

Transcription: Joe Raspante

Today is August 9, 2012. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Joe Raspante. This interview is being conducted in person at the Tyler Veterans Home in Tyler, Texas, and it is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today.

Joe Raspante: You're welcome.

It's an honor for us. Sir, the first question I always like to start off with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the Navy.

Joe Raspante: Well, we was truck farming, and I don't know if you know what truck farming is. We raised nothing but vegetables, tomatoes and stuff, you know, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, and I was going to school, too, at the time, and working on the farm, and getting up early in the morning, milk the cows and all that stuff.

Where did you grow up?

Joe Raspante: In Louisiana, Bossier.

Near Bossier City you said?

Joe Raspante: Yes sir, Bossier City, yeah.

Did you have a lot of brothers and sisters?

Joe Raspante: Yes sir, there was four boys. We was all in the Navy.

Wow, kind of like the fighting Sullivan's then.

Joe Raspante: Yes sir. And my oldest brother went in first. And I got kind of tired of the farm and everything, and they didn't want me to leave. I couldn't stay, you know, but back then they had a few farming, and your oldest son, you keep him, and he could stay up, but I wanted to leave then. That was too much for me. And I told dad, and he said, no, you're not leaving.

How old were you when you enlisted?

Joe Raspante: 19.

And what year was that?

Joe Raspante: '41.

So did you go in before Pearl Harbor then?

Joe Raspante: No, just right after Pearl. Then when I saw that, I wanted to get out sure enough.

So your brother was already in the Navy.

Joe Raspante: Oh yeah, he went in in '38 I think.

But I guess he had told you enough about it that you thought that's something I would like to do.

Joe Raspante: Well yeah, everybody said boy, I wouldn't go into this, I wouldn't go in the Navy, I wouldn't go in here. I wouldn't go in the Army. I'm not gonna dig no dang foxhole and hope it don't rain, and have a buddy in there with me or whatever. And if I survived, I might still get a can of pork and beans, but in the Navy if I still survived, I had a hot meal and a clean bunk, and that was great, too. That's the way I looked at it.

And you had two other brothers, were they younger than you?

Joe Raspante: Yeah, well let's see. Morris was the oldest, and Ross was next, then me, Tony, and Vick, five of us. We all survived, thank God.

And all five of you were in the Navy at some point during the war?

Joe Raspante: Yes sir.

How did your folks handle that? Was that tough on then?

Joe Raspante: Well back then, in the old days, Italian people, they just took it, that's all, took it with a grain of salt.

So you enlisted and you were in the Navy, you're already in the Navy on December 7th of '41. Where were you when you learned that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

Joe Raspante: Well about that time I guess I was already in the Navy.

But do you remember where you were that day?

Joe Raspante: Yes sir, it was San Diego, everybody hollering the war is over, and I thought what the heck they talking about, because I didn't know nothing about it, I was a dang old country boy, clodhopper, and I didn't understand too much about it then. And I grew up in the service. That's where I grew up.

So somebody there then said that Pearl Harbor had been bombed and we're at war.

Joe Raspante: I figured what the heck, it ain't in my backyard. After I got in there, I there very long, and I went from San Diego to Pearl Harbor, and it was on a transport. I was on three ships altogether, the USS Arcadia was the transport. We called it the pineapple run. We carried fresh stuff up to Pearl Harbor, got a load of pineapple, come back. And I saw this destroyer riding by me, boy, I said man, that's a good looking thing, that's for me. I tried to get on and it didn't work. I filled out a check, they called it a chit, which you would transfer. So next time when I got back to San Francisco they had another transport. This other one was something wrong with it, and they put me on the USS Wharton, and that's the same thing, but I met an old boy and he'd been on it about 20 years, you know, the engine room. I had a little machine experience and I said man, I want to get on that destroyer over there. He said Joe, you don't want that, man, you're crazy. They're in everything around you, they're in it. I said that's OK, it moves fast,

that's what I like. He said OK, he said go get the chit and I'll fill it out for you. I said OK. I went up there and got me a transfer paper and Old Smitty, he filled it out for me and I turned it in, and by the time I got back to San Francisco and San Diego, they had my papers all made out and everything. I got on the USS Melaney, they were just finishing it out of the dry dock.

