

Transcription: Dave Gebron

Today is Friday, February 12, 2010. My name is James Crabtree. I'll be interviewing Mr. Dave Gebron. Did I say that correctly?

Dave Gebron: G-E-B-R-O-N.

Yes sir. Mr. Gebron, and this interview is being done by phone. I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Gebron is at his home in Frankston, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us. I guess the first question that we usually start off with is just tell us a little bit about your boyhood and your life before you went into the Marine Corps.

Dave Gebron: Well, I started to work. I went to elementary school, Stephen F. Austin in Dallas, Texas. I went to work at eight years old because we were a very poor family and every little check helped. Then I went to Crozier Tech High School which is no longer in existence. I am a high school graduate, and I graduated later on when I was in my 20s. I went back and finished. I felt it was necessary. And I lived in Dallas, Texas. I was born in Dallas, Texas, and I lived at 2801 Floyd Street, Dallas, Texas. I don't recall the zip but it's no longer in existence anyway. And from there, after working and going to school and leaving school and skipping study classes so I could go to work to help support my family which needed the support at that time, and I started working at approximately eight or nine years old.

What did you start off doing at that age?

Dave Gebron: My granddad owned a grocery store. It was only a one-room grocery store, and I became a grocery clerk 'cause my grandmother was familiar with the owners named Morris Rubin and Ben Ackerman. It was called the American Trading Company. They were very friendly to my grandmother. They knew we could use the money so they hired me to help stock the store and everything. And my granddad went broke 'cause he was feeding people in Dallas. When he died he had a bigger funeral than the mayor. It's too bad people didn't pay 'em what they owed him but they showed respect for him so that meant a lot. My granddad always stated to me, "We are fortunate to live in America." And he always preached it's the greatest place in the world, you know, and how many opportunities and so forth. And he always made the statement, and his name was Dave Gebron also, always made the statement that if you ever find you can do anything, you know, for America, make sure you do it. And that was his belief, his sincere belief. And you know that 'cause he fed a lot of families. And then I had a chance, my aunt was very close to me in California, to go to California to visit with her, and while in California, I went to join the Navy, and there was a long line.

How old were you at that point?

Dave Gebron: Sixteen.

Sixteen, okay.

Dave Gebron: I don't recall exact dates I left Texas, you know.

But this is after the war had started?

Dave Gebron: Yeah, the war started in '41.

To back up just a little bit, sir. Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

Dave Gebron: Yeah, Dallas, Texas.

How did you first hear about it?

Dave Gebron: On the radio, I guess. There was no television at the time, and people were all shook up, you know. And that's when my granddad told me, if you ever get a chance to do anything for your country, make sure you do it.

So at that point you figured you wanted to go in the service?

Dave Gebron: No, I was just patriotic, that's all. I love America, still do. And I decided, you'll probably be shocked at this story. I went to join the Navy 'cause some of my Texas buddies were all in the Navy. The line extended from the office out to the hall, and I was at the end of the line. I happened to look down the hall and there was a Marine Corps sergeant, a buck sergeant as we called in those days, you're familiar with. He was standing outside his door, and he started waving at me. And I thought, "Well, why stand in this long line," and I had heard of the Marines. "I'm gonna go down and see what he has." The next thing you know I was in boot camp in San Diego, California.

How were you able to sign up at 16?

Dave Gebron: Well, I'm gonna have to tell you the truth 'cause I don't believe in lying, you know. The truth is exaggerating, no one believes it anyway so why lie? I had my aunt sign the certificate. In other words . . .

As your mother or as your guardian?

Dave Gebron: Yeah. But I was closer to my aunt. I was her favorite. She had no boys. She had nothing but one girl. You understand?

Sure.

Dave Gebron: She looked at me, she told everybody she was my mother. She even went down to the Marine Corps in San Diego and told the commandant, you know . . .

Commandant?

Dave Gebron: Yeah, I'm having trouble with that, and told him they better treat me right or they'd hear from her. It was crazy but that's the type of woman she was.

So when you signed up and you were there in San Diego because your aunt lived there, how long was it between actually getting her to sign that paper before you were actually in boot camp?

Dave Gebron: Quick, quick, quick.

Like a day or a couple days?

Dave Gebron: Less than, put it less than a week.

Yeah. What were your thoughts when you first got to MCRD San Diego?

Dave Gebron: Well, I was young. I thought I was tough. My mother once said, “I wish he knew the meaning of fear.” I didn’t realize what she meant ’til later on in life. And to me it was an experience, and they were making a movie, *Pride of the Marines* at _ something. I got to march up and down the field there which was a little relief sometimes, you know, from what you were doing. There were 30-some of us in the squad and only ended up with eight to the best of my recollection. It wasn’t easy, sir.

Where were most of the guys from, do you remember? Just all over the country?

Dave Gebron: I remember one, we called him Chief. He was from San Juan Capistrano. And another one was from Oklahoma. Basically that’s . . . and I wouldn’t remember A. J. Niebles unless he . . . The song, you know, the swallows fly over San Juan Capistrano.

So you’re in San Diego and you’re going through your training . . .

Dave Gebron: Boot camp.

Boot camp, basic training, and you spend, how long did you spend there, about 12 weeks?

Dave Gebron: Yeah, approximately. The best I remember I thought it was 13. It’s 12 or 13 weeks.

When I went through it, it was 13.

Dave Gebron: Yeah, I think it was 13 weeks. See my memory’s not that bad for an old man.

No, not at all. Where did they send you to next?

Dave Gebron: To the worst hellhole in the world. I don’t use vulgarity so when I do, it’s hell and damn. To Camp Elliott. It was out in the woods off the highway. There were tents, no heaters, no nothing, cold water, trying to toughen you up, you know. And you always knew who went to bed last at night because the heater was next to him the next morning.

Was that up at where Camp Pendleton is now?

Dave Gebron: Yes, you’re right. Over in the fields which is no longer fields, you know. I don’t remember which side of Pendleton. We didn’t get to go to Pendleton. It was Camp Elliott.

