

Transcription: Henry Franklin

Good afternoon. Today is August 6, 2014. My name is James Crabtree, and today I'm interviewing Mr. Henry C. Franklin.

Henry Franklin: Put Senior on there. We don't like Junior.

Henry C. Franklin, Sr. Yes sir. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program, and we're at Mr. Franklin's residence in South Austin, Texas. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to let us interview you.

Henry Franklin: You're very welcome.

Yes sir. Sir, the first question that 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, where you were born and that sort of thing.

Henry Franklin: Okay, I can give you . . . I was born in Austin, Texas, at 1816 Garden Street.

Was that in South Austin?

Henry Franklin: No, that was in East Austin.

Okay.

Henry Franklin: That's down Chicon and . . .

Did you go to Austin High School?

Henry Franklin: My daddy died when I was four years old. I went to grade school a lot but I had to kind of take care of my mama and my three brothers. We was living with no daddy so we had a hard time going, and I went to one grade, I think, in high school but the rest of the time I had to go to work.

Sure.

Henry Franklin: So at 12 years old I went to roofing, and I roofed for about 20 years.

Okay. Were you the oldest? Were you the oldest of the kids?

Henry Franklin: No. My oldest brother named Richard, and he had a body and fender shop, and when I got out of the service, I couldn't find no jobs 'cause everybody had taken 'em all up here. So I went to work for him painting cars for a year. And then I went back to roofing and worked there until, I don't know how long, a little bit. Then I joined the union, carpenter's union, and I worked for J. C. Evans Construction Company for about 20 years until they went out of business. The main thing I did all the time is work, work, work.

Yes sir. Let me ask you, how did you come to be in the Navy? Were you drafted when the war started?

Henry Franklin: When the war started, we all went down to join. Said, “Well, there’s too many of you. We got to draft you.” So they gave us a draft number and everything. Then went to San Antone when they got ready for me, and we went that way.

How did it come about that you went into the Navy? I know you were drafted but did you have a choice when you were drafted, what branch you were going to go into?

Henry Franklin: Well, I just always liked it better, the Navy, but I wouldn’t ever join them ’cause I get seasick all the time. I couldn’t swing in the swing. I couldn’t ride in a car. Couldn’t do nothing ’cause I’d get sick but I still went in the Navy.

Even with the waves and such, sure.

Henry Franklin: When we got down, got on the ship, well, we left San Diego going to Pearl Harbor. We got out about a mile and I got sick, and I stayed sick all the way to Pearl Harbor.

That can’t have been fun.

Henry Franklin: I slept in a hammock on the back of the ship ’cause I couldn’t go down inside the ship because it would make me sick, so I rode the ship all the way over to Pearl Harbor in a hammock. I’d get sick and I’d have to go way up high to look for Japs, and then I’d get sick and throw up, and the guy on watch, he said, “Henry, now when you get through puking, you get on down here and clean it up, and then get back up there.” That happened, 17 meals I didn’t eat a bite, and then when I did get over there close, I heard Hawaiian music and that kind of soothed me a little bit. But one of my buddies, he brought me a can of peanuts. He said, “Here, see if you can hold these peanuts down.” So I did that and from then on, the rest of the three years I was in there, I was seasick all the time. But when the war was over, I come into San Francisco, I was in charge. I was a boatswain’s mate. I was in charge. You see that everybody is in their uniforms and everything when we go under that Golden Gate Bridge, we want to look good and sharp.

Man the rails.

Henry Franklin: Just before you get in there they got what they call ground swells, kind of hit like that.

Big waves?

Henry Franklin: The ship started moving. I said, “Well, I’m going down below ’cause I’m sick again, and y’all do anything you want to. I don’t care.” Because you go down the after steering, it’s way down in the back, and you can steer from back there. Well, the ship down at the bottom stayed pretty still.

That’s right.

Henry Franklin: But up at the top not so . . .

So during the war, were you able to be in steerage a lot? Did you go down to the bottom of the ship, down to steerage a lot to deal with that?

Henry Franklin: I toughed most of it out. I guess I might've went down there three or four times.

You never thought about trying to go into another branch of service like the Army perhaps?

Henry Franklin: Yeah, I thought about it, then I stayed in the Navy.

You stuck with the Navy.

Henry Franklin: Because all the guys in the Army said, "Oh, I wish I would've joined the Navy so I could . . . You get to sleep at night. You get three meals a day, and we're over here in the Army sleeping in foxholes, eating K-rations and doing all this here."

But you wouldn't have been seasick.

Henry Franklin: Seasick, I still get a little sick.

So let me ask you, sir. When you got drafted and went off to the war, what did your mom and your brothers think? Were they worried for you?

