

Transcription: Robert Whelan

Good morning. Today is Tuesday, May 13, 2014. My name is James Crabtree, and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Robert "Bob" Whelan for the Texas Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Whelan is at his home in Boerne. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us and for our program.

Robert Whelan: My pleasure.

Yes sir. Sir, the first question that we always start with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the Marine Corps.

Robert Whelan: All right. I was born in Trenton, New Jersey, on 10/08/24, and I attended Titusville Grammar School, Pennington Prep School, then entered the Marines Corps, and after coming out of the Marine Corps '42 to '46, I then went to the University of Iowa, and Seton Hall University where I got my bachelor's and master's degrees.

Yes sir. When you were growing up in New Jersey, did you come from a large family?

Robert Whelan: Yes, we had twins, brother and sister, and lost their life when treated for whooping cough when they shouldn't have given them needles, and they died two weeks apart at the age of 4. And then we had two sisters and a brother.

And did anybody in your family, had any of them served in the military?

Robert Whelan: Yes, my brother and I enlisted together in 1942.

Forty-two. And what was it that made you go into the service? Obviously World War II was going on. Was there something that attracted you to the Marine Corps or was it just fate?

Robert Whelan: Well, I always wanted to be a Marine in the Marine Corps because if I served in any service, I wanted the Marine Corps. So we went down and enlisted in Trenton, New Jersey, and with the Trenton Platoon; Trenton New Jersey Platoon, and Jack . . . I was 17 and he was 19.

Wow. So I guess you had to have your parents' permission then, right?

Robert Whelan: Yes, I had my mother sign for me.

And how did your folks feel about you going off to fight in the war?

Robert Whelan: Well, they were very patriotic Americans, and they thought it was great, you know. The regular tears and everything 'cause we had a wonderful home life. It wasn't like, you know, I want to go in the service to get away. We were a very close family, and just had a great life at Washington Crossing, New Jersey, and there's no problems there. We enlisted because we thought it was the thing to do.

So you and your brother both enlisted in the Marines.

Robert Whelan: That's right.

Do you remember how long it was before they shipped you off to basic training? To boot camp?

Robert Whelan: Yes, it was in November 1942.

November of '42. And the two of you went together?

Robert Whelan: Yes, we were in the same platoon.

In the same platoon in boot camp?

Robert Whelan: Right.

So that had to have helped a little bit, to have your brother there with you, having somebody you knew.

Robert Whelan: Absolutely. Yeah, that was a great asset because we were buddies, and we did everything together, and made it very nice.

Did you go to Parris Island?

Robert Whelan: Yes, Parris Island, and then from there to North Carolina.

Tell us, sir, what your memories were of going to Parris Island. Did they send you down on a train?

Robert Whelan: Yes, we went by train, and I still treasure the pictures of my mother and dad and all of our family seeing us off at Trenton, New Jersey, headed for North Carolina.

What was your first impression of Parris Island?

Robert Whelan: Well, you know, I was 17 and just a kid, and it was very impressive. I was very impressed with the drill instructors because they're regular guys, and just had a whole group, and we were all faking that we weren't homesick.

Sure. Yeah, I bet it had to have been a traumatic time too in that you knew you were training to go to war so it wasn't just a summer camp or anything like that. It was tough boot camp but also you knew the reason why you were there.

Robert Whelan: Absolutely.

What do you remember most about basic training? Is there anything that stands out to you?

Robert Whelan: Yes, I was very, very impressed with the drill instructors. I mean, they were outstanding men, and, you know, they could kid ya, and we were used to that at home. And so it was accepted easily to have wonderful drill instructors who were strict but we knew they had a job to do, and they were training us to do jungle fighting and so forth.

What were most of the men like in your platoon? I know they were probably, as I understand it, probably would have all been from the east, east of the Mississippi, right?

Robert Whelan: Oh, yeah. There were a lot of hippies and everything else, but all good guys, you know. When you get homesick and all of you are homesick, they're immediate friends.

That's right. What did your brother think of basic training?

Robert Whelan: The same thing. We trained together and we were used to it. I was fortunate. I played four sports at Pennington Prep, and had several scholarship offers before I enlisted.

And he was your big brother, right?

