

Transcription: Joe Nemeth

Good afternoon. Today is Monday, March 24, 2014. My name is James Crabtree, and this afternoon I'll be interviewing Mr. Joe Nemeth at his residence in Waco, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to do this interview. It's an honor for us. Sir, the first question I always start with in these interviews is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.

Joe Nemeth: Well, of course, I's raised in Arkansas, little town by the name of Bonanza, south of Fort Smith, Arkansas. Coal mining town, of course.

Did you grow up in a big family?

Joe Nemeth: Sixteen children.

Sixteen kids?

Joe Nemeth: Sixteen kids. My mother raised all of 'em. Thank goodness, she passed after about, let's see, it's about four of us boys left.

What number were you out of the 16?

Joe Nemeth: Number four.

You were number four out of 16. What was that like, growing up in such a large family?

Joe Nemeth: Well, you know, a lot of people think that would have been a hard life but my daddy, he came from Hungary.

Hungary? The country of Hungary?

Joe Nemeth: Right, and he was a coal miner and a farmer, and he was a hard worker. He didn't know what quit was.

What brought him to America? Did you ever ask him?

Joe Nemeth: No, we never did get into that but anyhow, he and his dad, they came over here together, and his daddy, he didn't like it over here so he went back. The reason they came over here was because his mother passed away and that's the reason that they came.

So they immigrated to America.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, yeah. 'Course he had some sisters and one brother that lived in South Bend, Indiana. Anyhow, he made it on down to Alabama and got in the coal mine business. And then he came back to Arkansas for some reason anyhow, and that's where he met my mother in a little town by name of Midland, Arkansas. She was 14 years old when they got married, and he was 21 or 22, somewhere in there.

And so you had a large family, a lot of . . . You had 16. How many were boys and girls?

Joe Nemeth: Nine boys and seven girls.

Wow, almost even then.

Joe Nemeth: Well, it was seven-seven but the boys took over.

What was it like having that many brothers and sisters?

Joe Nemeth: Well, you know, I couldn't tell the difference because dad, he took us on the farm and we worked on the farm, you know.

So you did a lot of working, I guess, with your brothers as well, working on the farm, growing crops and that sort of thing?

Joe Nemeth: With my oldest brother. My oldest brother, he was the top hand, you know.

Were you living on the farm when World War II started?

Joe Nemeth: No, I was living in California. Los Angeles. In fact, that's where I joined the Navy there, and Gene Tunney swore me in the Navy.

Gene Tunney, the famous boxer?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah.

Wow, that's a story.

Joe Nemeth: I forget how many guys but a whole bunch of us that he swore us in.

That's great.

Joe Nemeth: And on the steps of the courthouse in Los Angeles.

And this was before the war had started?

Joe Nemeth: After.

Right after, okay. So you had gone to Los Angeles and were working out there when the war started?

Joe Nemeth: Okay, I was in Los Angeles, December 6th, 1941. Of course, the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor . . .

The next day.

Joe Nemeth: I mean, I was . . . December 6th, I was 21, and the next morning the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. That made me mad, I thought. Anyhow, so I and my buddy went down and joined the Navy.

That day or the next day?

Joe Nemeth: No, not the next day but a few days after. In fact, it took me a few days to get in.

So Gene Tunney swore you and a whole bunch of other men into the Navy there at the courthouse in downtown Los Angeles?

Joe Nemeth: Right, yeah. On the courthouse steps, yeah.

What made you pick the Navy?

Joe Nemeth: Well, that just came to me when, of course, when they bombed Pearl Harbor, you know.

So before that you had no experience with ships or any, nothing that stood out like why you picked the Navy over any other branch?

Joe Nemeth: That's right.

So you get sworn in. How long is it before they ship you off to boot camp?

Joe Nemeth: They took me right down, that evening they took us down to San Diego. Put us on a bus and took us to San Diego, and I was asleep when I got down there and I heard this boatswain's mate hollering, said, "You're in the Navy now." Anyhow . . .

What are your memories of basic training? What do you remember most about boot camp?

Joe Nemeth: Well, you know, you think to yourself, "What have I got into?" You know? 'Course they try to make a believer out of ya, you know. They want you to know who's boss.

