air Force, [chuckle] I wasn't in the Navy. And it wasn't in war time. One of the things that I remember is that it brought people together from all different parts of the country.

ROBERT: Oh it did. Right. We had people in all different parts of the country there.

MARK: How did everyone get along?

ROBERT: Well you had to get along. Man, if you didn't get along why you know there was no guy gays in there like we have now in today's services where gays could be in. Gays during WW II were shark bait. You throw them over the side, I mean you just didn't put up with that kind of crap.

MARK: Were there any? Did you ever find that?

ROBERT: What?

MARK: Did you ever find that?

ROBERT: Oh yeah, man they made it so rough for them they had to get out.

MARK: Now is this in basic training or is this on the ship somewhere?

ROBERT: This is on the ship and basic training both.

MARK: I see.

ROBERT: Yeah, it just didn't work out. They were looked down upon because we knew that that wasn't the right thing to do, they wouldn't make a good fighting man.

MARK: Well I wasn't thinking of that, while all of that is interesting [chuckling] what I was thinking of is southern guys still fighting the Civil War, east coast, how do people from different parts of the country. I mean, the services weren't integrated at the time too, but just even among white boys such as yourself, how did everyone get along?

ROBERT: We got along pretty good. There was very few Negro people in the service. I didn't run into very many at all till we got aboard the ship and then when we did get them, the Negro boys were ammunition handlers, mates cooks and things of that nature. They weren't very many rated men and there was no officers at all, Black officers. Well, anyway then, the Great Lakes course we had locker, uniform and hammock inspections and the hair was all cut off you know. And then after 10 weeks we were sent to go on a train to Camp Bradford Virginia, that's right outside of Norfolk, and we were put in the Amphibious Corps. They took our Navy uniforms off and we had to trade them in for helmets, beach shoes and coveralls and an M-1 rifle. Everybody was issued them for the Sicily invasion. And they got us out on the grinder, its called grill field, and they started reading off names and they got down I think to the R's, the letter R, and they had enough for the Sicily invasion and they said all the other people will be assigned to ship's company. So I got assigned then being a carpenter's mate to the carpenter shop. I was over there of course; they were making sea chests for the Sicily invasion. They were screwing all these sea chests together with screws by hand, and I told that one chief over there that, "Hey I can screw those sea chests better by hand." He said "Let's see ya do it." So I took a drill bit and put it in an electric drill and run those screws in with the electric drill, and he said, "My god man, you're a Carpenter's Mate Second Class." [Laughter] So I mean, if you could come up with something, they rewarded you with it right away. You didn't wait for a rate change.

MARK: Now did that change as your Navy career arose, and during WW II did that change as more guys ended up in the service, because you were in pretty early compared to a lot of people I've spoken with so far?

ROBERT: Yeah, well, it did. There were about 10 million men in the service and man I tell ya, you never seen so many people. You got on a train and it was just packed. You went every place by train; it was just packed with service men. Well anyway, then in 1943 I was assigned to the crew of the battleship Wisconsin. It was being built in Philly.

MARK: Yeah, I was going to say, which hadn't been built yet.

ROBERT: No. It was being built in Philly, and it was commissioned then in '43, and we left Philly then in Sept 1944, and it took eight tugs to push us around you know and head us out. We were tied up alongside a new carrier, Randolph. Everything was new and they were just working their asses off building ships and they were outfitting the ships with crews. There were 3,200 men on the Wisconsin, officers and men and they turned us around and we headed towards the Delaware River and then we came out into the Atlantic Ocean, went down towards the Caribbean, past Cuba and all and got to Cocosola, the Panama Canal, you know and we anchored there. From then on we went to bed that night, we got up in the morning and my god the ship had sunk 18 feet because the tide went out and you couldn't even see the pier. Anyway we did get on the way then that next morning and went through four locks to the Gatun Lake, and that's a fresh water lake there in Panama, and we anchored there all night. Then we got on the way that next morning, because the other four locks we would then be in the Pacific.

MARK: So when you first saw the ship, it was in the process of being built?

ROBERT: Yes, it was.

MARK: So, I want to go back to Philadelphia for a little bit. I have a couple of questions about that. So as the ship's being built, you were already in Philadelphia. What sort of duties are you doing?

