

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 751

STANLEY GRESICK

Interviewed

by

Douglas Silhanek

on

May 20, 1985

STANLEY JACOB GRESICK

Stanley Gresick was born on May 8, 1925 in Sonmun, Pennsylvania. His father died while working in the coal mines of Pennsylvania, and after his mother remarried the family moved to Chicago, Illinois. Stanley was raised in the city but left high school before graduation to join the service. After being refused because of his age, his parents eventually signed papers allowing him to join the Navy in late summer 1942. He served in the Atlantic on the U.S.S. Strong as part of the convoy system to North Africa. Later he was sent to the Pacific and saw action at Guadalcanal, Okinawa, and the Solomon Islands. While in the Pacific, his ship was sunk killing all but thirty-five of the crew. Stanley remained at sea for two days before being picked up by the Americans. Later while on the U.S.S. Laws, his ship was hit again.

After the war he spent three years as a civilian before enlisting in the Army. He served in Korea until his discharge in 1951. His service career over, he married and settled in Bessemer, Pennsylvania where he was employed by the Bessemer Cement Company until his retirement in 1982. He and his wife Mary have raised three children. Stanley is a member of St. Anthony Church, the Bessemer American Legion, and the Bessemer Rod and Gun Club. He enjoys hunting and fishing as hobbies.

Douglas M. Silhanek

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INTERVIEWEE: STANLEY GRESICK
INTERVIEWER: Douglas Silhanek
SUBJECT: Depression, Polish upbringing, training, reenlistment,
Navy life, Korean War
DATE: May 20, 1985

S: This is an interview with Stanley Gresick for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Doug Silhanek, at Mr. Gresick's home, on Monday, May 20, 1985, at 6:00 p.m.

Tell us something about your parents and family and what you remember most about them.

G: Originally, I'm from Chicago. I lived in Chicago for twenty-five years. I am an only child. My stepfather came from Poland. My first father died in the mines in Pennsylvania. Then the whole Gresick family moved to Chicago when I was five years old. Then I was raised in Chicago. I went to high school only six months. Then I quit and went to work. I worked until Pearl Harbor came in 1941. I tried to join the Navy before I was seventeen. That was in May. I tried to join in February, but they wouldn't take me because they said I was too young. I tried again in May and they told me that I would have to wait two more months. So I tried again in August, and they took me in in August of 1942.

S: What do you remember about your childhood most? Does anything stick in your mind?

G: I had more of what you would call a silent childhood. I was more of a lonely guy. I wasn't alone; I played with the kids a lot, but I never was into sports so I hung around the house; that's all.

S: You grew up in Chicago?

G: Yes.

S: Outside of the city or in the city?

G: Right in the city in what was called the Polish District.

S: How about the Depression? What do you remember most about the Depression?

G: I remember a lot of people were really starving because they weren't working. My father was one of the lucky ones, my step-father. He was working for Swift Meat-Packing Company in Chicago. I never remember having a hard time. Everybody around the neighborhood, a lot of people were laid off during the Depression and they couldn't eat or anything. That is all I remember.

S: How about the ethnic part growing up in a Polish neighborhood? Do you think that was good for you?

G: It was; it certainly was, especially when I was in the service. I always looked for a Polish district or a Polish settlement. I don't care where I went to. I found even a Polish district in Shanghai, China right after World War II ended. I enjoyed myself. Wherever there were any Polish people, they treated me like one of their own.

S: What about your Polish background?

G: I went to a Polish school. Actually, I had studied American history in Polish, adding and subtracting in Polish, reading and writing in Polish. When I went to a grocery store, I ordered whatever it was my mother wanted me to get in Polish because that was all that we talked. I had broken English when I was seventeen when I was in the Navy. One lieutenant on board the ship taught me English sentences and words and stuff and then I picked it up.

S: Was there a lot centered around the church by the fact that you were Polish?

G: I know there was a Polish Roman Catholic church, St. Mary's of the Angels, and that was in Chicago, right on the north side of Chicago.