Henry Franklin: Not that I know of 'cause my mom, she had to work at the CWA, PWA, sewing room and everything that people was having to do to make it during the war. The other brothers, they just worked. Everybody just worked, did as much as we could for each other.

When you went into the war, when you went in the Navy, were you excited? Were you scared? What were your thoughts?

Henry Franklin: I was excited. We got on this old troop train and went down to San Antone, and then we got back on it and went to San Diego.

So you did your basic training in San Diego?

Henry Franklin: Yeah.

What was that like? What are your memories of boot camp? What do you remember about going through basic training?

Henry Franklin: Oh, there are memories. I was going to chow, and they got what they call a grinder. That's where all . . .

Where you march.

Henry Franklin: Yeah. And I had a T-shirt on, a civilian T-shirt, and the guy already spotted me. He said, "Franklin, stay there when everybody else leaves." I said, "Well, what's going on?" "That T-shirt. You're not supposed to wear T-shirt or civilian T-shirt. Supposed to be in the uniform." So I went to tell everybody else who went to the chow, and it was all over with and I didn't get no chow that day so that's one thing I remember. We took long walks and marches and everything. I enjoyed doing that.

Did they teach you how to swim or did you already know how to swim?

Henry Franklin: I already knew how to swim.

So the swimming part wasn't hard.

Henry Franklin: No, that was nothing but get way out there and make us dive off of these big towers like you was on a ship and everything.

Exactly.

Henry Franklin: That wasn't no problem.

What about fighting fires? Did they teach you how to fight fires on a ship? I know that's one thing they . . . Did they train you in firefighting being on a ship?

Henry Franklin: We had so many . . .

I know that's always a big concern, is you have to know how to fight fires because on a ship there's nowhere you can go.

Henry Franklin: We had the fire stuff _ everything. If they had a fire, we'd take it pretty good. We had all stuff like that, was all right.

So when you finished your basic training, they sent you out to Hawaii right after that? Is that when you went to Pearl Harbor, after boot camp?

Henry Franklin: After boot camp? I'm not with you right now.

Yes sir. Tell me about what ships you were on or what ship you were on.

Henry Franklin: You're looking at it.

Okay, this is the . . . We're looking at a picture of the USS Ashland.

Henry Franklin: USS Ashland, that was number one.

Was that your ship for the whole war?

Henry Franklin: That was my ship for the whole war, and something you need to know about this ship.

Now it was an LSD.

Henry Franklin: It's an LSD, that's a local ship dock.

So it transported Marines?

Henry Franklin: I'm fixing to tell you right now. I'm fixing to show you.

Here's some of the landing craft. We're looking at a picture of the landing craft.

Henry Franklin: That's what it was built for.

That's right. Inside the well deck.

Henry Franklin: See these are tank ladders they call 'em, the LCMs. Each one of 'em got a tank in it. We had 17 tanks in this here, and they take the ship . . .

And they would exit out the back of the ship, out of the stern of the ship?

Henry Franklin: That ship was built like a pickup. Over half of it is a well deck. That's where the boats with tanks in it, and they take this ship and sink it about halfway like that, like a pickup.

Let the water come in.

Henry Franklin: And then take the tailgate and put the tailgate down and drive the boats on there with their tanks, raise the ship back up and go fight. And the reason for building this ship, Admiral Nimitz and them, they didn't have no way at that time to go get after the Japs. So it was a little island between San Francisco and Pearl Harbor, and it's called the Baker Island. A lot of people don't know nothing about Baker Island.

Tell us about is. Tell us about what you remember about Baker Island.

Henry Franklin: Okay, Baker Island was just a small island with nothing on it, so what we do, we took four or five ships and took 'em over there, and they had to build an airfield.

Okay.

Henry Franklin: So our aircraft could go over there and get back. There wasn't enough room to go over there and back and then turn around and come back 'cause you would run out of gas.

Sure.

Henry Franklin: So we got the Seabees and they got a whole bunch of graters, everything you needed to make an airfield. We got the airfield made, took a few days, and we stayed over there and worked day and night trying to get that thing built. And every night a little ol' Jap plane would go, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, drop a little ol' bomb but it never did hit nothing. It was dark, and then when we got the airfield built, we starting the fighting. That way they could go over to Tarawa, that's the first island we hit, and turn around, take a good fuel there and then turn around and come back. And that's where Baker Island come in then.

What was your job on the ship? What was your specialty?

Henry Franklin: Well, you call it just a deckhand. I worked my way up to second class boatswain's mate.

A boatswain's mate, yes sir.

