

## Transcription: Gilbert Bidwell

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*Today is Thursday, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010. My name is James Crabtree, and I'll be interviewing Mr. Gilbert Bidwell. This interview is being done by phone. I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Bidwell is at his home in Arlington, 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. The first question we almost always start with is to tell us a little bit if you would about your childhood and your life before you went in the service.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well I grew up in the Depression. I was born in \_\_\_ part of Texas, Young County, Texas. We lived in Newcastle at the time. My father, and I remember my father, you know, he was in World War I, and he come back from France, and I guess I was born, he come back 1919 and I was born in 1924.

*Did you ever talk to him much about his time in the war?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** He didn't talk very much. He was in France and I've got his discharge. I need to maybe get some, get his medals. But he was in France and I guess I found out he got gassed when he was over there, with the mustard gas, and he talked how cold he got and in a trench, and there was one of his friends that lived in Fort Worth came out visiting him in the later years when I was older, and it was kind of a story if you want to hear it.

*Yes sir, please.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** He said they found him in a dugout over there, this friend was telling me. He was laying down in the dugout, and my dad was gone and when he come back, he had found him a German belt buckle and put it on, and when he was coming down them steps, all he seen was that buckle, and he started shooting, you know. He'd like to got shot wearing that German belt buckle when they were down in the dugout.

*Did your father ever have any health complications from having been gassed?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yes, he was drawing some compensation for it. Of course you know, back then it wasn't very much. I don't think it was very much, you know, really. At the end, maybe. I know about how much if you want to hear that.

*Well I know that in World War I there's a Hall of Fame baseball pitcher named Christy Mathewson that was in the Army there and had been exposed to that mustard gas, and it really messed up his lungs and he died not many years after the war was over, and so I was just wondering if your father had complications with his lungs and his breathing because of that gas.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah he did, he coughed a lot. He coughed nearly all the time. But he kept saying that's what it was. He went to the Veterans Hospital several times, and I remember taking him over there when I got over there, and etc.

*When you were growing up on the farm with your family, how many siblings did you have?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** I had two brothers and one sister, and we were two years apart. My brother was the oldest, he was four years older than I. My sister was two years, and I was two years older than my younger brother. When we were growing up, you know, it was the Depression, it was kind of hard. Then when Roosevelt got elected, he started this Civil Conservation Corps, and so my father went to work for that. He was in engineers when he was in the Army, and so they were building roads. We moved around quite a bit. We moved to Memphis, Texas; Canyon, Texas; and we were in Amarillo for a while. Then we came on back to Wichita Falls. He had quit working then.

*Were you in Wichita Falls when Pearl Harbor was bombed?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** I was, yes.

*Can you tell us a little bit about your memories of that day?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, I was in town. Oh I guess I must've been 12, and everybody was just, man looked like the world had come to an end. They were shouting those newspapers and it was on pink newsprint. I don't know why. But yeah, it was kind of weird. Everybody was excited and when they declared war, everybody was joining up and they were opening, trying to get the defense plants open. They had been building those sooner, so they had some ready, got ready. Everybody was wanting to work, everybody they could get – the women and the young men and men. And I mean really, through the years, I think that's what won the war, the production back here. We never did lack anything to fight with.

*Did you go to work in one of those plants?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** I went to work at North American Aviation over here in Grand Prairie, at the time that's what it was. And they were building B-24's and B-51 Mustangs, and I was putting de-esser boots on the B-24.

*So you got to see, you got a chance I guess then to see firsthand though what those assembly plants were like and the massive number of planes that were being built.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Oh yeah.

*How long would you work each day?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, I'd work 8 hours. I had to get a release. I'd work in the summertime when I wasn't going to school, and we worked a regular shift. We'd get a release and I guess the state, they had the law, under a certain age you had to have a release, work release.