S: Were there a lot of activities? Were your folks real Catholic?

G: Yēs, my mother was; I was. I still am once in a while, but not like I used to be.

S: What about when you went to school? You said you went to a Polish school. Did you know what it was like, what other kids went through in a regular school in Chicago? Did you feel you were getting as good an education or were you held back because you were Polish?

- G: No. Most of the kids who went there were either of Polish extraction, which is they were Polish Jews or Russian Poles or whatever. Most of them were actually Polish; their parents were strictly Polish. I thought at that time that we had a better education than what they have today. They used to drive it in our heads whatever it was they wanted us to learn.
- S: What do you remember doing for a good time while you were growing up? At any age is there anything that you really remember as having . . .
- G: The only thing I remember as what we called it, Polish Boy Scouts. It was actually American Boy Scouts, but this was in the Polish District, so most of the American Boy Scouts studied in Polish and tried a little bit in English. That is the only good time that I had that I remember.
- S: How about when the war broke out? When did you realize the United States was going to go to war? Was there one event?
- G: The only time I remember it . . . I didn't follow the European theater too much before Pearl Harbor. The only thing I remember is that I had to go in when World War II started; that was when Pearl Harbor was bombed. I was in a movie theater. I was an usher. They shut off the screen. I don't remember what the movie was about, but they shut the screen off and announced that Pearl Harbor was bombed. A lot of people and a lot of kids asked where Pearl Harbor was because they had never heard of it. I had heard of it because I used to read in the paper about it. That was it. I quit the theater and went home and tried to join the Navy the next day.
- S: How about your folks? What did they think of when you said you wanted to go in?
- G: My mother didn't want me to go. My stepfather didn't want me to go, but I demanded that I wanted to go so they signed me up. They gave my permission that I could go into the Navy.
- S: Was this just on your own or did you feel like everybody else was doing it and that you were going to do it?
- G: No. This was all on my own. I was the only one out of our neighborhood who was actually volunteering to go. Most of them waited until they got drafted.
- S: Trace your movement from basic training, where you were, what you remember most.
- G: I was sorry I went in after the first two hours after getting in the Navy. I will never forget it; they gave us eleven shots, six on one arm and five on the other. They gave us all of our-- what we call--sea equipment, which was your hammock, your

blankets, your mattress for your hammock, plus your sea bag, all of your clothes, and you had to carry it three blocks from the dispensary to the barracks.

S: Where was this?

G: At Great Lakes, Camp Perry. I remember from carrying it I couldn't put my arms out for almost an hour. The guys helped me put my arms out because of the shots. The first night I heard guys falling off of their hammocks. Knock on wood, I didn't fall out of a hammock once. I really liked it. We only had four weeks of training and then we were driving more recognition of enemy planes and American planes and German planes, German ships, Jap ships, and American ships. We only had training for four weeks; that's all.

S: What was a typical day like in basic training?

G: Mostly a lot of classes, like I said, for recognition of enemy planes and stuff. We didn't have any marching whatsoever. The only time we marched was on the day of our graduation; that was it.

S: Were they training you for something in particular, you yourself?

G: No. It was just regular basic training, regular boot camp.

S: Why did you pick the Navy? Was there any reason?

G: I don't know. I just picked it because I lived close to Lake Michigan, about a mile and a half from Lake Michigan. It took you ten minutes on a streetcar to get there. I just picked the Navy out of the blue sky; I don't know a reason. I was never sorry I did.

S: Out of boot camp where did they send you next?

G: To Bath, Maine to go on the U.S.S. Strong; that was the DD-467. She wasn't commissioned yet; she was just pulled out of the yard. They just got done completing her. We had to wait a couple of more weeks after that to get radar installations put on the ship and a gun director for all five guns. Then we went aboard her about two weeks later. October 1st I boarded the ship.

S: 1942?

