

Gomer, Paul E. Interview 11-10-92

[Speaker 2]

This is an interview with Paul E. Gomer. The date is November 10, 1992, and the place, the Federal Building here in Nashville, Tennessee.

Mr. Gomer, when did you join the service?

[Speaker 1]

I went into service on January 1, 1942, right across the street from here.

[Speaker 2]

Did you volunteer?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, I volunteered in December the 27th of 1941, but I was not actually signed or sworn in until the 1st of January.

[Speaker 2]

Why did you join the branch of service that you did?

[Speaker 1]

I was sort of taken by their slogan, join the Navy and see the world, which I did.

[Speaker 2]

I hear a strange noise. No, I don't think so. I think it's all right now.

I think I was scraping the cord here. Could be. What do you remember about leaving home?

[Speaker 1]

I left without my mother's knowledge, even though she knew I had signed up. And I went to sign up, and immediately they marched me over at the same location, fed me, and put me on a train. This is in January.

I had on a brown suit, and they sent me to Chicago, Great Lakes, where I only had one brown suit, and the snow was up to my ankles, very cold.

[Speaker 2]

And how old were you at that time?

[Speaker 1]

Well, that's debatable. Somewhere in the 17 and a half year.

[Speaker 2]

Was anyone else in your family in the service?

[Speaker 1]

No. My father was an instructor later on during World War II in Atlanta, Georgia, in teaching auto mechanics to officers in line.

[Speaker 2]

Will you describe the places where you trained and where you went from the training?

[Speaker 1]

They sent me to Great Lakes, Chicago, above Chicago, where I stayed in confinement for two weeks. They then sent me to Navy Pier in Chicago, which I believe is in the Loop area, as we called it then, near Grant Street, and it's now the Chicago Art Museum on a Pier. Excuse me.

I left there immediately by train, cross-country, to San Francisco. I was put aboard a presidential liner ship by the name of USS Garfield, where we immediately took the southern route to Honolulu, Lafayette, or Pearl Harbor.

[Speaker 2]

Was this part of your training?

[Speaker 1]

My training ceased when I left Chicago, and they said, well, we don't march too good out here, and we'll just put you on a ship where you won't have to march, so they put me on a cattle car, as I call it, and sent me to San Francisco.

[Speaker 2]

They didn't waste any time, did they? Had you been to different parts of the country before?

[Speaker 1]

I hadn't been out of Tennessee except in Kentucky and Alabama.

[Speaker 2]

Now, what units were you part of, and what were your duties, and was that what you expected when you joined?

[Speaker 1]

When I got into Pearl Harbor, they put us in a cleanup crew assigned to Block Center, which is a basketball arena in present Honolulu area, and they assigned me to clean up the ships that were sunk during Pearl Harbor. We took a boat out to different ships, out to diesel oil and other things, prior to a ship being raised and put back in action.

[Speaker 2]

How long was this after Pearl Harbor?

[Speaker 1]

I arrived in Pearl Harbor February the 15th of 1942, and they assigned me to the USS Nevada BB-36, which was partially sunk during the Pearl Harbor attack, which then went into dry dock, then came back to the west coast to be repaired in Remington, Washington.

[Speaker 2]

This was just then a couple of months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, wasn't it? Yes, it was. You must have seen terrific devastation there.

[Speaker 1]

Yes. When I first got there, I didn't know too much about anything. I never had been to sea until this time.

I never had been on a ship before this time, and I saw the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attack. You sort of, when you're assigned to a ship, you sort of pay attention to that and do not watch or see the overall picture. You're sort of tunnel vision into your ship because that's where you've got to go, that's where you work, and then after you leave, you don't look around and be a tourist.

[Speaker 2]

What was your rating at that time?

[Speaker 1]

I was a seaman, first class. Of course, when you first join in, you're a seaman, first class, and I was assigned to what they call the deck gang, which means that I handled the chains, the ropes, topside, and was an assistant to a coxswain, which showed me how to do my duties, and we were assigned to the left or port side of the battleship Nevada, which we took care of.

[Speaker 2]

Was this what you expected when you joined the service? Was this the type of activity, or what did you expect?

