

Transcription: Tom Morales

Today is Wednesday, July 18th, 2012. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Tom Morales. This interview is for the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Mr. Morales is at his home in Irving, Texas, and I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to let us talk to you today. It's an honor for us, and the first question that we always start off with is just tell us a little bit, sir, about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.

Tom Morales: Well, my father passed away when I was 6 years old, and I lived in DeSoto, Texas. That's where I was born. We came to Dallas in the following year and we lived here in Dallas for about a year and my mother remarried again. Then well, I went to school here in Dallas, Texas.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Tom Morales: Yes, I had three brothers and two sisters.

Where were you when World War II started? Were you still in school?

Tom Morales: Yes, well see, I went to school in Kingsville, Tex-Mex, and I was there, I went in let's see, I was 14 years old when I went there and I was there for two years, in Tex-Mex in Kingsville. In November in '41, we went, we came home from vacation, and I joined the Navy.

OK, so you joined before Pearl Harbor was bombed.

Tom Morales: Before Pearl Harbor.

What was it that made you want to join the Navy?

Tom Morales: Well, when I was in school, there was Mexican boys coming from Mexico, they came over to our school and we taught 'em English, and they taught us Spanish, and one of the boys told me, Morales, you know what, my cousin and my uncle are getting ready, they're Air Force, they're getting ready to help the United States because the Japanese are gonna attack Pearl Harbor. I laughed at him, and then I found out when I came back home, double checked that and told my mother. You know what, there's going to be a war, and I want to go ahead and join the Navy and be prepared for it. I came to Dallas and I went to the recruiting office that I wanted to join the Navy, and they said OK, and I told them why. They laughed at me, and I said OK. I went ahead and joined. It was November the 16th or 17th, and then they gave me 15 days to come back to recruit me. It was only 15 days, Saturday morning, Saturday was the last day me and my wife, well she was my girlfriend then, we was out celebrating because I was going to join the Navy, and the next morning I was going to come to the recruiting office and the war broke out, Pearl Harbor.

How did you learn about Pearl Harbor being bombed? Did you hear it on the radio?

Tom Morales: No, no, yes we did. Anyway, when I went back to the recruiting office, I told them, I said I told you it was going to be that. You people laughed at me. Said anyway Mr. Morales, we have to give you 15 days to think about it now that this war is on, to think about it,

and come back to the office over here. So before we left, there was 120 of us from Dallas, and I think it was 112 of us said we'll go ahead and regardless, we'll stay. We volunteered. The other boys were married, so they decided to drop off. I came back to, I went off for 15 days, and then I came back and I went off to the service.

Did they send you to San Diego?

Tom Morales: San Diego. We stayed in San Diego about six weeks, and we were informed that we were going to go to the Pacific, for a special mission and all that, and the recruiting office, most of us volunteered to go onto the ships coming in. They said we had three ships coming in from the Atlantic. Those ships were ____ ships ____ Mexico, and we got the Idaho.

Those were all battleships, correct?

Tom Morales: Battleships. Then one night, they put us aboard ship. We went on the train to I don't know how far we went, but we boarded a ship at night, so Japan wouldn't know what happened, that we were still in another battleship. And they didn't know we had three battleships left, I think.

So you were in your boot camp, you were recruit training for about six weeks, and then at that point they told you hey, we're going to put you on one of the battleships. And so you were assigned then to the Idaho?

Tom Morales: To the Idaho.

What are your memories of the first time you went aboard the Idaho?

Tom Morales: Well we went there at night. We'd never seen a battleship, so the next morning we woke up and put us in little bunks in there. We went down to the bottom decks in bunks and all that and we didn't know nothing. And then all of a sudden we're up in the morning at revelry and they told us where we were going, we was going to do this and that, all the way to the Pacific. In other words, they told us we would be unknown. Nobody knew of our battleships, keep it secret. So we did for some time, I don't know when they found out we did. Anyway one time we got hit with I think it was a suicide. We had to go to dry dock and then they told us we couldn't write home because the Japanese would find out we had a battleship gone. So for a year I wrote to my mother and I told her I won't be able to talk to you anymore or write to you anymore, and that's it for a whole year, until they found out that later on we were allowed to write home.

I think a lot of people don't realize that, but you're absolutely right. I've read a lot of accounts of how during the war in the Pacific, there were battles where it would be months before people back in the United States knew what had happened and they would make sure the crews didn't talk about it, especially if a ship was sunk. They didn't want them saying anything because they didn't want the Japanese to know.