And how many men were aboard a destroyer?

Joe Raspante: It's normally 525, and we never did have over 500.

How long then did you spend the rest of the war then aboard the Melaney?

Joe Raspante: The rest of the war on the Melaney.

So from about '42 to '45 I guess?

Joe Raspante: Somewhere, I still, I think I got on there in '41, I'm not sure.

Tell us about the ship.

Joe Raspante: Oh, it was great. I mean you got used to it real quick. I was about 20, 30, 40th guy on there, and I was in the engine room and that's what I wanted. That's where I got my experience on the throttle, being a throttle man.

What was it that made you want to go work in the engine room? I've heard that was pretty hard work, wasn't it?

Joe Raspante: Oh, it's hot, hard work, but I loved to fool with cars when I was a kid and all that stuff. I figured well hell, I thought it was going to be about the same. Looking at valves and stuff. You're fooling with 600 pound steam pressure, man, you need to know what you're doing.

What was an average day like for you then aboard the ship? Would you work 12-hour shifts?

Joe Raspante: Well, you had, I forget, 4 on and 8 off. And you were lucky if you got a place where you had an extra guy and you could take time off. And then from there I went to the evaporators, I'd do steel water, and we never had a shortage. Smitty showed me, and another guy showed me how to do it. We'd run starch into the water, because you got steam tubes, and when you distill that water, the salt sticks to the tube, and every so often you had to take that whole thing apart, pour it out and clean it, and I told them, do they have any roofing, galvanized roofing? He said yes. I said get me a couple of strips about that long, about that wide and about that long. They gave me a half a dozen of them. I put a 2x4 on the end of one of them, and right between the tubes, and the salt would fall off. A lot of them you would beat it, punch a hole in one of them, and then they got water out so you could get it fixed. I think the evaporators put out about 500 gallons an hour or somewhere around there, and I was coming out with 505, 510 all the time, and just as pure. So you had to check it because you can't use bad water in a boiler.

What were most of the men like, the crew?

Joe Raspante: They was great, no kidding. We looked like after so long, you know, heck you was family, strictly a family. Something would come up and everybody would get it. And I ran across a kid named David Perry, and boy we clicked and we were friends, boy, the good Lord

couldn't separate us. Then after that we got out there, I'm getting way ahead of myself I guess, but then during a battle we got hit by a suicide plane, and we was fighting a fire, me and Perry and a few others, a bunch of them. We had a division just for the fire bail. And finally the old man said jump, said we can't fan the fire. Everybody was jumping, Perry jumped, and says come on Joe, and I said no, I'm not going. Come on Joe, you damn fool. I said no, I'm not going. I can't swim, dammit. And that's the God's truth, that's the very words I said, I can't swim dammit. He said jump, Joe, and lay your hand on me. Don't grab me, if you grab me, I'm gonna, that's a problem, that's what he said, and I'll help you off. So I did, but I didn't know, I jumped and I went down, and I remember going down some plane and came up like a cart and I saw water. And I just pedaled around and I just laid my hand on Perry's shoulder and we just got to talkin', and we was in the water I guess four or five hours, somewhere around there. We was wondering about depth charges and stuff going off in the water, but we was fortunate. Didn't have any submarines around.

Wow, yeah, I definitely want to ask you about that. When and where was that, that that occurred?

Joe Raspante: Well, that was pretty close to the end there, close to Japan, suicide planes, boy they were coming in by the droves.

So everybody, the captain of your ship then told everybody to abandon?

Joe Raspante: Yes sir. His name was Captain Melaney.

His name was the same as the name of the ship.

Joe Raspante: Sure was.

Was he related to the - ?

Joe Raspante: You know, sometimes I wondered about that, but I didn't know.

Maybe perhaps it might have named, it might have been an ancestor, I'll sure have to look that up, that makes sense.

Joe Raspante: I'd like to know that.

So he told everybody to abandon ship.