Henry Franklin: Yeah, that's a deckhand, and we just kept the ship all fixed up, painted and everything. And my job, one of them was before was just take the five-inch gun . . .

That looks like one of the forward guns. That's the bow of the ship.

Henry Franklin: That's the bow of the ship, and this is the . . .

So was that your battle station? When you went to battle stations, is that were you went, was to that gun?

Henry Franklin: That was my battle station, and these are gun turrets. This is where I slept all that time I was in there. And we got these big cranes for when you take the tanks into the beach, and then when you go back, then you ain't got nothing to do. That's what you think. They turned it into a dry dock. Then all the other ships and other stuff get hurt, well, they bring 'em up here and we . . .

Use the crane to dry dock them?

Henry Franklin: That's my crane, and there's another crane right here. But we would reach down there and pick up a big boat and tanks up with these cranes, repair 'em, whatever they needed, and send 'em back out. Or a lot of times, some big LSTs and other little smaller ship would get up on the beach and couldn't get off. Rougher water would put up stuff but we'd go over and hook on to 'em and pull 'em all. Whatever they needed, we'd do it. And so that was the . . . I got a lot of paperwork and stuff I gave him, I think, one of the magazines, the history of the ship, when we started, what we eat, when we eat it, and what we did and where we was, and all this stuff like that.

This was a big ship so it was a big crew I imagine.

Henry Franklin: It was four hundred and something feet long.

Yeah, a big ship carrying a lot of troops and cargo.

Henry Franklin: No, we didn't carry . . .

No cargo?

Henry Franklin: We carried a few troops but then we carried enough troops to take care of . . .

The equipment. So you didn't really . . . The troops really weren't on this ship. You just had the landing craft on this ship and they would take these landing craft over to the transport ships, right, to load them? And that's where you would see the videos, the pictures of the Marines climbing down the nets, getting into the boats, right?

Henry Franklin: I built one of them big old cargo nets where they can . . . I built one of them by myself one time. I was a head honcho on doing all that type of stuff.

Those were big nets, weren't they?

Henry Franklin: Oh, you got it. Sometimes you gotta go fly it up there, and the ship had a place right along here where the captain would go outside and they'd throw a big rope or something to try to find out how deep the stuff is like that, and we'd get out there and dive off that thing to go swimming. Lots of times we'd get in trouble for who's doing it but we did it anyway.

What was your ship's captain like? Do you remember the captain of your ship?

Henry Franklin: We had about two or three. I remember the last one really. Most of 'em was good.

Was he pretty good to the crew? Pretty good to the sailors?

Henry Franklin: Yeah, but sometimes they'd do stuff that we didn't like but we'd do something they don't like. So every time we crossed the equator, you better get initiated, and, boy, when you get initiated in the Navy, the captain takes the United States flag down and put a black one up there with a skull and all that on there, and then the captain ain't got nothing to say about the ship because it belongs to the ship's company. And we could do anything we wanted to do and get by with it. And the ol' captain, he didn't like that so we got one of these big ol' water cans, 10 gallons, we got it full of ice water and got up on the next deck and poured it all over his head and everything. And I got a bunch of pictures of that.

Was it a shellback? Is that what they call it when you . . .

Henry Franklin: You're called pollywog, then you're a shellback. And once you're a shellback, you got it made. But when you're a pollywog, you better run. They got my hair and cut, a long knife and cut my hair with that knife all over. And you could do anything you wanted to to your shipmates. I crossed that thing about 15 times.

But only one time do you have to get initiated.

Henry Franklin: One time you get initiated but the rest of the time you initiate somebody else.

How would you know when you were crossing the equator? They would announce it over the microphone?

Henry Franklin: Sometimes they announce you cross it but most of the time we knew pretty well where we was at. They'd know because the shellbacks want to initiate the pollywogs so they made sure . . .

They keep track, yeah.

Henry Franklin: They'd make sure they know . . .

Henry Franklin's Son: He got like a tattoo every time they'd cross.

Henry Franklin: This is my boy.

He said you got a tattoo every time you went across the equator, is that right?

Henry Franklin: No, I got 18.

Eighteen, okay.

Henry Franklin: But I got some of 'em in Pearl Harbor, and some in Waikiki. Got that one when I was 12 years old. Cost a quarter.

A quarter, here in Austin?

Henry Franklin: Yeah. You know what kids will do. They'll draw pictures on themselves and then they erase it. We did that all the time. Then this joint, a guy come down on First Street, set

up a little tattoo joint, so we went over there, said, "Let's get the one that won't wash off." That's what we did and it's still on there but it cost a quarter.

I'm surprised somebody give you a tattoo when you're 12 years old.