Robert Whelan: Yes, he was two years older.

So I'm sure he kind of felt like he had to look out for you in a way as well.

Robert Whelan: Oh, absolutely. So we were a very close family.

That's great. Now once you finished basic training, did the two of you get stationed together or were you split up?

Robert Whelan: Yes, we were sent to North Carolina and several ordnance schools.

Okay, tell us about that.

Robert Whelan: Well, we were very proud because they selected us to go to ordnance school, and already assignment, and we were thrilled that we were able to go to advanced ordnance school and learn all about armament and also both as ground troops, we were told and trained that although we were ordnancemen, we were Marines first.

Sure, and it's still that way in the Marine Corps. Every Marine is a rifleman.

Robert Whelan: That's right.

Did you go to Camp Johnson for training?

Robert Whelan: No, we went to Jacksonville, Florida, and then Lansing, Michigan, and several schools, you know. I don't really at this age recall.

But they moved you around a bit so you could learn about the different types of ordnance.

Robert Whelan: That's right.

And he had the same specialty as you then? So you were both ordnancemen?

Robert Whelan: Yes, that's right.

That's great. When you got through with all those trainings, all that schools, where did they send the two of you next?

Robert Whelan: Well, we went to North Carolina for a long training at Bogue Field, North Carolina, and then we both shipped out and went to Guadalcanal.

Okay, tell us what that was like, finally . . . You've gone through boot camp, you've gone through all your specialty training. What was that like finally shipping out knowing that you're actually going off to war?

Robert Whelan: Well, we felt good about it because when you're training, and in the middle of my training, I got hurt. I had a bad leg, and I got hurt, and they wanted to survey me out. I went before a board and refused to be discharged, and some colonel said, "Well, I'll sponsor him. We got somebody wants to stay. Most of 'em want to get out." And he said, "We're gonna accept him and he'll answer to me."

That's great.

Robert Whelan: So I was able to stay in, and my brother and I separated at Guadalcanal.

Okay, so you took a transport ship to Guadalcanal.

Robert Whelan: Yes, we went through Pearl Harbor and right into the Guadalcanal island.

What was that like finally separating from him because he's been your brother your whole life, you've gone through boot camp, gone through MOS school, and now here you are in a war and you're getting split up?

Robert Whelan: Well, it was tough but we knew it was all part of life and part of it. We had a strong religion and we just felt as though the good Lord wanted us to be separated. Let's just pray for each other's safety, and we clearly accepted it.

And when was it that you saw him again? Was it at the end of the war?

Robert Whelan: No, no, later on when we were in the Philippines, I got together with him again, and we came home together and were discharged together.

That's great. How did you track him down in the Philippines? Did you have word that his unit was in the area or something along those lines?

Robert Whelan: I don't know how to say it but I was a very good basketball player, and I said I can get us another good player, and the officer said, "Where?" And I said, "My brother, he's somewhere." He was in Green Island, and he had him transferred in.

That's great. So you were on a team together, one of those kind of service teams.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, we played the Army after the war. Moose Krause from Notre Dame was our athletic director, the famous Moose Krause. Great guy. And he appreciated us on our time off, we had a little rough going in. I was separated from my brother when we went in to Luzon. That was a little rough, and then we got together about six, seven months later.

Tell us, you mentioned Luzon. Tell us about that, what your memories are of that?

Robert Whelan: Oh, well, that was tough because we had a . . . We were assigned certain space and we met opposition. They didn't want us to make that space.

Okay.

Robert Whelan: You know, in the same jungle fighting. We did all right, got through and later joined together.

What type of ordnance normally were you handling? Was it artillery or planes?

Robert Whelan: All like 75mm cannons, machine guns, small arms and heavy arms.

Explain to us for those listening that aren't familiar with what an ordnanceman does, what was your typical role then in situations like that?

Robert Whelan: Well, after we captured our space, then we were assigned to the airport, and we captured the airport space and then we greeted our planes in, and we loaded bombs and, as you know, the dive bombers had an impulse that you fired between the prop so we had to put all our timers in, set all that up and all the ordnance matters.

Yeah, so you basically set up a whole, I guess, ammo supply point or something along those lines.