Joe Raspante: Oh, he was great, I'll tell you. We missed torpedoes by him being the captain one time. They saw it coming and he made a hard right, boy, it went right by us.

So did the ship sink, or did they tow it back in?

Joe Raspante: Another captain that picked us up told my ensign, let's go ahead and torpedo it, let her go down. He said no, no, no. It stayed up. So he asked for some volunteers. You kind of remind me of Perry. He was a slim and tall guy, and he said, I volunteered to go back, see. And he said well, pick you another machinist man to go with you, so I picked Perry. Perry got teed off at me. But we'd always talk about you had to do your job, you know. So we went back and

the kid was in the fire room, he did his job. He secured the border. We still had about 500 pounds of pressure up there.

Yeah, if that thing had blown, there wouldn't have been any saving the ship.

Joe Raspante: That's how we got the engine started back up. If it didn't then, we'd have to relight and all that stuff. But I told the captain about it. I said that kid stayed there until the last minute. He damn sure did.

Now I'm surprised, sir, you said you couldn't swim. When you went to basic training, did they make you swim or how did you get through that?

Joe Raspante: Well, I don't know whether I want to tell you or not. But they have lists that you've been here and you've done this, you've done that, and I went over and saluted him, saw my name on that list and all of them went through, so I went and got me a cup of coffee.

OK, that makes sense then, bypass that.

Joe Raspante: I thought the heck with it.

Did it ever scare you though, being aboard a ship and not being able to swim?

Joe Raspante: Truthfully, it run across your mind, but truthfully it never did bother me. I thought if it's coming, it's coming.

Wow. Where all did the Melaney go?

Joe Raspante: Oh, strictly South Pacific. Iwo Jima and all through there.

Were you down there near Guadalcanal when the Battles of Guadalcanal took place?

Joe Raspante: No sir.

What was it like the first time you were aboard the ship and you made contact with the enemy?

Joe Raspante: I was scared, I'm gonna have to tell you that. I wasn't worried when the 5-inch was going off, 5-inch and 4-inch and all that, I thought he's way off, you know. But when them ___ started going off, I said uh-oh, that's a little close. And I actually had a cup of coffee in my hand. You know, we didn't have no handles on them cups, you carry them like that. I was standing there with Smitty taking over the throttle then because he had more experience, and I was having him coffee and we was drinking, and all of a sudden bang-o, lights went out and everything. I said uh-oh. Of course we knew our way around, and got up and went up there with the firefighters, helping them, too, and that's when the old man hollered "abandon ship!" So we started off. It wasn't too bad. I'm not gonna say I wasn't scared.

So that was the one time that your ship made contact with the enemy was the time that you had to abandon ship? You didn't have any other experience?

Joe Raspante: No, that's the only experience we got. We got shot up a little and stuff like that.

So there weren't any other times that you were out there shelling other ships?

Joe Raspante: Like we was making a landing on Iwo Jima and all that, see what we did, day and night, up and down the bank, bombarding them, to try and get the shore clear. That was day and night, constantly.

Could you see the island very well?

Joe Raspante: Oh yeah. Like the time you think we saw the island, well they had 3-inch, and we were standing just far enough back from them shells would hit, shoo-, shoo- Boy, the captain, keep this damn thing away. Of course I don't think the 3-inch would hurt too much, but it'll kill you though.

Sure. And I know there was a lot of shelling done on Iwo Jima before the invasion.

Joe Raspante: Oh, day and night, day and night. I thought man, I've seen some dark, suicide plane comes in and everybody would shoot, and I said it's so dark, the sun, you couldn't see the sun through the powder.

Was your ship still at Iwo Jima after it was over or did you just do a lot of shelling and leave?

Joe Raspante: No, we were in and out, in and out.

Were you there the day, were you on the ship when they raised the flag at Mt. Suribachi?

Joe Raspante: No sir.

I know there was a lot of ships there that saw it, and I didn't know if you witnessed it.