Henry Franklin: Well, didn't nobody know it but me. Me and this other boy, we just saved up our money until we got a quarter, and we just had it done. Nothing you could do about it then.

Sure, it's permanent. Well, going back to the ship, let me ask you where were some of the places that you went to? You mentioned Tarawa. Did you go to Tarawa? Do you remember any of the places your ship went to in the Pacific?

Henry Franklin: There's so many of 'em.

Are there any that stand out to you? Any particular moments aboard that ship that stand out to you? Different battles or things like that?

Henry Franklin: New Caledonia.

New Caledonia, yes sir.

Henry Franklin: His mama, when I married her after the war . . .

I'm just writing notes. Just go ahead and keep talking. Tell us about New Caledonia, what you remember about that.

Henry Franklin: Okay, we went . . . Two ships went over there, and we just going over there more or less for recreation and everything. And like in the movies, you see these ship stories and everything, one ship against another ship. Well, that's what we did. We have our ships, somebody would say, "Hey mate. What ship you on?" And they say something else and, pow, we'd sock him one. And we get up on, we got the cops after us and everything. And we went down through a big restaurant, and when we were going down through there, we just grabbed the tablecloths and drug 'em all off. And I was going to get some ice cream at one of the deals like they have over at Dairy Queen, and I reached over to pull the lever and I pulled the front of it off and all the ice cream come out on the ground, and they started chasing us again. And this little ol' guy, named Fortuna, he had a good fifth of whiskey and he threw it up and poured _ and we got down on the dock, everybody was fighting and doing everything, and then the mayor there, he refused to let us ever come back in port again. So that was a lot of fun we had. Then when I married his mama when we got back, well, before I married her we kinda got . . . We'd go dancing every time all the time, and then she was a lot of fun, and we called her Caledonia. Said, "Why do you call us Caledonia?" "Because your head's so hard." But there's just all kinds of islands we come back through. When the war was over over at Iwo Jima, I was in Iwo Jima when the war stopped.

Okay.

Henry Franklin: I forgot what I was gonna say.

Did you have anybody on the ship that you were good friends with? Any buddies that you'd gone to school with or that sort of thing? We're looking at some more pictures.

Henry Franklin: That's just a few but I've got a whole magazine stuffed full over there. These are about the only ones I got with me.

Okay, so we're looking at another picture now. Where are you?

Henry Franklin: That's me.

That's the flag raising.

Henry Franklin: Which was wrong. Did you know it was wrong?

Well, they had two flag raisings. That's the second one.

Henry Franklin: And this is me.

Where is that picture taken?

Henry Franklin: That's in Waikiki.

Okay.

Henry Franklin: So me and this guy, we was on liberty and we seen this convertible setting there, and we had to taking some pictures. Said, "Let's just take a picture and make it like it's our car."

Like it's your car, yeah.

Henry Franklin: That's what we did.

Now who are some of these guys in this photo? Do you remember? Are those any of your buddies? Do you remember any of them?

Henry Franklin: This one right here.

Who is that?

Henry Franklin: That's ol' Moose Irwin.

Moose Irwin, okay.

Henry Franklin: Yeah, I used to call him all the time and he'd call me back and forth, and he come through here sometimes, stop and eat with us and do stuff. Then I hadn't heard from him in a long time. They was building a new place for veterans up in Waco somewhere, and his wife died and they moved him over there and I don't . . .

Lost track?

Henry Franklin: Lost track of him.

Where was he from? Was he an Austin guy?

Henry Franklin: No, he was from Pampa, Texas.

Pampa, okay. I know where that . . . Up in the panhandle.

Henry Franklin: Yeah.

How about some of these other guys? Were they in the same section with you?

Henry Franklin: Yeah, we're all together there. There's a whole bunch of us. I don't remember all them names but I got pictures of 'em.

That's great.

Henry Franklin: Got pictures of when you cross the equator, you got cops and stuff like this. I was a royal cop, so what I say is the truth. All the guys, they was cops and stuff. I got their picture and everything, and they could do anything they wanted to to you.

Sure.

Henry Franklin: Well, there's one guy named was Puz, P-U-Z, and he was big and fat, and he took his clothes, had his jacket off, and they put grease in his navel, a lot of grease. And they'd bring you up there and they put your nose down there, "Do like this." And another guy over here, he's a got a great big ol' deal with water in it, and they'd save up food from a week, had a lot of chicken in there, and then they've have a big box with grease in it, and they'd put you on that box and turn it up like that, make you slide down in there, what they call a slop chute, and you can't come up unless you got a chicken bone in your mouth. And just all kinds of . . .

Yeah, it's pretty bad.

Henry Franklin: They had me and another guy way up here.

Okay, up in the riggings?