Robert Whelan: That's right. We had our munitions area, and we took things from there, kept 'em hidden and camouflaged, and then would bring it to the airport the minute the planes were gonna take off, and then we guarded the field.

Yeah, and you knew, I guess, from your training how to handle all this very dangerous, you know, these bombs and munitions and things of that sort.

Robert Whelan: Absolutely. They gave us wonderful training.

So because of that training, I guess you were never really worried or apprehensive about being around ordnance?

Robert Whelan: Never. We never were because we knew it was our job, you know?

Exactly, a very important one too. I mean, it doesn't do a lot of good to fly a bomber who doesn't have any bombs to drop.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, and then finally somebody was wise enough to have us as infantrymen be ready when your planes finally clear enough to come into the airport, Henderson Field, and all these special spaces. I was in Guadalcanal, all this . . . They had somebody there to load the planes 'cause it wouldn't be very good for them to come in and no one to load the planes. So that was tricky, especially with firing between the prop, your time impulse and everything had to be set up correctly.

Tell us about the type of weapons . . . You were talking about firing through the prop which people don't understand meant that . . .

Robert Whelan: That's your machine gun.

Yeah, would fire actually through the propeller . . .

Robert Whelan: And if you didn't set that right, your propeller would be chewed up.

Yeah, you'd shoot your propeller off and crash.

Robert Whelan: Yeah.

How was it that . . . How did you do that? How did you set the timer on that?

Robert Whelan: Well, there was a form you had to do and you had to check it, and you would have the team mechanic warm the plane up, and you would sit there and put it on the timer so it would fire right. You know, you knew it was firing right, and you would release it. They would put ammunition in and he was set to go, and the big thing was putting your bombs on the wings and under the belly of the plane.

During this time while you were in the war, were you able to get letters from home or send letters back to your parents letting them know you were okay?

Robert Whelan: Not too much because they were censored. Not like today when the wonderful outfit can telephone from, you know, the bases.

Yeah, email and that sort of thing.

Robert Whelan: It was censored and you get a letter from home saying, "I know you're somewhere in the Pacific. I don't know where."

Yeah, tell us what some of the men were like you served with in the Pacific, some of the Marines that you were with.

Robert Whelan: Just great, great guys. They were just friends that we made friends and maintained 'em for years afterwards, you know. Because they were just all dedicated and very proud to be Marines. Never had any personnel problems.

I think you told me when we talked the other day that you rose to the rank of sergeant, is that right?

Robert Whelan: That's right. Both of us became sergeants.

And did that happen during the war when you were in the Pacific?

Robert Whelan: Yes, during the war, yep.

That's pretty good thing to pick up, be an NCO like that, and, of course, the saying is still today that the sergeants run the Marine Corps. So tell us, sir, what it was like being a sergeant during the war and what things you were responsible for.

Robert Whelan: You know, you gotta remember Marines are comrades, and you're not really their boss. You have to maintain the discipline but you also do it on a friendship basis, and you never had a . . . They were very cognizant that you were the sergeant and you had the responsibility, and they had dedication to you. And never had a problem like that. Never had any resentment or anything even close to it.

That's great. It sounds like the morale and the esprit de corps in your unit was especially good.

Robert Whelan: Oh, tremendous, yes. Tremendous. We knew we were protecting each other.

You mentioned you were in Luzon, and you also had mentioned Guadalcanal. What were some other . . . Were there any other places there in the Pacific that you eventually went to?

Robert Whelan: Later on, we got in and we went to Zamboanga, the island of Zamboanga.

What were those places like? What are your memories of Guadalcanal, Luzon, and things that kind of stand out to you?

Robert Whelan: Luzon was rough. In fact, we got hit pretty hard on a night raid. They dropped a bomb and I got kind of thrown around a little bit because the bomb sent impact through the LST, and a lot of people injured. And soon as we got out of there and got to Zamboanga, everything quieted down.

Okay, when you were on Guadalcanal and Luzon, I'm trying to picture in my mind. You were near the airstrip, right? Or at the airstrip?

Robert Whelan: Right, right.

Did you have little dugout bunkers and stuff that you would go to in case of air raid?

Robert Whelan: Oh, yeah. You had your own foxhole.

So I'm picturing in my mind just kind of like an air raid siren going off and having to take cover.