Tom Morales: I know the Japanese, they wanted to know, so we never did report ourselves and they didn't know either that we were operating until after within a year. Then we went to the Aleutians. I think that's when they found out that our battleships were coming up. We went through a whole war, all three of us, three battleships, from Honolulu we went all over the

Pacific, every operation there was. I think they said there was, the paper read I had nine engagements and 13 operations at 13 islands. So we went through the whole Pacific.

And you stayed aboard the Idaho throughout the war.

Tom Morales: Yes. I was in turret 1, and since I was in the powder room, I was in charge of the whole powder room. Then I got in charge of through the gun we kept getting, instructing the shells and all that. I stayed there a whole four years.

Tell us, sir, a little bit about being aboard the Idaho and you said you were in gun 1. Was that on the front, the bow of the ship?

Tom Morales: No, it was in the center of the ship.

Describe to us what that's like because I think a lot of people probably don't understand how big the battleship was and how big the guns were aboard a ship like that.

Tom Morales: They said we had approximately 2400 boys aboard ship altogether.

So a very large vessel obviously.

Tom Morales: Oh yes.

What type of guns were they you were firing? Were they 15-inch guns?

Tom Morales: 15-inch with 40 millimeters. We had all kinds of equipment. When the war first started, we had it all manual. Later on they came out with automatic _____. The guns were different altogether.

So you really saw quite a change then from the automatics to the automated.

Tom Morales: Oh yeah. And another thing, too, every time we had a battle, a couple of battles, or a couple of operations, we'd go to, they'd give us a leave, and we'd go to an island and they would give us two beers. Everybody would get two beers. And the recreation, we played baseball, most everything. That's all we did for a day, and we'd go back and we'd go to another operation, or two or three, whatever it amounted.

Describe for us, sir, what it's like to be aboard a battleship when the guns are firing because I've read that that's an almost indescribable feeling.

Tom Morales: Most of the time, well that's true, too, but most of the time we were below decks, so we never did see nothing until after our operation or while we were, when we had some people, when our men landed, we would come topside and see all what's happening. We had what they called waves, used to go in two or three waves or four waves, and when the war first started, I don't care what island it was, they would knock out three or four waves, sometimes five waves of our troops. We saw some terrible -

Yes sir, I can certainly understand.

Tom Morales: I'm sorry.

Let me know if you want to take a break at all. [break].

Tom Morales: I seen so many people, they killed so many, we had 1,000 kids get killed every operation. Everybody thought this was easy. None of it, and we saw that over and over again. Our ship, when we got in battle, we also had suicides, and we hit people times. We lost a lot of men.

Yes sir. Let me ask you to go back a little bit. When you were aboard the Idaho and you'd have a firing mission, describe what the sound in the field would be like from firing those guns. From what I've read, it was just a huge almost like a shock wave feel.

Tom Morales: Oh yes, well actually we'd get used to it. At first it's real terrible, but after we'd get used to it. We had ear plugs and all that, and sometimes we'd keep the ear plugs on even after the battle was over, and sometimes we'd stay two or three days in the GQ -

General quarters?

Tom Morales: General quarters.

Now when the missions were taking place, you said you helped handle the powder.

Tom Morales: Well, I was in charge of powder room.

Did they have, was it a series of conveyor belts or elevator lifts that would bring the powder and the ammo up to the guns? Tell us a little bit about that because I think that's pretty fascinating.

Tom Morales: Well, we put 'em in chutes and we were bringing the chutes and they kept on asking for more and all that, and then I was transferred to the projectal room, same thing with those, with the projectals, hold 'em in. We could get those projections by itself and roll 'em around and we'd pick 'em up. I don't know how much they weighed, but anyway we learned how to roll 'em around and all that. There was a lot of work down in the -

I bet. I imagine it was hot and loud and then of course you don't know -

Tom Morales: Well like I tell you, we'd get used to all that as you go along. But we did, one thing about it that after the operations happened and we'd sit down and talk about it. We talked about those boys getting killed, you know, and well, it's kind of sick. Before the war, well when we was in our last island, Okinawa, they said we was going to land in Japan, take over. So we went down to let's see, can't remember, Philippines, to train. We were going to be landing over there, 200 aboard every ship were going to land in Tokyo Bay. So I was one of the 200 men in our ship and we trained in the jungle there for two weeks. Then we started off to Tokyo. On the way over there, they dropped the first bomb, and all of us that was going to land there, we was happy. We had a party. We said that the war is over. Next day, then no, it's not over. They're not going to surrender. We will continue. So we were still going, we were still about two days off of Tokyo when the last bomb was dropped. We still went into the air base, I mean to the naval air base. That's where we was going to land, our ships went in there. So next morning we got up and we saw all the big old, they had some 16-inch guns. I mean they had one of the biggest ancillation of guns I ever saw, both sides. They would've wiped us out completely. We wouldn't have had a chance in a million.