So how long about do you think you were there at Elliott?

Dave Gebron: I don’t recall. It was several weeks just to toughen you up, you know. I can still remember how cold it was to shave in cold water.

Yeah, that’s probably one of the worst things to do.

Dave Gebron: Out of a faucet, you know. You couldn't take a bath. You did what we call spit baths.

Yeah, that's ugh . . . I've done those. They're not fun. So when you're at Camp Elliott and you're doing your training, I guess you had to know that you're going to be going into combat, right?

Dave Gebron: Well, they never tell ya you're going into combat. They only say they're toughening you up, you know, and teach you, you know, what they teach you in boot camp and at Camp Elliott, how to defend yourself, you know.

Sure.

Dave Gebron: And I was an expert. You're not gonna believe this. I still got my KA-BAR knife.

Wow.

Dave Gebron: It's 60-some-odd years old.

That's great.

Dave Gebron: A gun collector told me, you know, that some collector would like to have it, you know. I said, "Wrong. I got it. It's going to my grandson."

Yeah, that's great.

Dave Gebron: And then they had us lying on the dock at San Diego building some things, you know. And it was cold too. And we didn't know we were building things to go aboard a ship, you know, crates and stuff, you know. Actually let me use the word "supplies." All right?

Sure.

Dave Gebron: And so somehow or another, I was put on a ship and went to Oahu. That's in Hawaii as you know. And my first observation those days, it was the zoot suit days, and I don't mean this derogatory, I had a lot of Hawaiian friends. First thing I noticed was people walking around dressed up in big hats, suits, long chains and the most noticeable thing, they wore no shoes, and that's what stayed with me to a great extent. And so from Oahu, we got on a ship and, as usual, you know the routine, you circle around the ocean for a month or two, getting your sea legs as we call used to it, and you never know where you're going. And then you're notified at the last minute or so that you're going to the Marianna Islands.

Tell us, sir, about that experience.

Dave Gebron: Well, we landed at Marianna Islands, and the strange thing about combat, no matter who you're assigned to like the Fifth Amphibian Corps, you always end up with some other Marines. It's like, to me, as I got older, it was a state of confusion even at Iwo Jima. Some reason or another you get separated from the people you're with, but you eventually end up with 'em, if you follow what I mean.

Sure.

Dave Gebron: Okay, you know combat then. So anyway, to make a long story short, I was at Saipan, and we were there when they built the airfield later on, and our job was to clean up caves. When they declare the island secure which you as combat know, it's not really ever secure. But the world wants to know if it's secure and you say it's secure, and of course the Army comes in, relieves the Marines. But, we were cleaning up caves and, ironically, I was with a guy named Jesse who had the Christ tattoo on his shoulder, I mean on his arms, big pictures, and on his chest, and he said, "I don't wanna die." He stepped in front of me and got shot in the neck and was dead before he hit the ground. So I always wondered why people always getting killed ahead of me, you know. Makes you think you're special or something which you're not but I was so shook up with it, I rode in the back of a truck that finally managed to take the dead, and the corpsman told me, "Don't feel bad sergeant. He was dead before he hit the ground." He was hit in the neck somewhere. So he said, "Don't feel bad. It wasn't your fault." But during the course of trying to occupy that cave, I don't know whether you want to know this or not, but a Marine was yanked into it. And for years I heard him screaming. And we couldn't rot them outta that cave, throwing grenades, it had two miles, dropping it down there hole. 'Cause they had a room in that cave I found out later that was practically concrete, and with all the efforts we were making, they weren't getting hurt. But this Marine screamed like nobody's business and I guess for years and years I heard him screaming, you know, and I was real shook up about it to a great extent. You're not gonna believe this. In the last five years I've been thinking about him again, wondering what happened to him. But he was screaming like nobody, please help me, you know, blah, blah, and there was nothing we could do. You throw grenades into each end of the mouth and drop it down there hole, what else can you do?

Sure.

Dave Gebron: And you stay away from the mouth of the cave 'cause that's how he got it. And from then on I ended up in Maui at the hospital.

You were at the hospital because you were shaken up?

Dave Gebron: Yeah, I was in the hospital for something. I don't remember. I was in hand-to-hand combat on Saipan. I really didn't want to go into that but I will if you want me to.

Well, it's your interview, sir, but we . . .

Dave Gebron: Well, I used to say "Where are you Joe?" You're in combat, the old saying, "Where are you Joe? I'm lost." Well, unfortunately me and ol' Joe tangled and I woke up on a beach with a poncho over me. And when I woke up the sun was hot and I was sweating, and I looked around, there was a bunch more ponchos, dead Marines. So I says, "Wrong about this. I gotta go find my unit." My teeth were busted out. My finger was practically cut off, and a whole bunch of stuff, you know. Nose busted and all that stuff. But anyway, I managed to survive and I had a little knife wound in my ankle. So I wandered around until I found my platoon, and I told John Lundy what happened and he said, "When we get settled somewhere, we'll have to make a detailed report." And I says, "For what?" He says, "You can get a Purple Heart." I said, "No, no, I don't believe in medals. Nobody asked me to come in the Corps." And that's always been my same feeling for 60 years. Nobody asked me to join the Marine Corps. A sergeant waved at me and I joined the Marine Corps. And I never regretted it since 'cause it made a man out of a boy.

Sure.