Henry Franklin: Two coke bottles together looking for Japs. We never did find none but . . . Or they'd throw you over the side. Do anything they could think of, they'd do that.

Tell me, when you were aboard the ship, were you able to write letters? Did you write letters back home to your family?

Henry Franklin: Yeah. I never could write. I had nobody to write to.

What about news of the world? Did you kind of know what was going on with the rest of the war when you were on the ship, or did you really not have any other news?

Henry Franklin: Well, I could hear some news about stuff but most of the time we was just working and doing everything. When we went to Tarawa and I rode in one of them deals that had a tank on it.

Okay.

Henry Franklin: My job was to go up there and let my ramp down and let the driver of the tank out, and then get the hell out of there. So what I did when I got up there, so much fire and stuff

was coming through, I let my tank off in a bomb hole, and when I did, it broke my cable. Well, there I'm setting there with a broke cable, can't go forward.

Couldn't pull the door back up?

Henry Franklin: So the _ on there, he said, "Let's get it turned around and let's get out of here." But you can't get out of here 'cause the ramp . . .

The ramp's down?

Henry Franklin: The tail end is down and I said, "I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna give you a choice. I'm gonna knock you in the head until the jabs kill you or you back this thing out about six miles and I'll tie my cable back." He said, "I think I'll drive up _" So he did. And on the way back, we picked up three Japs that was out in the water, and we put 'em on there. Going across I had a boat _, a guy that had a machine gun on him, and he was just shaking like . . . Well, you can't blame him.

Sure.

Henry Franklin: But anyway, when we brought him back to Pearl Harbor, after we got going, we just turned him loose 'cause you can't go nowheres, and he knew a whole lot more about seamanship and stuff than we did. And he says he didn't like going to war. I says, "Well, just like you, did you want to go to war." "No." I said, "Well, I don't want to go to war either." Said, "Sit down. Let's talk about it."

So he spoke English? The Japanese sailor spoke English?

Henry Franklin: They kind of . . . We could talk some kind of way to where the other understands. One of them did pretty good.

That's interesting. I've never heard a story like that. You let him just be on the ship, walk around on the ship with you all? You let the prisoner be on the ship with you and walk around and that sort of thing?

Henry Franklin: Yeah, 'cause they couldn't do nothing. Couldn't kill you. They could kill you but . . . Otherwise they'd put you in a concentration camp or something so we just let 'em run loose. And on Tarawa, funny thing happened over there, kinda funny. We had a bank, where a bank blew up, we had money everywhere and all kind of stuff. And they brought the chow, had a chow line so everybody lined up to come into chow, and somebody hollered, "Jap in the chow line." But the Jap couldn't talk English. He just stood there. We got him. Everybody . . . "Jap in the chow line, everybody duck." Everybody ducked except the Jap. He didn't know what to say. He couldn't talk English so he just stood there. We just went over and captured him.

Wow. Yeah, that's pretty wild.

Henry Franklin: Yeah, that was pretty good. And I got a bunch of tapes, like you take with a camera of a lot of stuff that happened. We took the island and everything.

So you had like a movie camera with you? Like an 8mm camera?

Henry Franklin: Yeah.

Wow.

Henry Franklin: I didn't have it over there but I had it after that.

Oh, after the war, okay.

Henry Franklin: Like I said, I got three or four hundred of them, taking everything. Did I tell you about the paint dyeing my face?

No, tell me about that.

Henry Franklin: When I dropped my tank, bullets was flying so much and everything, and the guy next to me was named Holly. He's from Mississippi. I said, "Hey, Holly. Let's get out of here." Looked over there and half of his head was shot off. So, boy, we really got out of there then. So there was a little ol' dock right before that, and I got a picture in one of them movies at my house, a picture of me pulling up against that dock. But we got out of there and got out of there in a hurry. It's kind of spooky.

Yeah, I bet. What are you thinking when you're in a situation like that? Or are you even thinking? Are you scared or are you praying? What are you doing?

Henry Franklin: You don't really . . . My feeling, didn't have too much time to think about being scared. You spend most of your time doing, getting out of there but it's pretty scary. About the scarest I got come over the PA system one day, said, "Everybody be quiet, quiet as you can. We got a submarine underneath us and we don't have no subchasers." We always had a subchaser or something that could take care of a sub if they're there. Said, "We don't have no escort for some reason or other, and the sub is underneath us. So put your lifejackets on and don't say nothing." So we sit there for about an hour with the lifejacket on, and finally they said, "Well, he's moved on. We lucked out." And that's how close we come to . . .

Yeah, that can't be a good feeling.

