

Transcription: James Moore

Today is August 9th, 2012. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. James Moore. This interview is being conducted in person here at the Tyler Veterans Home in Tyler, Texas, and it's 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 always an honor for us. I know before we started you said you didn't have much of a story.

James Moore: No.

Tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the Navy.

James Moore: Well, my childhood, I went to the 9th grade in school, and my dad got killed at the time. My mother had five children to take care of and everything, and so I had to go to work early. I went to work when I was 16 years old.

Were you from Gladewater?

James Moore: Yeah, Gladewater, Texas.

Did you live on a farm?

James Moore: No, I never did. No, my dad, he worked in the oil fields, but he got, there was a store across the street where we lived, and he walked over there to get a pound of coffee, and coming back he got hit by an automobile and got killed. So that left my mother with all them kids, five children, and so I was the oldest one. So I knew I had to go to work and help her out, so I quit school and took a job. It wasn't much of a job. It was a job NYA was what it was called. It was part of a government job. But they didn't pay no money to speak of. I made \$19 a month.

Was that in Gladewater?

James Moore: That was in Gladewater, yeah.

How long did you stay in that job?

James Moore: Oh, I stayed in that until I joined the Navy, when I got old enough to join. I really went into the Navy when I was 17. I was supposed to be 18. So my mother had to sign for me to get in the Navy. I was 17 years old when I went in. But at that time, you went to the Navy, mothers could draw something for me. I don't know what amount it was.

What was it that made you want to join the Navy out of all the branches of service?

James Moore: I don't know. I just always was seeing pictures and things, and I went to the movies and seen sailors and all that, and I decided I'd just go in the Navy. I didn't know nothin' about none of them.

How long did it take once you signed up before you were on your way to basic training?

James Moore: Oh well, I went to San Diego, California, to take my basic training, and I was there only six months, and then I left to go overseas, and I didn't even know what I was doing, so the guy told me, said you'll be boarding a ship tomorrow. So we went down there and boarded a troop transport, USS Sweden. And we went to New Caledonia.

What were you thinking at that point? You were a young kid -

James Moore: Oh man, I didn't know what to say. I'd never been away from home in my life and nothin' like that. I didn't know what I was thinking.

Did anybody give you any advice?

James Moore: They didn't. They just told me let's go down and board the ship and we're going. I went down there and we all about I'd say there was about 50 of us they got on the ship and they had picked up some more guys from different places. That ship was full of sailors and things, and I didn't know what I was getting into. That was just like the war. I didn't know a thing or worry about that. I was too young really, but I went over there and I stayed in New Caledonia at an AEOB base with aircraft engine overhaul base is what it was called.

Did you have a specialty at that point?

James Moore: No I didn't. I didn't have no training, no nothing. Everything I learned I learned in the Navy, so I just had to go over there, and what they do, they bring old engines and things in there that was been shot up and everything. I don't know there was bullet holes in them and everything else, but all I would do, we got wrenches and took 'em all apart and put the parts in a screen basket, let 'em down, and we cleaned everything up.

So you helped rebuild engines then, aircraft engines.

James Moore: Yeah. And then taking parts out of there and they had the air hose where they blew all that stuff off of 'em and oil and grease and everything, but that's what I did for three years there.

Three years in New Caledonia. So you probably felt like you knew the place pretty well by the end of those three years, right?

James Moore: Oh yeah.

What are some of your best memories about being in New Caledonia?

James Moore: Well, I didn't have much memories other than that base, because we never did get to go nowhere or do nothing. We had to -

Did the days kind of blend together?

James Moore: Oh yeah, it was really boring to me. But thank goodness I didn't have to go to war, I didn't have to battle or nothin' like that. So I always had a bed to sleep in at night and everything, and I've seen pictures where all of them poor guys out in all kinds of weather and everything. I never had to do that.

Were you ever bombed?

James Moore: No, I was back behind the lines.

Sure. Well I know that some of those bases though, even though they were secure, occasionally they would be bombed by the Japanese.

James Moore: Oh they did have an air hose that knew all from that and had me on and all that, and you had nothing going, put in a certain place there, and I don't know whether there was any enemies flying over there or not. I never did see none of that.

What were the men like that served with you there in New Caledonia? Do you remember any of them?

James Moore: I can't, it's been so many years I can't think of none of their names. It slipped my mind, all that. But just like me, I know I heard a lot of them say this is a boring job. I said it sure is. It ain't like being home. That's all I could think that was getting back home.

Well I bet you really learned those aircraft engines though after three years of working on them.

