

## **Transcription: Edwin Searle**

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*Good afternoon. My name is Mike McRekin and I'm here representing the Texas Veterans Land Board's Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm in the home of Mr. Edwin A. Searle, Jr. He goes by Buddy, and we're conducting this interview on September the 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009, in Pasadena. With that said, when were you born, Mr. Searle?*

**Edwin Searle:** I was born April the 24<sup>th</sup>, 1923.

*And where were you born?*

**Edwin Searle:** Fostoria, Texas.

*Where is Fostoria?*

**Edwin Searle:** It's not too far out of Conroe, if it's still there. It was a little sawmill town.

*OK, so you were born just up the road apiece then.*

**Edwin Searle:** Yeah.

*OK, good. What branch of service were you in?*

**Edwin Searle:** I was in the Navy.

*Can you tell me where you were, what you were doing when you heard about Pearl Harbor being attacked?*

**Edwin Searle:** Yeah, I was waiting for the Eastwood Theater to open on a Sunday morning, and a bunch of other kids, and my older brother came down and told me that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and that he was going to join the Navy, and did I want to go with him, and I told him yes, and so we next day went up to join the Navy.

*So you and your brother joined the Navy together.*

**Edwin Searle:** Yeah, right, older brother.

*How did your parents feel about that?*

**Edwin Searle:** Well, they felt like it was probably the thing to do. My father had been in the Navy during World War I, and he thought the Navy was the best place to be.

*So you come from a line, a Navy family.*

**Edwin Searle:** Yeah.

*Before you joined the service, just tell me a little bit about your life in Fostoria.*

**Edwin Searle:** Well, I didn't have a life in Fostoria. My family had moved to Houston before I was big enough to even know. But we lived most of my childhood, we lived off of Washington Avenue in a little section called Camp Logan, and it was right between Washington Avenue and Memorial, had a little section in there.

*So you spent your childhood in Houston, right off of Washington in Camp Logan area. Where did you go to boot camp?*

**Edwin Searle:** In Great Lakes, went up to Great Lakes, Illinois, and funny part about it if it could be considered funny, they told us we was going to San Diego, and we went up, my brother and I, and had just a light sweater on, thought we was going to California, and ended up in Great Lakes, Illinois, and it was snow on the ground and everything.

*What a surprise. Tell me a little bit about your experiences at boot camp and where you did your secondary training.*

**Edwin Searle:** Well, my older brother had been in the Navy for a short time, and when we went to boot camp, he was kind of put in kind of in charge of the group when the boot camp officers and chiefs and stuff wasn't around, and we was I guess a week before we ever got a uniform and running around in civilian clothes up there about to freeze all the time we'd go out. There was snow on the ground and everything.

*Not like Texas.*

**Edwin Searle:** No, not like Texas.

*How long did it take you to get through boot camp?*

**Edwin Searle:** Well, that was a very short time, maybe six weeks at the most.

*Where did they send you after that?*

**Edwin Searle:** After that, I came back to Texas, Corpus Christi Naval Air Station. At Corpus Christi, I was put into a grocery store and all I did was the same thing I did in civilian life, I stocked shelves and all this stuff until they, I didn't know what the deal was, but they were building ships as fast as they could after losing a bunch at Pearl Harbor, and when they got another carrier built, the Yorktown CB-10, well they shipped me and several others up there and we went on the Yorktown, and we had to load all the supplies on the ship. There wasn't anything on it after it had just come out of the shipyard. We had to put all the supplies and all the furniture and everything else on there, and then we went on a shakedown cruise to Trinidad, and we was gone I guess maybe six weeks on that and came back to the shipyard, and they put the ship back in dry dock and fixed everything they found wrong, and we had to paint it before we left. Sitting like the guys do on these boards that they lower down by the side of a building, we were doing that on the ship, a whole bunch of boards and people on down painting. We got that finished, well we went down through the Panama Canal and headed for Hawaii. Once we got to Hawaii, well then we got set up with a taskforce and operated with a taskforce. Had several other carriers and a battleship and a couple of cruisers and a bunch of destroyers.

*What were your duties aboard the Yorktown?*

**Edwin Searle:** Well, on the Yorktown I was in the deck division they called it, and we had to do all the upkeep on the ship, and then we also had battle stations and watch stations, which mine was on a quad mount 40 millimeter anti-aircraft gun, and it was right up above the bridge on the island structure, and we stood watch, 4 on and 8 off, when we wasn't in the battle zone, and if it was in the battle zone, 4 on and 4 off. So we'd go up and stand watch for 4 hours and then we was off for 4 hours. When we was off, if it was daytime we had to be working.

*So you worked on the deck during your regular –*

**Edwin Searle:** Well, people like me, any kind of a chore that needed to be done on the ship, wasn't real technical, then that's what we did, painting and scrubbing and all kind of splicing lines and all this kind of stuff, and we had a certain area normally that we would have to keep clean at all times because they might come through inspecting at any time.