Robert Whelan: What it was, they had three shots, and you knew you were gonna get an air raid. And then, you know, you get away from the bomb area, munitions area, and you go in your foxhole. And the only disturbing part about that, there are so many rodents on the islands, and you'd have to clean out your foxhole and then drop your poncho on top of what you cleaned out, you know. And that was a little disturbing.

I guess it's better than getting hit by fragmentation of a bomb.

Robert Whelan: Oh, yeah. And you wonder how you did it when you got home, you know.

I've read that the Japanese had a bomber that had a nickname, it's kind of like . . . I forget what they called it, like a flying wash . . . What was it? It had a distinctive sound to it I guess is that I'm recalling.

Robert Whelan: Oh, yeah. But really the sound truthfully didn't bother ya. See, what happened is when we were loading the LSTs, I guess somebody left the lights on, you know, just to keep loading, and they could spot that from up above. We got the three shots and all of a sudden the plane was right above us and dropped its bombs, wiped out the whole front end of the LST. But, hey, that was part of it.

Sure. I guess what I had read once about some of these Japanese bombers was that they had kind of a whistling sound to them, and I forget what they called them. They had some derisive nickname for them.

Robert Whelan: Like a whine.

Yeah, like a whine.

Robert Whelan: Whining sound.

They called them like a . . .

Robert Whelan: Yeah, it was a distinct sound, you know. And you knew they're there. But the biggest thing that I can say, Mr. Crabtree, is that the cooperation and the esprit de corps in the Marines is so outstanding that you knew your buddies were there. They were going through the same thing as you. You were not bigger or smaller than they, and the officers were good guys. And you just had a camaraderie, you know.

That's great. I'm sure then too, you had to have felt ultimately that the Japanese were going to be defeated, right?

Robert Whelan: Absolutely. And then we got word that they dropped the bomb. It's so funny. Mr. Truman okayed the bomb drop, you know, and I later met him. I became an FBI agent, and I met him in Kansas City, and I was able to thank him for doing it, you know.

What did he say to that?

Robert Whelan: Oh, he said, "I appreciate that, Bob." I had been in the town, and he sent a couple of his secret service over, and they asked, "Are you Special Agent Robert Whelan?" I said, "Yeah, who cares?" He said, "The president." I said, "Oh, good, Mr. Truman?" And he says, "Yeah, he'd like to meet you." And so I went in and I met with him and we became instant friends because my brother's godfather used to play cards with him.

Really, wow.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, and so he said, "You gotta promise me every time you come to Kansas City you'll have lunch with me." And I said, "Oh, it would be an honor, sir." But I never had to go back because once we got it so we didn't have to pay cash, you know, we bought a company in Kansas City, and when we could pay cash for it, we didn't need personnel to come from the home office in New Jersey.

Tell us, to back up a little bit then. So the war ends. Where were you when you learned that the first bomb had been dropped?

Robert Whelan: We were in Luzon.

Luzon.

Robert Whelan: Watching a TV show, not a TV, no . . .

Radio program?

Robert Whelan: Yeah, listening to a radio program and they said, "The war is over." Well, we just went crazy.

I'm sure that had to have been a great feeling.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, 'cause that was the only disappointing thing we had. No one told us, you know, you had so many points, when you went past those points and you accumulated so many more than you had to, you said, "Well, I got the points. When are they gonna send us home?" But then the points counted more.

So once the war ended, did you have enough points at that point to go home?

Robert Whelan: Oh, yeah. I had double the points.

I'm sure your brother was in the same boat.

Robert Whelan: Same boat.

And you said that you went home together, right?

Robert Whelan: Yep, we got to California and then California, six of us, six Marines, hired a limousine to take us to Indiana, and from there we took a train home.

Wow, so you drove in a car all the way from California to Indiana?

Robert Whelan: Right.

Wow. Was it a situation where it was just quicker to get that way?

Robert Whelan: Well, the war had ended, and people . . . It was so crowded that you just couldn't get on trains and you couldn't get air. It was impossible to get a flight home, so you said, "Well, I'm gonna get home by Christmas." So that's what we did. We hired a car to take us part way 'cause then it was, you got away from the west coast where all the Pacific veterans were being discharged, and were able to take a train on in to Trenton, New Jersey.