Joe Raspante: I would have loved to have been, but they did it, so -

Yeah, that's great. Tell us a little about you mentioned Captain Melaney, tell us a little bit about him and his interaction with you -

Joe Raspante: Oh, I mean he was, I don't know how to say it, it's kind of like, I put him with Santa Claus, when he comes down and he'd have inspection, he'd get his glove and run it across this. Boy, this is the cleanest damn place I've seen. Of course, it's the first one I've seen.

So he had a sense of humor then.

Joe Raspante: He did, he really did. And I set up at night a lot of times. My shoes, I'd get that Kiwi polish and spit. I tell you what, that shoe was hard and shiny as that. He'd tell me a lot of time when he'd come by, how'd you do them shoes? And I told him, you know. He said, would you like to do mine? And I thought he was kidding. I said yes sir. In about a day or two he had one of the boys come down and get me. I went up there. That was great. I mean I enjoyed that. Everybody told me, OK sir, suck. Got brownie on your nose, and all that stuff. But it was great, it really was. Then I got in with the chiefs there.

Oh, that's good.

Joe Raspante: So I started making coffee and fixing stuff there in the chief's quarters.

When you're with the chiefs, you're probably gonna be all right.

Joe Raspante: You ain't kiddin'.

You're sure gonna eat good.

Joe Raspante: You're dang right. And I helped them to eat good, too.

Captain Melaney, was he the captain, the CO of the ship the whole time you were on the ship?

Joe Raspante: Yes sir.

So the whole I guess three years or so, he was the ship's captain. What about the rest of the crew? I know you mentioned Mr. Perry being your best friend.

Joe Raspante: Yeah, well he was just kind of a guy, and we were just close. I don't know how to explain it.

Where was he from?

Joe Raspante: He was from Duluth, Minnesota.

Way up north.

Joe Raspante: And we'd set around and argue about, he's talking about Texas and Minnesota. I said OK, let's get a book. We got one of them big old books they got over there, he said Minnesota. Two-thirds of Minnesota is a lake, water. I said now what the heck you gonna do? You all go to town in a boat or something? We argued and all that. That was what's good. We set up and yacked about it.

That's great. Now during this time, did you have any contact through the mail with your brothers? Did you know where your brothers were and what they were doing?

Joe Raspante: Tell you the truth, no sir. We never contacted each other. We didn't know where each other was. The only thing I know when I got hit, my brother was on, what the heck you call it, a tinder.

They repaired.

Joe Raspante: He was a ship welder. He was the best underwater there was in the Navy. That's what he got a citation for. And tell you the truth, what's good about it, we cut him in crippled, you know. I forgot what it was. I think it was a Pearl Harbor, and there he was, we was pulling up aside of them to tie up, and him and another guy was up there, and me and Perry was down here, you know, and the other guy said, I had a cup of coffee, and he said hey buddy, what happened? I said termites, dammit. Exactly what I told 'em. And I looked up and here's my brother, my oldest brother. He said, "smarty."

That was a pretty small world then.

Joe Raspante: Sure was, it was great. He had to have my watch and everything. We traded watches.

What did your other brothers do during the war?

Joe Raspante: Well, my youngest brother was on the beach, he was what you called paramedics.

Corps man?

Joe Raspante: Yeah, shanker mechanic. And let's see, Tony, the youngest, I forgot where he was. But what got me then after that, he got out on points and stuff, and my future brother-in-law, he was running around with him, and he joined the National Guards. Once in a while he went and my brother didn't go. He said come on, why don't you join the National Guard with me, so we go together. He said OK, he did that, but by that time the Korea War come up and they stuck him in there.

Yeah, went back to Korea.

Joe Raspante: Then he got mad at his brother.

Kind of pulled him in, I guess.

Joe Raspante: Yeah.

Were you able to write home to your folks?

Joe Raspante: Oh yeah, well, for a while, I was like a country boy and I never did do nothing. My dad had somebody write the captain. The captain took me up there and he rolled my butt around, buddy.

Yeah, told you to make sure to write your parents, right?

Joe Raspante: He said you write two letters. He said I'll take one and I'll mail one for you. He was real good. He was very personal.

That's good. What about the ship's XO? Did the ship have an executive officer?

Joe Raspante: Oh yeah.

What was he like?