Henry Franklin: And then we got into where they got all them depth charges and stuff like that. We got in the middle of one of them, and lucky we ever got out.

The mines?

Henry Franklin: Yeah, got in a mine field. So we would take this ol' five-inch gun that had a whole bunch of 40mm _ and we've move up a little bit and they got what was called a power bayonet, a big ol' thing right along here. No, it's right along here. That's got a cutting edge where it will cut a cable. So we'd go up, get close to one of them mines, and guide that thing over and it would blow the mine up, the thing from over there, and then they shoot it and get rid of it. But that was pretty scary too.

I bet.

Henry Franklin: To my knowledge or to other people's, do you know why the rising sun . . . They call it the rising sun, is so dangerous? Early in the morning when the sun first comes up, it

just comes up a little bit where they start shooting you. You can't see 'cause the sun's in your eyes. That's why they call it the rising sun. We got a lot of that.

Got a lot of that going on.

Henry Franklin: And then torpedo, and we give 'em a lot back. In fact, we outdid 'em 'cause we're still here.

Sure. Was there ever any doubt in your mind that the U.S. was going to win the war? You never felt like the Japanese were going to win the war, did you? When you were out there? Did you ever have any doubt that you were going to be victorious in the war? Did it always feel like the Japanese were getting pushed back?

Henry Franklin: I just prayed a lot. I prayed a lot to the dear Lord, "Help me make it through one more day." And here I am over 90 years old and I'm still here.

That's great.

Henry Franklin: But we got scared a lot, and lots of time you just can't help it. You look up there and there's a hundred airplanes coming at you, and you know what they're doing. They're coming at you 'cause they're gonna kill you. But, here comes a hundred ships. They got all the guns and everything, and they're gonna shoot 'em, get 'em back. Did I tell you about the one? Talk about the hundred ships, they were there. And when they come in sight, we seen him. We said, boy, everybody starts shooting something and hollering, and you scared with all the planes just shooting at you. One airplane picked us out to get us.

You guys had to have been a big target. You were a big ship so I'm sure you were a big target to them.

Henry Franklin: Well, it wasn't as big as the one next to us.

What was next to you?

Henry Franklin: Next to us was an aircraft carrier.

An aircraft carrier, okay.

Henry Franklin: So that plane come on down like this, see like them planes coming on down like that, and he gets down here and then turns and hit us. It was shooting for the aircraft carrier but they was using us for a . . . To make us . . . When they got down to, they hit this aircraft carrier. So all the way back, is he coming back? We had a list and we's coming back to Pearl, and Admiral Nimitz put on that paper about, "Does anybody know anything about that ship? That aircraft carrier that was going there?" We said, "Well, it didn't make it." They turned around and didn't make it back to Pearl Harbor.

What carrier was that? Do you remember?

Henry Franklin: I don't remember, they had so many of 'em.

Was it the Yorktown?

Henry Franklin: I really don't know. Like I say . . .

I know what you're saying. It was one that was hit, and then they were trying to tow it and it got hit again, right? It was sunk later. The Japanese sunk it?

Henry Franklin: No, that one time, when they first come down . . .

Yeah, they wounded the ship, yeah.

Henry Franklin: Well, the bomb that he used there worked, but he didn't blow him up.

Exactly.

Henry Franklin: They just lifted him so he could come on right, but before he got back to Pearl, he sank, that one bomb sunk it.

Sunk, yeah.

Henry Franklin: And that's why they put it in the newsletter. And Admiral Nimitz said, "Well done, boys." What we did, we built a ship, we built an island and everything. We're gonna take a ship and put it in a victory wall down in . . . Where's that?

Henry Franklin's Son: Is it in Corpus?

Henry Franklin: They got a . . .

Talking about a museum?

Henry Franklin: Yeah, in Fredericksburg.

Oh, in Fredericksburg, the Nimitz Museum, yes.

Henry Franklin: Okay. This is buried in the cement in the wall. He says, "Boys, you done such a good job in everything we did, we're gonna put you on a victory wall."

That's great.

Henry Franklin: And that's where it's at now.

That's great. You had a chance to see that museum? You ever been out to Fredericksburg?

Henry Franklin: Yes sir. I went as soon as I got that letter, I told my wife, "Let's go to Fredericksburg."

That's great.

Henry Franklin: So we went down there. I'd been down there before. They had a picture as you went into the room, one whole wall was nothing but the picture of Tarawa. Okay, and I was standing there looking at these pictures and everything, and some people, a lot of people were looking at it. I said, "You know, that's my ship."

That's your ship.