That's great, and your goal was to get home by Christmas of 1946?

Robert Whelan: Yeah, right.

Did you make it?

Robert Whelan: Yep.

That's great. Tell us, sir, what that was like, when you and your brother got home and saw your family again.

Robert Whelan: Oh, it's the greatest reunion you can imagine, you know. And the mother and dad were still in good health and everything else, so were all my sisters and that's when my brother was with us. So we just had a great reunion.

That's great. Were you able to call them and let them know you were on your way?

Robert Whelan: Oh, yeah. We called them. "Call tomorrow night when you make your next stop." We were dropping coins in the telephone, you know, in those days.

Sure, that's great. When you got back home and the war was over, you were discharged. You said you ended up going into the FBI, so tell us a little bit about that.

Robert Whelan: Immediately, I had played a little ball in the service and I had a big offer from Iowa University, and I liked the Iowa because it was more farm-type school, and the Big Ten. And I went immediately to Iowa. In fact, we even got time in that year, half a semester. And then my legs were hit a little bit, and I came in and the famous Dr. Kessler, the Kessler Institute, said,

“Bob, I’m sorry to tell ya, your basketball days are over.” And so he operated on me and that was the end of my basketball.

But you got to play some basketball at the University of Iowa?

Robert Whelan: Oh, yeah, yeah. I was touted as the world’s greatest set shot. Yeah, you know, Mr. Crabtree, it’s funny. I kept all those write-ups so when people say, “Oh, what do you mean?” I say, “Here. Look.” And show them the write-ups.

That’s great. So this was in 1947 then?

Robert Whelan: This would be ’47, yep.

In Iowa.

Robert Whelan: Yeah.

And what was it that happened to your legs that you had to have the surgery?

Robert Whelan: Well, when that bomb hit that I told you about on the LST, it wracked my legs, and they had already been bad so I turned around, just ruined ’em, and I couldn’t play, couldn’t go that long without damaging them for life, you know.

That’s too bad.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, well, you know, that’s part of life. And then later on after I got my master’s degree, I said, “Well, I’m going in here to Newark and take the test and see how I make out with the FBI.” And I went in and I aced it, you know. And the SAC, special agent in charge, says, “Well, we’ll get you in the next class.” I said, “Just a minute, sir. I have bum wheels.” He says, “What do you mean?” And I told him about having been operated on a couple times. And he said, “Well, what we can do, if you can pass the test at Walter Reed at the PPC course and so forth, and you can pass the test, you’re in the next class.” And I was able to without jamming my legs to do everything else, and they accepted me and that’s how I got in and spent eight years in there, almost nine.

That’s great. So you were at the University of Iowa when you applied for FBI?

Robert Whelan: No, I had transferred to Seton Hall.

Seton Hall, okay.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, that’s where I got my bachelor’s and master’s degree.

What was it that made you want to try out for the FBI?

Robert Whelan: I always wanted it. My brother’s godfather was head of the state police, and I always wanted to be either a state trooper or an FBI agent. So I said, “What the hell. I’ll give it a try.”

What type of test was it? Was it a written test you had to pass?

Robert Whelan: Yes, oh yeah. Really, and then a personal test.

So you did well enough with that, and then obviously the physical test. And then did they send you to Washington, D.C., or Quantico?

Robert Whelan: Washington, D.C., then Quantico. Yeah, first Washington, D.C. The old building there on Main Street. We were there and then went to Quantico. And then my first office was San Francisco, and then Los Angeles, and then back to New York.

What was that like being in the FBI? This would have been, I guess, the late '40s, 1950s?

Robert Whelan: That's right. The greatest . . . It was like having all Marine buddies. Lot of ex-Marines, you know, and former Marines. There's no ex-Marine.

Sure, that's right. Marine veterans.

Robert Whelan: All former Marines. Just had a great time. Then after about eight years, my legs were sort of giving out on me, you know. So I had to resign. But both the Marines and the FBI were just tremendous to me.

So to catch up to the Truman story, when you were in Kansas City and this would have been, I guess, sometime in the 50s because it was after Truman had left office.

Robert Whelan: That's right.

He knew you were there as a special agent, and . . .