Joe Raspante: He tried to be hard-nosed, but Captain Melaney calmed him down.

Really, that's great. Where all did your ship go?

Joe Raspante: I can't remember all of them. From there to Australia and back and all the way up in there, not too far from Japan.

Where were you when the war ended? Do you remember where you were when you learned that the Japanese had surrendered?

Joe Raspante: Where the heck were we? We was up around Fiji, somewhere in there I think, yeah, Fiji Islands.

Do you remember that day at all when you learned the war was done? Did they tell you?

Joe Raspante: Oh yeah, everybody hollered, you know, and we also was bringing supplies. What really got me, I always wanted one of them jeeps, I wanted one of them jeeps bad because every time we'd go to San Diego, I said if I was close to home, I'd steal this damn thing. Then when we got over there and the war was over, and I saw the ships shoving them things in the crate over the side. Planes and everything over the side, over the side. A lot of guys said woah, they're crazy, we can take 'em and sell 'em. I said you take all that stuff back to the States and then they will go in a hole because won't nobody can be working. That's the way they did it. That was a shame, but now, you know what, you see these trucks running around here carrying all these crushed cars, you know where it's going? China.

How long did you stay in the Navy once the war was over? Did you get discharged?

Joe Raspante: I signed for six years, and it was over in '45, and I had to stay until '46, '47. Of course, I didn't mind it, but everybody hollered, oh boy, I got points. I said points, I didn't know what he was talking about, points.

Yeah, because you had enlisted I guess before that, so the point system didn't really apply to you, did it?

Joe Raspante: Well, on that though, I was in regular Navy, it wasn't no Reserve.

You weren't drafted.

Joe Raspante: No, I was signed for six, and I served six. Five years and nine months, and I forgot, 29 days. It was great though.

You didn't spend the whole five years aboard the Melaney, did you?

Joe Raspante: Yes.

You did?

Joe Raspante: Yes.

You did your whole tour then.

Joe Raspante: My whole tour.

Was that unusual?

Joe Raspante: Very unusual. I think in the Reader's Digest it said the ship that outlasted time, the USS Melaney. It's in the Reader's Digest somewhere, way back there.

But you being aboard one ship for an entire five or six-year tour, that was unusual wasn't it?

Joe Raspante: Yes sir, very unusual.

How do you think it was that you got to stay on just one ship the whole time?

Joe Raspante: Oh, I loved it. Man, I wouldn't give up, it's just like your car, you go take care of it. You're down in the engine room, got something to do, you'd be damn sure it was done right.

Were you married during the war?

Joe Raspante: No sir.

I guess you were a single guy.

Joe Raspante: Yes sir. Everybody wanted me to get married and even my father-in-law, he didn't say, and one day we was out foolin' around and I said, not one day, it was one time I was home, and he said you thinkin' about getting married? I said not right now. I called him Papa, everybody called him Papa, and old Italian guy. I said when I come back, if I got both arms, both legs, and everything, then I'll get married. He patted me on the back, come on, let's go have a cup of coffee.

Was he from Bossier City as well?

Joe Raspante: Well, no he came in here from Italy, but he went to Louisiana, but Bunkey, I don't know if you heard of Bunkey, Louisiana.

No, I've not heard of that.

Joe Raspante: Me either. Right next to the Sheffelah River.

So after the war did you go back home to Louisiana then?

Joe Raspante: Yes sir. Well, I was down in San Diego getting my discharge, and they wanted to send me where in the heck, they wanted to send me back to New Orleans, you know, where I enlisted. I said no, Dallas, with that travelin' time, see, so got discharged in Louisiana but went to Dallas.

What was that like coming back home after having been in the Navy?

Joe Raspante: It felt funny, it sure did. Talkin' about what am I gonna do, you know? I know my girlfriend, I knew my dad and them, but it looked like everybody else was in a different country.

Different world.

Joe Raspante: That's right.

What did you end up doing?