I've read that the Japanese were tenacious fighters as well. It wasn't that they were going to surrender.

Tom Morales: You know, they talk about dropping the bomb and killing all those poor people and this and that, but they don't realize if we hadn't dropped that bomb, they would've killed millions of us. They were prepared. Well, actually they had been preparing for 20 years. If you get down to it, they prepared the islands for 20 years. That's why we lost so many men. We would've lost more than that if we had to land.

Oh I think you're right. I think the cost to our troops but also to their troops and their civilians would've been even higher. It would've been a very horrible, even worse than what happened with the two bombs, as bad as those were. Sir, tell us a little bit about some of the men on your ship in terms of maybe the ship's captain or some of the petty office men, the senior chiefs you might've worked under, any characters or any memories that stand out?

Tom Morales: Well we had an Ensign, he was one of the nicest persons there was. Most of the boys had their Lieutenants and Ensign real strict, and all ours were lenient with us because we did the right thing. We took our orders right and we went to the gun. I mean we backed each other up. We never let anybody cross the line and all that. So we had a good, I stayed aboard at my same 1st Division all that time, and several times I had a chance to get transferred to other ships like some of my boys did, but my instructor wanted me to stay there. He said Mr. Morales, you understand all this, you're not scared, and a lot of people get scared, and I'd hold it. And so I stayed there and they told me the only thing is we won't be able to give you no rating. You'll still be a 1st Class. We can't give you no rating but you've been doing a good job here and we'd like to keep you. So I stayed there for four years. They were pleased with me and I liked it, too. I don't care about the rest. When the war was over, we was in Tokyo Bay, and our ships were recommended to be at the decoration because we went through the whole Pacific, and that's why they honored us to be at the signing.

That's got to be a great memory. Tell us a little bit about that day.

Tom Morales: Well that day, when the surrender went, mostly we heard through the loudspeaker and all that, about the surrender and all that, and they said the war was over, and our ship Captain told us there's 40 of you boys that came through, stayed on board this ship for four years, you boys are going to be out. We're going to discharge you right here on the spot.

Wow, first ones.

Tom Morales: Yes, the first ones. So to come back to the States, we went aboard the Texas battleship, battleship Texas.

OK, yeah.

Tom Morales: We boarded her, and they brought us back to the States.

Oh, that's great.

Tom Morales: And we were discharged as soon as we got back to the States, and we went through New York and came to _____, Oklahoma, and they discharged us right there. They had papers ready and everything. So we were the first ones to get out of the service in the Navy.

What was that like when you finally got back home?

Tom Morales: It was beautiful. Well, the thing is, too, they give you the discharge, what happened to me, too, they gave me the discharge but all my operations, all our ships did was never put on my discharge. The only thing they had is that Mr. Morales served four years on a battleship and that's it, and a Good Conduct medal. I come back home, and I never did pay no attention to nothing like that. When I tried to join the American Legion over here, they said well did you see any action? I said yes. Well it don't show nothing on your discharge. Well I'm sorry, they made yours first before you got to the States and they never heard about what you did. I had a hard time explaining to people what I did.

Well I would think as long as it said that you were aboard the Idaho, that should be proof enough. They could look up the ship's record.

Tom Morales: That's what I told them, too. So they did look up my record. They said boy, you went to every operation, you did everything. Yup. You got everything. The interesting I can tell you, too, I got the other day, I caught the, it says all about our, we were hit here, we were hit there, and we went to dry docks. One time we were hit and we went to the edge of Russia when an airport Corsair was trying to get there to dry dock, to repair one of our ships, and you know, the Russians wouldn't let us. They said that they were neutral to Japan, and we were fighting for them over there in Europe, and they were neutral in Japan, and our Captain got so mad he felt like bombarding them. We took off and went somewhere else to repair our ship. But they turned us down, those good old Russians, boy. That is something I never heard of that.