ROBERT: Since I'd had four years in the National Guard, and I was a Third Class Carpenter's Mate, was a rated man, you know, they had me drilling the troops and mustering the crew along the Wisconsin. We were put up in barracks; some of us couldn't be on a ship yet because it was being outfitted. Every morning I had to muster the troops and march them and you know, with the chow, we had to stand in line for chow, we had to stand in line to go the head, you had to stand in line for everything you did. You had locker inspections, you had bunk inspections, you had to make up your bunk just right. You had to wash all your clothes by hand and you had to press them and you had to maintain your own body. You was inspected; your body and you had to be clean shaven every day. It was

tough. You couldn't crawl around and you had to do what they said. The officers made damn sure that you obeyed everything that was said to you.

MARK: Were there discipline problems?

ROBERT: No there wasn't.

MARK: Other than just being you know young and ---

ROBERT: Anyone that got out of line was sent over to the brig you know, aboard ship, anyone that wasn't, that got out of line was disciplined and they were not allowed to go ashore. So they just closed up the brig. We didn't have a brig on the Wisconsin. They just kept you all on the ship and that was enough discipline.

MARK: So when you first saw the ship, in what condition was it?

ROBERT: Oh my god. I was amazed at the length of the ship, the width of it, it was just unbelievable. It was longer than the street I live on here today. It was 888 feet long. It had, being a Carpenter's Mate; I was assigned to the fresh water cane.

MARK: Which is what? I was in the Air Force.

ROBERT: I was in charge of the forward and after evaporators where all the fresh water was made. It made 2000 gallons of water per hour from sea water to fresh water because there had to be fresh water you see for the boilers. And fresh water to drink but we had to take a shower in the salt water, the sea water and then rinse off in fresh water so they had all these bells that you had to be pretty particular. We made, we had 20 tanks that held 25,000 gallons each. There were four huge boilers, steam propulsion on the ship. There were a lot of things on there they had to keep ya busy doing as each rate had something to do. They had 62 different rates on the ship so they had 62 different professions on there. They had hospital corpsmen, they had the bakers, the cooks, mowers, and machinist's mates, and the doctors, and by god, you name it. It's just like a city, that's the way it is on these big carriers now.

MARK: As for your actual duty station and living quarters and that sort of thing, why don't you just describe them? First of all, your duty stations. Where precisely on the ship were you and --

ROBERT: Well I was confined to damage control, damage control central. That was about four decks below the main deck and it was all enclosed with armor and that's where all the central damage control, in case the ship got hit or there was an explosion, or a kamikaze hit it or something like that. Everybody was routed out of damage control and also the bridge, up in the conning towers. All the armament, all the salvos and the five-inch gunnery that left the ship or kept any enemy that came into the ship. We were all buttoned down, and the hatches were

all closed and all the automatic doors weighed down by the boulders and everything was all protected by the closing, quick-acting doors. In fact when they sounded general quarters, boy you'd better get to your station within just a few minutes because the doors were all battened down and the hatches were all closed and everything like that in case they launched torpedoes or a bomb was dropped. Because a explosion like that, that hit a ship there was so much ammunition and fuel on there and all the gun powder and all the salvos and all those shells, plus all the high bottled-aviation gas that we had for our two planes on the fan tail, and if that stuff ever caught on fire and started to blow up, the ship could sink itself just by blowing it up. Oh man. So all the fire hoses were rigged out and all the hatches were dogged down and everything was all set for action and then it had a battle announcer up on top side of the conning towers that told us what was coming in. What enemy, what kamikaze was coming in so that we were all prepared for them and we had radar, since jets didn't have radar we could tell the bogies coming in, see for many miles away. So we knew they were coming but when they got there, we didn't know how many, where they picked up so many bogies but there were so many coming in, in different directions, it was hard to comprehend with all that. It was really scary. Since everything was all dogged down, the steel decks would start sweating and you would get a lot of this watery condition. Water would run down the bulkheads, the decks would get all damp with water and everything so you just were down there like rats, you couldn't get out neither. So if anything did hit, you was done for, like being in a submarine. That was terrifying.

MARK: I bet it was.

ROBERT: Oh boy, and you know, this damage control and all that stuff that I was involved in and general quarters, you just had drills day and night. You better grab your life jacket and you had a gas mask and you had a whistle and a knife and you had better get on your head, and know where your shoes was and the rest of your stuff was because you had to run. You know, you run down a 187-foot length ship, and a huge ship with 3000 people on there, you'd better go the right way because you know everybody going forward, you go up on the starboard side and up and everybody back aft went on the porch side and down.