Dave Gebron: Then I went to Maui and I was in the hospital there. Then I got a leave from Maui for one night, and this is a funny story. I was looking forward to it and I went downtown with some little boy. I thought I'll have me a drink of some kind. I don't drink, you know. I smoke now and I did very little then. I never really liked the taste of alcohol. But anyway, to make a long story short, two guys were in an argument. Well I didn't know it and I walked up to the bar and the guy on my right ducked and the guy hit me and knocked me cold, and I actually did see stars like they used to put in the comic book Joe Palooka. That's true, I saw stars. Well, guess what, back in the hospital, never got the leave. They notified me I was going aboard ship. They didn't waste any time, so that leave never really materialized to a great extent. Until this day I don't know who knocked me out. But anyway, then I was aboard ship again, done a circulation on the ocean and all that stuff, and we finally found out we were going to the Volcano Islands, that's what it's called. That's what it's called on the back of my discharge to be honest with you. So, the thing I recall the most is you know aboard ship Marines are always the guards. You know, we guard everything aboard ship. Any place we go in the Navy that's got anything, we guard it. Anyway by that time I was well liked by my lieutenant and everybody else. The platoon sort of followed me, you know. I kid with him. I'd say, "How come at payday I'm never in line first but when it's time to go somewhere on shore and do something, I'm always in line first?" He just laughed. I said, "You make me mad and I'm gonna start calling you lieutenant instead of John." He says, "You wouldn't do that, would you?" I said, "You make me mad I will." I was only kidding of course. It was not a threat, you know. We were on a friendly atmosphere. You know in combat. You can't call an officer by his rank, you have to call him by his first name 'cause you know and I know the first guy they want to pick off is men like you, that are officers. And reality don't know that in the Marine Corps in the field in combat, sergeants ought to ran the Corps to a great extent. I don't mean any braggadocio but it's true. You depend on the sergeant for a lot of things.

Absolutely.

Dave Gebron: So the thing I remember the most, and this is very important in my life, when we were going . . . You know what a rope ladder is?

Yes.

Dave Gebron: We were going over the side to an LCM which, of course, landing craft man. I looked up and there were two sailors up there holding the rope and one of them was crying. He looked down at me and he said, "Bring 'em all back, sergeant, including yourself." I says, "I will, thank you."

Wow.

Dave Gebron: That's the thing I remember the most about Iwo. That's something, isn't it?

That is.

Dave Gebron: So we hit Iwo and I was running 10 miles an hour and my crippled cousin was in the Majestic Theater in Dallas, Texas, and they told the Marines invade, you know, blah, blah, blah, and she's crippled with a club foot, and she jumped up and says, "There's my cousin."

She saw it on a newsreel, right?

Dave Gebron: Yeah, and that's when she went home and told my mom, "I know where Dave is now. He's on some island. You should see him. He's really running fast, crouching sorta low but he's really running." And she said, "He had a rifle in his hand." I had a Carbine in my hand, James. I love the Carbine.

Yeah.

Dave Gebron: Anyway, to make a long story short, the whole family gathered down at the Majestic Theater, you know, and when I got to Iwo, there really wasn't any shooting. The Japanese were waiting for the third wave. Lot of people don't know that. That's to the best of my memory, okay?

Yep.

Dave Gebron: It was quiet, not really that quiet 'cause, you know, the Navy was still throwing out ammunition and stuff.

At that point I know the Navy had done a lot of shelling and I imagine you were able to see and hear a lot of that while you were on the ship, right?

Dave Gebron: Oh yeah, tons of it. We used to watch it.

So when you finally got on shore, did you think for a second perhaps that maybe the shelling had been effective and that there just weren't as many Japanese left?

Dave Gebron: To tell you the truth, no.

Yeah.

Dave Gebron: No, it was not effective. I didn't see any signs of it or I'd remember it. I was a young guy. I'm 16, you know. I would remember it.

So you were pretty certain then, you thought that they were still dug in waiting for you when you got there?

Dave Gebron: Yeah, they were dug in, there was no question about it. They were really dug in. There was no question about it. And from then on I was on top of Mount Suribachi and crouched behind a rock. I mean, I'm sorry, kneeling down behind a rock. And I was looking at this Japanese who was behind another rock, and I was wondering, "Is he thinking of shooting me as I am him?" So we just looked at each other to a great extent. But the thing that really amazed me is that I don't really like to record or remember, but we stacked Marines on top of one another like it was a wood stack you're building. My cousin who was a hero in Italy, he said they did the same thing over there. No place to put 'em. You're on top of a mountain. Where you gonna put 'em?

That's right.

Dave Gebron: Then you got another, a day or two later, a message from "Howlin' Mad" Smith to get off our asses and occupy that island. Of course, ol' "Howlin' Mad" was ensconced three or

four miles out on the ocean over a loudspeaker if you know what I mean, the general, which is where he was supposed to be I guess. I'm not criticizing, I'm remarking about him. Of course I was brave at Saipan, and I found out in a hurry on Iwo, you can get killed. My bravery didn't turn to cowardice, but I wasn't the old tough Dave Gebron that I was when I hit Saipan, I can assure you of that. Anyway, they said evacuate the mountain, that we had hit a gas tank, a tank, a 55-gallon drum containing gas. But I, like all Marines, had relieved myself of my backpack. You know how Marines, you're a former Marine, they drop 'em in a hurry. They don't need that extra weight.

That's right.

Dave Gebron: So anyway, I did not walk down that mountain, James, I leaped down it like a leap frog 'cause it's ash, you know. And I thought, "Let me get to the bottom as quickly as possible." And as I was leaving, I turned around and looked at the Japanese behind the rock, and he sort of glanced my way, and I thought, "Oh, hell. This guy gonna pop me, shoot me." But it didn't happen. So I jumped down the mountain. I was looking, screwing around trying to find a gasmask, couldn't do it. So I remember what they taught me in boot camp, you know, get a blanket, wet it, put it in your mouth, dig a hole, you know, in the event of gas, you know. So I did what I was taught to a great extent. Then later on, and it was rumored it was one of our gas drums. I don't know how true it was, I'm just relating the story to ya as it happened that's all. It could've been false, you know. But that was it. Then after the mountain, after the island was secured and they were still cleaning out caves there too which I didn't have to do, I was put aboard, back aboard ship. And once again we were circling around and we didn't know that we were in the invasion of Japan. Then it was finally announced that the war was over, and it was probably one of the greatest things ever happened to me 'cause I left _ Japan September 22nd, 1945, and that's verified on the back of my discharge. And it's a good thing because the war was over because the pillboxes were about a foot apart. What you call, as you know, individual pillboxes.