*So the Yorktown got to Pearl Harbor when, was it in 1942?*

**Edwin Searle:** Yeah, 1942. It was probably 1943 because I was down in Corpus, I got through boot camp, you know, in the first part of '42 and went to Corpus probably I think maybe that Yorktown was commissioned about April of '43, but I'm not sure about that.

*Then after you got into Pearl Harbor, what engagements, or what did the Yorktown, where did you head after Pearl?*

**Edwin Searle:** Well, we started striking some of the Japanese held islands. A taskforce of maybe one battleship, two cruisers, and a couple of three carriers, some destroyers would go and the planes would take off from 50-60 miles away from the island and go over and bomb it and raid it and then come back and land. We were maybe there two or three days, and then come back for the next assignment later.

*Was the Yorktown ever attacked?*

**Edwin Searle:** Oh yeah, by planes, yeah. I was on a 20 millimeter one time when we had I think about five Jap Zero's come in strafing and come across, and we were shooting back at 'em. I know we got a couple of 'em, but I don't know about the rest of them whether they fell later on or went on back home.

*And how long were you aboard the Yorktown?*

**Edwin Searle:** Oh, probably a little over a year, I'm not real sure. I came home off the Yorktown, I got a 30-day leave. Yeah, I was about to forget something. When I got off the Yorktown, it was in Hawaii, and they put us on a liberty ship that was converted into a transport, and we came back and out of San Francisco, there was a little group of rocky islands, and we came in through there about 3 o'clock in the morning and it was foggy, and that ship run aground and knocked a hole in the bottom of it, it set down on the bottom and we had to abandon ship, and go over to an island over there that was a little higher than the ones we ran into, and it was a little station over there, with lookouts, maybe three or four guys stationed out there, and watching to see if they see any enemy subs or anything, and call back. Anyway, they helped us out and then the ship came in and they had one of those lines going across from the shore to the ship where you sit in the thing and they swing you out to the ship, get on it, and brought us back in. Of course I was covered in oil, and when we got back to San Francisco, Treasure Island is I

think where they put us off, and they give us a bottle of mineral oil and we had to strip our clothes off and wash with that mineral oil as well as we could, and then shower with soap and water and try to get it all off. Did pretty good getting it off. Then after we did that, the first night we were there, well of course we didn't have anything anymore, our clothes and everything went down with that ship, so they had a bunch of guys that just got out of boot camp there, so some friends of mine and I, we rented a uniform from each one of us got one of them guys to rent us a uniform and we went into town and had a few beers and stuff.

*So you had your real action right outside San Francisco with that transport ship sinking.*

**Edwin Searle:** Yeah.

*You got back to the States after your liberty ship, the converted liberty ship, the transport sunk, and had your leave and then what happened after that?*

**Edwin Searle:** Well after that, I was transferred back up to Newport, Rhode Island, and they put us in a group where they went to rifle range and 20-mile hike and all that stuff, and then they had the Shangri-La, another carrier, ready, and we went down and went on the Shangri-La. We went on a shakedown cruise back down to Trinidad and back, fixed everything they found wrong, and we took off and went down to the Panama Canal again and went back to Hawaii and then started operations out of there to strike different islands and everything, and then we got down to the point where we was bombing Japan, and then one day they had us, heard there was an American plane gonna drop an atomic bomb. So we had to get down on our knees and cover our head like that when it came the right time, and the atomic bomb went off. All I saw was light through my arm.

*So how close to the islands were you do you think?*

**Edwin Searle:** We were probably 10, 15-20 miles out, I don't know, but we could just see the light.

*What did you think when you saw all that light?*

**Edwin Searle:** I didn't know what to think, but we was told what it would do, and we was hopin' it wouldn't do anything to us, that radioactivity and stuff. One thing, we pulled into Japan shortly after that, and tied up and we went, another guy and I, while they was signing the peace treaty I think it was on the Missouri, this other guy and I went ashore and walked into Tokyo without any guns or anything else, and all we had was American cigarettes and that's all it took. People were crazy about American cigarettes. They wanted them and so we swapped 'em for little souvenirs and stuff like that.

*That's amazing to think that you walked into Tokyo unarmed.*

**Edwin Searle:** Yeah, it was quite an experience. We run into people on the streets, and they was just nice, and there was one place that we went, and it was a young girl's school, and it wasn't Japs, it was white Christian girls. It was a Christian school. I guess they was over there when the war started and they were stuck over there probably.

*That was in Japan.*

**Edwin Searle:** Mm-hmm.

*How long did you stay in Japan after the treaty was signed?*

**Edwin Searle:** Well it was just two or three weeks I guess, because about time that they got things settled down in Japan, I was eligible for exit, because I was just doing it for the duration in six months, but we came back to Pearl Harbor and then went back to the United States, and I think maybe it was San Francisco, I'm not real sure, but I got to go home again and come back and got discharged.