MARK: Yeah, it sounds like it might be a mess.

ROBERT: Yeah, and every morning you had mustered all the hands with their muster stations day and night to see if anybody had fallen overboard or if anybody was missing. See cause some people just jumped, they couldn't take it and they just killed themselves, you had a suicide rate. Then we'd bury people at sea too, from other ships. The, every third day we'd top the destroyers and give them 640,000 gallons of fuel oil so we were floating armored tankers in a way.

MARK: As, for your sleeping quarters and that sort of thing—

- ROBERT: Well, sleeping quarters were, actually where we where down and around the Philippines and close to the equator, you couldn't sleep in your sack. You had to sleep up on topside or sleep on the deck or you know up where you got fresh air, because it was so hot down there you just couldn't stand it.
- MARK: I don't suppose there was air conditioning in there?
- ROBERT: No there wasn't. Damage control was air conditioned, down in the logging room or down in the where the quartermasters were. Certain parts of the ship were air conditioned.
- MARK: As for the food and that sort of thing, how was it?
- ROBERT: Well, food was wonderful when you first left the states, but about a week afterwards you just didn't have hardly nothing no more.
- MARK: Started to run low huh?
- ROBERT: Everything was low when, I mean I was there one time and we just ran out of food so to speak and our rolled oats was wormy, we had to throw away a lot of beef, I mean a lot of pork, dump it out at sea. It was just spoiled, you couldn't have no vegetables or nothing, and they were all gone. So you know they baked a lot of bread and stuff but it was all wormy too, the flour.
- MARK: Now once you got to the Pacific did you get shore leave or anything, did you get to pick up supplies somewhere down the line?
- ROBERT: Well they picked up supplies at sea. About every, oh a few weeks a big supply ship would come alongside at night. Usually it did it at night and we would do it on the way about 12-14 knots.
- MARK: Did you get any shore leave at all?
- ROBERT: No. Well, we got a little bit there in the Carolinas. They had a little shore leave. But very seldom did we see any land at all.
- MARK: I don't suppose there was much to do there either?
- ROBERT: We didn't see any women either. [Laughter] One time we did though, our hospital ship pulled along, we were coming alongside a hospital ship, the Hope, and transferred some people.
- MARK: Now, as for the battles, the Japanese and that sort of thing.
- ROBERT: Well that was the worst part, the kamikazes.

MARK: Why don't you describe the first engagement you were involved in and what your role was and what you did and what you saw and what you experienced.

ROBERT: Well the first engagement we were in, we were in the Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. We got a battle star for that and of course we were in Task Force 58.4 then, and we had the battleships Massachusetts, Indiana, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Missouri were with us then. Then we were in Task Group 58.4 and that was about the battleship. We had 10 battleships out there and we were all in battle, the task groups were divided into four groups [BLANK TAPE] so when the Japs came out they couldn't hit us all at once. They could only hit a fourth of us. Then we had aircraft carriers, the Lexington, the Essex, the Bennington, the Hancock, the Randolph, the Ticonderoga, the Yorktown, the Shangri-La and the Bonhomme Richard.

MARK: That's a lot of ships.

ROBERT: And the Wasp and the San Jacinto. President Bush was on that thing.

MARK: Is that right?

ROBERT: And the Belleau Wood and the Monterey, and the Baton, and the Cowpens then we had the, well, I won't go through all of these but we had all these big cruisers with us too. We had 40 cruisers with us, 10 battleships, and 120 something destroyers. I got a list of all these ships that were just in our group.

MARK: When I talked to guys who were in the infantry, they talk about their baptism of fire and that was the first time they were shot at or attacked somewhere.

ROBERT: Yeah, the baptism of fire, I told you about, we were all below deck. I didn't even know what was going on. And after it was all over, you come up on topside and you couldn't hardly walk because of all the cork and the debris of all the shells. We had 10 dual 5-inch 38 guns, mounts, five on each side, there was ten and then we had 16-inch salvos, we used, we could shoot in the water when the kamikazes come in real low, we could put up a wall of fire and then we had about 40 quad, 40-millimeters that the marines shot went on, and a 20-millimeter. So the battleship had so much fire power and armor that no one could get to it. Very few of them even got hit. The Jap kamikaze went after the picket destroyers and the carriers. They are the ones that took the brunt. I counted 21 explosions on the Franklin. The Big Ben it was called. Well, like I say, when they come in at us there in the Philippines were all down low deck so I didn't actually see anything going on at all. But like I say, when you come up on topside you could see everything that was done. Most of our fights were in the night. Nothing in the day.