[Speaker 1]

I didn't know what to because there was so much war talk and everything, and fear ran through me, but when they sent me over there and there wasn't any actually fighting at the time that I was there, I did not see any fighting, so I was relieved to know that I wasn't scared to death of getting shot at. Our ship, the Garfield, zigzagged to avoid submarines, so we saw no enemy action on the way from San Francisco to Pearl Harbor. This was a little different from what I was expecting.

I was sort of hoping to get more sea legs, as we call it, or train them to be aboard ships before I went to ship.

[Speaker 2]

Were there people from other parts of the country in your unit, and what did you think of them, and how were they different from the people that you were accustomed to being around?

[Speaker 1]

We had a real mixture of people, from Indians, Jewish people, different parts of the United States. As long as you did your job and used your own accents of locale and make talk slow, everybody could understand you. I was locked in with a German Dutchman from Pennsylvania who, in his thick tongue, would teach me how to do this and do that.

There was no mixture of people that you were just about it. You did this, and you liked everybody.

[Speaker 2]

Did you spend time out of the United States, and when did you leave, and when did you get back? Of course, we covered, well, Hawaii was part of the States then, wasn't it? Let's talk about that.

How much time did you spend out of the United States proper?

[Speaker 1]

Just to give you a quick rundown on that, after I left Bremington, Washington, after going to Pearl Harbor, we went to California, took on supplies, and went into the Battle of the Aleutians. More exact, it was the retaking of Attu, which is near the Russian island. We was the original attack into an area called Massacre Bay, which is northern part of Aleutian Islands.

There we came back through the Panama Canal and ran convoy duty from Boston to New York to Belfast, Ireland. We were protection for the convoy ships. We did this five times prior to the invasion of Normandy D-Day.

From there, we went to South England, got supplies, and had the Battle of Cherbourg, France, the liberation. After that, we went to the States again and got supplies and came back and was in the invasion of southern France at Toulon and Marseilles. From there, we went back to Norfolk, outfitted, and the ship went back to the Pacific.

During this time, I switched to an AKA, which is attack cargo auxiliary, a new one, and was assigned to her as the chief gunner and hatch captain to break in a new ship in Bethlehem Yards out of Maryland. Then we went through the Panama Canal and ran from San Francisco to the South Pacific and got into the Battle of Okinawa from the west side during the original invasion. From there, we went to one of the first ships into Nagoya, Japan, for the occupation forces.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, you really covered a lot of territory, didn't you? Oh, my. No, no, that was wonderful.

What memories do you have of the men who served with you? You talked a little bit about some that you were with, but any other special memories of people, or did you become particularly friendly with some of them?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, we had a, I reckon you'd be sort of clannish there, because each little division would have their own personals and peculiarities and people, and you'd learn to get along with them, and if need be, you'd fight the rest of the ship. But everybody was friendly. There was no misunderstandings, no racial tones, nothing because everybody had a cause to go and do their thing and do it right and get out of it.

This was carried all the way through, no matter what part of service, even to the occupation, because they had a cause and a goal to work for. And when you have that, you have something to work for and don't worry about the, he's got the wrong shoe on, or he don't look right to me.

[Speaker 2]

Do you keep in touch with any of these people?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, I've been to five reunions in different parts, and it's amazing how old they get before I do. But we have been to Seattle and Los Angeles and Carson City, and this last meeting was in St. Louis, Missouri, which I did not go.

[Speaker 2]

Well, I know you have a good time when you get together with these people and lots of memories.

[Speaker 1]

Yes, because there's some people that wouldn't believe us unless they was there on some of these stories that we tell. So when we tell a story, well, they'll shake their head in unison because they know it's true, whereas our wives' children will shake their head the other way.

[Speaker 2]

Were you ever under fire?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, we was under fire a little at Aleutians, quite a bit at Normandy. We went in at Utah Beach at first, from Belfast, Ireland, down through the Irish Sea, and the German 88 guns, that's the size of the guns, fired at us. And then after we got through there and we saw ships getting hit, we went to the other invasion, American Invasion Beach, the Omaha, which at that time was being handled by the battleship, West Virginia and Texas and Arkansas.