*Was it set up where you were, was it like an assembly line? The planes would come along and then you would - ?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** No, not where I was. We were put, you know they had the landing gauges that was metal, and we'd put the rubber boots on these metal, you know, and screw 'em in and they would take 'em and put 'em on the shift on the assembly line. But I worked in aircraft later on the assembly line when I came back, but everybody was working real hard out there. I'd go in the plant, but I was lucky I got out. I was away from all the hustle and bustle, but you know I remember going out there and I was working a night shift, and went out and those people lining

up to get on these, looked like they had trailers, cattle trailers now, like the back of a cattle truck, and but they had they were pulling them with a big truck, up on instead of a fifth wheel. They would have them lined up and have people getting on them going to Dallas to work. I was living in Grapevine. I had an old Model A, I'd drive that Model A.

*At this time you were just a teenager. Did you think at some point that you were going to be going in the service yourself?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, I know that if the war gets going, I'm gonna be there because I think at one time they were drafting at 18, and they were to 38, and I think they cut back on the 38, I think to 36. I'm pretty sure though. But they 18, I don't know whether they dropped that, or I mean pushed that up or not. They might have.

*Now you'd mentioned sir that you had siblings and when we talked before you said that you had an older brother that had gone in the service. Tell us a little bit about him and was he drafted or did he sign up, or that sort of thing.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** His name was James Bidwell, and what he did, he joined the Merchant Marines to begin with, he and a cousin, and they took the Merchant Marine training and I guess the Germans were staying outside of New Orleans and picking those ships off as they come out, and so they decided that they would, they'd rather go into the Army. They said well, you'd be drafted if you quit and go in the Army. They said yeah, we know. And so they went into the Army. They went immediately.

*How much older was he than you?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** He was four years older. He went in immediately and then I don't know it was his hip, I guess he was injured or something, and I don't know whether he was shot or what, but then they did surgery on his hip and I guess it got infected. Well, they notified my mother and they didn't say anything, just told her. Then she was opening a letter and I was, I don't know where I was at -

*You were already in the Navy at that point?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, I was on the ship, but I don't know exactly, but anyway, some time we didn't get our mail for three or four months, and I think one time it got burned. I don't know if the ship caught on fire or an airplane, but we learned that our mail was burned, and we could read parts of it. They got it back to us. But of course I couldn't go nowhere, and our captain, he went right by the book, and so coming home after the war, we had to go to China. I guess that may be an untold story if people don't know about it.

*Well, we can get to that. I guess to backtrack a little bit sir, because I kind of jumped ahead a little bit with your brother being hospitalized. So you were working at the plant there, helping to assemble aircraft for the war effort. And then at some point you go into the service and how old were you when you went in?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** We were barely 17.

*So you had to get permission from your parents, right?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** That's correct.

*What did they say and how did they feel about you wanting to go in?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** They didn't want me to go, my mama didn't. And my dad, he wasn't, he didn't object, but -

*So did you get your father to sign for you?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, I did finally. So he signed and I went in when I was 17.

*Where was the first place the Navy sent you?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** They sent me to San Diego, California to boot camp.

*What was that like?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** It was pretty rough. I wished I was back home. But I made it through all right.

*I've always heard in Navy boot camp they spend a lot of time teaching swimming and fire control on a ship. Was that the experience that you had?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, we had a lot of swimming. There was a recreation place there at Mission Beach. I guess it was publicly owned, huge indoor swimming pool. But the Navy took everything over, and we had to march out there, it was several miles from the Navy base, and swim. We'd have to jump off, I think they had, I don't know if it was a 50-foot tower was as high as they went or not. It seemed like it was higher than that. We had to jump off of that and we had to do a lot of swimming. It was a huge pool. Then they had an obstacle course underwater that we had to swim. We had to do that several times. They set the water on fire, you know, and you had to dive under it and come up and push the water away from you. You know what I mean, push the fire away?

*Yeah, I'm sure that was good practice in the event of a ship sinking.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, and then we had to take our britches off and tie up the legs and catch air in them and throw them down in the water and use them for a life jacket.

*Were you able to do that? Did that work very well?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, it worked pretty good. I don't know how long that would last. Then you could do your jackets the same way. They made us jump with our undressed whites. Well, you could do your blue jeans that way I guess, I don't know. But a shirt, I don't think you could. But they just showed us how it was done.