Oh yeah.

Dave Gebron: We'd a never made the first, second or third wave, I'm telling ya. How can you shoot through those things? And they were close, really close. So I remember saying, "Man are we lucky. We are really lucky to a great extent." And then from Japan I developed something and nothing, and they took me home by hospital ship. I was on the ocean 17 days and been drugged up so much I didn't even know it. I woke up when they were taking me down the gangplank in a stretcher and I heard guys on the railing, "Good luck sarg. Hope everything will be okay with you sarg," and blah, blah, blah. You know how Marines are. They love one another, you know. And so they put me in Balboa Park U. S. Naval Hospital, and I had a very severe case of malaria. I mean, real bad, you know, where you sweat, shake. You know how malaria is.

Did you have flare-ups of that over the years or were you able to get pretty much clear of it?

Dave Gebron: Well, I got clear of it but it took several years and I never got clear of the screaming in my ears which is still ringing so loud I can hardly hear sometimes. And my finger healed up. It's still, you can feel the bone where it's cracked, you know, where it's cut in the middle, you know. And I got a scar on my leg but other than that, when I was in Balboa Park

U.S. Naval Hospital, all I wanted to do was get out of there. So I returned home and I was in bad shape physically. My mother and dad told me one day I was having a nightmare and was trying to choke my younger brother to death. It took several of 'em to pull me off. I definitely was not of clear head if you know what I mean to a great extent. And I was too young to realize I was entitled to disability by applying for it. I finally put in for it last month when a couple of congressmen told me they owe me about 65 years worth but I'll never get it 'cause I deal with the VA. I've been dealing with 'em for years and years. They don't answer you 90% of the time, and then when they answer, they tell ya there's nothing in your file. It's crazy. But I managed to find things out and found out that the VA had destroyed hundreds of thousands of records, and had run 'em through a shredder.

Yeah, they also had a big fire in St. Louis at one point.

Dave Gebron: Yeah, well they shredded these, and one of the ladies that worked for VA asked me if I was in combat, and I said, "Yes ma'am." She said, "Where?" I said, "I don't like to talk about it." My own family never heard me talk about it for years and years until the DVA started that stuff. But anyway I figure it's private, you know.

Sure.

Dave Gebron: James, you or nobody in the world asked me to join the Marine Corps, did they?

That's right.

Dave Gebron: So I never walked around telling anything about anything. I kept it to myself and all of a sudden here it's sort of exploded. I accepted the invitation. So it was on TV, a documentary, and Linda saw it about Iwo Jima, you know, this and that. And then she accidentally, we were at an Office Depot, ran into . . . I had on a World War II cap and of course I always got my Marine Corps emblems on 'em 'cause I'm proud of it. And everyplace I go, I wear that cap which was given to me, and I picked up a few emblems here and there so I put 'em on top of the cap. And that's when people say, "You were in World War II?" "Yes." And a lot of 'em don't even look. "Were you in the war?" I says, "In the Marines Corps." Anyway, to make a long story short. Linda, we were in Pala, California, one day entering a casino to go eat 'cause they had the best food in the world, and four young Marines with their young ladies were standing at the door, and they opened the door, stood at attention and saluted.

Wow.

Dave Gebron: She says, "You weren't an officer." And I said, "What difference does it make? This is respect from young Marines to an older Marine."

Exactly.

Dave Gebron: I said that's all it meant, nothing else.

That's right.

Dave Gebron: And when I took her to Pendleton, I says, "Can a former Marine visit the base that's never been on it?" He stood back and saluted and said, "Enter sir."

That's great.

Dave Gebron: You know, and now she's beginning to get the drift that Marines, no matter in or out, respect each other.

Oh absolutely.

Dave Gebron: And they always will. That's why they call it Semper Fi.

That's right.

Dave Gebron: Always faithful.

That's right. Yeah, once a Marine, always a Marine.

Dave Gebron: I'll never change, don't you know that?

Absolutely. When I know the Marine Corps, too, very much prides itself on its tradition and its heritage and it's still taught today in basic training. Marines learn about, you know, Marines that have gone before us and that's why I wanted to go back real quick, sir, to Iwo Jima, because that's such an iconic battle, and Marines study that battle and I think it was . . .

Dave Gebron: Probably the most famous battle in the world.

Exactly. And I think it was Secretary Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy, said that Iwo Jima guaranteed there would be a Marine Corps for the next 500 years.

Dave Gebron: Oh, no question about it. I was there when they raised the flag.

That's what I wanted to ask you, sir.

Dave Gebron: The real flag, not the phony one.

Yeah, and I wanted to ask you what your memories were about the first flag raising and then also the one that Joe Rosenthal took the photograph of.

Dave Gebron: Well, the first flag raising was hardly nothing at all for me to be very candid with you to a former Marine. It was just a flag gone up. I'll be truthful with you, James. We didn't even have it all occupied yet.

Oh sure, sure.

Dave Gebron: But that flag was going up. You know how Marines are. 'Cause it led to an inspiration to make you want to fight harder.

And could you see it when that first flag was raised, or did you hear? Because I've read that the horns on the ships started sounding and the Marines, a lot of the Marines saw it and started yelling. Is that your memory of it?

Dave Gebron: Well, you know, I missed that part of it. I missed that part of it but I was there when it went up, and Joe Rosenthal, I didn't even know they posed for another flag, and I was on top of the mountain, figure that out. But remember, people think that mountain was small.

Yeah, no, it wasn't.

Dave Gebron: You could be, you know, 500 yards away from that raising.

Sure.

Dave Gebron: And if you hid behind a rock like I was, you didn't like to stick your nose out too much.

No, sir. And I think most Marines know that from that Joe Rosenthal photo, there's five Marines and a Navy corpsman in that shot, and three of them died later in that battle. So it's like you said, it was far from wrapped up by that point.