James Moore: Yeah, I mean because they had all kinds that come in there. All we done was just tear 'em down, put the parts in that big screen thing, that laid it down in acid and everything, take all the oil and grease off of 'em, but I saw a lot of new this and that. When one would come in there, you'd get to know every kind of tubes we had to have, and bolts, everything, take 'em apart and put 'em in that basket and send 'em down in that acid that they had there, and take 'em out, get your air hose and blow 'em off real good, and they all looked like brand new when you got through with them.

That was definitely important to keep the war going to be able to rebuild those engines.

James Moore: Yeah, I never did have to fight or nothing like that. I was just glad of that. It was all part of the war.

Were you able to get letters from home pretty regularly?

James Moore: Yeah. I got my mail from home about once a month, or sometimes when they come up there and bring my mail to me, I'd have four or five letters.

That's great. I guess your mom and your siblings wrote to you.

James Moore: My mom, my sisters and my girlfriend back home. I had a girlfriend. I went to Gladewater school and she went to another school that was three miles from Gladewater, and we went to the same church together.

So I guess you were probably a little bit homesick being gone those three years and having a girlfriend and family all back home.

James Moore: Yes I was. All I could think about was getting home.

I guess you were there then when the war ended.

James Moore: No, I had done come back home and I was stationed in Corpus Christi, Texas. We come back to Treasure Island at San Francisco and everything, and I was only there about a month, and after that they come up there and told me do you want to transfer close to home somewhere? And I said yeah. They said we got a place we can send you right now down in Corpus Christi. I said well that'd be good enough for me. So they sent me down there, and I stayed there oh, about a year before I got my discharge, and while I was there I come home when I was 23 years old then. I come home in the late evening and got back with my girlfriend, and me and her got married while I was home.

While you were on leave.

James Moore: Yeah, while I was on leave.

That's great.

James Moore: So I had that woman a long time before she died. Me and her was married 57 years when she died. She had diabetes real bad.

When you got married, did you wear your uniform?

James Moore: No, when I pulled that uniform off I never did put it back on. I didn't want to wear it no more.

You'd been gone three years in New Caledonia and you came back to Treasure Island, did she come meet you there?

James Moore: No, she didn't come meet me until they transferred me to Corpus and I got a leave.

And then so in Corpus, you finally were able to go back.

James Moore: Yeah, I came back to Gladewater then.

Tell us about that. Do you remember that day getting back home after being gone that long?

James Moore: I sure do. Boy I tell you, I never was so glad to get home in my life as I was then.

Did you ride the bus to Gladewater?

James Moore: Yup. Greyhound bus.

Did they know you were coming?

James Moore: Yep, they knew. I called them.

Did they meet you at the bus stop?

James Moore: Yeah, that's right and when I pulled up, they was all down there, my mother and my sisters, my girlfriend, there was all the huggin' and everything that was going on there.

That's great.

James Moore: But now that is about my story. That wasn't very exciting or nothing.

Well no, it's a great story. Everybody that serves especially during World War II, all that was important and it was all part of the war. Those pilots flying those planes couldn't have done it if they didn't have engines to fly.

James Moore: That's what they told us. They told us when it was through I know this is not a very good life, but you boys never did get out there and fight and all that. You had to be sleeping at night and everything. Says our work over here is done, but this is all part of the war they said. So we're going on now, and man, I never was so glad to hear that word.

Well anybody that's ever served in the military knows that where you go a lot of times is not up to you, it's where Uncle Sam needs you. So they gave you a job to do just like somebody that would've been on a plane or on a ship. It's all part of the one effort and one fight. So what you were doing was a vital thing.

James Moore: That's what the guys that was over us told us. Said you just don't really realize how important this job is, but it was all a part of the war and this had to be done.

Well especially where you all were in New Caledonia, it would've really probably been one of the first real places that they could've repaired any of those engines rather than sending them all the way back to Pearl Harbor or Treasure Island or someplace like that.

James Moore: Yeah, New Caledonia is not too far from -

It wasn't far from the fight really.

James Moore: No, it wasn't.

What do you remember about New Caledonia itself? I imagine it was a pretty big base.

James Moore: It was a big base. But it was kind of on a little old line of a mountain town.

Did you live in tents? Did you have big tents you lived in?

James Moore: No, metal buildings, round looking things.

Quonset huts?

James Moore: Yeah.

OK, so you lived in those and did you work out of those, too?

James Moore: Oh yeah.

How would they bring the engines in to you?

James Moore: I don't know. They always left and went down to the boat docks. They must've come in on ships or something down there because they always went down and got a whole load of engines and things and brang 'em back, so I guess they come in on boats I guess.

Yeah, that makes sense. And then so you were involved mainly with just tricking down, breaking them down, and cleaning them up.

James Moore: That's all I had to do. I had the same old, that's the reason I say boring. It was just the same old thing every day, every day.