MARK: And so there were other campaigns you were involved in too---

ROBERT: Then after the Philippines, we went to the South China Seas. We heard the Yamato and other Japanese battleships were in that area so we pursued them. We got into another battle in the South China Sea but we never did catch up with the Yamato but we got out carrier planes had sunk some Japanese carriers and also some cruisers and destroyers from Japan. That was the second action we was in. Then the third action we were in, we went to Iwo Jima. When we got there they had, the Navy had the old battleships like the Arkansas and the Colorado and some of those real old battle anguses laying off the arm there, pumping in 16-inch salvos. Then all these new battleships, like I was on, we pounded that Iwo Jima for 2 weeks, shot sours in there, you wouldn't think there was anything left. After the actual invasion the Marines invaded that, that was one of the worst losses they had at that time and they lost all of them, the Marines killed thousands of Japs on that barren volcanic island. You know you could see it out there, sitting all by itself, it wasn't very big. It had good airfields that we wanted so that is why we took it, and then they gave it. Then the next action that we was in was Okinawa. We went up to Okinawa and we shelled the heck out of it and it was towards the last of the war, the kamikazes were coming in from Kyushu and we lost a heck of a bunch of people. We lost a lot of them, Navy ships, it was about 10,000 sailors that got killed and about ten times that many Japanese. Okinawa was even worse than Iwo Jima. Then we left Okinawa and went into Hokkaido, Japan with some other battle ships and bombarded the Amacido Iron Works right in Hokkaido, that's north of Tokyo. It was about four or five battleships went in there and carriers and destroyers and cruisers lay out off shore. We went in that channel and we killed 80,000 people that night. We hurt. Then when we came back down after Okinawa and everything, we heard the war ended.

MARK: I was going to ask, where were you when you got the news and what the reaction was aboard ship.

ROBERT: Oh man, they just couldn't believe it! It was just, you know, here you are all geared up for all this action and getting up every morning at 3:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. in the morning and going through all these different quarters and everything and just working your ass off, and then all at once its over, it's a lull. Gee, you didn't know what to do. There is no more drill and all you did was walk around and congratulate everybody. Everybody was just so happy that the war was over and that you could go home.

MARK: Then, after the surrender, you went to Japan?

ROBERT: Yeah, we pulled in there at the Yokosuka Naval Base there in Yokahoma.

MARK: What date, do you remember?

ROBERT: It was before September the 2nd because the 2nd, they were in **-[TAPE ENDED]** It was, I think it was around about the last of August.

MARK: Did you have any concerns that ---

ROBERT: Well, yeah, everybody was getting kind of wondering if we were going to get shot at you know, but we got in there all right and I've got a picture of it in the naval war history about us going into Tokyo Bay and you seen Mt. Fujiyama there. There was a beautiful country there in Yokohama. After we anchored there, in Tokyo bay, they said we are going to let you go ashore and walk around and then you come back in several hours, so we did. We went by groups and there was hardly any Japs there at all, in a big city of a million of Yokohama, everyone was scared and left. The Japanese you did see was hiding. They gave us a box lunch, I think an orange, a piece of chicken and or a sandwich or something and the stuff that you couldn't eat they would run out and grab it like birds and eat it, even bones. They were starving. They bowed to you. They were little people and here you are, I was about 5, I'm pretty near 6 foot tall and I weighed around 180 and you know here I am and little people coming out to you just your shoulder height, smiling and bowing to you. You just, you was victorious but you didn't feel that. It was you know, I don't know what words you describe that as. It was humiliating in a way.

MARK: For you?