G: 1942. October 12th, we went on a shakedown cruise to see what the ship would do on speed, on depth charge explosions, how close we could be to where the depth charges were dropped from the fantail of the ship until they blew up to see if the ship can take it, and gun recourse. At that time I was on the depth charges and I made a little boo-boo. I was supposed to set

the depth charge for 150 feet. I set it for seventy-five and the whole fantail shook when it blew. That was 500 pounds of TNT on a depth charge. That was the one that was rolled off the rack. The side ones were shot off a gun, what they called a K gun.

S: Did you get heck for it?

G: A little bit. They took me off the depth charges and then they put me on a five inch gun, first loader, which I didn't like too well. They put me on a forty millimeter and then I didn't care for that either. So they put me on a twenty millimeter. I stayed on that. It was an Arlokun gun. We called it a gun but it actually was a cannon.

S: You were in the Atlantic then.

G: We were, yes.

S: Did you just stay out?

G: No. We took a convoy to French Morocco, Africa. That was in November of 1942. What I remember of it was that there were sixty-four ships in the convoy. There were only five of our destroyers escorting it. We pulled in with twelve troop ships. None of them were hit, but the rest of them were hit by submarines, tankers, camel ships. We brought the troop ships in and then we brought the old Arkansas battletwagon back. We brought her back. They must have done bombing there for an invasion.

S: Any action yourself on the way over in the first convoy?

G: No.

S: Didn't see anything?

G: No.

S: Then on the way back, anything?

G: We lost the convoy four times. We hit a bad storm. The waves must have been, in my estimation, forty, fifty feet high. I know I got drenched a couple of times. I had to go down below and change into dry clothes. No matter what you put on you got soaked. We lost the convoy for a couple of days. Then we would gather them back up after the storm tapered down to nothing.

S: Were you lost by yourself?

G: By ourself. Then we picked the convoy up two days later. There was no damage done or anything.

S: Pick it up from when you came back.

G: From there we came back in the middle of November. They told us we were going someplace else. We went down the Atlantic through the Panama Canal to the Pacific. We went to Hawaii. We picked up a bunch of cruisers, which I thought were the biggest ships in the world. I never saw a cruiser before. I saw the battlewagon, but not the cruiser. We went with four cruisers and five destroyers. We stayed in the task force. The task force number was 71.1. That consisted of U.S.S. Helena, U.S.S. Memphis, U.S.S. Honolulu, and U.S.S. St. Louis. The destroyers were the Macaule. I forget the number on her. There was ours, the U.S.S. Strong 467. 468 was the U.S.S. Taylor. 463 was the U.S.S. Chealaie. I forget the last one. I can't remember the number of the last destroyer. There were five destroyers and four cruisers in our task force.

S: How long were you in Hawaii then?

G: We were there two days. We shipped out of the Pacific. We went to Nouméa, New Caledonia. That island was just captured about a month before. It was under French domination before and then the Japs took it and then we took it back. That was our place to anchor at and get ammunition and fuel up and get supplies. That was our advanced base to go to Guadalcanal for the invasion.

S: What about your time in Hawaii? Did you get time to rest up?

G: Yes, just the two days; that's all. I went to Honolulu.

S: What was that like for you coming from Chicago to go to that place?

G: It didn't bother me at all because it was hot. That is all I remember that it was hot. That's all I can think of. I had a good time there.

S: Did you get a chance to enjoy it then?

G: Yes.

S: Just for the two days?

G: Yes.

S: What would you consider a typical day on board?

G: Paint and chip, chip and paint; that's all we did. I was part of the deck force. That was all we ever did, work on the deck chipping and painting. That was it. You started at the bow on the starboard side. You would line up on the port side

on the bow and you would have to go back to the starboard side and chip and paint again, anything to keep you occupied. The only time we went out was when we had an air raid or submarine contact or something like that. Then we would take off to get them or whatever.

S: How about the food?

G: Delicious.

S: Was it?

G: When I got out of the Navy, I didn't have any turkey, steaks for three years after I got out because that was all they gave us. It was delicious food. You couldn't beat that.