Dave Gebron: Oh no, it wasn't wrapped up. Same thing when we were leaving Saipan, the Army was coming over. I mean you know how they all rib each other. When some of the Marines would say, "I did." And "No, we got it wrapped up for ya." They said, "No, we'll do the clean up after you guys." And Marines just laugh. You know how Marines are, all Marines. They just laughed. They thought, "What the hell are you talking about? We're the ones that got killed." You know, and declared it a safe island which was basically true. They were all engaged in caves what few were left. So people don't understand that to a great extent, and I don't explain it. I don't tell anybody anything. The DVA I gave a talk, and I stayed away from blood and guts. The part they liked, there was over 100 people there to shake my hand. I told you the story, I was hoping nobody'd be there 'cause it was raining so hard you could hardly see in front of you, and they all told me how much they enjoyed my speech. I stayed away from blood and guts. The part they liked the most is when I told him I got knocked out and never got to leave. That's the part they laughed at. And they all thanked me 'cause I'm there with Marine Corps veterans, combat veterans. They're all Vietnam. I'm the only World War II there but they consider it an honor me being there, and that's why they all showed up in the rain. And of these 200 people chosen to go to Washington, DC, which I'm one of 'em, it doesn't mean they're all World War II vets. They're from the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and I don't know what it's about. The DVA president called my daughter and said we'd like for Dave to be one of the ones chosen to go to Washington, DC, because we picked him to represent us. And I still go when I'm not sick to their meetings 'cause I find it very informative. They're a group of people helping people, you know, and they're proud. There's all former Marines, not many, four or five out of 100 or so, you know. But we all come up to each other, hug each other even though they're from the Vietnam War.

Sure.

Dave Gebron: But they show me a lot of respect. Now look, they voted for me to go to Washington, DC. Isn't that something?

That is.

Dave Gebron: And they're paying for it for three days. You know that's not cheap.

No. That's an honor but I think it's . . .

Dave Gebron: And they gotta pay for my room, and . . . I've always helped people. George Utley once said . . . I got lucky and made a lot of money. I don't have any now, I'm broke. The State of Louisiana took away the only income I had. But anyway, George said, "You as an individual probably helped more people than anybody on this earth, in the United States, and nobody knows it." I said, "George, money is only good for what it will do for you and others, nothing else." When you learn to cherish, you're not even a human being. It's that simple. The money rules you. You don't rule the money. And I always gave to everybody. I still, when I had a few bucks, I'd mail out 10 children's charities every month even though I knew I couldn't afford it, but those children like Operation Small, Feed the Children, you know, St. Jude's, Father what's his name, you know, Boys Town, Flanagan.

That's right, Father Flanagan.

Dave Gebron: And there's other charities too. As long as it's for children and I had a buck, I'm not saying I mailed 'em a thousand dollars, maybe it was ten dollars, maybe it was twenty. You know what I'm talking about.

Absolutely.

Dave Gebron: I'm not gonna parlay myself as a big generous thing but when I did have money, I would hand it to people, you know, or I'd help families that were poor. And I helped some nuns go to Houston to study some further educational methods. I walked into Saint Monica's Church in Dallas, Texas, and they were selling Christmas cards or something, and nobody was buying 'em, and this is a rich church. This is not a poor church. And I was in jeans and loafers and I walked up to 'em and asked 'em what, and they told me and everything. They said they're trying to raise so much money to go to Houston for three days. They got some new educational blah, blah, blah. And I said, "Well, sister, I'll tell you what." And nobody knows this story except you probably. I said, "I'll send you to Houston on one condition. You are to never reveal who did it." She said, "You serious?" And they looked at me, probably thought, "This guy can't afford this." You know, I thought, "If they only knew and went outside and saw I had a Cadillac." I always had a Cadillac, not now. But, I went and got my checkbook and wrote 'em a check, told 'em, "You gotta fold up your tent and stop this 'cause you got more 'an enough to take you to Houston, to keep you there, to pay your expenses and bring you home." And I looked at 'em and grinned, and said "The check's good sister." And I got the most beautiful letter I wish I would'a kept from that group than I ever received in my whole life.

That's great.

Dave Gebron: But I did sort of wild things like that, James. But, you know, I don't want it publicized. But, you know, I did things like that, you know. And I've got streets named after me. Gebron Boulevard is a thriving boulevard over in Fort Worth. There's Gebron Boulevard in Austin, Lake Travis out there, there on Highway 625. You go to Cardinal Hills, they'll show you Gebron Boulevard. There's also one in Oklahoma, Gebron Boulevard, and there was one in Lake of the Woods but they changed all the name of the streets out there 'cause I built Lake of the Woods in Mineola, Texas. And I signed away all the rights 'cause a school for the handicapped and disabled children is gonna be put . . . I don't want this publicized . . . gonna be put at Lake Hawkins. And I gave away all the rights. A guy chased me down from a big law firm, wanted to know how much I wanted. I said, "What's it for?" When he told me, I says, "This for sure or

you're lying like most lawyers?" He said, "No, this is for sure." I said, "Give me the paperwork, I'll sign it."

So when you got back from the war then, you went into the building business? The home construction business?

Dave Gebron: No, actually I was a door-to-door salesman, rose through the ranks of Britannica, become one of the higher paid executives in the country.

With Encyclopedia Britannica?