Yeah, that's pretty horrible. What was it like living aboard the ship in terms of food and - ?

Tom Morales: Well, you get some friends and sometimes we would, when we would go to these, like I say once in a while they give us a time off, and we'd go to this island and meet a lot of friends from other ships and all that, and we had a lot of fun meeting different people from different states and all that. They used to tell us Yankees, us southerners, you boys saw them people got that, that southern talk, and they used to make fun of us. But we had a lot of fun meeting everybody over there.

I know for a long time you couldn't write home, but was your family able to send you letters or packages?

Tom Morales: Oh yes, only my mother was the only one, and my brother, he was in Europe, he was in the Army, and he'd write to me a lot, too, and that's all I had, just two persons to write to me.

And how about, at that time you weren't married yet, is that right?

Tom Morales: Oh no, I wasn't married. Well, we was, I'm sorry, in 1944, we went to the Aleutians, around the Aleutians, and after the Aleutians we needed some repairs on our ship, and so November 1944 we came to Seattle, and our ship repairs, we was in dry docks there, and the Captain said you boys have two weeks to go home for vacation, so we can come back and finish

the war. So I called my girlfriend that I was coming home, and that I have two weeks, can we get married? She said yes. So I came to Dallas and within two weeks me and her got married. We had one of the biggest weddings there was in our part of town, Mexican people, and we had, I think she had 13, just a minute – how many girls you had Elia, at our wedding? Bridesmaids – 8. We had 8 bridesmaids and then there was 3 sailors from Dallas were there, and I couldn't find any more so I went to the USO and I told the guys, I got beautiful women, all you can drink, how about joining me for my wedding? Oo, sir, they came, a bunch of them came and I had a beautiful Navy wedding, had a great time.

So you wore your uniform.

Tom Morales: Yes, oh yes. So after the marriage, I went back, we went back and finished the war.

I'm sure that had to have been hard to have to go back, and I'm sure it had to have been hard on your wife.

Tom Morales: Oh yes. Well then, another thing, too, like I told her, I says you can't tell what's going to happen. We were kind of afraid at first, getting married, but she convinced me we should go ahead and get married.

That's great.

Tom Morales: After the war of course I came home and raised a big family.

Oh, that's good. Do you still have much from your time in the Navy in terms of pictures or uniforms, that sort of thing?

Tom Morales: Oh yes, oh I got pictures and all that.

You know it was your daughter, Annette, was the one that had called us and said you should interview my dad, and I told her we'd be honored to do so, so I'm glad that she heard about our program and called us.

Tom Morales: Well I'm glad that you could hear me and tell people what really happened.

Yes sir, well what we do with these interviews is we save 'em for posterity here in the archives. We'll send you copies so you and your family can have copies, but also our goal is to keep these for generations to come so that long after we're gone, people can still listen to these interviews and learn something from them.

Tom Morales: Like I say, and I'm proud to serve my country, that's the main thing.

Yes sir, well especially in such a critical war as that.

Tom Morales: Yeah, when I talk about it, I think about all those people.

I'm sure it brings back tough memories.

Tom Morales: Yes.

But you should also definitely, sir, be proud of your service because I think obviously the world would be a far worse place if it hadn't been for service like yourself and others that helped win the war. And that's something that people need to remember.

Tom Morales: I'm sorry I get upset like this.

Oh, don't apologize, sir, I understand absolutely what that's like.

Tom Morales: I get up sometimes at night and you know, still worried about, thinking about what happened. And even when I go to VA over here, I see all those poor guys, and I feel sorry for them. I go there to get my peals, that's all I need now, but I feel sorry for all those boys right now, and hundreds of them, when they came back from the service, poor kids, and I just feel sorry for everybody.

Yes sir. Tell us a little bit about the ship in terms of do you remember the ship's Captain? Did you have the same Captain?

Tom Morales: No I didn't, but see, aboard ship we used to have, it's equipment we used to have to go around our ships to keep us from land mines and torpedoes and all that, and it was a big tarp made out of wire and anyway it went all around our ships, and it was 40 of us I think, 40 or 35 of us, we used to dive in there and I was one of them, we used to dive in there and get those, tarps, I mean what do they call it, protectors or whatever it was, we used to drag 'em on around all of our ships and everybody had those when we went to landing, when we stopped at a port or close to a port, to protect ourself.