S: Were you satisfied with the way the ship was run? Do you think it was well captained?

G: I have been under five captains on five different ships. There was only one who I really got to like just like a father. He was a really good skipper. He was the only one I know of who had four stripes. Usually they would have a commander to be the captain of the ship, but he was a four-striper; he was a full captain. He was one of the best ones who I remember. His name was Captain Wellings. Now he is a two-starred admiral. He might be retired now. He was pretty old.

S: Next you were on New Caledonia, right?

G: Yes. From there we took three liberty ships full of ammo and supplies to Guadalcanal. I just got in there for the last link of the invasion. The invasion was over November 28th. We got there November 26th. We brought those ships in. Then we joined the task force again.

S: When would that have been? Was that the summer of 1944?

G: What, the invasion?

S: Yes, Guadalcanal.

G: No, that was in August of 1942.

S: 1942, okay.

G: Yes, and it ended November 28, 1942.

S: Where did you go from there then?

G: From there we went back to Nouméa, New Caledonia. We stayed there for a couple of weeks. Then we formed another task force. We had to go with the four cruisers and the other four destroyers

besides ourselves. We had to go and make a bombardment run on a Japanese island, Villa la Villa, part of the New Georgia Islands off the Solomons. That was in 1943. We bombed it in April of 1943--bombarded it I should say. Then we bombarded again in May of 1943, June of 1943. Then the invasion was supposed to start July 5, 1943. We started prebombardment July 4th at 11:50 at night--that would be 2330 in Navy talk. We were hit by torpedoes at exactly 11:50. My ship was hit with two torpedoes, one on the starboard side and one on the port side. I remember nothing. I was blown off the ship. I woke up. I was on a life raft with nine other fellows on one raft and nine fellows on the other raft. They told me that the ship had gone in seven minutes.

We stayed on a life raft. At 5:00 in the morning we saw a black object coming towards us. We thought it was one of our ships coming to rescue us. It put its search lights on. We knew our ships never did that, not in a combat zone. It was a Japanese gun boat. It came to strafe us. They started strafing and I jumped overboard the first time. My buddy jumped overboard with me. We went under the life raft. They strafed the life raft. They didn't sink it or anything. We came back up and there were nine guys who were killed and nine of us who survived it. It was up to me to get the dog tags from the dead ones, keep a set and leave a set with them. We just let them cast adrift on a life raft. Then we kept the nine in the other life raft. My buddy was hit the second morning by another Japanese gun boat. He was hit right in the stomach. He died three days after we got picked up. I buried him in Guadalcanal and I buried him again in Springdale, Pennsylvania. He was from Springdale.

- S: Was that your first confrontation with death? You hadn't mentioned anything before. Was that your actual first combat?
- G: No. The first combat was comical in a lot of ways, but in a lot of ways it wasn't. A month before we got sunk we got a blip on the radar, on the surface radar, about five miles away. We figured it might be a Japanese sub surfacing, so we got permission from the task force commander to go after it, so we did. We went two miles. We were going to use five inch guns. The captain said, "No, we are going to get closer." The sub was still surfaced. They must have been celebrating the sinking. That was what we figured anyway. We got too close to use the forty millimeter guns. The captain said that we were going to use the twenty's. We started to use the twenty's. He said, "No, we are going to ram it," bow first, ram it. I, like a jerk, was on a gun. I said, "What are we going to do, tie along the side of the son of a bitch?" The captain said, "I will talk to you after, Polack." That was what they used to call me. We never got the sub. It submerged before we got there. We threw a couple of depth charges, but we never got anything. I got three days bread and water for that.

S: What was that like being in the water?

G: Scary. I bawled like a baby because we lost so many guys. There was oil on the water after the ship got hit.

We got on the life raft. We didn't give a hoot. It was still dark; we didn't give a hoot.