Dave Gebron: Yeah. I sold great books, and I was fortunate to have as a friend Dr. Mortimer J. Adler, the world-famous philosopher, and Robert Maynard Hutchins who's been called the "Father of Education." Like Linda said, "You probably met and know more famous people than anybody in the United States of America." I knew Adlai Stevenson. I knew Senator Robert Bitten, and so on and so on and so on. I was just happened to be there at the right time, and Senator Stevenson nicknamed me "Diamond in the Rough." And when they'd award me with something, I was in a tux, he'd come by 'cause he was on the board of directors, he'd say, "You're all dressed up, Dave." I said, "Not to my choosing." Anyway, the way I became an executive, division manager, was I's running around, I won the diamond pin in a shorter period of months than anybody had ever had in the history of Britannica. I was always a good second man but never a good first man. And I used to open up their offices from scratch like in Saint Louis, Metairie, Louisiana, so on and so on, and Harvard and Connecticut. I'd buy, negotiate for the lease, buy the furniture. They let me do everything. Then I'd go out and sell and I'm hiring and training people while I'm doing that. So one day Robert Maynard Hutchins who was president of Britannica called me to come to Chicago. So I went to Chicago, and he was telling me they're promoting me, giving me a division in Milwaukee. I already knew it was the worst division in the United States of America. And we were talking and outside of his glass wall was what he called his wall of fame, and I said, "Dr. Hutchins, you don't even know who I am." He said, "Yes, I do. You've been with Britannica for a lot of years." I said, "Dr. Hutchins, if you'll look to the right, how many times do you see my picture on that wall?" He was probably the most embarrassed man ever lived in the United States of America. But I laughed and told him, "That's okay, sir. Don't worry. I'll make Milwaukee a success." And I did, and the flagship division was Chicago. They gave me three counties, I ended up with over 20 states. And I was also named the director of management training, so after I left my elaborate offices and I was the one told Britannica, "You put in elaborate offices, you'll hire a much better class of individual that you can teach to sell 'cause salesmen are not born." And then after 5 o'clock, I would go over to the management training and I'd teach, said, "Well, now that you've learned what you have, I'll now teach you how to sell." And they had everything possible, James, there were quarters, mirrors, you know what I'm talking about, a school with the best that money could buy. They were determined to make salesmen and sales managers out of 'em. They paid 'em pretty good living too. I forgot, four or five hundred a week or something. It was huge. It was tremendous. But basically then I, after I left Britannica, I was hired by, through a management company in New York called The Horizon Corporation. They had four million in debt and hadn't paid their bills in a year. They wouldn't even take 'em to Chicago, the hotel, unless I guaranteed it personally, and that was the president. The Houston Chronicle at the time wouldn't put an ad in unless I guaranteed it personally. At that time I had AAA credit which I don't at the moment 'cause they broke me. But anyway, I was gonna write a book, From Rags to Riches, From Riches

to Rags. To make a long story short, I was a success at everything I did. If I went to work for a company, it wasn't three months later I was in management, you know, in a good position. Then my whole family had been in the oil and gas business for years. My cousins and so forth, so I . . . Oh, from Horizon Corporation, I formed Pyramid Corporation. When I left Horizon, it was doing 300 million a year and had 55 offices. It had none when I started and couldn't pay its bills. And then I formed Pyramid Corporation 'cause I owned the building in Dallas on Northwest Plaza Drive. And I made that a huge national success. Eventually it got too big. I had to sell some of the stock so I lost control of it. So they voted against me. They sell it to Thomas Cullen Davis. If you remember who Thomas Cullen Davis was? The guy in Fort Worth supposedly shot the basketball star and the 12-year-old girl?

Okay, I was thinking of someone else.

Dave Gebron: It was national publicity. He never really went to jail and when he did, he had an open cell, a telephone, a chef making him private meals. That's what money can do for you. And he had Racehorse Haynes, one of the best, you know . . .

I've heard of Racehorse Haynes.

Dave Gebron: Yeah, he's a great criminal lawyer, you know, in Texas. One of the best. Anyway, to make a long story short, that's been the succession of my life. The one part I left out that I didn't know if you wanted.

Well, I was going to ask about the streets that were named for you because I thought maybe you had gotten into the building business or . . .

Dave Gebron: No, I was a land developer, and I always named a street after me 'cause I knew it would be there forever. And if you go to Oklahoma City, you're gonna see Gebron Drive. You go outside of Fort Worth on 377, you're gonna see Gebron Boulevard, and it's very busy in there. If you go to Austin on highway, I think it's 625, I don't remember correctly, it's right in Lake Travis there.

Six twenty?

Dave Gebron: I had six miles up there. And same thing you'll see in El Paso, and you'll see it . . . when you do see Gebron, you'll say, "Well, that's my friend, Dave Gebron."

And so you made a transition then at some point from being with Encyclopedia Britannica to having your own land development?

Dave Gebron: No, I didn't have my own land. Horizon hired me out of Tucson, Arizona through a New York management firm.

Okay.

Dave Gebron: The first year they owed me 25,000. They had to give me a note but I made so much money with Britannica, I wasn't exactly a pauper. I could sustain myself. But I figured nobody'd ever sold land door to door, so let me do something different, and I took a four million dollar corporation that couldn't pay its bills and built it into a 300-million, 55-office deal per year. They gave the president the Horatio Alger award. That's when I learned you could buy it

'cause that's exactly what we did. He didn't deserve it. I ran the company. He didn't deserve it. And then from Horizon, they were paying me a lot of money, and who's the first guy you thought they wanted to get rid of, that it will run itself? Me. But that doesn't happen. A good person and sales manager, just like in the Marine Corps, if you manage your squad, they'll do what you ask them to. If you don't do it properly, you're always gonna have somebody gonna object. Well, the same thing in management. I built the corporation around me. It was the only protection I had. I wasn't gone a year and it fell apart. And from there I formed Pyramid Corporation, but I used to travel from states. You'd always see these Pyramid Paint signs along the highway? You probably don't remember but there were a jillion of 'em, and that's where I came up on the idea of Pyramid. But basically I had a . . . I've been on television, made a movie, you know, was the number one guy on television in Texas for years. We couldn't get Frank Lovejoy, John Wayne or anybody so one day I asked Ford Agency which was huge, Ford Advertising Agency, "How much does this cost?" And they said, "Ten thousand a day." We had to flow in Hollywood cameras and this and that, and I said, "Really?" And they said, "Yeah." And a little clapboard girl, you know what clapboard is? They get the clapboard, you know. She says, "If it were me, I'd pick the man paying the bills. I like to look at him." So I took it over and our sales . . . We were selling at least eight to 10 times more. We had to put in many lines 'cause people were calling from out of my past, "I know him," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, you know. And it was unbearable. You couldn't go in a store lest people. I couldn't eat my lunch even on Highway 75 one day at Romano's. Women would come up, "Oh, I saw you," you know, blah. And finally some men said, "Why don't you ladies let the man have his lunch. He's kind enough, you know, to sign autographs for ya, be nice." And like my wife said, I should write a book. And I was probably the best CID agent the government ever had. I only handled serious crimes. You remember the movie with Cary Grant, the cat burglar?