We was under fire from the shore. We had five near misses there at shore and salvos, as we called it, and then in southern France we was shot at. When I got to Okinawa, I changed ships.

The old ship that I was on was off in the distance, only 600 yards, and I saw her get hit by a kamikaze. We, being inside the perimeter, were not allowed to shoot at the diving kamikaze planes, but I saw my old ship get hit on the fantail, as we call it, and kill 16 Marines at a 20-millimeter gun. That is about all that we did.

We never did actually get hit, but we had some close calls.

[Speaker 2]

And you had just transferred from that ship? Oh, well, you said you were inside of the perimeter and you were not allowed to shoot? Why was that?

[Speaker 1]

This is in Okinawa, West Side. During the invasion, we put over the landing boats that took the tanks and everything to the invading groups. The Marines, the 25th Lightning Division, we sent ashore and gave them tanks.

We got inside because we were a supply ship. We were not so armed as the bigger ship, and they did not want us to shoot because our tracers from our 40-millimeter, 20-millimeter, 5-inch guns would let them know where the fleet was at twilight time or dusk or whatever.

So we let all the big ships do their firing on the outside, which made a firing protection umbrella for us.

[Speaker 2]

Well, with all that firing in all these different places, you were really lucky, weren't you, to escape yourself?

[Speaker 1]

I still have the same rabbit's foot and the uniform and everything, so I'm going to keep that all together. I can still wear my original uniform, which I have, the peacoat I had and everything, and in that is a rabbit's foot. Yes, I was lucky.

[Speaker 2]

Tell me something about the rabbit's foot. Where did you get it? Do you want to talk about that for a minute?

It's not here on the questions, but this is interesting.

[Speaker 1]

I picked this up on the pike, if you know where the pike is in Long Beach.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, I do. As a child, I remember that.

[Speaker 1]

They had carousels there, and I just had learned something about girls. In fact, when I was in Bremerton, I had my first bottle of beer, which I thought I was a big man on. And when I got down there, I met this girl, and we had a date, and we met on the carousel there in the pike, on the pike, whatever term you want to use.

And she said, Well, you've been lucky you got back from a battle. How she knew that, I didn't tell her where or when, but she must have seen it in my walk or something. So she gave me a rabbit's foot to help me in the future, and I still have it.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, that's nice. Now, this next one, did your unit take any prisoners under your circumstances? I didn't think you would.

What were your relationships with the civilians overseas? And you never got off the ship, did you? Did you have any contact with any Allied troops, and what did you think of them?

Would you have had any on your ships or someplace else?

[Speaker 1]

We had contact in the different seaports that we would pull in. For instance, when we went into Boston down on Sumner Wharf where we ran into some British sailors who was coming aboard, I mean coming ashore, and we mingled in with our liberty or vacation hours. And I learned that the English were dressed sort of funny, but their ships weren't as clean as ours, but I imagine they didn't have time because they started war before we did.

But one thing that struck me funny about them, that they would come where we had ice water and drink gallons of ice water because they did not know or hadn't used any in their workings, and they actually got sick from drinking ice water, and that was unusual. I met some French sailors onshore in Belfast, an Ireland native, and their ships were a little different from the others around here in that they were color different, but their uniform with the little white top notch on top of the head sort of blew me, so I couldn't speak their language. And we just, the natives in North Africa where we stayed, I learned some of their habits and some that I want to forget.

And I had shore patrol duty in Toronto, Italy, and met some of the people there. My job was to keep our American sailors away from the cat house, which I had to do. But I did meet some people in Japan.

One of the first persons doing the occupation was a Japanese policeman who informed me that he would give me directions not to go into a weird part of town, which I imagine he knew better than I did.

[Speaker 2]

You said keeping them away from the cat house. I know what you're talking about, but was that difficult?