Every time before we went to our battle stations--general quarters, battle stations--I always fixed a pack in this aluminum cigarette case. I always put a fresh pack, never opened, in there and a book of matches in there. Every time we went to general quarters, I always did that. I was the only one on a life raft who had a pack of cigarettes that we could smoke. I looked at it and said, "Oh, no, it is no good. There is all scum on the outside." The cigarettes were good. I shifted around and I only had two cigarettes left. We smoked them whether it was dark or not. I think that was what tipped off the Japanese that we were in the water. That was when they came. We didn't care because we were dying for cigarettes. You weren't allowed to smoke when you were in the general quarters.

S: How did you eventually get to . . . How long were you in the water until you got picked up?

G: I was on a life raft for three days. We got picked up on the third morning. It was three days and two nights. We got picked up at 12:50 in the afternoon. I forget the name of the ship. One of our destroyers picked us up. They took us to Tulogi which is an island right across from Guadalcanal. There was a Navy base there. They picked us nine up.

On board the ship I was nervous as heck, shaking. When they picked us up, number three gun, the one in the back, blew; she had a hang fire. Your shells are present before it is shot off. You have so many seconds until it explodes. None of the guys got hurt. The gun crew got out in time. When I heard that, I thought we got hit again. I jumped overboard. Then they fished me out again. They picked me up and told me what it was. I felt better then. I was a nervous wreck I would say for about two months after.

S: Did they give you a chance to rest up?

G: Yes. They took us to Tulogi. They wanted a couple of volunteers, so I went. There was nothing wrong with me. I went on a PT boat, 703. I was on it for two weeks, just normal patrol. We came back and here the guys were gone. They weren't on board the ship; they were taking them back to the States. Then I started moaning and hollering and all that. The lieutenant said, "Don't worry about it. I will see what I can do." He was the captain of the PT boat. He called Henderson Field in

Guadalcanal. I just happened to get a B-24 liberator that was going back to the States. They let me get on board. I beat the buys back by a week and a half. I was waiting for them.

S: Then what about from there then?

G: From there I was stationed in the Great Lakes for about a week. From there they put me on a Navy pier in Chicago. It was almost in downtown Chicago. I was there for a month, month and a half. I got orders to report on board the U.S.S. Laws, the 551. She was in Seattle, Washington. I went over there and boarded her.

S: When would have this been?

G: This was in October of 1943. During that time I was home, I was on survivor's leave for thirty days, which was uncommon as leave by the Navy.

I boarded her and she was a brand new ship. We commissioned her and took off for the practice on the shakedown cruise. Then we took off for the Pacific. We made the Kwajalein invasion, all the Marshall Islands, Aniwejek, Rongelap, Tinian, Saipan. Then we had a couple of air raids in between that time. That was about it.

S: Any other enemy fire in between that?

G: Yes. Our ship was hit by a bomb from a Japanese plane. We lost twenty-six guys. We had 315. On the U.S.S. Strong there were 312 and there were only thirty-five of us who survived out of it.

S: What was the other ship?

G: U.S.S. Laws.

S: But that wasn't destroyed, it was just hit.

G: It was a destroyer. It was the same kind.

S: Was it destroyed?

G: No.

S: What did that feel like being hit the second time? Did you get a flashback?

G: No. I jumped. They said that we were going to have a possible abandon ship, so I jumped. Then they fished me out again and said that they were going to seal it because it may have been crippled up too bad. After that there was a ride to Hawaii and then they transferred me back to the States to be on R&R

(Rest and Recuperation) again for thirty days. That was about it.

S: What about from there then?

G: From there I went on the U.S.S. Atlanta. I didn't like that too well so I told them that I wanted another ship. They took me off of that. They put me on U.S.S. LST (Landing Ship Tanks), 732. From there I made the Okinawa invasion, April 1945. I saw a lot of ships being blown up by kamikazes, but we weren't hit. The closest one was 1,500 yards away. It was a ship that was full of ammo and they blew it by kamikaze.

S: Did you know about that beforehand?

G: About the kamikaze?

S: Yes, or was that a surprise?