Robert Whelan: Yep, somehow he knew because I think he probably said, "What is that guy doing?" You know, they had to scan the _ there where he had lunch to find out, "What's that guy comes in here for lunch?" Well, what I was bringing was payroll to a company we had purchased, and so I was alone, you know. And he said, "What's that guy doing all the time here?" So they must have checked because the guy said, "Aren't you Robert Whelan?" And I said, "Yes, who cares? Who the hell are you?" He said, "Well, we're with the Truman detail."

Yeah, that's great. That's a neat story. How long were you in Kansas City? Were you stationed there at that point?

Robert Whelan: Oh, no, no. I just . . . To tell you the truth, I'd run 50,000 in cash to make payroll. We bought a company there and the union, the IBEW, said we had to pay cash until we got our banking set up. And that's . . . Mr. Truman was so great, so nice, and I was just so sorry I never had another chance. But once we got our payroll out there, we didn't need me. We just had a payroll clerk make payroll, you know.

That's a great story though that you got to meet him that one time.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, then I ended up guarding . . . After the FBI, and I left because my legs were bad, and I was a private investigator, and I got to be an expert at inaugurations. So I had a couple inaugurations with Reagan and three with Nixon, three occasions with Nixon. And I handled security for several presidents.

That's great. I'm sure those are some neat stories and neat experiences.

Robert Whelan: Oh, yeah. I still have all . . . People say, “Oh, come on.” Well, I made sure I kept all my appointments and all that. In fact, I’m a lifetime member of the Society of Former Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

That’s great. Let me ask you, going back to Kansas City a bit, you said that the FBI had bought a company. That seems interesting. What was the story?

Robert Whelan: No, not the FBI. The company . . . I had left the FBI and I was working for Emerson Gordon Electric Company, and they bought what was called Boise-Hilburn, and we were in the midst of jobs. And they had to get paid by cash so I’d have to fly the cash out.

Okay, for some reason I thought you were still in the FBI when Truman wanted to talk to you.

Robert Whelan: No, I just, between you and myself, I often wondered how he got so interested in me, but a lot of the times the politicians think there’s some reason you’re in town, you know.

Sure, that’s great. That’s a neat story. I guess I didn’t ask you. During the war, were you . . . Did you get married or get married after the war?

Robert Whelan: Oh, no. Jane and I have been married 64 years.

That’s great.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, she’s a great girl. And we met at Seton Hall. And we got married right after we graduated. She had to wait for a teaching degree, and I got my first office with San Francisco, and I was sent there, and she had to finish up her degree. Then we’ve been together ever since.

That’s great. And when you went to Seton Hall, were you able to use the GI Bill? Was that something?

Robert Whelan: Yes, oh, yeah.

That’s good. So you were able to use that for your education which was a new thing.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, I got my master’s degree.

That’s great. And then, did you all have any children?

Robert Whelan: Yes, we have three. Michael is the oldest, and then Joan, and Patricia. Two girls and a boy.

Do they ever ask you very much about your time in the Marine Corps, or you talk to them very much about that?

Robert Whelan: Oh, yes. And they loved it, and they loved about the FBI. In fact, we got the good news just yesterday that my granddaughter passed opening test to become a clerk for the . . . She’s going to graduate from Columbia University in New York . . .

That’s a good school.

Robert Whelan: And she wants to become an agent, and she passed her first test yesterday. She calls Grandpop all the time to tell us how she's doing.

That's excellent. So she definitely is kind of following in your footsteps then with the FBI route.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, she's a sweet girl and she's a talented girl.

Well, yeah. I know Columbia is a very good school so just to even be able to go to school there is a good sign.

Robert Whelan: She'll graduate next year, and she's gonna work for, if the good Lord comes through and he always does, she will work as a clerk for seven weeks there this year. And the following year she can take the test to become an agent.

That's excellent. That's really good news.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, we're thrilled to death.

That's great. Then, what was it, I guess, that brought you to Texas after all those years?

Robert Whelan: You know, you're a family man. We talked the other day. And all of a sudden our daughter married her husband, the chairman of orthopedics at the University of New Mexico. She lived here in San Antonio, and she had three children, and she got a little surprise, she was going to have twins. So she said, "Mom, could you come down to help me?" I was doing private work then, and we just came on down, and we've been here ever since.