*What about the firefighting? Did you do much of that?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, they had some metal buildings that they would set fires in there and get you to practice putting them out. Then they had tear gas and they made you go in there and wear your gas mask in a tear gas room. Then they had you take your mask off where you would get a

good dose of tear gas, wouldn't let you out, and stuff like that. My good friend Herbert Bywell that was on the Bunker Hill when they got hit at Okinawa there, and he was down there. He got trapped down in the bottom there when it was hit. He told me a good story on that. But we'll get on back to what you want to know.

*Sure, well then I know sir that you went through your basic training. What at that point, did you have a specialty? Had you been assigned a specialty yet?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, not yet. We went to a Marine base there, Camp Wyneemi I think. I don't know for sure. I didn't stay there, just for three or four days, and then they started sending us out. Then some of the ships, they sent me to Coronado Island in the harbor -

*OK, in San Diego.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** ...for amphibious training, and we trained small boats landing, you know, in the small boats, haul the troops in, and before it was over we had some transport ships out there and we would land the Marines in those small boats. We'd make a mock invasion of that island and we'd load 'em up on the cargo nets, then climb down and get in the boat. Then we would go out, circle and make a wave, you know, line up and make a wave, and they had a flare they would shoot and we would go in and hit the beach.

*What was the hardest part of learning how to pilot one of those vessels?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, I guess you know, the waves hitting you in the back, you know, when you hit the beach. They would try to turn you sideways and broach it. Of course at the time, it didn't always happen, I couldn't always get out. We had two crewmen with a line, at the bow and one on each side trying to hold it straight, and if it got sideways you were just useless, them waves hitting on the side.

*Then you would be pretty much just stuck.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, and the troops didn't have a very good way of getting off. They had to climb over the top of that thing, and they had their packs on. So we hardly ever broached. I never seen anybody broach. But it was kind of hard to stand beside the ship if you was out and the waves were up. You were bouncing up and down and you were trying to hold it up there where the troops could get a hold of it, get on it rather, about the only thing. Of course you had to learn how the flare signals, which one, what each flare meant when you went into the beach there.

*So after you finished all your training at Coronado, and you were certified as a pilot of an amphibious vehicle, where was it that you ended up going to next?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** We went to Pearl Harbor, and they took us to their Navy air base there, at another little island there. I can't think of the name. And they put us on the aircraft there.

*Which one was that, do you remember?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** \_\_\_geline, I think it was a little Jeep carrier. You know what I'm talking about? So we went to Pearl Harbor on that, and so that's the only time I ever remember getting a welcome. They had the hallway of music and hula girls dancing and throwing up the lei's, and

so we disembarked and went over to tent city. It had tents. But it had wooden floors, that's one thing. But so we would wait in there to get on the troop transport ships. So I think they were going to Saipan, I don't know. But anyway, they hadn't got everything in there, but the LST come in there on a shakedown troops in the states and they wanted three men, so they got three of us, Bidwell, Blair and Bersendoff, and they put us on the LST. We didn't know what that thing was.

*Tell us a little bit about the LST, and what that was like.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, you mean the size and all that?

*Sure, your thoughts, your memories of it.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** It was 327 feet long, and that's 27 feet longer than a football field, and it's 50-foot wide. The inside of that they called the tank deck, and it was hollow. Landing ship tank is what the LST was for. Then they had a ramp up to the top, and they loaded the bottom and go up and they'd load the main deck. But it was round-bottomed, no keel. They called it the floating bathtub, and so man, it would roll. So when it hit the beach, it had about 3-1/2 foot draft on the front. What they'd do, they'd move all the water back, you know, ballast, to the stern. They would raise the bow up and they could get closer to the beach. And they had big bow doors, two of them that they opened wide, and then the ramp, they lowered it down. So if we wasn't on the beach, you know, we had to float. We carried two pontoons on the side, one on each side. We'd have to float it around and put it under the ramp. But most of the time the troops had to leave there without the pontoon.