ROBERT: That you won the war and yet, [laughter] it was all over and yet you were the victor and yet they just honored you and you were like an idol to them. After it was all over, people were just so damned pissed off at the Japanese today, a lot of people won't even buy any Japanese stuff because of the stuff that they did to us. And they are the ones who started all of this, we didn't. Look at all the people, when we pulled into Pearl Harbor and tied up alongside the second battleship Oklahoma, you could see all the devastation that they did, there, in Hawaii, sunk our ships and killed thousands of men and all the people on the Arizona, killed, and all the ships that, the Nevada, the Pennsylvania and all them old ships were sunk, and all the people they killed in the war. We killed a lot too but my gosh, they are the ones that started it. When it all ended, when it started, they had the largest Navy in the world, but when it ended they didn't have nothing. They brought out those envoys on the Missouri to sign the peace treaty, and they didn't have any ships to bring them out, they had to bring them out in a tug boat. You know it's a pitiful sight, they, it was a dishonor for them to surrender and they would commit hari-kari and kill themselves before they would surrender. And that's what these kamikazes were. That was the last resort, they ran out of fuel and they were getting all their gasoline from Burma and down through the Solomon's there and their supply line ran out and they couldn't get any more fuel. They, they're shops couldn't get any more steel to build anything and everything they had was junk. Yet, today, look at what today has happened. Today, they are in business; they were giving America a hard time just in building cars and imports. So, you know, we did a lot of bad things to and we shot people out of the parachutes. I seen people that was shot, I seen tragedy, we picked up war prisoners in Okinawa on the way back and those poor guys were just skin and

bones. They were fed rotten fish and patties and sea weed and rice, and they were just hideous looking with cigarette burns all over their bodies where they were tortured. Their finger nails were pulled out.

MARK: Did you get a chance to ---

ROBERT: And their testicles cut off. I tell you, there was a lot of bad things that were done to our prisoners.

MARK: Did you get a chance to speak to these prisoners at all?

ROBERT: Oh yeah!

MARK: How were their spirits? You've described their physical conditions, I mean --

ROBERT: Oh their physical condition was terrible. They just, thankful to god that we liberated them and got them out of there. The Japanese on the other hand were just so scared and so, the way they treated them. You can imagine how you would be if you hold someone prisoner and treated them like trash and then you scared, you didn't know if you were going to be reprimanded for the way you treated this guy.

MARK: So, how long did you stay in Japan?

ROBERT: About a week.

MARK: About a week, that was it.

ROBERT: Yeah. And we went to Okinawa and picked up these prisoners and we went back to Pearl Harbor. They said where are you being discharged, I said in Chicago so I got on the Iowa and came home on the Iowa. The Wisconsin went to the west coast and I came to Burmington in Seattle, Washington. We got on a train there in Burmington with our hammocks and everything and we went to Chicago. It took us four days and three nights on the train just to get there, and every stop we would make, it was all Navy train, and we'd stop and they would run in the hardware stores and stuff and they painted all that train all different colors [chuckling] writing [unintelligible] on it, the name of their ships. You should have seen that train coming home! My gosh, they just threw the seats out the doors, they just ripped, just ruined the train.

MARK: Good celebrating.

ROBERT: Good celebrating that's right. And playing cards. My gosh, some guys got in a fight, gambling you know. I wasn't a gambler myself, I would just stand around and watch and sometimes I was in the wrong place and someone got throwed against me or something, I got out of there. Even if I was First Class Petty

Officer, you know. You couldn't do nothing, shore patrol couldn't do nothing, there was just too many of us. Then after the war, we got home, it was a different story. I went back to Ashland and went back to the place where I worked and they wouldn't give me my job back so I went to another place and they said, "Can you draw?" and I said, "Yeah, I had drafting in school." They said, "Well, we need draftsmen." I started to draw for them and then the Navy built a training center over at Mansfield and I was living in Ashland and I hitchhiked over to Mansfield in 1946 and joined the Reserves over here. In 1952 I become a chief, Chief Draftsman then.

MARK: So in the Naval Reserves, after the war, what sort of duties did that entail?

ROBERT: Well I was an instructor then. I was an instructor in the Navy, I had to go to Navy instructor school to learn to write lesson plans and how to – I taught the basic seaman requirements for recruits. We had to drill them and we had all the studies that you had to do, we had to go on train duty every year. Aboard ship I was on 27 different ships, every year I would go on different ships and from repair ships, I was on the Wisconsin twice even. Back on it, it came back into duty in the 1950's. Then I was on the Yorktown Carrier, I was on the Saipine, I was on a lot of repair ships, all the new ones and Norfolk, and at Philly, and at New London, Connecticut. So I Just traveled all over, every year we would go on different ships and that's how I got my 32 years.

MARK: Now after the war, a lot of guys didn't want anything to do with the military. What possessed you to want to stay in the Reserves?