Henry Franklin: Ship stuff right there. “No kidding?” “Yeah.” Anyway, then after that, they changed the room, the pictures and everything. When they told us that they built a wall, we went out there and went outside and I told that lady that Mr. Nimitz put our picture of our ship on there. She said, “Well, you can go in free. It won’t cost you nothing.” I said, “Well, thanks a lot.” Went in there and two little ol’ Mexican boys, they came up there. I said, “You see that ship there?” They said, “Yes.” I said, “That’s the ship I was on.” “Oh, no.” They was all afraid and all that stuff, but it kinda makes you feel good.

That’s good, sure.

Henry Franklin: And we’d go up and see it all the time.

That’s great. So let me ask you, sir, where were you when the war ended? Were still aboard your ship when the war was over?

Henry Franklin: When it ended up, I was right there.

You were at Iwo Jima when the war ended.

Henry Franklin: I was at Iwo Jima and . . .

How did you learn that it was over? Did they announce it over the speakers or did somebody just tell you?

Henry Franklin: Yeah, it was all over everywhere, boy. The people was doing everything except us ’cause our good ol’ captain, ol’ Captain Hatch, said, “You boys are in the Navy, ain’t ya?” Say, “Yes sir.” “Well, get back to work. The war is over.”

So he wouldn’t let you celebrate?

Henry Franklin: We couldn’t even celebrate and all the other ships and everything, they were doing all kinds of . . . But we got him later.

How did you get him?

Henry Franklin: I don’t know but we got him. We’d have to get him every once in a while. One time we had a couple of shoeboxes, I might not ought to say this, but we used it for a restroom for a while, and then we put it under his bed, and he couldn’t hardly find it so he didn’t know who to punish so he just punished us all. And we’d do all kinds of stuff. Have you ever been in a typhoon?

No. I’ve been through a hurricane.

Henry Franklin: Okay, I’ve been in three of ’em. None of us had been in a typhoon.

And you were on the ship in typhoons?

Henry Franklin: Yeah, we were on the ship going over, and one of them hit and that ol’ captain, I forget what his name was, but we had 55-gallon drums and dogs and cats, all kinds of stuff on there. And that ship took a roll like that and everything went off except our ex-captain. When it

come to the lifeline, well, he grabbed that and that's the only thing that saved him. But from then on, we tied everything down.

I bet. It's pretty scary.

Henry Franklin: I could think of a lot of the things but I can't think of 'em now.

Tell me, sir, what it was like when you finally got to come back home after the war was over. Do you remember coming back to Austin, what that was like?

Henry Franklin: It was kinda spooky, not being able to go to work, and my mama . . .

Were you happy to be back home though? Were your mom and your brothers happy to see you, have you back? Because you had been gone for . . . How long you been gone, a couple years?

Henry Franklin: About three years.

About three years. So what was that like, to get back home to your family again and your hometown?

Henry Franklin: Well, not too exciting. Just glad to see you, and just start trying to make a living again. And they lived in a little ol' house. I built another room on it, floors and everything, and we just started working and just still working. I belong to the union. I'm a union carpenter. I'm one of them.

That's great. I know you kept in touch with the one sailor, a sailor named Moose. Did you keep in touch with any other sailors that you served with?

Henry Franklin: I seen . . . One of 'em come through here. That guy, he was a little ol' skinny radar technician, and he called me up. They called me Hank. He says, "Hey, Hank. We're lost and now we'd like to see you." I said, "Okay." He told me where they lived out on 183 someplace, and he said, "Now you ain't gonna recognize me when you see me." I said, "Okay." Because he weighed about two or three hundred pounds, great big guy. And I didn't know him, but that's about the only one.

Well, I really appreciate you taking the time to share some of these stories with us and show us your pictures.

Henry Franklin: When you leave, I'll think of a thousand things to tell you.

That's always the way it is, yeah. I don't know if your . . . It's your granddaughter. I don't know if she told you but, we save these interviews for future generations for posterity. And we have archives at the Land Office 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, and we have the original registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of all the Anglo settlers that came to Texas. So what our goal is with these interviews is to save them in that archive so that hopefully hundreds of years from now people can listen to interviews like yours and maybe learn something from it. So it's an honor for us to be able to interview you.

Henry Franklin: There's so much that people don't know about.

Sure, exactly. And just being able to record . . . Every veteran has a story that's unique so just being able to get your story means a lot of us.

Henry Franklin: I was staying with a sister-in-law when I got in here, and I don't know what happened but I'm in here. I was gonna say something but I forgot what I was gonna say.

Are there any other veterans here? Have you met any other veterans in this home?

Henry Franklin: Yeah, there's veterans that live here.

Other veterans, yeah?