That's great. I know the whole San Antonio area has a lot of veterans and it's very military friendly, and good cost of living.

Robert Whelan: It's a great town, yeah. I was the head of security for the biggest caterer in Texas for 17 years.

That's great. So you feel at home now in Texas.

Robert Whelan: Oh, love Texas, yes. I'm so proud of Texas. The attitude of people, so patriotic and so good. You know, we always used to kid the guys from Texas. We'd say, "Oh, you can tell a Texan but you can't tell 'em much."

That's right.

Robert Whelan: But I was impressed as a kid, you know, in the service. "Why are they so proud of their state?" And then I came here and now I know why they're proud of it 'cause it's a great state.

Sir, speaking of Texas and Marines, you told me when we talked last time that you'd had a chance to go to the Marine Military Academy down in Harlingen.

Robert Whelan: That was a big thrill. A gentleman kept saying to me, he came over, and my wife works for the visitors' center here in Boerne, and this guy came in and he said, got to talking about the Marine Corps and he tied in with the school there. And he said, "Jeez, you're husband was a Marine?" "Yep. And proud to be a Marine," she said. And he said, "Well, I'll get

in touch with him.” And he did, and he came up and picked us up and we drove down to the school and spent two days there, and just had a great time.

That is great.

Robert Whelan: So proud of General Smith. The 134 acres, the boys there, and the school is just something for the Corps to be proud of even though they’re not attached to the Corps. They’re independent but they’re all former Marines.

That’s right. It’s definitely a de facto Marine Corps relationship. I mean, all the Marine veterans that are there, and the uniform that those kids wear, and that sort of thing. And the values that they’re taught and instilled in them.

Robert Whelan: It’s a great school.

Yeah. That’s great. I know that’s a bit of a drive too from where you are down to the valley.

Robert Whelan: Yeah, he came up and picked us up and brought us home.

That’s great. That’s really neat. A neat thing to be able to do that.

Robert Whelan: Because at my age it’s a little rougher, you know?

Sure.

Robert Whelan: Because I was born in ’24. So next year I’ll hit the “big 9-oh” mark.

That’s great.

Robert Whelan: If the Good Lord’s willing, you know?

Yes sir. Well, that’s great. Do you belong to any veterans groups, anything like the . . .

Robert Whelan: I belong to all of them, you know. I belong to Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Veterans, you know. Disabled American Veterans. And I belong to American Legion. I belong to all of them, yeah.

Did you ever keep in touch with any of the Marines you served with in the Pacific? Any of them that became friends, or that sort of thing?

Robert Whelan: Oh yeah. We were always in touch after the war. One buddy of mine got the Navy Cross.

Wow.

Robert Whelan: And we were in touch, he was dating my cousin, things like that. But then when we changed and came here, that sort of severed our relations with everybody back east. Now I go to all the meetings of the ex-agents. As I said, I got the honor of being made lifetime member of the former FBI agents.

That’s great. That is an honor.

Robert Whelan: So everything is going along in good shape.

Yes sir. And sir, what about your brother after the war? What did he do?

Robert Whelan: My brother's the same way. He just dedicated to the Marine Corps. He preferred to just stay in Jersey. He's two years older and he still doing all right back in New Jersey.

That's great. That's great. What did he do after the war? I guess he didn't go in the FBI.

Robert Whelan: No, he went into business.

Into business.

Robert Whelan: I later . . . When I couldn't work anymore for the FBI because of my legs, I joined him in the business.

That's great. That's great. That's wonderful. I'm sure you've got a lot of memories. And the fact that the two of you went to boot camp together and off to the war together and returned together, that's a unique story. There's not a lot of stories like that.

Robert Whelan: There's not too many because I think there was 70-something of us, and someone told that there's only 30 or low 40s came back, you know.

That sounds probably about right.

Robert Whelan: We were fortunate both to come back.

Have you ever been back to Parris Island since you graduated from there?

Robert Whelan: No, no. I wanted to because I was in Washington so much. I had security for all the presidents, you know, and Reagan was so interesting. He was a good guy. I had Clinton, I had 'em all. I think I guarded seven presidents.