No, I've not seen it.

Dave Gebron: Well, it was many years ago. It was very famous. I was the man who caught the cat burglar while I was doing surveillance on a Navy captain they thought were giving away government secrets when in actuality he wasn't 'cause he had a beautiful blond girlfriend and they figured she's Russian. Found out we could never find out who she was. And so some guy was going in between houses, it's an interesting story. I said to Otto Bevrige, my German counterpart in the Black Opal, I said, "Hey, some guy's robbing his house. Wake up, Otto." We were freezing to death. I said, "This captain's sleeping in a nice big house. He's warm. We're freezing to death. Let's grab this guy." So we did. He turned out to be probably one of the most famous burglars, had a movie made after him with Cary Grant, that ever lived. 'Course nobody knows it was me 'cause the provost marshal always takes the credit surrounded by all the loot.

So when were you working in CID?

Dave Gebron: Well, I'm 'bout to shock you. I couldn't resist the Korean War. So I went to it.

Okay. I didn't realize you were a Korean War vet as well.

Dave Gebron: Yeah, I'm one of those Americans, pal. You said you wanted a true American, right? Anyway, I was discharged from Army in 1951.

Okay, so you served in the Army as well.

Dave Gebron: Yeah, I served in the Korean War. But Truman, sir, put out an order that anyone who had combat time in World War II could not be sent to combat. So I was put in a unit that my job was to pick, control all the New York police. They'd gimme guns. They'd make me inspectors, captains, anything to stay from going in the service. My job was to pick one of 'em that we were short of in the Korean War like a captain, a lieutenant or something like that, you know. So naturally they showered me with favors, you know. They tried to, and I told 'em, "You know I go by the rules and regulations." And prior to that I was a drill sergeant, and the colonel said I's probably the best, and I do brag about this, that ever built men that really became a fighting force.

And this was in the Army?

Dave Gebron: Yeah. They said, "He is tough, boy. He is tough, man." Remember I'm an old former Marine, right? So I made 'em and molded 'em into probably the finest fighting men that the Army ever saw. Then I saw an opportunity. I was volunteering to go to combat then which was, you know, not too smart but I saw an opportunity to attend a CIA school in Oberammergau, Garmisch, Germany. It's up in the mountains there. And I love the way they conduct exams. They have chairs on each side of you. When they get ready for an exam, they turn the lights out and you have two flashlights to do your exam. If the flashlight's pointed too far to the right or left, you were tapped on the shoulder and you left. But I became one of the better ones. In those days you had to learn to read fingerprints, oral loop, all kinds of stuff. You had to use, I think, 5x7 speed graphic. You had to develop your own film. You didn't have labs, in other words. You know the labs they have now, you know, even prior to that we didn't have labs. You had to do it on your own to a great extent. So it was a good education. And I attended the University of Heidelberg there for three or four months, I don't remember, just in B&A taking business administration and so forth. I've done it all.

Yes sir. It sounds like it.

Dave Gebron: I even sold cars. I even made a movie. I was on TV.

Yes, quite a renaissance life.

Dave Gebron: Oh, I'm telling ya. My wife, like I said, "You know more famous people," and I met 'em accidentally. I met Dale Robertson, my close buddy, the cowboy star. And I met Forrest Tucker at an airport and we became friends. I met a lot of fame. Look, I know, Dr. Mortimer Adler once sent me a note, "I'm on an airplane flying and I want to say hello to my good friend, Dave Gebron, who's helping rebuild great books again." And Robert Maynard Hutchins, the "Father of Education," who went on to become the Chancellor of University of Colorado, was a friend of mine. And I had a slew of pictures but they got lost, you know, to a great extent, with congressmen, senators, but I's never impressed by that. Back when I went to Washington, I thought we were in trouble lots of times after meeting some of these men and smelling the booze on their breath. I really thought the country was in serious trouble to tell you the truth about it. 'Cause I'm a grown man now, you know, I'm not a young boy anymore. But, I been through a myriad of things, you know, and I did, the thing I did most for Texas is when I had Pyramid Corporation. Back in the '70s, times were tough. Well, I furnished a couple of presidents to companies, and United something company was huge at that time, U.S. something, and they were getting presidents from me, but I found out that these companies were in bad shape, some

of 'em, so I hopped planes and I went around to these corporations and I was teaching 'em, believe it or not, how to build a successful corporation like Pyramid was. Keep your GNA low, 5% or below, and quit taking so much money and putting it in your pockets, and cut down your expenses. I'd go through their company and show 'em where a lot of the money was waste. I said, "This way you don't have to terminate anybody, and we can keep people working in the State of Texas." Well, one of the presidents was a friend of one of the trustees of the State of Texas, and he was telling him about it one day. He said, "You won't believe this guy. He pays for his own expenses. He came into my company and sure told me how to cut things down and keep my GNA down, how to keep it profitable and keep people working, and maybe have to hire additional people." But let certain people do two or three jobs, you know. But he didn't have to terminate anybody. So he told the University of Texas at San Antone, which is a beautiful campus, if you ever been there.

I have.