Oh, sure.

Joe Nemeth: So that's about the way it happens. And then after you go through basic training, it's a different story all together, you know.

What were most of the men like in boot camp with you? Were they pretty young as well? Young men from all over the country?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, yeah. Well, yeah, that's true.

So you go through your training. Did you know at that point what you were going to be doing in the Navy?

Joe Nemeth: No, I didn't. No, when you go through basic training, you don't know what's gonna happen.

Yeah. How long did you spend there? About 10 weeks, 12 weeks?

Joe Nemeth: Six weeks.

Six, so very quick.

Joe Nemeth: Six weeks but they was needing men aboard ship, you know.

So you get through in six weeks, then where do they send you to?

Joe Nemeth: You go aboard ship.

They put you on a ship that quickly?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah.

What ship did they assign you to?

Joe Nemeth: I was aboard the St. Louis.

USS St. Louis.

Joe Nemeth: Cruiser, St. Louis.

Tell us a little bit, sir, about that ship.

Joe Nemeth: Okay, I boarded that ship in San Francisco, California, and sent us on down to Pearl Harbor.

What were your thoughts the first time you saw Pearl Harbor?

Joe Nemeth: I thought, you know, that Pearl Harbor is something else. And, of course, it had all those ships . . . Had the Arizona, you know, was sunk out there in the harbor.

So there were still . . . Remnants were still visible?

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah. You know they got that thing . . .

It's a memorial now. I mean, they never raised the Arizona.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, they got it concreted in, you know.

But when you arrived, there were still other ships that were sunk and some of the structures still coming up out of the water.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yes, yeah. I can't remember though. In fact, I had a friend back in Abilene, he was aboard this one battleship. It must have been ashore or something when it got hit 'cause he'd a got killed more than likely.

So, you were saying, in Pearl Harbor you had a friend that served there.

Joe Nemeth: Let's see. No, I didn't have a friend there.

So when you arrived in Pearl Harbor, you were aboard the St. Louis. How big of a ship was the St. Louis?

Joe Nemeth: Okay, here it is, right here.

Oh, you have it all written down, okay. I'll take a look at this paper here real quick.

Joe Nemeth: That can tell you better than I can.

It's a light cruiser.

Joe Nemeth: Tells you how many men and all on there.

Launched in 1938 so it was still a pretty new ship at that point. What are some things that stand out to you most about it?

Joe Nemeth: Well, you know, in the Navy you talk different and everything, you know. So that's one thing. You see things that you haven't been used to seeing, you know, when you board ship. You look, you're out at sea and looking out as far as you can see, all you can see is ocean.

I notice here in looking at this page that it says the St. Louis was the first ship to clear Pearl Harbor after the bombing.

Joe Nemeth: Right, absolutely. And this friend of mine that was aboard the St. Louis, he was telling me about some of the things that happened. He said they threw everything overboard and they got underway, and he said they run over a two-way sub.

Yeah, one of the two-man subs?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah.

It says here by 9:30 that morning, the St. Louis had moved away from the pier and headed for the south channel and the open sea. It's a large ship too. It says on here 888 officers and men, and it was over 600 feet long so it was a big ship. What was your job you were assigned to when you got aboard the ship?

Joe Nemeth: I was aboard a five-inch gun mount.

Okay, so you were a gunner?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah.

What did you think about that? Was it something that you wanted to do?

Joe Nemeth: Well, I was what they call . . . I was a powderman. Okay, those five-inch guns, it had five-inch 38, and it had . . . It had a five-inch gun, shell, I'm trying to say, and a five-inch powder. It was about the same length.

You had to work closely with your crew, right? So I'm sure you did a lot of gun drills?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, we had . . . Of course, that was a double mount. In fact, you had to have two for each one, you know. I mean, you had to have four for the two. Of course, we had what we call a guy that sets the range and all.

So when you went to battle stations, that was your assigned place of duty was aboard that particular gun with your gun crew firing.

Joe Nemeth: Absolutely, yeah.