So you used to jump in and help deploy those.

Tom Morales: One time, one year, I don't know whatever year it was, our ship had already unloaded everything, we didn't have no supplies like that, and our ship was real high, and they called to us to go put those tarps in there, and I was in the foksul, and I ran to the foksun and had my jump suit on and I jumped in the water, I found out the ship was so high it took me half an hour to get to the water, and I was drowned. I went all the way and I couldn't, when I went into the water, I went so deep that I was trying to get up, and I finally made it up and everybody said I bet you stayed five minutes down there, ten minutes. I was drowned. But that's what we used to do. We used to jump up in the ship and bring those tarps in.

Yeah, bring those around.

Tom Morales: Most of the islands we had to do that to protect our ship.

Tell us about some of the men you served with aboard the Idaho. Were there many that were from Texas or any that stand out?

Tom Morales: Well, yes, well we had some boys that they were like policemen aboard our ship, and they were real nice, and we went up, since I was of Mexican descent, and I talked purely English, and they put me in charge of the boys and I had, it was about 25, oh about 100 of us, about 100 Mexican boys, and I was in charge of them, and we had meetings and when we first joined the Navy, it was pretty hard for, even though we were all together, posted together, but

they kind of, they didn't like the Mexican people really because a lot of people never did live with, live around Mexicans, they never did think much of us.

So there were some racial tensions.

Tom Morales: Yes, and one time, one of our boys was going to do this and that, and I said, I got all the boys together and I said you know what, I'm going to tell you something. You boys, I don't know where you come from, you think you're mean and all that, you can't be around this ship because if you touch one of those Anglo boys, they're gonna get us all and they can kill us all and throw us overboard ship and nobody ever know the difference. I said we have to be strong, that's all that's to it. So I helped with that part, with the racial deal we had. It was just in the beginning when we first went aboard ship. After two or three months, we all got together just like family. But we did have a hard tension, no use lying about that. We had a hard time and well actually one time, I had two of them that I was as good as anybody else, one of the boys told me, was down deck, I heard him talk about damn Mexicans, something like that, and I jumped out of my cot and I said you said that? You talking to me, or what? No, not you, the other damn Mexicans. Oh, you're talking about my race, now we're going to get together and let's finish this out. And the guy said OK, we'll go and put our boxing gloves on. I said OK. So we went down to master arms and they gave us boxing gloves, but they didn't want to give us, just I heard later on, they don't have no boxing gloves. Can you fight like that? And I told the guy, sure, we'll fight like that. So we went to the foksul and altogether, and everybody was there. Well, actually I found out later this guy was a boxer.

Oh, geez.

Tom Morales: I could fight, I was a street fighter, I could do it, but not a boxer. Anyway he had an advantage over me and he hit me pretty hard. I stayed about two rounds and the third round, I had a friend of mine named Callahan, and he says Mr. Morales, I want to be your second. And so he helped me and told me you know what, these guys are boxes, all these boys right there. So what you have to do, you know how to hit a guy pretty good? Sure. OK, just take one lick at his nose and from then on you can finish him up. So sure enough, I stayed for a while with him until finally I broke his nose. I hit him a couple of times and they stopped the fight. I went, we went to sick bay and they said that I was going to get, let's see, court order, or something like that, it was against the law to hit, to hurt another person or something like that, and they was going to give me a court marshal. But I found out later that they couldn't do that because I went and did the right thing, went to the master arms to get the gloves and they didn't give us no gloves. Actually we was going to have a fight real, but they let it go and left me alone. But then from then on, it helped our people because they found out that we weren't cowards like they thought we were. That was one of the biggest things that ever happened aboard our ship. We did have a lot of people that had folk's trouble and we had a Chaplain would help them out. Every once in a while you'd hear somebody that had troubles at home and vice versa.

I'm sure it was difficult. What about news from the outside world? Did you have a pretty good idea of what was going on in the world?

Tom Morales: No, not really. Like I say, my mother, she was worried about me and my brothers overseas and me, and that's about all. We just got news from here. We never heard nothing about nothing else.

So you really didn't know what was going on or that sort of thing, didn't know even what was happening back in the States in terms of sports or elections or any of that sort of thing.

Tom Morales: No, nothing like that, we never heard nothing about it. Well actually we were most of the time engaged and we never were, we never had time off. We always went through one operation after the other and that's about all.

If there was such a thing as a typical day, would you work 12-hour shifts or 8-hour shifts?