*How many landing craft would be in an LST?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** The later ones, mine was a later one, it just had 2, and the early ones, some of them had 6. And ours would just hold LCD landing craft vehicle personnel. It would hold one Jeep or I think 38 men, and I was in one boat crew, and Bob was in the other. So if they needed anymore boats, these transport ships, they were on a bunch of the boats around that could get 'em if they didn't, we didn't haul that many troops, you know.

*Where was the first place that you made a landing?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** We were usually late when we come into the islands. We didn't get into the first one. But what was the little island there - I can't think of that name -

*Were you landing Marines? Did you have Marines that would take ashore?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** We took the Marines ashore one time and we took the, before where there was any opposition, I'll give you where we went there. Name is Ie Shima, it was a little island off of Okinawa, and I don't know whether you remember the story about \_\_\_ Powell in the \_\_\_\_.

*Oh absolutely, yes sir.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah he got killed right there, and they put, right there on the beach, right where we hit.

*So were you there that day?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** No, I wasn't there that day, but they put a monument up there for him, right there where they hit. But we put these, Army a lot of equipment come in there, we put them on, and the first one over there, he sunk in his Jeep. That was kind of funny, but I seen him later you know. That's the reason I was laughing. And you could hear explosions over there. Wasn't nobody at the beach there when we went in there. But we stayed there quite a while on that beach, but not a whole lot, a few days.

*Did you ever have to make any landings, sir, that were under fire?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** No, you know, Okinawa, they didn't have any opposition until they got on the beach. They let everybody on. And no, I never did, I never did do that. I guess I was lucky.

*What about the troops that you were putting onshore, did you talk to them much? Was there much interaction with them, or was it kind of separate because you were in the Navy and driving the vessel?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** No, we talked to them because they were slow and it was a long way over there, and -

*What were some of the things you remember that you guys would talk about, any particular topics or that sort of thing?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, they never had been over, and we just talked about different things. Of course they stayed mostly together, but we didn't have a chaplain on there, and they had some chaplains, and so they went over and we'd go to the church services. I remember them chaplain, they were praying that we'd become better shots, you know. We wasn't hitting nothing. And one of those troops, it wasn't too long after that there was more, Japs said they would surrender, I mean until they dropped the bomb, and one of their guys got killed there at Iwoshima, and that was bad. I still remember that, you know. He had a family back here in Fort Worth. His name was O'Hara. I still remember that name. Anything that impressed me, I remember.

*Yeah.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, that was bad. He got the top of his head knocked off. I think he was the only one that got killed there. Because I know they come back and we made him a box, you know, for a casket, the shipfitters did.

*Did they bury him at sea?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** No, they buried him there on the beach. See, we were still on the beach there at Iwoshima, and they come back to the ship and we made him a box there. They buried him on that island somewhere. And so we stayed on there quite a while. They went on, I don't know where they went, but they had an airstrip there. Boy, it was loaded. I was setting there, standing watch there at the bow. We had the bow doors open, and an officer come by and said hey, when you get off watch, they're having a program show right over the hill down in that gully there. You go through these airplanes. I walked him through there and down there. I guess a big bomb exploded something at that air. They were sitting on the side of that and had a stage there in the middle, and it was Bob Hope.

*Oh really, so you had a chance to see Bob Hope.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Boy yeah, that was a thrill.

*Where was this? What place was it again?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Ie-Shima.

*Tell us a little bit about that show.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, he had his girl, he had Jimmy Durante, and so it was everybody up there, and he was telling his jokes and everything, and the girls would sing and dance. And then towards the end he picked out a Marine in the audience there, he got to them and that guy, you know, she run out there and grabbed him and hugged him, and jumped up in his lap and whatever, and everybody was really yelling. That was good.

*I bet. I bet that helped the morale a lot to have a little bit of home like that.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, it did. I thought well, I just wonder, you know that guy is taking a lot of chances. I thought about that.

*That's neat. Yeah I know he did that for years and years afterwards, too.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, I don't know whether he ever went over to Okinawa. I never heard of him going there, but that little island there, it wasn't too far from Okinawa. Boy, that was great. So we pulled back out to sea and we went on back, went over to Okinawa, you know. We was empty, and see what we was going to have to do next. But we was out in the harbor. We was empty but airplanes were still coming over. You know what I'm talking about?