What jobs would you have when you weren't at general quarters or practicing? Did they put you in a lot of watches or KP duty?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah. The first thing you have to learn when you're . . . Everybody has had to be a KP, anyhow, so I had to do three months at sea, three months of that.

Working in the galley and that sort of thing?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, and then after that, I was . . . You know you're always scraping paint in the Navy.

Because of the rust, sure. The salt air and water.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, so that's one of the things I did. So many different little things that I did.

What's your first memory of enemy contact? The first time your ship was engaged in action?

Joe Nemeth: Well, 'course, you're excited, of course because of that, because you don't know what's gonna happen, you know.

Sure.

Joe Nemeth: I can remember later on when I'm on the Missouri here, we bombarded the mainland at 12 o'clock noon. That's unheard of.

And where was this?

Joe Nemeth: We bombarded the mainland, yeah. In fact, it was the steel mills. And the second time we bombarded it was 12 o'clock at night. We had some English ships with us then.

So this would have been before a landing, before a Marine landing, that sort of thing? Shelling the island?

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Where was the first place you remember shelling? Do you remember any of the particular islands?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, down in the Solomon Islands, yeah.

Solomon Islands, yes sir.

Joe Nemeth: About the first part of the St. Louis I was on, we had patrol duty up in the Aleutian Islands.

Okay, way up there by Alaska, way up north.

Joe Nemeth: Where it gets cold.

I'll bet. I'll bet it was real cold.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, I was cold. I was air lookout, I and my buddy. One was sitting in the can, the other was wearing the headset, you know.

Way up on the top of the ship?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah.

Okay, yeah. So you're up there really exposed to the wind and the elements?

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah, up there where the breeze and that, I can't think of the word to use . . .

I can imagine it was very cold.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah. Oh, you bet. I was glad to get outta there.

You were glad to head south I bet.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, we was getting outta there that evening, I remember it was a Friday evening. We hit a storm, and it was a bad one.

It talks in here in this sheet you gave me that in 1942 or something, you were up in the Kodiak Islands, so you remember that and the Alaskan Peninsula. Talks about doing a lot of patrols and trying to intercept enemy shipping. It mentions Kiska, Alaska; Kodiak, Alaska, and then it says that in late 1942 you departed San Francisco with transports bound for New Caledonia. Do you remember that?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah.

What was going through your mind at that point?

Joe Nemeth: Well, I was kinda getting used to it then, you know, and I just kinda took it as things came, you know. You don't think much about what's coming or going, you know.

I imagine the longer you're aboard the ship, the more you become comfortable with the routine and know what's going on and that sort of thing.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah, right.

It mentions here you then went to Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, into the Solomons, and then in January '43, bombardments of air facilities at Munda and Kolombangara, and in the next five months repeated those raids and patrolled the slot in the Central Solomons. So you definitely were a busy ship, busy crew.

Joe Nemeth: Right, yeah.

What are some things that stand out to you the most during that time? Do you remember what the ship's captain was like or what the men were like in your section?

Joe Nemeth: Well, you know, you always look up to your captain, put your faith in him. And we had a good one.

What about the men that were in your section? Did you get along with them pretty well? Pretty tight-knit group?

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah. That's right.

During this time, did you have any of your brothers go into the military too?

Joe Nemeth: Two of us that were in the Navy, and two in the Army.

Two in the Army, yeah. Were you able to send letters back home to your folks?

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah, always. I always written to Mom.

That's great. Were they able to write back to you pretty regularly?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, right.

That's great. I'm sure that was a good morale booster for you but also nice for them to know where you were.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah. Mom, she was looking forward to that, yeah.

Did you know through your parents what your brothers were up to, kind of an idea of where they were a little bit? Did they keep you posted on that?

Joe Nemeth: Well, no. We never did mention that because, you know, you couldn't.

Sure, you couldn't say where you were, right?

Joe Nemeth: You couldn't write anything like that, you know. Of course, they could, you know.

They could tell you your brothers were okay and that sort of thing.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah, right.