[Speaker 1]

The cat house was way out in the eastern part of Toronto, Italy, which is in the arch of the boot of the country, if you know the outline, and this was on the east side. It was a two-story old brick-type building with a high wall, which had broken glass on top of the wall to keep people from crawling over it. It had a double wooden gate at the front, and I was stationed in that, taken out in the jeep, and stationed there with a shore patrol outfit of 45, and a belt, and what do you call it, the club and the leggings.

And the English, the French, and other sailors that come in there would come in the front gate and walk right in where we, the Americans, couldn't go in. So I told our boys when they came there that it was a no-no, but I heard that somebody had told them there was a ditch in the back of this place that they could sneak in without the guards seeing them. So being a very precise person, I wanted to make sure that everything was up and up, so I went in to see if everything was right, and I did not see any American soldier or sailor at the time I was inside.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, that's great. Did you ever get home on leave during the time that you were in the service?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, I was lucky. When we got through rebuilding the ship in the Seattle-Bremington area, I got to come home for two weeks cross-country by train, and that was very interesting because I had been up through there. Then when I came into Norfolk, I took a bus back to Nashville to see my folks, and when I was assigned to the new ship in Maryland, they let me come home for two weeks.

So I've got plenty of time that I could come home during the time in there.

[Speaker 2]

Did you write letters home often?

[Speaker 1]

No, I didn't write too many letters. I never could write very good, and my folks would keep in touch every once in a while by me just dropping them what we call a V letter in the mail. I'm well, I'm somewhere you don't know, and I'll save you and call you as soon as I can.

Since back then, you couldn't tell them the particulars. You weren't allowed a camera or to write anything that could be coded as a message or anything, so most of my correspondence was by mail or in person.

[Speaker 2]

Well, the next question was did you take pictures, and you just said that you were not allowed a camera. Did you get pictures around? I know you have this book that we'll look at later.

Did you buy pictures on shore or anything like that?

[Speaker 1]

We found that through a little looking around that some of the higher pay officers had bought cameras in different places, and they took pictures, and some of these pictures are pictures that were put out by the Navy or the Army and just duplicated, and the personal pictures were made from a camera that was borrowed from somebody else that none of us owned.

[Speaker 2]

Now the next question, did you ever wonder about what you were doing in the service and why you were there?

[Speaker 1]

No, we had a purpose, and we didn't know where it was going to turn up next, so we just went along with the crowd to where the ship went we went. If they said pick up a shell, we picked up a shell. So until we got on liberty, well, we did everything we was told, and when we got on liberty, we'd done everything we was told not to do.

[Speaker 2]

And then what did you plan to do after the war was over, and did you end up doing that?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, when I was in high school, I wanted to be a draftsman drawing plans. Being semi-artistic, I could draw cats and dogs, round figures. I decided I wanted to do that, and when I got out of service, I went back to high school and finished six months of high school that I needed and went on to college and became a draftsman or a draftsman and have continued it up through today, which I'm still connected with blueprints, housing, and non-commercial buildings.

[Speaker 2]

You were talking about being a draftsman. This is a different kind of draft we're going to talk about now. Did you have any feelings about the people of draft age who were not in the service?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, we figured some of them that it wasn't a big thing, but we figured one or two of them we saw on the street had some political friends or money or something. But we was too busy trying to enjoy ourselves to get too uptight about one person or nothing. We didn't have any bashings.

We might have said something unruly at the time, but we didn't go over and beat them up or try to find out why they weren't in service. One time was when some of the boys had a special girlfriend back in the States and they was overseas. They would show resentment, and I can't blame them because they wanted their girl to be just like they left her, which is natural.

So they would mouth a little bit, but that was normal.

[Speaker 2]

That's understandable. How did the war affect you? And how did it change you?

[Speaker 1]

I think it educated me in that going back over what I just said, you will see that I saw quite a bit of the world. And to learn to appreciate the United States more than somebody that would have stayed stateside or maybe just went down the road or something like that. So I think I was well-educated about the service.

And again, I say I was mighty lucky.

[Speaker 2]

Do you think that the war changed the country?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, it did, because during wartime it showed that everybody had a job to do, to do it and do it quick and do it correctly. People from different walks of life were thrown into different situations, as myself, and had to adapt real quick to the conditions around them and adapt and learn to survive what was going on and what would be required the next day.