Henry Franklin: Every once in a while I'll see one. One of 'em had a _ says "World War II Veteran," and then you got about three or four that I've seen in here. But I don't know what part of the service they was in but it don't make no difference as long as you was in the war. That's the main thing.

Sure. Any other stories you can think of, maybe any questions I'm not asking that I should ask? Any other?

Henry Franklin: Yeah, but I don't know what they are. A lot of times I would always go over the H-E-B to buy food and stuff like that, and nearly everybody I see is my friend. Everybody is, "Hi Henry." "Hey, how you doing?" They still do it. I'd go out here and everybody out here just . . .

Why do you think that is? Is it because of your personality?

Henry Franklin: Yes. They said, "Do you smoke?" I say, "No." "Do you drink?" "No." "Do you cuss?" "Yeah, a little bit." And "Do you do exercise?" I do my exercise. I do what I'm supposed to do, and do everything. And the doctor tell you, says, "That's the reason you are like you are. You do what everybody says but you don't let nobody pick on you."

That's good.

Henry Franklin: And I get to talking to somebody. Somebody will see this on my cap, and they'll be from some service, and they'll start asking questions. This one time we was outside and was talking a little bit, and I look around and they had about 10 or 15 people standing around listening, trying to find out what a little bit. And they stop me at the store and we talk about stuff like that. I had a tough life but I had a good life, very good.

And I know your family is proud of you. I know, like your granddaughter who wanted us to interview you today. I know she's proud of your service.

Henry Franklin: They think the world of it. They gave me a birthday present over here.

Great.

Henry Franklin: One of the others, he give me something and one card over there, I forget who it was sent it. Well, why, they give me a party and all this stuff here. It's not who I am, it's what I am. That's good.

That's great.

Henry Franklin's Son: He always, he's got his music that he plays.

That's great.

Henry Franklin's Son: And he is a member of the VFW, not the VFW . . .

The American Legion?

Henry Franklin's Son: Yeah.

Okay, great.

Henry Franklin's Son: He was a commander.

Henry Franklin: There's a bunch that lives over here.

Henry Franklin's Son: He was like a second commander.

That's great. Well, sir, I really want to thank you again just for letting me being able to interview you to record your story. On behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everybody at the General Land Office, we just want to thank you for your service to our nation. And as I was telling your son here earlier, in about a week or two we're going to send you copies of this interview on CDs so you can keep some and you can give them to your friends and family so they'll always have this interview to listen to.

Henry Franklin: That would be really nice.

And we're going to put it also in a commemorative binder and it's going to have a signed letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson. Just a small token of our State of Texas appreciation for your service to our nation.

Henry Franklin: I married his mama when she was 16 years old. I was 23. She lied to me and told me she was 18. But anyway, stayed married to them about 10 years or so, didn't keep. But then my last wife, I was married to her for 45 years, and this is where we just did everything, and she was with me 100%. And anything, I belonged to the American Legion and I've been commander over there and did all that, and everybody over there just thought the world of me and everything. So the more they think of you, the more you want them to think. So, that's something else. I appreciate what you're doing.

Oh, it's my honor, my honor, yes sir.

Henry Franklin: Like to have something to show my kids or something like that.

Oh, yes sir. We'll send you a bunch of CDs to start with and you'll have my card. If you ever need more, just let me know. It's all free. We'll make more copies of them and send them to you.

Henry Franklin: You're gonna do what?

The CDs, we'll send you four or five to start with but if you need more, just call me or have your son call me and we'll send you more.

Henry Franklin: Do you know how many CDs I got? I got two hundred.

Well, I'm talking about the ones from this interview.

Henry Franklin: I know. I'm talking about . . . I got these here, and I got . . .

Well, every CD is going to be the same. It's going to be this interview on a CD. That way you can give copies to whoever you think might want to have it.

Henry Franklin: I understand.

So if you need more, we'll send you more.

Henry Franklin: Good.

Well, sir, again I really appreciate it, and I'm going to go ahead and turn the recorder off.

Henry Franklin: How's the handshake with a 90-year-old man.

It's good. You got a good handshake. I hope I have a handshake like that.

Henry Franklin: Well, a lot of people in here challenge me to . . .

They thumb wrestle you?

Henry Franklin: He said, "Man, you're awful strong. I never shook hands with a man as strong as you are."

That's good.

Henry Franklin: I said, "Well, I get that all the time."

You lift weights still?

Henry Franklin: I was a roofer.

Okay, so you had to use your hands.

Henry Franklin: I had to use my hands all the time.

That's a lifetime of work making your grip strong.

Henry Franklin: I was always doing pushing and joining clubs and everything else. I decided to do just . . .

That's great. I'm going to turn the recorder off now. Again, sir, thank you very much.