That's good. What things stand out the most to you when you look back on your time aboard the St. Louis? Any particular incidents because I know in looking here, there is a photograph of a torpedo damage that your ship had suffered in the Battle of Kolombangara.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, we got our bow knocked off. Okay, the second bombing of the island, you know, we got our bow knocked. The first one, the Helena got sunk, and then the second time we got our bow knocked off. I can remember seeing that bow getting attacked. We had to go back States to get her fixed.

Yeah, the picture here with the horrible bow damage to the front bottom part of the bow, when that happened, what was that like aboard the ship? I mean you had to have known that you were hit, right?

Joe Nemeth: When that thing knocked that bow off, man, that water just come pouring, way back half the ship, you know, and man, man, that kinda scares you.

Sure.

Joe Nemeth: If you got any scare in ya.

Yeah, I would think so. And those came from bombs, from planes that dropped them, right?

Joe Nemeth: No, it came from a torpedo.

Yeah, but it was a torpedo bomber, right?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, yeah.

It was a plane that dropped that torpedo it says here, and that 23 men . . . It says the first plane dropped three bombs, all near misses. The second released three more and one hit and then the bomb that hit penetrated a 40mm clipping room near the number six gun mount. What number gun were you on? Do you remember?

Joe Nemeth: I was in number three, I mean number four.

Number four. It says here that it exploded in the midship's living compartment and that 23 were killed, and then 20 others were wounded, 10 seriously.

Joe Nemeth: Now that part there, I had left that ship when that happened.

Oh, you had, okay. You had left already by that point.

Joe Nemeth: That part there, yeah.

When did you leave the St. Louis?

Joe Nemeth: I left the . . . Now I couldn't tell you the date, I'd have to look at my discharge, and I don't even have a discharge. I got the old thing here. Anyhow . . .

Why did they move you? Did they move you to another ship?

Joe Nemeth: You know, my officer was up on deck this day, and he said, "Nemeth," he said, "You been on this ship long enough." He said, "You're up for new construction." So that's when they sent . . . I said, "I'll take my chances." And he said, "And they might send you over here to the Green Island." Anyhow . . .

What was new construction? What did that mean?

Joe Nemeth: Just like me, I got on a new ship, see?

You were moved to a new ship, okay.

Joe Nemeth: Right, yeah, so that's what happened.

So basically your time was up when you had served for . . . How long do you think you'd been on the St. Louis? A year or two at that point?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, about a year and a half, maybe pretty close to two.

What ship did they move to you?

Joe Nemeth: Well, they sent me to Providence, Rhode Island, and we had to go for new training, you might say. Anyhow, they sent us on a rifle range and we had to march must have been two or three miles, and I got a . . . Rubbed a blister on my heel. It got infected and had to go to the hospital.

That's not good.

Joe Nemeth: Anyhow, so you don't know how long you're gonna be there anyhow, and 'course, they's waiting on a ship for to pick people going to be assigned to be ready, and I was there when they commissioned it, the Missouri.

The Missouri, okay. I didn't realize they commissioned a second Missouri after Pearl Harbor.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah. That's when they did it, you know. See it was a new ship.

Yeah, you got paperwork on that too?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah. I can tell you better.

Okay, yeah, the second big Missouri, commissioned June 1944.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah.

What was that like, going aboard a battleship?

Joe Nemeth: Big, yeah.

So it made the St. Louis seem small I guess.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah. You bet. You know, we'd been up alongside a carrier, and I'm aboard the Missouri, and we're looking up like this at that carrier, and I'm aboard that big ol' Missouri.

What was it like the first day going aboard the Missouri?

Joe Nemeth: It was humungous.

Did you have the same job aboard it that you did aboard the St. Louis? Were you a gunner? Were you assigned to a gun crew aboard the Missouri as well?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, right. When I got aboard the Missouri, I was . . . They assigned me to 40 millimeters.

So they put you on the 40mm guns?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, and my battle station was on top of a 16-inch gun mount on that 40 millimeter.

Okay, I don't know why I was confused. The Arizona was the ship that sank at Pearl Harbor. Yeah, I've been aboard the Missouri because it's most well known for the surrender ceremony that was conducted at the end of World War II. I don't know why I was thinking . . .

Joe Nemeth: Have you been to Pearl Harbor?

I have, yes sir. I've been out there.