Dave Gebron: And I was in Saint Louis one day from my home office in Dallas, and Barbara, my secretary, went on to become the secretary for Ross Perot who asked her where she learned how to write letters. She said, "Mr. Gebron had a philosophy. You gotta write letters, answer letters like you talk 'cause they'll never understand what you're saying." He said, "Well, do that for me from now on." And she called me in Saint Louis and I said, "Well, Barbara, this better be important. I'm in an important meeting." She said, "Well, they're a couple of gentlemen here from the University of Texas San Antone." I said, "Really? Well, if they want money, I'll give 'em some. Get their name and address and we'll send 'em a check." You know how I am, I believe in education like nobody. I used to give the kids five bucks, the black kids that clean my office in Chicago, if they made good grades. They came with their father, and I'd tell 'em, "You make good grades, I'll give you five bucks each," you know. And no big deal but it was to them. But, she says, "They're here and they'd like to have met with you." And I said, "Well, unfortunately I'm in Saint Louis. Ask them how much they want. It's that simple." She says, "They don't want any money." I said, "What do they want?" She says, "They want to present you with a doctor of laws degree." I started laughing. I thought it was ridiculous. I thought it was a joke. I said, "Barbara, I don't have time for jokes." She says, "Mr. Gebron, this is very serious." And she says, "Here, I'll ask 'em to let me read it to you." So she did. I said, "Well, do me a favor, put it in the drawer in my office. I'll be back in a week or so, and tell 'em if there's anything I can do for 'em, I'll be happy to do it. 'Cause by that time I'm in the world's marquee, marquee world world, you know, that famous world book they put only, it's called the Marquee, which very few people get into. You're in there with presidents and kings and queens, and I don't know how they picked me. But anyway, that's how I got my doctors of law. And I'd go around the State of Texas, and if I thought a little company was in trouble, I'd try to salvage it 'cause we couldn't afford in the '70s for people to be fired in Texas. It wasn't that great if you'll remember. And we was successful so it was no big deal to me, and that's how I acquired the doctor of laws degree.

Yes sir. Well, sir, it's been a great interview. I know we've taken about an hour of your time but . . .

Dave Gebron: Hey, I'm sick at home, James. You're not taking any of my time. You're a former Marine, aren't ya?

Yes sir. I'm still . . .

Dave Gebron: Is any of this any interest to ya?

Oh absolutely, and especially just being able to get your life story and your memories, especially of your time in the service means a great deal to us. That's what our whole program is about, is trying to save these stories for posterity. Commissioner Patterson is a Marine veteran, myself. There's a lot of folks here that are.

Dave Gebron: You think they'd be interested in that?

Oh absolutely, and that's why we do these interviews, and when your wife called, we said we'd love to interview him because that's our . . .

Dave Gebron: You want to know what my nickname was?

What was it?

Dave Gebron: The Fighting Marine.

The Fighting Marine, well, that's good.

Dave Gebron: That was my nickname. The Fighting Marine.

Well, that's a good one.

Dave Gebron: I'll always cherish that.

Yes sir.

Dave Gebron: I've never heard it since. You think any of this will work?

Oh absolutely. What I'll do is once this interview is done, we'll get copies made of this onto CDs.

Dave Gebron: Well, you can edit some of it, you know.

No, what we do is we save the whole thing because we don't want to edit any of it out. It's your interview and it's . . .

Dave Gebron: Well, I don't care if you think it isn't necessary.

No, we think it's great. All these interviews we keep.

Dave Gebron: I was always a success at anything I started. You know, I once hit 89 oil wells in a row and nobody believed it 'cause I researched it so good. But, I hope you'll use it, and I hope it will be part of the archives. I'd like for my grandchildren someday to know it.

Yes sir, and we're going to send you copies you can give to them as well.

Dave Gebron: In other words, it's a done deal.

Oh, yes sir. Every one of these interviews we do with any veteran, we save it in the archives and then we also send copies.

Dave Gebron: I want to thank you. You know, my cousin, Gebron, Khalil Gebron, very few people ever heard of 'em even though his paintings hang in the Smithsonian, his works are in the Smithsonian, and Kennedy used to borrow, let me use that word, not steal, from his books word for word. But he was probably the most famous Gebron we ever had. So anyway, I hope someday somebody will go through your archives there and they'll see the Dave Gebron story.

Yes sir, exactly.

Dave Gebron: And I hope we meet some time. Occasionally they call me to Austin when the weather's nice. I have to sign releases but I became friendly with the owner of the hotel. He puts me up. He once put me up in a 700 dollar-a-day room, and I didn't like it. I made him move me downstairs to a 500 dollar-a-day room.

Well, sir, anytime you're coming to town, just call and let me know. I'd be honored to meet you.

Dave Gebron: I'd be honored to meet you, sir. And I mean this sincerely. It's a true honor for me to meet you and Mr. Patterson.

Absolutely. We'd set up a tour and let you see the archives and everything so just let me know.

Dave Gebron: Well, am I gonna be in it?

Oh absolutely. I'll show where all our other, we got a whole bunch of other interviews here.

Dave Gebron: Well, my wife asked me that question is why I asked you. By the way, I have no idea why I's picked to go to Washington, DC.

Well, if you find out, let me know.

Dave Gebron: Well, there's 200 veterans were picked from the United States of all the wars, and I understand that I'm one of the very few World War II veterans.

That's great.

Dave Gebron: You know, the rest are all Vietnamese, Korean and all that stuff. So I have no idea. If I find out, you know, and it's good, I'm sure the Texas delegation will be there, and I'm not for sure we won't meet, you know, the president or vice or somebody, you know what I mean? 'Cause they're making it a big deal.

Sure.

Dave Gebron: And I know Obama likes to be on television.

Well, let us know. Let me know when it's coming up.

Dave Gebron: Well, it's coming up in the next couple of weeks. I accepted. My daughter emailed the president of DVA and told him that I accept and I'd consider it an honor to go with the group.

That's great. Yes sir.

Dave Gebron: Thank you, James. May you and your family always have a safe day each and every day of your life.

Well, thank you, and you have a great weekend, sir, and we'll talk to you again soon.

Dave Gebron: Well, I don't know about you but I see nothing but snow out the window here, two to three inches.

Yeah, we don't have that here.

Dave Gebron: Thank you, James.

Thank you, sir.

Dave Gebron: And thank, is it Captain Patterson?

Commissioner Patterson, yes sir.

Dave Gebron: Thank Commissioner Patterson.

I'll do that as well. Have a great day. Bye.