ROBERT: No they didn't, no they didn't. I just loved the Navy, I tell ya. I love the comrade you had when you went on training duty and you were with the guys that liked the Navy, I liked the Navy chow. They always had the best food and you could eat all you wanted to eat. I took my wife with me when I went to Norfolk, when I went to Philly, and the admiral down there, I was working at Westinghouse as a draftsman and they had a program where you could recommend that the company be rewarded for honoring the veterans. I recommended Westinghouse receive this award and the admiral from the fourth naval district came up here and we entertained him. He was up here 3 days, Admiral McLean and he said, "Hey chief, when you come down to Philly, be sure to come and see me because you gave me such a wonderful time in Mansfield." That's the way the Navy was. There were a few goof-offs, you know, like tail hook and different things that happened in the Navy, I mean but you can't judge the service from what a few bad ones do. Just like a rotten apple in the barrel of good ones. Over all, you had a lot of respect for your Navy officers and I never put a man on report. I would take him aside and turn, "Hey, you gotta do this way if you want to stay in." And if you liked the Navy, the Navy likes you. So if you don't want to be Navy, get out. And that's the way it was.

MARK: I just have one last area that I want to cover and that involves veteran organizations and reunions and that sort of thing. I know for a fact you have been involved with some of the battleship Wisconsin veteran types of things. But let's start from right after the war. Did you ever join any of the major groups like the Legion of the VFW or anything like that?

ROBERT: Yeah, I joined the VFW because it honored the veterans that went overseas. The American Legion don't so I didn't join the American Legion. I joined the VFW because it honors the people that served overseas. Then I joined the American Battleship Association, that's out in San Diego, California. I'm a light member of it and the only people that can belong to that are the people that served on battle ships and so you know that's about the only two veteran organizations I am on to.

MARK: Are you what you would call an active member? Do you hold offices and ---

ROBERT: No, I never did hold offices. It never did anything good for me. I quit smoking about 20 years ago and you go to that stuff and the room is full of smoke so I just quit going. I didn't go to any of the reunions because the reunions was out in the west coast and it's too far to go so I just didn't go and I'm 82 years old this year. So I figured, well shoot, I'm not going to go to those. And you know, being in Ohio, or even where you live in Wisconsin to go clear to the west coast just to go to a reunion that's only a couple days, and it costs you hundreds of dollars to do that, you just don't do it. [Chuckle] But I did, I got, I wrote, I got teed off when Admiral Borda committed suicide, in the Newsweek magazine one of the reporters that was from a different branch of the service was the cause of that. Because he was going to interview him and bring up the fact that he was wearing two "V"s, only combat Korean ribbons that weren't authorized, yet the night before on the Larry King Show, I heard Admiral Zumwait, who was the Chief of Naval of Operations during the Korean War, authorize Admiral Borda, who was a commander then, of a destroyer, to wear those. So, its just stuff like this that goes on, you know, that turns you against something. It's a shame that we have people like that, but you yourself, you know if you got a certain thing that's happened to you; you think hey you don't let that get to you to the thing where you are going to kill yourself. So that's kind of up-ended me. Then they took the four battleships out of commission, the Iowa, the New Jersey, the Wisconsin and the Missouri. They struck them from the Naval Register and yet, there was a thing in Congress for being struck from the register. There was two ships in the best material condition like the Missouri and the Wisconsin that was over in the Gulf War that shot the missiles and the cruise missile and the tomahawk, why not keep those because that's the only fire power the Navy had. So, you know, that's stuff in the air too.

MARK: You pretty much exhausted all the questions that I have.

ROBERT: No kidding.

MARK: Yeah, is there anything you would like to add or anything, before we finish here.

ROBERT: No [laughter] it's just nice talking with ya and I'm glad that you have your Wisconsin Veteran's Association, the State of Wisconsin, they provided us, on the ship I was, the name Wisconsin, they provided all the silverware, they provided us with all the coffee pots and the repair lockers where we made coffee. They replenished a lot of the things aboard ship that we had so it was an honor to be on the ship called Wisconsin from the State of Wisconsin.

MARK: Well, we are glad to hear it.

ROBERT: I tell ya, if it wasn't for you guys, maybe there wouldn't have been a Wisconsin. [Laughter]

MARK: Who knows?

ROBERT: That's right. It was an honor, every time I hear Wisconsin, or see, Wisconsin play Ohio State, I think of them. [Laughter]

MARK: Well again, thanks for taking the time out of your day.

ROBERT: Thank you too Mark, I appreciate it.