Joe Nemeth: That's where you saw it?

I've been out there a few times, and I've seen the Arizona Memorial and then, of course, the Missouri now is docked right near where the Arizona was, and you can go aboard that ship and see where the Japanese surrendered. So tell us then, sir, about being aboard the Missouri and being in the Pacific and that sort of thing.

Joe Nemeth: Well, it kept us pretty busy. In fact, every day at 1 o'clock, I'd look at the radar, see what it was doing, and when it was working . . . When it was going and stopping, picking up targets, I'd just go up and get on my battle station. That was every day.

Every day. Did you have any good friends aboard the Missouri while you were serving?

Joe Nemeth: Well, yes. In fact, I met a friend. He was raised in a little town south of where I was raised in Arkansas. After I got out of the Navy, of course, didn't have a car or anything then. I was riding a bus. There was a little bus from Fort Smith down to where he lived in Hartford. And I looked up and there he was, and he said, "What are you doing here?" Anyhow, I got to talking to him. He was telling me about one friend of mine that got killed.

During the war?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, yeah. And if I'm thinking right, we stood watch and battle stations within that five-inch gun mount. That's on __. They're supposed to check the gun range on those ships, you know, the fire range, to keep it from firing into its own ship.

That's right, sure.

Joe Nemeth: I can't think of the word I want to use but anyhow . . .

Fields of fire.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, they were firing and this one five-inch mount fired into the other one, and if I'm thinking right, that's where Bowman, that's where he was standing watch and battle station at that time. But if that had been the case, I'd been in that gun mount.

It would have been you, huh?

Joe Nemeth: Been me, right.

Did you stay aboard the Missouri until the end of the war? Were you aboard the Missouri until the end of the war?

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah. I went all through the . . .

All through the rest of the war on the Missouri.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, all the time, yeah.

What are some of the battles and engagements that stand out most in your mind from your time aboard the Missouri? Do you remember any of the kamikaze attacks and that sort of thing?

Joe Nemeth: Well, yeah. That was the most of the things that . . . On the Missouri. Of course, you know, they's always on you, you know, those . . . Enemy is always after you, and especially . . .

Especially a battleship.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, you bet. Looking for the big guns, yeah. I never will forget when I was on the Missouri. The Missouri keeps coming back to my mind, you know, anyhow, even though it was my second ship. That was my last ship. Anyhow, we sunk two Japanese battle wagons. I remember when we was going up there, it was northern Japan where it gets cold. Anyhow, it really kicked it up about 35 knots or so or more . . .

Wow.

Joe Nemeth: I knew there was something happening but anyhow, the next day they sunk those battle wagons. Boy, that made the ol' Japs mad. They come after us really.

Yeah, I'll bet. I know too, sir, and it mentions in here as well that Admiral Halsey was aboard your ship for a while and commanded the fleet.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, in the latter part of the year. I mean, latter part of the war, yeah.

Did you ever see him in passing or did he ever . . . ?

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah, yeah.

What are your memories of Admiral Halsey? He's a pretty famous individual.

Joe Nemeth: He was a regular guy, you know. He would come down deck and we'd be sitting down or something, doing something. He'd say, "Sit down boys."

Yeah.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, he was a great guy.

That's great. Yeah, he's a very famous commander in World War II, Bull Halsey.

Joe Nemeth: You know, he had planned on riding that horse down main right up to Tokyo, you know. He had that saddle aboard ship there.

He had a horse?

Joe Nemeth: No, he had the saddle.

A saddle?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, had the saddle, you know. Of course, you know, that Japanese guy, he had a horse, you know.

Okay, I didn't know that.

Joe Nemeth: Anyhow, he was gonna ride that horse.

When he came aboard the ship, did things change because he was setting out on the ship? Did it still kind of stayed the normal? Wasn't like anybody got nervous or . . . ?

Joe Nemeth: It's about the same.

About the same. That's great. Were you aboard the Missouri when the Japanese surrendered?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah.

Wow.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, I was up in the superstructure watching that take place.

That had to have been an amazing moment.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, you bet that was.

You knew that it was a historic moment, right?