G: We didn't know diddly about that; we didn't know anything. It just came out of the blue sky. We should have known because they were coming between us, when the invasion started in Okinawa, and the troops. They would fly over and we would start shooting at the planes. We would be hitting our own men because they were up ahead. Wherever the shells hit, they must have hit some of our guys; I don't know. But that was a complete surprise.

S: How about the invasion? What do you remember about Okinawa?

G: That's all. We had to take the stuff out of the tank deck, the ammo and stuff like that. Then we went back. I forget where we went.

S: Was it easy getting on the beach?

G: Yes. The beach was already secured. Troops were already a mile, mile and a half in. We were third wave to come in with the ammo and stuff. The task force, the big ships, the destroyers, the carriers, the cruisers, the battlewagons, they all were within five, ten miles away from the shore. They were bombarding.

S: Were they pounding away?

G: They were hit too. I read in the paper about a year after I got out of the Navy that we lost thirty-four ships, all big ships, capital ships from destroyers up, and we lost some ALST's, but not a lot. They didn't consider those as a capital ship.

S: On Okinawa what came next?

G: Okinawa . . . then we were getting ready for invasion of

Japan and the atomic bomb was dropped at Hiroshima, the first one, and then in Nagasaki and then the war ended. I was right in Tokyo bay. I was 2,000 yards away from the battleship Missouri when the surrender was signed.

S: What do you remember about that? Did you notice anything?

G: A blind man could see that we were ready to really blast that city down to the ground because we had 5,000 planes flying over. They say that fifteen of them had the atomic bomb. All of the guns were aimed at Tokyo. We were anchored out. You never forget a picture like that. As far as the eye could see, there were planes flying over. You know they were loaded with bombs. We thought maybe it might have been another sneak attack or something.

S: Did you have word that surrender was being signed, when it was being signed?

G: Yes. They announced it all through the ships. They broke radio silence then and everything to announce that the war was over and they were signing on the Missouri so we could look with binoculars.

S: What did you see?

G: We just saw a group of people at the bow of the battlegroup; that's all. All of the sailors were all over the ship looking at the surrender being signed. From there we took Japanese soldiers from Formosa, which is Taiwan now, to Kyushu Island, that is part of the Japanese mainland. We took them over there. We transported them from Formosa because that was a Chinese island and they didn't want any Japanese on the island so we transported them over to Kyushu Island. That was about it.

S: On the way home after that?

G: From there I grabbed another ship, U.S.S. Latimer, as an old APA; that's a tank transport. That was so I could decommission in the United States in Baltimore. That was where we went. I got off in Baltimore, Maryland.

S: Did you get discharged right away or did you have to spend a few days?

G: No. I joined up on a minority cruise. I served from seventeen until the day before I was twenty-one years old. That was what they called a minority cruise. That was when I got out. I got out May 7, 1946.

S: What did you do in between the time of the surrender until you got back to Baltimore? Was it just day-to-day work?

G: It was routine. Then they really got chicken. You had to work either uniform in the Pacific while you were handling the greasy lines and all that. That was why I didn't want to join up again. I was thinking about enlisting, but I just got too chicken. It got real regulation where it wasn't like that during the war.

S: How about at any time while you were in? Did you hear anything from home? You mentioned earlier about hearing from home. In what way, did you receive packages?

G: We received packages. I can recall one time that we were almost fighting against each other on board the first ship that I was on. We didn't get any mail whatsoever for three months. Then when we got it, the mail clerk got disgusted. He was going to dish it out. He got disgusted so he put them all on the five gun covered mounts, the mail. He said, "You guys go get it yourself." I had over 100 and some letters, about five packages. That was all we did. Three months was a long time not to hear from anybody.

S: What happened?

G: The mail got screwed up someplace along the line. They fouled it up and they sent it to Alaska. Then they sent it to Alutian Islands. From there, as I understand it, they sent it to New York. From New York it came back to the Pacific. Then Hawaii finally got it and then we got it.

S: How did you get the mail when you were out on the ocean?