*So you were discharged in the end of 1945 or first part of 1946.*

**Edwin Searle:** No, it was '44 I think, about the 1<sup>st</sup> of December of '45, I was discharged.

*The atomic bomb was dropped in August of 1945, so it would 1<sup>st</sup> of December, and that was the end of your naval career. What did you do when you got home? You would've been about 23, 22?*

**Edwin Searle:** I was only about 21 or 22 I guess. See, I was born in '23, that's the way to figure it I guess.

*'43 makes 20, and almost three more makes 23. You were just barely out of your teens. Did you go to work or go to school under the GI Bill?*

**Edwin Searle:** Well, first I went to a photography school and when I finished that, before I went and got a job, there was a commercial photographer, but they kept me in the dark room all the time. I had a good friend that was there, too, and he was out with a car and camera and going to different assignments taking pictures, and I was in the dark room. I did get to go a couple of times, but anyway I decided after a while that I was going to go to art school, so I went, quit the job and started art school. About the time I was in the art school good, I think it was about the time I met my wife and I decided I better get a job. I have all my pictures.

*Oh shoot, that's pretty. That's really a colorful picture.*

**Edwin Searle:** And that one over there, too. But anyway -

*Did you go to art school under the GI Bill?*

**Edwin Searle:** Yeah.

*Well it paid off because those are both beautiful paintings.*

**Edwin Searle:** Thank you. About the time I was going to get married, I got a job with Anderson Clayton Cotton Company, and I went to work in the data processing department. I didn't know anything about any of that, but we had drawers of cards, IBM cards, and we had one card for each bale of cotton that they owned, and it had the warehouse and the class and the weight and all that, and my first job was they had samples of these bales of cotton, and they had the tag on them. Well they decided they were going to ship these certain bales, and they'd take the tag off of it and send it in to us and we'd pull the IBM card. They would have about close to 100 cards to one shipment, and we'd run it through the IBM machine. It had the weight and

everything on it, and that's the way we'd end up shipping the cotton, make a shipping list from these IBM cards.

*All through an IBM machine. So you were in the ground floor of IBM and data processing. That was back in the 1950s?*

**Edwin Searle:** Oh, it was even earlier than that I think, in the '40s, close to the '50s I guess.

*What is your wife's name?*

**Edwin Searle:** Doris.

*How long have you and Doris been married?*

**Edwin Searle:** Oh, we got married in '48 I think. Don't tell her I said that.

*But it is recorded.*

**Edwin Searle:** About 60 years now that we've been married.

*So you just had a 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary then last year. Congratulations. How many children?*

**Edwin Searle:** Three. We got one boy in the middle of two girls. One girl married to P.T. Ride and he did work for the government, and he's retired from the government now and working independent on a civilian job, but they have one child, a girl. Then my other daughter lives up north of Dallas and she had one daughter by one marriage and she's working in New York, that daughter is, and then she remarried and had another daughter and a son by this husband.

*So that's three grandchildren then.*

**Edwin Searle:** I have no, it's four.

*You had at least one by your son.*

**Edwin Searle:** No, he has two daughters. One is just out of high school going to college and the other one is married with children.

*So you've got a pretty good-sized family.*

**Edwin Searle:** Yeah.

*Do you get to see your family much?*

**Edwin Searle:** Oh yeah, we had a big time over the weekend. The fact is, I was gonna ask you if you knew my brother Noel, Dr. Noel Searle, because I thought at first that you might be with him in something because he told me when I saw him this weekend that he and a friend of his was writing a book, and I don't know what on, but he was a medical doctor, and he's retired now.

*Very good. Just with your naval experience from shakedown cruises on two carriers and just the time you spent in combat and aboard ship and throughout the time you served during World War II, what words of wisdom or suggestions or ideas would you give to the current group of soldiers and sailors and Marines and airmen and maybe even younger men and women that are thinking about joining the service? What might you tell them that they can carry with them?*

**Edwin Searle:** Well I think about the best thing they'd do is play by the rules. If they don't play by the rules, they're going to be in trouble. Some guys I think they get by with something that they do something they're not supposed to be, but sooner or later they get caught, and I think as long as you're in the service, you need to play by the rules if you want to get along good.

*That's pretty good wisdom. It's just almost like raising children.*

**Edwin Searle:** Oh yeah.

*Very good. Do you have anything else that you'd like to add before we end this interview, Mr. Searle, anything at all?*

**Edwin Searle:** I can't think of anything.

*OK, well on behalf of Commissioner Jerry Patterson and the Texas Veterans Land Board and the citizens of Texas, we thank you for your service and thank you for taking your time to share your service with us.*

**Edwin Searle:** I enjoyed it.

*[End of recording]*