Tom Morales: It was a 24-hour deal, and we was always in our position, for instance when GQ came, we just went to our gun. But we did have the guys on 20 millimeters, they were stationed all the time, but we never did unless we had bombardment.

I guess my question, sir, is obviously a ship has to run 24/7 and then when you are at general quarters, everybody is awake and ready, but when you are just on a regular, you are out patrolling or you are cruising to somewhere else, would you work a 12-hour shift and 12 off?

Tom Morales: No, we had different times they kept us busy repairing the ships and scraping the ships, but you had all kinds of work to do.

When would you get to sleep though?

Tom Morales: Oh, well every night, and then of course we used to have operations going on or like that, we stayed below decks all the time and we never did come up to foksul because sometimes we'd stay three or four days down below decks.

Sealed in I would guess, right? Seal the doors?

Tom Morales: Oh yeah.

Well sir, it's amazing how long you served, all the places you went there in the Pacific. Have you had a chance to do much research? I think you said you did on your ship later and where all you went.

Tom Morales: Oh yes, well, I was given a book when I came, when I got out of the service, and this book gave me every detail of every island we went to, every operation, and where we went to Australia, we went to Philippines, and most all down in the Pacific, every island there was, even the Aleutians. A lot of ships didn't go there. We were, our ships went up to the Aleutians.

Way up north.

Tom Morales: Yeah, we was gonna, well actually Japan was gonna come in through the Aleutians, up there in Alaska, that's where they were coming in, and we stopped them. Our ships got there and they had some troops already, I think a big troop ship was already landed over there and we got there and we sunk that ship, and we stopped them from coming in there. The U.S. don't know how close we came to them coming in from Alaska.

That's right. Yeah, there was a lot of fighting up there that people don't remember.

Tom Morales: And they don't remember that because they came close to it, coming in like that.

You'd mentioned, sir, that your ship was hit a couple of times by kamikaze's, is that right?

Tom Morales: Yes, but once. One kamikaze, and we got hit a couple of times in the side. I think a torpedo hit one side and it just bounced off, and another one penetrated and we just closed up one department, that's about all. We got hit quite a few times like that, but didn't amount to nothing.

So by and large the Idaho came through OK.

Tom Morales: Oh yes, we went to dry docks I don't know how many times. Every time we turned around we were getting repaired for something or other.

What were the two sister ships?

Tom Morales: Mississippi and New Mexico.

They were usually operating alongside you or in the same area?

Tom Morales: Most of the time, most of the time with us, we'd stick together. Since from the beginning of the war, we were the only battleship where there were some cruisers and destroyers I suppose, and aircraft carriers left, but we were the only battleships that weren't. In Pearl Harbor, we used to go to Pearl Harbor and bring battleships to the States to be repaired in between operations.

So you would tow 'em?

Tom Morales: Yes. Well actually we didn't tow 'em, they just, most of them came out on their own. Oh yes, they came on their own power. See, we didn't lose that many ships. It just these ships, the ships are prepared for something like that and the bombs of course are just topside, but the rest of the ship was OK. Some of the ships weren't hurt at all, just – but we brought ships back and forth.

Looking back on it, are you glad that you were on a battleship and not a destroyer or some other sea vessel?

Tom Morales: Well that was another thing, too, you hear about these boys in Vietnam and all that, and I had a son that he was going to college and when he was going to college, Vietnam came in and he came home from college, and daddy, he says I would like to join the Navy. Why? He said because I'm going to get drafted eventually anyway, he says, and I want to pick my own like you did. So I couldn't say nothing. I didn't like it, but he went off to serve in the Naval Air Force, and I'm glad he did because a lot of his friends went to Vietnam and none of them came back. I mean we had oodles of boys that went to Vietnam, poor guys, that's was one of the fortunes of our son was in the Navy and he was in safe coach you say, comparative to the other people.

Yes sir.

Tom Morales: Anyway he came back, too, like he says, daddy I'm glad I picked the Air Force because I feel sorry for all my friends that we lost. He lost a bunch of friends that went off to college, went off to the service.

What was it like when you finally got back home after being gone for four years? Was it hard to make that adjustment back to regular civilian life?

Tom Morales: Well yes in a way of speaking because we just came out of school and we didn't have no training for anything, but I came back and I joined the, what they give us a program where you were allowed to go to school to learn this and that.

The GI Bill?