I know Parris Island is still there and it's still a big training depot. I was just curious if you'd ever had a chance to go back.

Robert Whelan: I would have loved it. Being out here and being with this fellow that was the biggest caterer in Texas, Don Strange, I was invited by a retired general to go out and see it, but I said . . . It gets tough to travel, you know.

I understand. Yes sir.

Robert Whelan: So that's why I never went back. I would have loved it.

Yes sir. Especially when you see the recruit graduations that they have on Fridays where all the newly graduated Marines march out and they have the ceremony and they get to see their family again after basic training and it's just a neat thing they do.

Robert Whelan: And you know what's neat? That evening in Washington.

Oh yeah, The 8th and I?

Robert Whelan: The 8th and I, yes.

That's right. That's a real show.

Robert Whelan: I used to go there regularly because I was chairman of a big commission for the State of New Jersey for 20-something years. One of my employees was the senior noncom for the Marine Reserves.

Oh that's great.

Robert Whelan: And he used to keep me all posted and he'd get me tickets for the . . . I must have gone to that thing eight or ten times.

Yeah, they do the sunset parade and everything.

Robert Whelan: That's something. Unbelievable.

Yeah, it's a real neat show. It is. Well sir, I've really enjoyed being able to talk to you today and of course record some of your memories. We have here at the General Land Office an archive that goes back to the 1700s.

Robert Whelan: Oh my God.

We have the original land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo, and we have the registro which was the register that Stephen F. Austin kept of all the original Anglo settlers that came to Texas. So our goal is to take all of these interviews that we've done and add them to that archive so that hopefully hundreds of years from now people can listen to these interviews and study them or learn something from them.

Robert Whelan: They would learn that what a great country this is.

Yes sir. That's what I was going to ask you. Is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview long after you and I are both gone?

Robert Whelan: I'd say be loyal to your Marine Corps because that's the greatest group of guys ever assembled, ever will be assembled. Because Semper Fi is always faithful and you just can't beat the Corps.

I agree. Finest fighting force known to man, as they say.

Robert Whelan: Yeah. And that just shows you what you can do if you're honest with each other.

Yes sir. I agree.

Robert Whelan: I appreciate it.

Yes sir. It's a real honor for me and on behalf of Commissioner Patterson, who's also a Marine veteran. He served in Vietnam and retired as a lieutenant colonel in the Reserves.

Robert Whelan: Great.

In fact his son is a Marine and is a Cobra pilot.

Robert Whelan: Oh boy.

An attack helicopter pilot in the Marine Corps.

Robert Whelan: Oh, congratulations. You have to have some talent to do that.

Yes sir. On behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everyone at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service to our nation, and as I mentioned before we started recording, in a couple of weeks we're going to send you copies of this interview on CDs along with a nice letter and certificate signed by Commissioner Patterson that's going to be in a commemorative binder. All of that is just a small way of the State of Texas being able to say thank you to you for your service.

Robert Whelan: Tell Commissioner Patterson and yourself that I appreciate your following up. It's not surprising because you're both former Marines, and that's the way we are.

Yes sir. Absolutely. It's definitely the way it is and it's a special honor for me as a Marine to be able to interview you as a World War II Marine veteran. It's been an honor for all of us.

Robert Whelan: Thank you very much.

Yes sir. And sir, you've got my numbers so if there's anything you need just give me a call and like I said, we should have these to you in a couple of weeks. But if you need more copies, just let me know and we'll get more copies made. You mentioned those clippings. If you have any photographs or clippings that you want to make copies of and email to me or whatever, we'd love to add those to the archive as well.

Robert Whelan: Let's hope that if you come over this way sometime, I can give you copies right in person. We'd love to have you visit Boerne. We're right outside of San Antonio.

Yes sir. I know right where it is. It's a good town.

Robert Whelan: My wife is very active as a volunteer for the Chamber and the visitors' center. We'd love to have you.

That's a nice area. I know Boerne and kind of the German-Texas hill country. Nice area.

Robert Whelan: That's it. Semper Fi to you.

Yes sir. Semper Fidelis and take care, sir.

Robert Whelan: Thank you.

Yes sir. Bye-bye.

Robert Whelan: Bye-bye.