*Sure.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** The kamikaze? So we'd get out in our boats and we had these three-gallon cans of smoke with pull tabs on them. I think the military invented the pull tab, and they would pull that out and cause smoke and we would throw it out in the water and we were round and round that ship. We had a generator there that we burned diesel on there to throw smoke out, too, and we were covered up in smoke. So were the other ships covered up in smoke, and they would have that whole harbor covered up with smoke. And the Japanese, when they come in they had to go way out to where there wasn't any smoke and get about 10 feet off the water and come in until they hit something. If they didn't hit a ship, they would hit the island. So it was crazy.

*Did you see many of them then? Kamikaze's?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Oh yeah, quite a few. But I seen more attacking other ships than I did ours. You know there's two sides to that island, Buckner's Bay and the other one over there on the cliff where we was at. Sometimes they wouldn't bother one side and then get the other side. They didn't like and go and get over LST's very much I think. We have a lot of anti-aircraft guns and we had 20 anti-aircraft guns.

*That is a lot. I think you had told me before that you had joked that the LST stood for large, slow target, is that right?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Oh yeah, we'd cruise at about 9-10 mph, and at 12 knots, you know, you'll turn your ship up in seconds or so, and that was 15 mph. The guys got to where they liked it all right. We'd joke about it but nobody else better not talk about it, you know. They thought that was their field. It was. But it got us there and back. We had a lot of trouble, and we went back to Ie Shima and picked these guys up, and brought 'em back to Okinawa and put 'em on the beach there, and never did hear from them anymore. But I found out later that they went to Korea, and we went on back. I think, I'm not for sure went to Guam. We picked up a bunch of tanks and Marines, and brought 'em back to Okinawa, and put those Marines on the beach and the tanks. The war was getting, of course I'm probably getting ahead of myself in a lot of places.

*During the time that all this was going on and you were going from island to island to island, did you have a pretty good feeling that we were going to defeat the Japanese at that point?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, well I thought I was going to live until they said we were going to invade Japan, and then I thought well, we're not gonna make it through there.

*What did they tell you about the potential invasion?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, they were getting ready there over at Okinawa, and they were putting troops and troops, you know, and ships in there. I bet they had 1,000 ships in there, and we were going through these big straits, and they said that the Japanese had trained their civilians and kids and everything else for a last ditch stand, and we were 350 or 370 miles from Tokyo there at Okinawa, and then they dropped the bomb, and then we decided we were going to make it.

*So you were in Okinawa when you learned that the first bomb had been dropped?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah.

*Did you believe it or did you think somebody was telling you a story?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** We heard a rumor first, and they said ah, they were talking about this big bomb that was going to end the war, you know. We heard that a few days earlier before they actually dropped it, maybe a month.

*When did you finally believe it was true?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, when they dropped it, you know, we got a radio message on it, and boy, how about the story that all the ships opened up and started shooting them guns. It was a wonder they hadn't gotten anybody killed. It was a celebration.

*I imagine.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** So we stayed, even after they said the war was over, we stayed there a long time.

*In Okinawa?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, we stayed, and altogether we was there about 3 months. I think it took 89 days to stake that island. The Navy lost more men than anybody. They lost more men there than they lost in the whole war. Everything was suicide. They had suicide swimmers, suicide boats, and suicide planes. So there, in fact we were there getting ready, we were up beside a merchant ship, and the merchant ship wasn't going to go any further, and they said they weren't going into Japan, and we were going to take their load, you know. And so we, when the war was over we stayed there, we went on in to Tokyo and that's when we learned how bad it would have been.

*How long was it after the war was over before you got to Tokyo?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** I don't know, we was there in Tokyo Bay when they signed the surrender.

*Wow.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** And we took off and we had a load of CB's on there. They were going to build an airstrip there close to Tokyo, so we went into the captain, he wanted to be there in the Bay when the surrender was signed. We had to anchor way out, and he went into Tokyo Bay and you could see 'em with field glasses, you know, with all the tables out.

*So you could see the Missouri.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah.

*Wow.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** You had to have field glasses to see 'em good.