Joe Nemeth: Oh, you bet. Now that's a happy moment. I was so glad to know that I was not going to have to being up on my gun mount watching for, firing on those suiciders.

When that ceremony was held, from what I've read, there were just ships everywhere. Everybody wanted to see or be as close to that ceremony as they could. So where were you exactly? You were up in the superstructure up high?

Joe Nemeth: Well, I wasn't the highest point. It was what you call mid level.

Yeah, so you were able to look down then and see the deck.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, I could look over and down.

How long were you up there waiting for the ceremony? I guess you . . . When did you know that the ceremony was going to take place?

Joe Nemeth: Oh, we knew. In fact, they had brought one of the wheels aboard ship a couple days before.

Okay, so you knew a couple days in advance that something was going to happen on the Missouri?

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah. They knew right away when that peace treaty was going to be signed, yeah.

So when that day arrived, how long in advance . . . Because I'm sure everybody wanted to see it but probably not everybody could. How was it that you were able to get . . . Like were you off? Were you not on shift at that time where you were able to . . . ?

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah.

How long in advance did you have to get in your position to see it? Were you waiting for hours?

Joe Nemeth: No, it wasn't that long because, you know, in the Navy, everybody's got a job to do. Every four hours, okay, you have watch of some kind to attend. So those four hours, everybody's doing something.

What was that like when you saw the Japanese delegation come aboard the ship?

Joe Nemeth: I was glad to see him, yeah.

Do you remember how long the ceremony lasted? Did it seem like it was pretty brief or was it . . . ?

Joe Nemeth: Well, it didn't last too awfully long. I'd say maybe a couple hours, maybe not that long.

I'm sure that had to have been a sight to see that.

Joe Nemeth: I've got a picture in my Navy book, got the picture of that.

I know the press was there.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah. There was press from all over the world. I never seen so many people. That ship was full of people.

I bet.

Joe Nemeth: It really was. That was something to me.

Oh, yeah, historic moment.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, you bet.

That's great. What was it like the rest of that day? Was it a celebration aboard the ship?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, oh, yeah. Seemed like they changed everybody's attitude, you think?

I bet. And then at that point, how long was it before the ship headed back home, back to the States?

Joe Nemeth: Just a few days. In fact, we picked up a bunch of people. In fact, we had one guy. In fact, he was my neighbor back home in Arkansas, and he got in the Navy after he finished high school. In fact, he finished high school with her.

Oh, really. That's great.

Joe Nemeth: And I looked up, my position was on the fantail so to speak, and I looked up and there was ol' . . . What's the name? Can't recall the name, anyhow, he was a neighbor, right there.

When the ship sailed back, did you go to Pearl Harbor on the way back or did you go straight back to the west coast?

Joe Nemeth: We came right . . . When the ship came back to the States, we landed in . . .

San Francisco?

Joe Nemeth: No.

Did you go to Los Angeles or San Diego?

Joe Nemeth: No, it's on the east coast.

Oh, you went back to the east coast.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, the east coast, yeah.

Okay, I was just thinking you would have gone from Japan back to the west coast of the United States.

Joe Nemeth: No, we came back to Virginia.

Okay, you went all the way back to Norfolk or Newport News?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, Norfolk. We came back to Norfolk. You know, my ol' thinking cap, sometimes I just cannot think of words.

So it must have taken quite a while to get back home then because you went that route, you went through the Suez Canal, I would guess, and Gibraltar and all the way across the Atlantic.

Joe Nemeth: Yeah.

It must have taken a while. At that point, did you have enough points to get out of the Navy or did you stay in.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, yeah.

You did.

Joe Nemeth: I had my seabag packed.

So when you hit Virginia, you were ready to go.

Joe Nemeth: When I hit Virginia, I got off then and everything already fixed up and they took me down to this little camp where they had . . .

Like a POW camp?

Joe Nemeth: A POW camp, yeah.

Okay.

Joe Nemeth: And those, what got my attention was, those tabletops were just snow white because those guys, they was glad to work.

Yeah.

Joe Nemeth: They said they liked it. They didn't want to go back to Germany.