[Speaker 2]

The next question is what do you remember most about coming home? Now this would be after, whenever you were out of the service and coming home, the war was over.

[Speaker 1]

I was on what they call the magic carpet, which is a bunch of ships that took sailors with outage or overpoints or something from the Pacific and brought them back to the States. I came back into San Diego, which they sent me to Millington, Tennessee. They asked me at Millington, this is near Memphis, asked me where I lived, and I told them I lived in Knoxville, Tennessee, instead of Nashville.

The idea there, I had a girlfriend at Knoxville, and I wanted to get passage to her by train, and then I would come home, not knowing that the paper had picked up that I had been cashed out or whatever, out of the Navy in Memphis five days prior to me getting home. My mother sort of worried where I was and my whereabouts. But I did get home in a week's time, and so it was very well spent, and I got busted because I didn't come directly from Millington to my mother's daddy's house.

But I figured this would be my last go-hoo-ha or go around without getting involved with anybody else.

[Speaker 2]

And this was when the war was over. When were you released?

[Speaker 1]

I was released, let's see, it would be the latter part of November, December of the end of the war, and I can't pick out the dates exactly, but I was in San Francisco when V-J Day was announced, and V-E Day I was near land, so I celebrated those, and that was my homecoming then when I was in a far-off city celebrating the end of both situations.

[Speaker 2]

And how had things changed when you got home and got out of the service?

[Speaker 1]

Well, being in the Navy, you get sort of, I reckon sort of get used to your close surroundings, so when I got back home, I had fear of riding the bus to town because that was outside and laying in long ways and I didn't know anybody, so it wasn't until I got back into the high school that I got some returning veterans who was in the same situation I was that we became buddies, and then we all got used to acclimatizing ourselves from Nashville again.

[Speaker 2]

Testing, testing. The very last question. One, two, three.

What could we have done better during the war?

[Speaker 1]

I think, in all fairness, a lot of people will disagree that we should have gone to the European countries before they got into such a helpful, I use the term, a helpless condition that they needed us and we should have got to the European theater and stopped some of this overpowering armies and things like that before we did.

[Speaker 2]

Now, I'd like for you to tell me about these books. You have two albums with you? Oh, I see.

First, explain something about them and what's in them, of course, because we can't see the pictures, but let's talk about them.

[Speaker 1]

I have the five albums, which were gathered up from different places and different sources throughout the United States. My shipmates sent them to me, and I found some in

publications that's out to the public, and some research was done by other people that I've just copied. Some personal pictures are in here.

Some was taken by real good people. Some of the write-ups were made in New York when we came back after the invasions were public print in the New York Times and papers. And little bitty souvenirs of where I went to the theater or slept on a pool table in Belfast, Ireland, things like that I kept as scraps that just sort of remind people that I've been there.

So I've kept them over a period of years. They really belong in Carson City in Nevada because that is the headquarters of the USS Nevada, but I've been sort of stingy and didn't send any of them to them.

[Speaker 2]

Well, I don't blame you. Now, let's just open it up and tell me some of the things that are in there.

[Speaker 1]

Museum, and they're all messed up, so they scramble, but you'll understand what I'm talking about. For instance, this is pictures of artist paintings of Pearl Harbor during the attack, and these are actual photos here made by the Navy that we got after the service of Nevada being hit. Nevada, the ship that I was on, was a battleship that was the only battleship that was partially sunk.

She beached herself on purpose so she would not block the entryway to Pearl Harbor. She beached herself because she was hit by bombs and torpedoes during the attack, and this can be documented and all through some of your newsreels. It's still going on.

These pictures here, this being when I joined up, this is my...

[Speaker 2]

Oh, I recognize it. Royal Hawaiian and Diamond Head and all of that.

[Speaker 1]

This is a little girl down on King Street that would pose for you. She's a Hawaiian girl, and I think she cost a dollar and a half to get your picture made behind false scenery. This is the Royal Hawaiian, and as you can see, the lack of people or buildings on Waikiki Beach from Pearl Harbor around the Diamond Head.