*Still, that's amazing though to witness that history.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, and they had these chow tables like we use on the ship, they had three or four of them out there. They signed it on chow tables, you know, the Navy had. They couldn't get any desks up there and the hatches wasn't very wide and they couldn't get them big tables up there. They got them chow tables up.

*I've seen the photographs of that event and I've had a chance to actually tour the Missouri out in Pearl Harbor, and it's a pretty moving spot. I know in the pictures you just see sailors just everywhere on that ship trying to get a view of it. Was that what you saw? Did you see them just all over the side of that ship?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, they was all over that ship, but we were a good way but we could see it, but we couldn't recognize them, but we got the field glasses and we would pass them around, you know, and we could see their faces, make them out.

*Wow, that is really something, that's being a witness to history right there.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** I never did tell many people about that. In fact, you know, a few stories you don't tell. I like to tell the funny stories. I got a lot of funny ones.

*Sure, share some with us.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, I'll think of one in a minute.

*OK, let me ask you this then. So you were in Tokyo Bay and you saw the surrender and everything. Had you been able at that point to have any contact with your family? I guess you were getting mail, right?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, but we didn't get it very often. See, we moved around a lot. They'd say LST 979 somewhere in the Pacific. That was our address. So if we were moving, that yeoman told me we went enough miles to go around the world three times. And so we had to, when we were in beds around Tokyo, I'll tell you what we did with our CB's, right? We were on back to Omanata, Japan. It hadn't been occupied. It was a seaplane base and it was out of Tokyo there, I guess kind of like a suburb, but it was an island. So we landed on that seaplane base, and that water in the bay, this is interesting a little, that water in the bay there was so dirty, we couldn't use it, you know, distill it for our drinking water. So we went and checked their water plant out there, and it was good, so we took a fire hose and run from the hangar out there on ship. That's where we got our water while we was there. And so we run our flag up there and we waited and waited, and the CB's I guess stand watch on the island, an admiral and some troops got there, so anyway we run the flag, the first flag up there, and so they decided they wasn't going to build the air base there. They went on in closer to Tokyo, and it was Kazarzoo, or Kissarazoo we called it, and they built the air base there and it was a suburb of Tokyo, and we'd ride the trains into Tokyo, and it was deserted. Boy, no one, none of the shops or nothing was open. In fact we went all over town, them big buildings, and we did find one shop that was open and we walked in there to see what they had, and they just threw his hands up and run and screamed, you know. An old crystal radio is all he had.

*So the Japanese people had been told that the Americans were going to kill them all, huh?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, you couldn't find one. The Marines was in there, and they opened up a place where we could get peanuts, candy, and apples. We weren't allowed to eat anything that they had. So we'd go in there and visit once in a while, but that reminded me of a funny thing. Riding that train into Tokyo from Kazarzoo, had the flat cars at the back and you would, they didn't stop, they would just slow, same speed all the time, just slow and you just jumped on them. You threw your bags on the flat cars and jumped up in it. That's what the Japanese did. Of course we didn't have no bags. But we had a sailor on there, I don't guess he liked the Japanese, but this poor Japanese, he was running that thing and throw his bag in there and he would throw it back off. He would throw it in, and he would throw it back off. And he'd like to run him down, but he kept chasing that train until he got back on. So we finally told him to leave him alone, you know. But then we'd go through the train. You know, the Japanese wouldn't let those, they'd make the women far on, wouldn't let 'em walk with them, and the men set down and the women stood up in the train. So every time we'd ride that train, we'd go through there and we'd make the men get up and the women sit down. Some of the women would cry, begging us not to do that. I guess those men must've been mean to 'em.

*I guess so. That is different.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** We did that, we'd get 'em all setting, and then we'd make another run and they'd be standing up again, and we'd make 'em do it over again.

*So how long in total did you spend in Japan?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** In total? Oh gosh, let's see.