Joe Raspante: Well, I got out and was looking for a job, and my uncle said, hey man, old RC Cola was looking for a driver, you know. So I didn't think nothing about it. I didn't think about a driver's license or nothing, I went down there, and I drove a truck around there, and said oh man, you're OK. They put me to work. Well, you know how back then, I don't know whether you remember RC and knee-high drinks, they were about that tall, and you try to carry two of them things, you know, and then you put your dollar, it's got a lip on it, hang your dolly over the bottles like that, and I got too close to the curb and hit the pole, hit the handle on the dolly and scattered dang RC everywhere. A cop come over and raised what the heck you doing, blah-blah-blah, give me your driver's license. I said what'd you say? I said driver's license. I don't got no driver's license. So he called the company and the company called my uncle because my uncle knew them. The guy said come over. My uncle knew the cops there in Bossier City. Said come on. So I got in the car with the cop and he drove around the block, signed the paper, here, go get your driver's license. It's the truth.

That's funny. How long did you end up working for RC Cola?

Joe Raspante: Not too dang long after that, not too long after that. Then I went to work for Manor Bakery I think. It was door-to-door and bread stuff, and I said I didn't like that, and I gave them plenty of notice. Hell, I had a \$100 bond put up, too, and all that stuff. So then I went to work for a beer company, worked for Jack's. I don't know whether you've heard of Jack's beer.

No, I've not.

Joe Raspante: It's made in New Orleans. And Pearl was San Antonio beer.

I've heard of Pearl. How long did you end up working for Jack's?

Joe Raspante: God, for I don't know how long. Stupid, because I could've found a job that I could have some retirement in, but Jack's, when you got too old to push that dang dolly, you're gone. So I did pretty good I think. I had some tough times.

Did you keep in touch with David Perry, your buddy?

Joe Raspante: Yeah, I sure did for a long time. And my daughter said dad, the USS Melaney is having a reunion in Chicago. I said great, can you go borrow some money so we can go? And my son-in-law, yeah, said pa, get your clothes ready. Said we got tickets. I said what do you mean? He said we got tickets, me and you and my oldest son was going. So he went up there and bought tickets and everything and we went to Chicago, and I met Perry there, first time in 62 years.

Wow, when was this? Just a few years ago?

Joe Raspante: Yeah, about a year and a half or so ago.

Wow, what had he been doing that whole time?

Joe Raspante: Well, he went to work for a lumber company and he fooled around and bought that lumber company.

In Minnesota?

Joe Raspante: Uh-huh, and then I don't know how long he kept it, and then he sold it and he retired. I got a picture of him if you'll wait a minute, I'll go get it.

Sure, after we're done here, we'll go in and see it. I guess did you recognize each other?

Joe Raspante: Well, I could hardly recognize him but I knocked on the door in his room and I said David Perry here? Then, my name was Rats.

Why did they call you Rats?

Joe Raspante: Well, my name's Raspante, and on my skivvies I had put my name on it, so I just put Rats, Rats. So from then on that's all it was, Rats. If they called me anything else, I'd never even look around.

That's funny. So you told him Rats was there and he remembered?

Joe Raspante: Yeah, old man, two old boys huggin' like women.

I bet. That's a long time to go.

Joe Raspante: It was 62 years, yes sir. Right now, I keep up with him. I call him maybe once a week or every other week.

That's great. Did he get married and have kids?

Joe Raspante: Yes sir, he had two daughters and two boys I think.

That had to have been great for your family to meet him and be able to hear the stories.

Joe Raspante: He told my wife a lot of things I didn't want her to know.

They'll do that.

Joe Raspante: They sure will.

That's great. I bet he had to have been glad that you went to that reunion.

Joe Raspante: Oh God, yeah, it was, it was great.

When was the last time you'd seen him, I guess when you were still aboard the Melaney?

Joe Raspante: Yeah. We broke contact and everything. And the ship was having a reunion and this kid, I don't know whether his dad had a lot of money and everything, but he bought what you call like the wheel of the ship or the bell, and he bought a bunch of that stuff. He wanted to buy the whole damn ship.

He brought that stuff to the reunion?

Joe Raspante: Just the bell he brought up there. See, they sold the destroyer to, I forgot, Vietnam or somebody.

Yeah, they sold a lot of those ships. A lot of South American countries bought a bunch of our old World War II ships.