And these are current pictures of the Royal Hawaiian. I have not been back to Honolulu. This is downtown Honolulu at the attack.

This is when the ship was under fire and smoking.

[Speaker 2]

I was in Hawaii in 1938.

[Speaker 1]

You were?

[Speaker 2]

And so these look familiar, not the ships, of course, but the... Oh, yes.

[Speaker 1]

So you ought to know.

[Speaker 2]

I saw a reference to the Lurline, the ship, the Lurline.

[Speaker 1]

Out of San Francisco, that is correct. See, the President Line ran the same run. Lurline was a cruise club, I call it, and the President Liners were another group, and they both ran to Honolulu on different occasions.

Lurline, Lurline, it was the luxury ship of all the groups, I think. This shows the front part of the ship, bow, where it was hit, and the wooden deck that was blown apart with bombs, radars, different pictures in there. This is an unusual thing because when we were hit, and I say we now, I'm just speaking of Nevada, when we were hit by a torpedo, they decided that because we did not sink, they would put a Band-Aid or a blister on the side of our ship to patch the steel and weld it together so that we could get underway and go back to Washington.

That is what that picture is, as you can see there. So we had a Band-Aid on us. This is what my ship looked like when she pulled in the Seattle area.

And being a little writer, I sort of drew a quickie map of what I could see to let them know where I was coming in with them. This is friends and buddies. That's downtown Seattle there.

Back in 1942, December to be exact. And drone planes, you know about. And this is friends that we took over in the night liberties and visited in Oregon, hitchhiked down there all night.

And different friends. And this is when I got my second class, and this is a gun I used when I practiced up in Washington. So this, like I say, this is the USS Tennessee in Bremington being worked on right there.

Here's a theater ticket from the Roxy Theater in Long Beach that I used. It cost me 25 cents, and I don't know how I could afford it. This right under here is a place in Chehalis, Centralia, Washington, which is the logging country and home of the Blackberry Pie.

I stopped in for a loggers dance, and it was very entertaining, hitchhiking through Washington at night. This is pictures of ships, battleships, of the invasion of the Aleutian Highlands, to be exact, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Idaho. And when we went in, my notes, but these were made at the time.

This is pictures I drew of where we landed, and we got different things.

[Speaker 2]

Let's go back a minute. You say your notes at the time you landed. No, that other.

Your own notes of what you were doing. How were you able to keep that? Wasn't that secret?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, but being in the deck game, we had a lot of nook and crannies in the machinery that we could hide this book. I did this not as a diary, but as an observation that we left Long Beach at April 7, 1943, went to the Aleutian Highlands. Some of this was wrote while we were doing it, and some of it was afterthought that we put in there.

So the things that stood out in my mind, I added on a little green book the size of this book right here. It had a hard cover to it, and I just kept it hid around the ship because during wartime in New England, under battle conditions, they don't search too much for books.

[Speaker 2]

I guess not. Well, I just saw that, and I think that's something.

[Speaker 1]

I'll tell you things quicker because I've done this once or twice before.

[Speaker 2]

Well, you've done such a good job of preserving all of this, too, and all your descriptions in your pictures.

[Speaker 1]

This, of course, is what she looked like. And you can see from Puget Sound, as you probably know the word here, this is when she was refitted after Pearl Harbor and brought out and ready to go to war at the Aleutians. So you can see this is my part of the ship right here, and this gun all the way forward.

This had 14-inch guns, and when I first went on, I was in the shell deck in turret number 2 of the 14-inch gun loading the shells to fire at the end of it. This is Panama and friends, and as you can see, Panama was one of the times we went ashore in Uruguay, Panama. But this is...

[Speaker 2]

What is this? I see some headlines. What's this?

Paul Gomer.

[Speaker 1]

This is a thing they had during World War II, which included funny things. And I was in town in Nashville on one of my liberties, and they came down the street and said, We'll put your name in the headlines if you give us 50 cents or a dollar. And one of them happened to be a lady at the church at the time, so she put in there on the front of her paper and stamped it, Paul Gomer in town, weds beautiful heiress.