I imagine you could tell when certain pieces were salvageable and other times when they weren't. I guess you and the men you worked with would screen out what you would keep and –

James Moore: We just cleaned 'em up good and it was somebody else that picked out the good parts and what they could use again or something like that. We didn't have to do that part of it.

Sure, well I'm sure the whole operation, but yeah. How was the food while you were there?

James Moore: It was pretty good, naturally.

Did you get any USO shows there while you were in New Caledonia?

James Moore: No I didn't.

I was just curious. I know that some of the entertainers would occasionally go around and do USO shows and I didn't know if they made it there or not.

James Moore: Some were further away from ours, and one time I heard they had said Bob Hope was over there, but I didn't get to see him.

Yeah, that's too bad. So after you got back home, you got out of the Navy and you got married. You stayed in Gladewater?

James Moore: Stayed in Gladewater. Went to work for the railroad, T&P Railroad. I worked for them for several years and then I quit that job and went to a steel mill where they made steel, Lone Star Steel. I worked for them as a crane operator for 30 years.

Wow, that's great. So you stayed in the Gladewater area the whole time?

James Moore: That's right.

Did you have any children?

James Moore: I had two boys, but my oldest son died last year. He had leukemia. And I got one, my baby boy is still living, but he's 57 years old, but he's working, he's in North Dakota. He's working for Pie Dunn Company out of Canada.

Oh, that's a booming place now, North Dakota is a big, booming place. They can't find enough people to work up there now.

It's so far north.

The ___ shale is a big thing up there. It's like 2 percent unemployment rate. I mean they can't find people to work in some of the jobs.

James Moore: I know he went up there one time and put in an application and it wasn't no time after that, four or five weeks, something like that, they called him and told him to come to work.

It is a modern day boom area, yeah.

James Moore: So he worked in there as a pumper, works in a house and all you got to do is watch the gauges and things. Has a pipeline, 52-inch pipeline that comes down to Houston, a refinery down there, and he has to do all that pump on all the time and keep that line. He said he had the gauges he had to watch and I don't know what all, but keep the same pressure on the line and everything, pumped oil down to the refineries in Houston. But they pay him really good money, I mean I tell you.

Everybody up there is doing real well. It's a good spot right now. There's kind of a shortage of houses and that sort of thing because it's such a quick boom.

James Moore: He's making \$24 an hour and works 10 hours a day. So you see how much they have to pay him, just 10 hours.

Yeah, booming spot, that's great. Do you have any grandkids?

James Moore: Oh, I've got two grandsons, lives here in Tyler. I got one granddaughter.

Well what we'll do in a couple of weeks, you'll get a package from us that will have copies of this interview on CD's that you can give them copies if they want to listen to your story and they can save it this way and they'll always have that. And if you want more, I'll give you my card and just give me a call and we'll make more copies.

James Moore: OK, be glad to.

We'll also send you a commemorative binder with a letter and certificate in it from Commissioner Patterson. So it's just a small way, a very small way for the state of Texas to say thank you for your service. Even though you don't think it anything, we know better.

James Moore: No I don't feel like I did much.

Well we appreciate your service. All these stories are unique and your story, you're the first veteran I've interviewed that did what you did in New Caledonia, so I enjoy hearing about it. And I'm sure your mom and your siblings were proud of you.

James Moore: Well, they was. My mother's been passed away for years and years.

She had to sign for you to go in the Navy.

James Moore: Yes she did. She signed for me to go in when I was 17 years old.

Was that hard for her to do that?

James Moore: Oh, she cried like a baby, I'll tell you. She sure hated to sign them papers, but she did and I went on in the Navy. As I wound up, I'm glad she did. I'm glad I went in the Navy. Like I say, I didn't know nothing about the Navy, Army, Marines or nothing, but I'm glad I got to go in the Navy. I was treated real well by the Navy and everything and while I was overseas, they was real good to me.

That's excellent. Well I really appreciate you sir, and it's an honor for us to be able to talk to you and do an interview like this. I think I mentioned we have documents at the Land Office that go back to the 1700s, very old documents, and our goal is to save this story for future generations. With that in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview years from now?

James Moore: I can't think of a thing I want to say. I'm glad to have a daughter taking care of me and got me home safe and sound and I married my sweetheart in high school, and me and her had a long, good life together. We had 57 years together. I don't think we ever had an argument or nothing and she was good to me and I tried to be good and everything to her.

That's great. I'm sure she was proud of you, too.

James Moore: Yes she was. I heard her say that several times.

Yeah, most excellent. Well sir, I do appreciate it. Thank you very much for your time and for your service.

James Moore: You're welcome.

[End of recording]