Oh, I'm sure. So did you take a train to get back home to Arkansas?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, I sure did.

What was that like, coming home and seeing your family again?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, great, great.

I'm sure they were excited to see you.

Joe Nemeth: Oh, you bet, yeah. Always a good time is when something like that happens.

How did your brothers do? Did they make it home from the war as well?

Joe Nemeth: Yeah, yeah. We were very fortunate. My oldest brother, he had a good friend that got killed. They were in the house over there he said, and his brother got killed. He was fortunate there.

So you got back home to Arkansas, and then did you go back to work on the farm or did you go back to L.A.?

Joe Nemeth: You know what I said, we raised cotton, you know, and cane. I said, "There ain't gonna be no cane. Ain't gonna be no cotton if I can get away from here."

So where did you go to then after that?

Joe Nemeth: Well, let's see. I finally went up to Indiana. My aunts live in South Bend, you know, and I went up there and I had learned to be a meat cutter at Notre Dame. I had this friend, he took me up, he was a meat cutter there, and he took me in and I learned to be a meat cutter there.

How did you come to Texas? When did you get to Waco?

Joe Nemeth: Well, I tell you what. I was gonna tell you this. There was four guys of us left there one Sunday morning at Bonanza, and we went to Los Angeles, and that's how come we go to Los Angeles.

How did you get to Texas. What brought you to Texas?

Joe Nemeth: When I went back from California, and I was, let me get my story here . . .

Okay.

Joe Nemeth: Just like that now, I've lost that word.

At some point you came to live here in Texas. Was it because of family or work?

Joe Nemeth: No, I had a brother in Texas but that didn't bring me to Texas. I was working for the Army base in Fort Smith. See, just like that, I lost that. But anyhow, I worked there about six seven years or so. Anyhow, when they closed her down, then I had a friend, he came up and down to Abilene, Texas, and so I wanted to still be in civil service so I came down and got on down here. So that's how I come in Texas.

That's great. Did you ever keep in touch with any of the men you served with in the Navy? Did you ever go to any reunions?

Joe Nemeth: I never have. You know, I was back home on vacation one time, back in Arkansas, and I saw in the paper something where they's having a reunion. See, I didn't have any . . . didn't have any contacts, see. You know you gotta have contacts but I didn't have any contacts. Consequently I didn't know. Evidently, I'm thinking I'da went because I really loved that ship.

Did you ever go back to Pearl Harbor?

Joe Nemeth: No, I've never been back there but I've got a sister-in-law, she worked for the post office department. Anyhow, she loves Pearl Harbor. I mean . . .

Hawaii?

Joe Nemeth: Hawaii.

Sure.

Joe Nemeth: She said she'd move back there in a minute. Her husband died, of course, my brother. Young man, he passed away with Alzheimer's. He didn't last any time. But anyhow, she might be down there now. I don't know. She goes every chance she gets.

Well, I really appreciate, sir, you taking the time to share your memories with us.

Joe Nemeth: Well, thank you.

And especially, you know, being in the Pacific, aboard the St. Louis and aboard the Missouri, and what you got to see and experience. At the Land Office, we have archives that go back to the 1700s. We have the original land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo. We have the registro which is a big, leather-bound volume that Stephen F. Austin kept of all the original settlers that came to Texas, and our goal is to take interviews like this and add them to that archive so that people can listen to this hopefully hundreds of years from now. With that in mind, is there anything you would want to say to somebody listening to this interview long after you and I are gone? Is there anything you would want to say to somebody listening to this interview about your service or anything in general?

Joe Nemeth: I'm just thankful that I went through with the people that I went through with, and I'm sorry that some of them didn't make it. But that's the way it works.

Well, we appreciate, sir, your service to our nation, and like I mentioned before we started the interview, in a week or two we're going to send you copies of this interview on CDs so that hopefully you can give them to friends or family, and we'll also send you a nice letter and certificate of appreciation from Commissioner Patterson. It's just a very small way for the State of Texas to say thank you to you for your service to our nation.

Joe Nemeth: Thank you.

Thank you very much, sir. I have enjoyed it.

Joe Nemeth: Thank you. Have a nice day, sir.

I appreciated it.