Well, I didn't even know what a heiress was then. So this was a fun thing that broke some of the fear and actually made money for some project they had going at their high school at the time.

[Speaker 2]

Those are all typical of the times, too.

[Speaker 1]

And this is when we went to New York. I said I went five times back and forth. This is a gentleman from Murfreesboro who was killed later on a destroyer.

His name is Charles Travis. He was our officer during the Battle of D-Day in Cherbourg in southern France and one of the best around. And I didn't know after he left the ship that he was killed until I read it in a local paper.

He's got write-ups about his artistic ability during World War II. This is a picture of our ship firing. As you can see, I've got a bunch of those.

And war-racing books. And, friends, this is Belfast, Ireland. This is the Donoval Square, as we call it.

This is coming back to Boston on our convoy trips where we had Thanksgiving aboard ship, and that's our menu. And this is where I went to a football game in Boston.

[Speaker 2]

I see a lot of pictures of girls here. You must have had a good time when you had the opportunity.

[Speaker 1]

Yes, I enjoyed myself when I got with the natives. And not knowing what was going to happen tomorrow, I sort of shut my eyes on a few things. This is a picture of Blowdecks aboard ship.

This is a U.S. troop dancing. This is another ship. This is a friend.

This friend here was from Coos Bay, Oregon. And she worked in Seattle, Birmingham to be exact, at a torpedo place north of the Silverdale area. And she and her met in Birmingham in advance.

And she followed me up until after the invasion of Normandy, of which she joined the waves and left. I started in Oregon and came to New York City and was stationed at Hunter's College in New York. And then after that, she got shore duty in New York, so we got together.

And she was later transferred to the Naval Air Station in Trenton, New Jersey, of which I went to see her one time on liberty while I was in that area. She married a sailor and moved back to the west coast from Mr. Brown. I had some children.

And at one of the reunions, I tried to track her down, but I used her dog tags. She'd give me her dog tags. We'd swap dog tags during service time.

And I tracked her down through our business here in the Veterans Affairs and found out just prior to me going to, back to Seattle for a reunion, she had died. And I did talk to her husband while I was in that area. So that's a little.

[Speaker 2]

You say you exchanged dog tags. Were these the official dog tags that you exchanged? How could you do that?

[Speaker 1]

We had several made up. Back then, they were on wires and made out of flat steel with your name and your serial number and your service. And since we had several, we just swapped.

Of course, at that time, you could go out in the general public and get a duplication of this for making them pretty or what have you. But these were the original dog tags that I kept for myself, and I kept hers with me too. Of course, she kept mine for at least a couple of days.

But I returned her dog tag to her husband after I found out she had deceased. I sent him back to her with some pictures that I considered it was passing fancy. I didn't want to embarrass him or nothing.

They were all good pictures taken in uniform that he probably hadn't seen. So I sent them back to him, to him and his children, two children, and he thanked me, and that was the end of that go-on there. This is the, what did they call it, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

This is Gertie. Gertie was an Englishman in the English service, and we met in Belfast when I went over one night. So she wrote me from Belfast and sent a mail to me, and we became, of course, pen pals, I reckon, even though we met personally twice.

And she showed me the countryside of Belfast where she was stationed. I never did hear about her after I went back to the States because I was assigned to a new ship, and she was probably shipped overseas somewhere. So this is just a few days of friendship and pen pals.

That's why her letters are still there now. This, of course, being in Scotland, we went into the area of Glasgow or Greenock, Scotland, prior to the invasion of them. And these are just pictures of where I dressed up in Scottish kilts in Glasgow, Scotland, and stayed in a hotel in there and got English money and took Glasgow, that's old postcards there that we kept.

And this is coming back to Maine. This is more Belfast here. This is Eisenhower, and that's me coming home.

And then we're getting ready to go into the Battle of D-Day, which we can continue on and on. So we had a nice ride up in D-Day, and we kept all that. As you can see, most of this is scraps from magazines and different books that I ran into and kept over a period of years, and people have sent me.

So all of this, even though it relates to me personally, don't mean I was in every one of these pictures.

[Speaker 2]

It's a lot of historical information here.