Joe Raspante: When I was in South Carolina, I was putting them out of commission, and we sprayed the web all over them and all that stuff. Then come to find out they sold them to Korea and all that stuff. I didn't know that until after I met my buddy, my daughter found an old Reader's Digest and it was in there and the picture said the ship that out-sailed time.

I'll have to check that out.

Joe Raspante: Yes sir, it's in there.

So it sounds like you had a good tour in the Navy. Definitely no regrets.

Joe Raspante: Oh, great man, no regrets, no nothing. If I had to do it, I'd go right back.

How about your brothers, did they all enjoy their time?

Joe Raspante: Yes sir, sure did, and I think we're pretty thankful all of us came back, even my older kinfolks after I got married, my wife had two brothers in and two uncles in the service.

Wow, definitely blessed then to have everybody return because many people were killed and wounded in the war and especially for your folks to have five sons serving in the Navy at that time, and all five of you come back just fine.

Joe Raspante: But you know what, and I'm gonna tell you this is off of the record.

You want me to turn the recorder off?

Joe Raspante: Yes sir.

OK, we're recording again.

Joe Raspante: Yeah, that's where people don't even know what truck farmers are, see we'd get up early, and boy it would be hours before the sun would ever give up. We'd pick turnip greens, onions, and get it all ready for the next day. We bought a stake body Chevrolet truck with the sides and everything for \$900. It took us years to pay for it though.

Oh I'll bet. I'll bet having five sons helped with the farm.

Joe Raspante: Yeah sure, but see that's my aunt always said, I'm not bragging or anything, but I've done whatever my dad ever said, I did it, if I could do it, if I couldn't, I did it. And my oldest brother said you're crazy, man, you'll kill yourself. Finally everybody left and just left me and dad there on the farm, and that's when I thought hell, Joe, you better get out of here.

Did your folks keep the farm running during the war when you and your brothers were all gone?

Joe Raspante: No, after I left, dad folded it up.

Sold the farm?

Joe Raspante: Because I done everything, and I even went to work for a guy in Louisiana. You know back then they had farmer markets all over the road, up and down the road. This guy had a big place. He had a place where he had chickens, and you could go in there and feel those chickens, yeah, I'll take that one, and kill and clean 'em right there. I went to work for him. I was going from Bossier City to Texarkana, pick up a load of chickens and come back. Well I was making enough, I paid a couple of black guys to do my job, but dad said, yeah, it ain't right though, it ain't right. So I thought well, it's about time for me to get out of here.

And go in the Navy, that's great.

Joe Raspante: But I'll tell you this, I got scolded boy, the day I went in the Navy.

From your parents?

Joe Raspante: Yeah. Oh God, I thought he was going to whoop me. And I was picking tomatoes, I was coming out of the field with a big bushel of tomatoes and I saw this big old car pull up there, and guys get out, had the scrambled eggs all over there, I said uh-oh. Then they went out there talking to my dad, and my dad didn't even look at them. He was looking at me, boy. He was really upset. But I couldn't help it, I had to go. He said you think you're gonna go over and pick Japanese off of Christmas trees, don't you?

That's great. Well sir, I appreciate you taking the time to talk with us today. Like I mentioned before we started the interview, our whole goal is to save these stories so people can hear 'em years from now. We have items at the Land Office, David Crockett's widow, the land grant that she received when he was killed at The Alamo, and we have the original Registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of all the settlers that came to Texas. So our goal is to have these interviews for hundreds of years. So with that in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview long after you and I are gone about your time in the service or any advice?

Joe Raspante: I think they should have remembrance, say like my grandchild is going to be coming into this world in about two weeks, and just think, he gets 18, 19 or 20 and he goes to Washington and he looks through there and says dang, that was my family.

Yeah, you can listen to the story, hear some of your stories, that's right. We're gonna make sure to send you copies of this interview so you can pass it along to your family and make sure he gets a copy one day, too.

Joe Raspante: Sure.

Well sir, again, I really appreciate it. It's been an honor. We'll go look at some of the photos you've got in your room.

[End of recording]