*Several months?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** So there, after we did that, we started hauling, you know Japan, we were getting into China now, and Japan had taken China over, you know, and we runned them back to China hauling them Japanese soldiers out of there back to Japan. And we'd load up, we'd haul 1,000 at a time, and we'd pack 'em on there, and then that tank deck, they couldn't, didn't have room to sleep. They'd have to order 'em to stand up. Well, they had to sleep. So we had to take loads of them back and I think -

*Did they come from China back to Japan?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** They come from China and some of them, they had to take 'em from Korea, too, but we went to, yeah, it was Shanghai where we were getting them, and so we could stand 1,000 on there. We'd pack 'em, and they had, we had Marines on there to guard 'em, had two Marines guarding 1,000 Japanese. I guess that was good. But anyway them guys had to stand out there. We had a place above at our gun locker and they could stand above all those Japs and watch 'em. Of course they had their rifles or DAR's or something, and they didn't have trouble off of 'em, but they could have I guess. And we hauled them back to Sansaboo, Japan, and made 'em go back. We'd get their families. They had their family over there, and we'd get the kids and the women, and hauled them back, you know. Most of those women had their husband in a box, you know, when they got killed, and had their ashes piled around their neck, you know, white papers, red ribbon, and they would tie it around their neck. And we'd count 'em coming from one of the women, one with babies and then the kid, and the one that was pregnant. There was pregnant ones we had on there. We had a lot of Japanese babies born going back and some of them died, and then we would have their burial at sea. Then we got all of 'em out of China, and about that time, the Communists, the time we got them Japanese out, the Communists and Nationalists started fighting. So you want to go there?

*Well, a little bit, sir. So did you go to China then at that point?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, we'd go to China to haul them Nationalists troops up and down the coast fighting the Chinese Communists.

*And how long did that go on for?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Oh, several months.

*Did you think at that point that you were just going right from one war to another and you might not get a chance to come home?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, we'd watch it pretty close. Some of them were getting shot on, going up, there was a bunch of them had C's going up and down those beaches, and I mean going up, yeah, shores. We had to unload them in northern China and it was cold. That's where Taiwan came from. They hauled them over there and told them that's as far as you go. You don't get no more. So that was after I got to go home. We went to Hong Kong, Shanghai, and all those towns up and down the coast, and we were there, we got a China service medal for that. But see, we're the ones that didn't have enough points to go home.

*That was because you were so young and you'd joined later on, right?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, and you wasn't married, and you're young, and you didn't have enough, we didn't have enough points. The ones with points got to go home and they were running short of men, even our crew. Our captain, he was trying to go home there when the war was over. We thought we were going home. We went to Guam, and that's when they said we were going over to fight these Communists. He had a baby girl that he had never seen. He wanted to go home, but he said he would go to China, get us to China. So at Shanghai he left the ship and went home. So all through the war he did a pretty good job, he kept us pretty safe except a bad typhoon at the end of the war there at Okinawa, that was terrible. We didn't think we was going to make it that night, but we did.

*Wow, so were you almost more concerned then for your own life in that typhoon than you were at any other time?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Right, everybody. Even the captain said that was the closest we come to dying, but a lot of them did. That was a bad deal.

*What was the location for you when you were in that typhoon?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** We were in Buckner's Bay at Okinawa, and they said all the big ships could go out to sea, and they had the priority, and a lot of them was going out -

*To try to get away from it?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, but all of them didn't. But we decided we'd stick it out, the captain did. He kept the engines running all night and we stayed awake all night. I imagine it was all of our fathers said that night, I don't know whether it's true or not, but really man or whatever, stuck to the instruments. He said that wind was 239 knots, I don't know, or miles or whatever. He said it broke at that, which it could have been a gust.

*Well, if there was a typhoon and you were rolling in it, I'm sure the wind speeds were high no matter what.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** We broke, we had a stern anchor we put out when we hit the beach at \_\_\_\_\_, and then we had a bow anchor, so them anchors were breaking on the ships and man, they were hitting the beach, water was so high they was going 50 yards up on the beach. So he kept the engines running and had that stern anchor out, and when it broke, we dropped the bow anchor, and we finally made it through. But boy, that place was ripped, and we had all those troops and Marines on the beach there, and in tents, ready to go into Tokyo, and those tents and them were scattered everywhere, you know? It was a bad deal. A lot of them ships broke in two, and we were lucky again. Then we headed off to Tokyo and we hit another one, and we was at sea then. We were the flag ship and we had four or five LST's with us. The next morning, you couldn't see nobody.