G: We took the mail from their ship and brought it onto ours. If we had mail, we would ship it across the line while we were still on the way. It was the same thing when we fueled up. We were fueled up on the way. Every man on the deck was supposed to keep an ax right by where the hose was at. Then when we were under Japanese attack or something like that, then we would have to cut the line, chop the line and let the hose go.

S: What kind of packages and things did you receive?

G: I got cookies from my mother and some from my grandmother. That was about it. Most of the time it was something good to eat. The packages used to come in pretty regular. It didn't take them long after that first foul-up. I would say within the week you got a package. They used to fly everything over.

S: Was there anything you missed while you were in, anything you missed from home?

G: No. I felt happy, especially on the first ship. I felt happy. I didn't miss home at all; I could say that. I missed the States, but I didn't miss home. That is about it.

We had a chaplain aboard. We were one of the lucky ships. We had a chaplain on board. He happened to be a Roman Catholic. I used to see him about every couple weeks or something. We were fortunate that we had a doctor on board our ship too. Generally about every fourth ship has a doctor. The rest are all pharmacist mates.

- S: Did you ever run into anybody you knew while you were in the Navy, at least by accident?
- G: No. If I asked anybody if they were from Chicago, they weren't even from Chicago in that sixty-five square miles of where the city is. It was very rough to find somebody.
- S: At any time while you were in was there a time for you to maybe forget about what you were there for and go out and have a good time?
- G: No. I knew what I was fighting for. In fact I wanted to go on another destroyer. They wouldn't let me go on another one. They figured the averages on getting hit. I would probably go down with the next one. That was about it. Mostly after the first ship was sunk I really wanted to get at the Japanese. Up until today I won't buy a Japanese-made car or anything. I still have it in for them. In fact after the war was over sailors, soldiers, Marines would fraternize with the Japanese, but I wouldn't. I know I am not the only one who did that. There are a lot of fellows like me who thought the same way.
- S: Were you able to go into Tokyo at all?
- G: Yes. I went in there two days after. We had to carry side arms just in case. We still didn't trust them. They didn't trust us. They wouldn't show their faces for a couple of days. They just kept themselves inside the houses and that was all.
- S: What was the city like? Was it pretty well bombed?
- G: Half of it was bombed. They made sure that they wouldn't destroy most of the strategic places like your castle that Emperor Ito stayed in. That wasn't bombed at all. There were a couple of churches and stuff like that also. I would say about forty percent of the city was totally bombed. I took a ride by jeep. A couple of us went to go see Hiroshima. That was really a wipe out. I wanted to go see Nagasaki but we had to go back to the States then.
- S: What do you recall about Hiroshima?
- G: It was flat as a pancake. It was a nice city, the way I understand. It was a beautiful city. There were 180,000 people in it or something like that. 100,000 were killed or burnt or whatever, but it was flatter than a pancake. There were just

maybe a couple of chimneys that were sticking up from industrial places. That was about it.

S: Any evidence of death anywhere?

G: We got out of there. There were a lot of dead bodies, but we didn't see them. They told us that we could only go so far. The shore patrol and the Marine MP's (Military Police) told us that we could only go so close and that was it and that we had to turn back then. It was all cornered off. You could see . . . There was a little hill. You could see the way the city was completely wiped out.

S: Did you keep track of the entire war while you were in? Did you hear anything about what was going on in Europe?

G: Yes. We were interested in that. They usually had the Stars and Stripes. That was supposed to be actually just for the Army, but I think from 1942 they started shipping it over for the Navy too so we got the Stars and Stripes in the Navy. I used to keep up with how the war was going in Europe. We cheered like crazy and cried like crazy when we heard that D day had started on June 6, 1944; we heard that. We all were happy about that. We were really happy when we found out the V-E Day was May 8th. We thought we were going to get released because they were going to bring the troops and the ships all in the Pacific, which they didn't do for a good six months. They finally brought some of the ships over. They were too late.