Tom Morales: GI Bill. So I went for six months, well almost a year, to radio school, and a few things, and none of them ever helped me any at all. So I went off and I started being a helper, paint helper, and I started my business there. I started as a paint helper and then I used people and I ended up being in charge, and then I had shops, one shop after the other.

So you ended up making the transition pretty well then.

Tom Morales: Oh yes, I did and I learned fast, and then one year when I was pretty well on the way, me and Kim Grand from Ford, a little place in there, and I came to work with him. We had to build our shop. It was a small shop. And I worked there and then Ken Ray, we built inray tube, from there I went off to Culber Chevrolet. I built her when she was in Grapevine, a small little shop. Me and Bob went off to Culber Chevrolet and built that shop. I was the head of all the painters and body men on that, for years and years. That's where I retired from. I did have a good living because I learned my job right and I served my country. I've always been proud about that.

Well absolutely, I would, you have every reason to be. That's all the service you did especially for the whole war and being in the Pacific. Did you have a chance to go back on any battleships since then? Have you had a chance to tour any battleships?

Tom Morales: No, I was, when the Bells of Texas came over here, I've been aiming to go there to talk to the people and tell them where I used to – when we came back coming to the States, I had a place where a little, right in the middle of two of the guns, 40 millimeter guns, and that's where me and the boys, six of us, instead of going below decks, we'd sleep there and everything, and coming back. I wanted to go to that Texas ship and tell them over there that I was setting in that hole right there for four months coming all the way to the States. I haven't been able to go to Texas over there, I mean to see it. They're repairing I now I heard. And when they do finish, I'm going to go over there and talk to the people that I'm one of the men that came on that ship when the war was over.

Yes sir, well you need to go down and see it.

Tom Morales: I'd like to go there and put my name on it.

I'm sure they'd be honored to have you go there to see it, too, it's one of the original dreadnoughts.

Tom Morales: That's what I'm planning to do, before something happens to me I'm going to try to go down and see that, and tell them that I was one of the men that came over on it.

I'm sure they would love that. Sir, do you keep in touch at all with anybody that you were in the Navy with?

Tom Morales: Yes, I had a friend of mine, he was in my division, and one day he came over, he was a contractor for the, I think it was some big lake we had over here in Dallas, around Dallas, and he was a contractor and he called me up one day. He says hey, Morales, are you the Morales that used to be aboard ship? I said yes. So we talked and his name was Sanchez, John Sanchez, and he came to visit me. He stayed here about three weeks with his company, and that's the only person I ever saw that was aboard my ship. One day I was at a café drinking coffee with some friends of mine and I saw a gentleman stand up over there and I asked him, excuse me, do I know you? He says well I don't know, but I know you, so we talked. He was aboard our ship. He lived in Louisville and that's the only person I ever saw. We talked for a while and I met him a couple of more times and that's about all. But I hadn't seen nobody. A lot of my friends, they get together every year and they get together with their friends and all that. I never did, or shipmates or anything.

Yes sir. Well sir, I really appreciate you taking the time today to let us interview you and to record your story.

Tom Morales: Like you say, we do have it on the Internet. Anybody just name our ship and they know that the ships, what they did and all that.

That's right, nowadays you can find almost anything if you look for it.

Tom Morales: I had some friends once in a while called me up and said we found your ship and we know what your ship did, we know all about you now. Before you just heard stories and now we know for a fact that it was true, everything you're talking about.

That's great. Well sir, again, it's been an honor. I really appreciate you taking a little bit of time to share your story with us.

Tom Morales: Oh no, I appreciate you calling me. I'm just sorry I got upset once.

No, sir, that's completely understandable. That happens quite a bit. That happens sometimes, powerful memories aren't easily erased. Sir I want to thank you, and on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everyone at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service to our country, and this is just a small way, a very small way for us to say thank you and in about a week or two you'll get from us a nice commemorative binder with a signed certificate and letter from Commissioner Patterson and we'll also include about four or five copies of this interview on CD that you can give to your friends or family or whomever, and if you need any more copies just let us know. And then also and your daughter might be able to help you with us, but if you have any pictures she might want to scan and email to us, we can get those copies and put them on our web site along with your interview so other people can listen to your story.

Tom Morales: OK, that'll be fine.

Yes sir, well sir again, thank you very much. It's been an honor and you have my number and we'll be in touch.

Tom Morales: OK, thank you.

[End of recording]