*When was it that you finally got back home?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** I got back in May, went under the Golden Gate Bridge on my birthday.

*May of '46?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah.

*So on your birthday you went under the Golden Gate Bridge?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, under the Golden Gate Bridge. I was 19 years old.

*So I'm sure that was quite a sight to see that and know that you were almost home.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah it was.

*At that point, were you able to finally make a phone call to your parents or let them know you were coming?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, I told 'em where I was at. We decommissioned the ship and at that point, my brother was in the hospital. I told 'em well we'll get you, said we'll get you a replacement. So I got to go home about a week before we decommissioned the ship.

*What was that like finally coming home after being gone?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Oh man, I don't know, it was just kind of a weird feeling, that now everything, nothing had changed. It was just like coming back to the space, you know. We thought maybe there was going to be somebody there to even take a line, but we went into Fort Wyneemee first, you know, we got in there late. We were going to San Francisco the next day. So the doctor, they finally got someone to take a line over to tie him up, and we stayed there that night. There wasn't nothing open but a grocery store. It was a bad place.

*When you finally got back home, did you have a chance to see your brother again?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, I went over to the hospital, the VA hospital here in Dallas, but he had, I seen him, and then I walked through the hospital and they had a bunch of veterans been injured over there back here, some of them with their legs off. I knew one kid, he was a sailor and they took his leg off and put a cast on it, and he was running a rope down in there with a clothes hanger and jerked, and tied a knot in it and pulled it out trying to get his itch stopped, and I seen 'em, amputees, they were trying to get them, working with them. They did a lot of good back then, and just lots of things. Like we stopped there at Fort Wyneemee and said ya'll were leaving early in the morning, so there was four or five of 'em decided they would go into San Francisco. They hitchhiked. Of course they didn't have permission. So they got into San Francisco and they got picked up by the police and he turned them over to the Navy. So we pulled out without 'em.

*After you got back home, I think you mentioned earlier then you went back to work at the airplane plant?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** No, it was about closed up. They had, they might have been remodeling then.

*OK, I misunderstood.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well I did, I went to work for another one. It was Kronberr then when I went to work for 'em. They were building those B-36's. Did you hear about them?

*A little bit, yes sir.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, those are big engines. And then the cold war, we was having the cold war then. They were building, oh they built a bunch of them things. So when I, I stayed in the aircraft there for a while, and quite a while. I worked out there 10 years. They had the B-58 after that. I got tired of it and I quit and I went to work over at a Bell Helicopter came in here about that time, and I went to work for Bell Helicopter. I really enjoyed working for that company.

*How long did you work with them?*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** I worked with them for 30 years.

*So you retired from Bell Helicopter.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Yeah, I retired from Bell Helicopter.

*That's great.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** They built a lot of helicopters.

*Oh absolutely, they still do. Yes sir.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** When the Vietnam War, around there, they were putting one out every two hours.

*Well sir, I really want to thank you for letting me interview you today, and the Commissioner is a veteran, myself, and a lot of people here at the Land Office are veterans, but even those that aren't are very thankful for your service to our country, especially in a war, and it's just an honor to talk to you.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, I didn't tell you much. I know I kind of butchered it.

*No sir, I think you did a great job, and every veteran's story is unique, and what we do is we're saving these interviews for future generations and we're gonna make copies of this interview onto CD's for you that we'll send you soon, as soon as we get those printed up I'll put them in the mail to you. And it's an honor and really thank you, sir. I really enjoyed it.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** Well, I enjoyed talking to you but I'm just thinking to myself I should've written it all down.

*Well, I think it was good, sir, and we'll send you a copy of it soon so you can listen to it and you've got my phone number, so you ever need anything, feel free to call me.*

**Gilbert Bidwell:** All right, thank you Jim.

*Yes sir, thank you very much. Have a good day, sir.*

*[End of recording]*