When Russia declared war on Japan exactly two days before the surrender was signed, we thought that was pretty crappy of them. They should have been in there a long time ago. That was the only thing. We were never so happy when V-E Day was or V-J Day was, which was when the war completely ended. We could have all of the lights on board shone at night, smoke your hind end off any time you wanted to at night, don't worry about black clouds or whatever, silent running, and all that. It was something else. We shot off all of the shells and ammo and everything off of the guns; we just fired them off.

S: Overall, did you think Navy life was good for you?

G: I liked it; I liked it better than I did the Army because I went in the Army in 1948. I just wanted to see what it was like in the Army. I stayed in the States the whole time. Then I got out in 1950 in January. Korean War started June 20th; I was called back June 21st. I was in the reserves. I was in Korea from October 1950 until July 1951. I was in the combat engineers.

S: When you went back into the Army, you didn't expect anything in Korea, did you?

G: No, no. I stayed in what they called the peacetime Army. From 1948 until 1950 was peacetime Army. They wanted to cut the Army

down to 320,000 so they asked me if I wanted to get out and I said, "Yes." I got out and they said that I had to join the reserves. I said, "Okay," so I joined the reserves. That was when President Truman called the reserves in. That was when the Korean War started.

- S: When you got out the first time, what was that like coming home after World War II?
- G: I was lost. I think in one week's time I had eight jobs. I just couldn't settle in one place. It just got boring because I was used to the service. I got disgusted so in 1948 I joined the Army. I didn't fit into civilian life; that was the way I felt. I expected more than what civilian life was giving me. I don't know, but that was the way I felt.
- S: Did you go back to Chicago after the war?
- G: Yes.
- S: How did you end up in Bessemer?
- G: My wife was originally from Bessemer.
- S: You met your wife in Chicago?
- G: Yes, I met her in Chicago. I met her at a Polish dance in Chicago on the north side of Chicago where I was from. We got married. Like I said, I got the good news to go back into the service on June 22, 1950. In October I was in Korea.
- S: After the Korean War did you move here?
- G: After the Korean War I moved to Bessemer, yes.
- S: Is there anything about the war that sticks out the most in your mind?
- G: Naturally, the first ship, especially when I couldn't believe when I woke up after the ship was hit that I was about twenty feet away. It blew me thirty feet off the ship, the way I understand it. Then when they picked me up, I woke up. I must have been blown unconscious. I looked about and my ship was gone. That must have been more than seven, ten minutes when I was knocked out.
- S: Is there anything else you think important to add that we might have missed?
- G: Yes. In 1963 they had this television program, "This is Your Life." I was watching something else. Harvey Grimes, who worked at the cement plant, called me up and said, "Stanley, your ship is on 'This is Your Life.'" I said, "Which one?"

He said, "The Strong." I switched it on to "This is Your Life." Here they brought on this lieutenant. At that time he was Lieutenant Hugh BarMiller from North Carolina. He was directly under the torpedo when it blew and it blew him eight-five feet up in the air, back through the ship; down to the bottom. He got multiple cuts, bruises; he had his stomach all goofed up from that. He and five other fellows went on a life raft which must have been on the other side of the ship from where we were at. They went on to this Japanese island. We were only two miles away from this Japanese island. He was on the Japanese island for thirty-two days by himself. He told the fellows to leave. As I understand they survived though. He stayed by himself for thirty-two days and killed twenty-eight Japanese by himself, picking up their weapons. He killed the first one by choking him to death as he said. Then the MC (Master of Ceremony) said, "Do you know this voice?" I picked it up right away. I said, "That is the God damn skipper. I thought he went down with the ship." Everybody thought he went down because we never heard from him. There he was; it was the captain. I wrote him a letter right away as soon as I found out; I wrote him a letter. He answered back. It was a nice letter. My eyeballs bulged out when I saw he was a two-starred admiral. That was another bright day because I always thought he went down with the ship, he and the chief radio man. They were the last ones to leave the ship.

S: Is there anything else?

G: That's about it.

S: Okay, Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW