

Interview with
WARREN LEE PETERSON

October 24, 2018

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WARREN LEE PETERSON

Warren Lee Peterson was interviewed by Randall J. Bunn on October 24, 2018 at the Southern Utah Veterans Home in Ivins, Washington County, Utah. He related his life experiences, particularly while serving with the United States Navy. Also participating: Brady Fronk.

RB: Before we get to your military experiences, I would like to ask some questions about your growing up years. Were you born in Salt Lake City [Salt Lake County, Utah]?

WP: Yes.

RB: In 1940?

WP: Yes.

RB: What do you remember as a child growing up? Did you have a good childhood?

WP: I think so, compared to what children have today. Being from a big family, we stick together. Communication was one big factor in our family, but we had our disputes.

RB: How many [children] were in the family?

WP: [There were] seven [of us].

RB: You mentioned there were one girl and six boys.

WP: That is correct.

RB: What was it like living in a household with a bunch of brothers?

WP: Crowded! [Laughter] We lived in a small two-bedroom home.

RB: Were you close to —

WP: Yes, we were a close family.

RB: — any one brother more than the others?

WP: Yes, [William] “Bill” [Peterson], the brother just younger than me. We were probably closer than I was with the other brothers because they were much

younger than I. The other brothers had paired off also. It was just “Bill” and me; we did quite a bit together.

RB: You mentioned that you had a brother named Buddy who died.

WP: Yes.

RB: How old was he when he died?

WP: He was six [years old].

RB: Were you number two in the family?

WP: Technically, yes.

RB: After Buddy left, you and “Bill,” the older two boys, were the —.

WP: The honcho. [Laughter]

BF: [Laughter]

RB: Yes, the lead dog of the pack. Everybody had to fall in line with you, maybe?

WP: They generally did as far as with school and sports. They would follow in my footsteps. I had one of my brothers, I think it was [Robert] “Bob” [Peterson], come up to me when I got out of the service and said, “You left some big shoes for me to try and follow.” [Laughter] I could not believe it.

RB: What was he talking about? What kind of shoes did you leave behind?

WP: Football, mainly.

RB: Did you [participate in] sports in school?

WP: I did some baseball and basketball, but that was primarily with the church [program]. My sport was football. I played for four years.

RB: When you say the church, was that The Church [of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] church?

WP: Yes.

RB: You played basketball, baseball and then football mainly in high school?

WP: Yes, at Granite High School [in Salt Lake City, Salt Lake County, Utah].

RB: What [position] did you play?

WP: Center, what everybody likes to beat up.

BF: [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter] Were you a big [person]?

WP: No bigger than what I am now, probably smaller. I weighed 165 pounds in high school.

RB: That is a good size.

WP: Yes, for the size [and] the growth of the children at that time, we were average. Now, you have to be 6'1" or 6'2" to get in on it.

BF: [Laughter]

RB: That is true.

WP: I fit in.

RB: [What] about academics? Did you have favorite subjects?

WP: No. [Laughter] If there was, it would have been arithmetic class. I was good in arithmetic. Spelling came about third.

RB: [Laughter] [World] War [II] ended in 1945 and [went] into peacetime. What do you remember [about] growing up in the 1940s? Was it a good time?

WP: Yes. It was a good time. I vaguely remember the war. One day, dad came home and he had [a lot] of red marks on him. He had gone for his physical for the [United States] Army. It ended before he could be drafted. He was very upset. Another thing I remember [was] moving. We moved from the city to the city of South Salt Lake [Salt Lake County, Utah] and bought a home there. That was a two-bedroom home with seven [children]. [Laughter]

RB: Close family is right!

WP: Yes.

BF: [Laughter]

RB: Was your family much different from others in the neighborhood?

WP: No.

RB: Everybody was in the same boat?

WP: Yes. We did not have the alcohol or the liquor or the dope to contend with. It was a much cleaner life we lived then. We could leave our doors open. We did not have to lock them at night; the cars did not have to be locked. It was much safer than it is now-a-days. I remember when they were testing the [atomic] bomb.

RB: I think they started in the late 1940s and then into the 1950s.

WP: They had to have started in the 1940s because the war ended in —.

RB: The war ended [in] 1945, and the Cold War started right after that.

WP: I remember them doing — we used to cuss them every time. We lived upwind with the draft. They would bomb over here in Yucca Flats, Nevada and then the wind would come up and carry that radioactive fallout up over the Salt Lake.

RB: Did you see anything, or did you just know it was there?

WP: We just knew it was there. Every time it bombed, we [had] heavy rainstorms [and] they tested it.

BF: Do you remember in junior high or high school in the 1950s doing the bomb drills?

WP: Yes. We had the information on the walls of school. We had a way to get to the basement, if they were to attack us. We practiced them all the time, crawling under the desks — that all started in the 1950s.

RB: Were you ever worried that World War III was going to break out and what was going to happen?

WP: Yes. It was over and we talked about it. We were educated towards it in the 1950s because you never knew [what might happen]. We used to, again in the 1950s, ride our bikes to the park.

RB: I [wanted] to ask you what kind of things you did for fun.

WP: We rode our bikes and did a lot of swimming. I liked to swim. We did not have cars we could drive then. [Laughter]

RB: Did your dad have a car?

WP: Yes, he had a car.

RB: What did he drive?

WP: He drove a 1952 or 1954 “Chevy” [Chevrolet] station wagon.

RB: I [wondered] what he used to transport the family around; I knew it must have been a station wagon. [Laughter] Did you get to sit in the far back [of] the station wagon sometimes?

WP: I had to most of the time even though I was the oldest. The only time I got the front seat is if mother did not go then I could take it.

RB: [There were] no seatbelts then, probably.

WP: No seatbelts and if you are familiar with the 1950s, you know what steering was like on the steering wheels; the brace that they had was solid steel. People had head-on collisions and it would kill them.

RB: Yes.

WP: I remember the changes in all the cars.

RB: You said that you started your association with the [United States] Navy in 1957. Were you still in high school?

WP: Yes, I was still in high school. It was the reserves and so we had meetings every Monday night. I did that for two years and then went [on] active [duty] for two years. While on active duty, a few hair-raising experiences occurred. I enjoyed it. I was stationed on the *USS Sperry*.

RB: *USS Sperry* – S-P-E-R-R-Y?

WP: Yes. That is a sub tender, in other words, a floating garage for the submarines. We would go out 200 to 1,000 miles away from the live action. When they found out the subs had been shot up or needed repairs, it was much easier and cheaper to have us sitting there floating, away from the action.

RB: You were the service station. [Laughter]

WP: That is right. If we were not there, they had to go [more than] 2,000 miles for the same things. This way, it was a matter of a couple of days sailing.

RB: You were in the reserves from 1957 to 1959. You graduated from high school, and then did you go on active duty?

WP: Yes.

RB: Since you were in the reserves, did you do some sort of basic training? Did you have to go to basic training after —?

WP: During the two years prior to going active, we had what was a two-week leave. On the two-week leave the first year, I went —

RB: Where did you go?

WP: — to Hawaii. Why not?

RB: Somebody had to do it.

WP: The second year we went to San Diego [California].

RB: Both [were] good assignments. [Laughter]

WP: Yes. I enjoyed that; I [was able] to know a lot of good people. We were stationed at the NTC, which is Naval Training Center in San Diego. That has since been turned into apartments. I went to San Diego because we were stationed with the — the *USS Sperry* was stationed in San Diego as well. When we were on vacation and I [wanted] to show my wife [Alyse Peterson] and a friend of ours who went with us, the ship I was on, but she [the ship] had been retired. [Laughter] In 1961 or 1962, they converted her to a nuclear sub tender. I thought she would be around for a long time, but unfortunately she was not. She was a big ship. Actively, we had a crew of between 800 and 1,000 people when we were out to sea.

RB: You said they retired the ship. Is it still in existence somewhere?

WP: It is in dry dock somewhere.

RB: You went down there and you could not see it.

WP: I do not know if it is on the Pacific coast, or the east. They have a lot of the ships back east, in dry dock or retired.

RB: That was your two-week training in the first two years, in 1957 to 1958. You went on active duty. Where did you report in San Diego?

WP: San Francisco [California]. I was there for awhile. That is the first ship I was on, which was a destroyer escort. So if you know the line up of the ships when they maneuver out into the ocean for battle, the escorts are the ones that lead the way out. They are smaller and faster and then as you get going, you go back to the — the [USS] *Arizona* was one of them — the battle wagons, the big ones; the [United States] Air Force and the carriers. It was very interesting.

RB: What was your job on the escort?

WP: I was a deckhand.

RB: What did that mean? What did you do?

WP: We chipped a lot of paint to get rid of the rust.

BF: [Laughter]

RB: Maintenance?

WP: Maintenance, mainly. You had your assignments for the day. I had an experience — that was an experience on the other ship, if we can get to it.

RB: Yes, tell about your tour on the escort.

WP: On the [USS] *Sperry*, the sub tender, there were only the two weeks. It was a matter of trying not to get seasick.

RB: Did you ever get seasick?

WP: Yes, every day that I was on the destroyer escort. Seasickness was part of the job. [Laughter]

RB: Did you ever get used to your sea legs?

WP: Yes. I had no problem with sea legs.

RB: What made you sick, the motion?

WP: Yes, motion sickness. The walls were moving back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. From there I was transferred to the [USS] *Sperry*, where I spent two years. Again, I was a boatswain's mate on the *Sperry* because I did not have any other trade. I had passed the test to be what I wanted to be. When you pass the test that is okay, but you have to be active for six months before they will give you a test. I was aboard the *Sperry* doing deck work when I was assigned to the electronic supply room. It was up to me to keep us current on all electronic supplies, have what they need there to fill the billet. One day, the chief told me that he was going to have me paint the deck. That is fine. He said, "I will order it, you go get it and paint the deck." All the decks in the Navy are gray. I went to the paint store and said, "I am here to pick up the deck paint that chief so-and-so ordered for me." I looked at it and asked him, "Are you sure this is my paint?" He said, "That is what the chief ordered." It was green.

RB: Oh, no!

WP: Yes! I went back to my area and had the floor almost half-way painted when the chief came down to see what was going on. He looked and saw that [it was] green and he went off like a firecracker. [He] exploded with all the choice words that the higher echelon would use.

RB: [Laughter] I can imagine! It was not supposed to be green? [Laughter]

WP: No. "That is what they gave me at the paint locker. They told me you ordered this specifically." He was ranting, raving and carrying on. It upset me.

RB: You were doing what you were told.

WP: I was doing what I was told.

RB: And he is mad at you?

WP: Yes, and he is taking it out on me. I looked that chief in the eye and I said, "Chief, I respect that uniform you are wearing, but I do not have to respect you." He [stammered] and took off. I guess he thought he was dealing with some little naïve idiot [youth]. I never had any problem with that at all. He transferred me to what is called the captain's — or the commodore's at that time — gig. Do you know what a gig is?

RB: No.

WP: It is their private boat. It is strictly for him and whomever he invites to ride in it.

RB: I see. And you were working with him on that?

WP: Yes, I was transferred to it — because I was a boatswain mate — to take care of the ship itself.

RB: That is great.

WP: I [took care of] the bow hook so when we would pull into the landing, I would be the first to jump off with the rope, tie the rope around a cleat on the ship. The engineer would get out and pull the backend in. The commodore and his party would disembark. One time, it had been stormy and windy; the seas were very choppy. We made our run to beat the commodore out to the boat. I was standing on the bow of the ship, out at the very point to jump off. I am ready, had the rope in my hand. I was watching the waves coming in and going out. I figured I had them timed. I jumped, and just as I jumped, the boat went out and I went down. The first person out of that gate was the commodore himself.

RB: Were you in the water?

WP: I was in the water chest deep. He did that so the boat would not keep banging me into the wall. I tell you, I surely thanked him. He was a nice man. After the chief I had, this man was really nice.

RB: Was that a good assignment?

WP: Yes.

RB: It sounds like it.

WP: Everybody envied me because of the assignment. I never saw any action on it. The only action I ever saw was when we would go through maneuvers for a week to stay in shape. We would get rid of all the barnacles on the bottom of the boat. We would get rid of all the coffee grounds, because we were considered the coffee ground ship in the bay. All you had was coffee to drink.

RB: You got all the grounds.

WP: We would go out and then we would come back in. When we went out, I was working the forward gun; that was my assignment. I would fire the gun; that was an experience too.

RB: Tell about that.

WP: The first time I did it, I knew it was going to be loud, being that close to that big of a gun. I think they were five inches or so.

RB: Did they have you wear ear protection?

WP: No.

RB: Not back then?

WP: [We wore] steel helmets, but no ear protection. The first time we were out and ready to shoot, I put my hands over my ears. The person in charge said, "Take your hands down off your ears. Do you want to explode your ears?" I said, "No, I do not." He said, "When that shell kicks back," — in and out like they did and I had asphalt-type gloves on — "your job is to make damn sure you hit that thing so it will spring to the deck and not bounce back up."

RB: You needed your hands available.

WP: Yes.

RB: Not on your ears.

WP: Yes. Had I had my ears covered, the compression would have broken the ear drums.

RB: He was looking out for you. [Laughter]

WP: Yes, and the old man was looking out for him. We had been in a storm and the boat was covered with salt water. We always washed down the boat after we got into a —.

RB: Was this on the [USS] *Sperry*?

WP: Yes, this was all on the [USS] *Sperry* that I am talking about. The next incident that happened with me was while we were hosing down the boat from the salt. That was during the same time we were out doing maneuvers. The person in charge sent me out to spray — I was the bottom man on the totem pole — the water out. He did not give me a lifeline; all I had was my life vest. One of the waves came up over the bow of the ship and caught me right square in the back. I had six inches of water on the deck and that caught me. I was sliding across the deck. There were twelve-foot waves out there, waiting to eat me. The ship had a quarter-inch railing around —.

RB: Is that [all]?

WP: The bulkheads would come up, but waist-high it had a lifeline made out of cable. I am sliding across there. They also had a pathway around the deck so when it is normal you can walk on it because it is sand. I thought: the sand will stop me. I looked up and saw the lifeline coming. I grabbed on to that for all I was worth because I had waves this close.

RB: Would it have carried you over the edge of the ship?

WP: I would be dinner for some [shark].

RB: Would anybody notice that you were [overboard]?

WP: Yes, they noticed. Actually, if I had gone in, by the time they [had] the boat turned around and came back to get me, in the twelve-foot waves, they are not going to find me. I would have been lost at sea and that would have been [the end]. That was an experience.

RB: Did that scare you?

BF: [Laughter]

WP: I had to go change my pants.

RB: [Laughter] You never forgot about it.

WP: I will never forget either one of those incidents. Those were the good old times.

RB: You said you never saw action or combat. You were active duty from 1959 to 1964. There was not a lot of action. Viet Nam was still — there were advisors there, but not major troops.

WP: You are right.

RB: You were in the Navy, but in a support role.

WP: That is what I did.

RB: Did you go to any ports that you recall?

WP: Hawaii.

RB: Was that the main one?

WP: The only one.

RB: Did you go from San Diego to Hawaii?

WP: Yes, San Diego to Hawaii. It took three days going and to come back.

RB: Did you get shore leave in Hawaii?

WP: Yes. We spent three weeks there and we [had] shore leave. I do not remember very much of it. It was a matter of sightseeing.

RB: Had you ever been to Hawaii? [This was], at least, the first time.

WP: Yes.

RB: That would have been fun. Did they have a memorial to the [USS] *Arizona* then? Or to the Pearl Harbor casualties?

WP: Yes, but it is not like it was. It was a like a big barrel out there that you look down and see the [USS] *Arizona*. Now, they have a tremendous monument.

RB: Yes, a visitor's center and monument.

WP: Yes, the whole works.

RB: What was life on the ship like? What was food like? Chow?

WP: The food was good, plentiful.

RB: Did you go to a chow hall and eat?

WP: Yes, and that brings up another topic. Working for the commodore, it gave us first in line privileges to everything. At dinnertime, [we were] front of the line. At haircut time, front of the line. At liberty time, front of the line.

RB: No wonder everybody was envious of you!

WP: Yes. I never stood night watches like everybody else. It was choice duty and the chief who sent me there thought he was giving me a bad job.

RB: [Laughter]

WP: He did me the biggest favor I could ever ask for.

RB: Working for a good [man] — was the commodore and 06 [captain] or a 05 [commander]?

WP: Commodore rank was put into effect, in that time, just after the war, because they had so many admirals who were not ready for retirement. Yet, they had all these captains who were ready to move up into the admiral position. They had to create the commodore position to give the captains a chance to at least be higher than the normal, but next in line to the admiral's position.

RB: Was the commodore an admiral? Or [he] had been an admiral?

WP: He was a captain and he was moved up to the commodore —

RB: — to allow some of those underneath him to move up to the captain's slots?

WP: Yes.

RB: It was a special 06 [captain] position.

WP: Yes.

RB: Interesting. What were the sleeping arrangements like on the ship?

WP: One on the floor, one halfway up the bunk and the other one on top — bunk bed style. There might be twenty or thirty men in that area.

RB: How much space between your space and the next bunk?

WP: There was just enough that you could lie on your side and not scratch yourself on your buddy's [bunk]. Unless you [had] somebody of pretty good size, then he would take up two bunks. He would sink down into you unless you had a [very] small individual. [Laughter]

RB: Did you ever have anybody that snored?

WP: Snoring.

RB: [Laughter]

WP: Yes. We had an African-American who was a third-class petty officer.

RB: What rank is that?

WP: That is equal to a 04 [lieutenant commander]. He would have to stand watches once in awhile. When he got off a watch and climbed up in the sack, he would let it roar. There were nights he had to stay over — he was a good size [man], and his voice made a horrible noise. It kept me awake all night. I would go over and shake him. I could have [been] court-martialed for doing something like that.

RB: Yes, he was an officer. [Laughter]

WP: Yes, he was higher ranked than I was. I could have, but I needed sleep. I would get there and his snoring would start up.

RB: Growing up in a household with five other brothers, were you used to sleeping in close quarters?

WP: Four of us were in one room.

RB: Yes, but this was thirty in a bunkroom. That is not the same, yet you were used to sleeping with other [fellows].

WP: It did not bother me to sleep with other people. Actually, I enjoyed it. Working in the electronic supply office, we had a three-square-foot cabinet to keep our belongings in. I [had] what was called an on-switch. It is always open until you close the door to turn the light off, an open switch. I put a light in my bunk where I could do things standing at my desk or write down things without people bending over me. They were envious of that also, because I knew that advanced information. At that time, I wanted to be commissary, which is a cook. I got to know the cooks quite well, so even though I had head-of-the-line privileges, if I wanted. I [had] head-of-the-line privileges for midnight snacks.

RB: Very nice! Did you ever get into the commissary? [Laughter]

WP: No.

RB: Were you always in electronics supply or as the commodore's boatswain mate?

WP: Yes, those are the only two positions I held. In San Diego, [a sailor] who was stationed with us was from San Diego. He had friends there and we did a lot of partying at his home. One night, we were all on board [ship] and thinking: what can we do for some excitement? I said, "Let us go on a scavenger hunt. Knock on the door and tell them who we were and why we were there. We want one lemon, one lime and four ice cubes. Not a tray, four." We did that to see if people would accommodate you. The lemons and limes were a piece of cake, but they had to open an entire tray of ice cubes just to give us four.

BF: [Laughter]

WP: "We cannot have three; we cannot have five. It has got to be four." [Laughter] That is one of the nights that we had a tremendous time. I had an experience where we were going to a party, but we did not have any alcohol. I had just turned twenty.

RB: The drinking age was twenty-one [years old].

WP: Yes. We got to the liquor store and they had [many] liquor stores. There were four of us altogether and I told the other three, "I bet I can go in there and buy the booze that you want, and come walking out without any problems."

RB: Why did you think that?

WP: Confidence.

RB: Attitude.

WP: I had the attitude. I walked in there, looked up, and said, "I want a pint of this." He said, "Okay." He set it on the counter, rung it up and put it in the bag. I started to pay for it and he said, "Now, can I see your ID [identification]?" I said, "Certainly." I opened my wallet and gave him my driver's license. He read the driver's license and said, "Oh, just getting started, aren't you?" I said, "Yes, it is all brand new." I folded it all back up, walked out and sat down in the car.

RB: He did not register the dates and your age?

WP: He thought I had turned twenty-one, and I had only turned twenty.

RB: "This is the date, this is your birth date; you are not twenty-one."

WP: Yes.

RB: [Laughter] It was your attitude. Wow, that was pretty good!

WP: I got out to the car and they are all with their mouths open.

RB: How did you do that?

WP: They said, "We thought you were dead when he asked for your ID. Why did you do that?" I said, "Why not? I know I am under twenty-one. What is he going to do? Take the bottle away from me?"

RB: The worst that can happen is that you will not get it.

WP: That is right and that is what I told them. They [laughed] about that all night long.

RB: Have you always been a confident man?

WP: Pretty much. There are times, but yes, pretty much.

RB: When you were in the Navy, had you married your wife?

WP: No.

RB: When did you get married?

BF: [In] 1964, right when he [was discharged], probably.

WP: It was shortly after I [was discharged from] the Navy.

RB: Did you have anybody that you were writing home to?

WP: Yes, I had a high school sweetheart that I wrote home to all the time.

RB: Would you get letters from home and from your girlfriend or sweetheart?

WP: Once in awhile I would get a letter from the family. Dad would write a letter and send it to me. I would get one or two letters a week from my high school sweetheart.

RB: What was her name?

WP: Rae Gene. I do not remember her last name.

RB: How did they distribute the mail?

WP: We had a regular post office aboard the ship.

RB: Did you have a box where you [picked up] your mail?

WP: No. We would go up to the window like you do anywhere else, tell them your name and get it. My friend from Ogden [Weber County, Utah] was the postmaster.

RB: You had friends in high places! [Laughter]

WP: Confidence will do that. At least high-placed people can say, “You cannot get away with it.” If you exhilarate the confidence, stand up straight and look them in the eye —.

RB: What can they do?

WP: They do not refuse you and if they do, “Big deal; I tried.” I have something I want to show you after we get through. I am having that problem with my confidence against theirs. [Laughter]

RB: I want to hear that. You would get your mail —.

WP: Anything I wanted to ship home off the ship, legal or illegal, once it [was] put into a mail sack, nobody could touch it, but a government agent. They could not search it or anything. I used to send home big twenty-gallon cans of coffee. We were big coffee drinkers. [I would send] silverware for the future and things like that, I would send it home.

RB: You never got caught?

WP: Never. Tom [his Ogden, Utah friend] would put it in that mail sack. We would take tools.

RB: [Laughter]

BF: [Laughter]

WP: Maybe a high-armed [inaudible] I kicked him so hard, I would still be looking at the rear end.

RB: That is pretty funny. Did you like your time in the Navy?

WP: I did.

RB: Did you make some good friends?

WP: I did.

RB: Are there any that you still keep in touch with?

WP: The one in Ogden. The other fellow who was his assistant, we were good friends too, but he moved back east and we lost track of him. Every once in awhile, we run into each other.

RB: That is nice.

WP: I went to school with Tom's younger sister.

RB: When it came time for the end of your tour of duty, where [were] you mustered out or discharged? In San Diego?

WP: Yes, San Diego.

RB: What was that experience like?

WP: You get orders, you are mustering out on such-and-such a date, and see — I have forgotten who it was we had to go to, to get our final orders and discharge orders. They handed them to us and flew us home.

RB: Had you considered re-enlisting?

WP: I have, but age caught up with me. There was a time — unfortunately it was all — my [children] were born. I was home, a free person when my [children] came along. After they moved out and married, I thought of it. But then, the [grandchildren] came along. They, more than your children, can stymie something. They are wonderful to have, but it is nice to say, "Good night."

BF: [Laughter] That is right.

RB: I have eight grandchildren.

WP: I do not have eight, but I have Lorrie's [Lori Dawn Petersen] two, "Bill" [Peterson's] two, is four, Larry [Peterson's] two is six, my sister [Sandra Peterson's] two is eight. [Robert] "Bob" [Peterson] has one.

RB: [That is] nine.

WP: And two great-grandchildren, ages six and four [years old]. The six-year-old took bi-lingual classes. He speaks French. His sister will fall right behind him. They are the ones I miss the most. I raised all the others, the grandchildren [and] my children. Since we moved here [to St. George] five years ago, we have only seen them once, maybe twice.

RB: Tell about when you [were discharged]. You flew back home to Salt Lake City? You [were] married not long after. How did you meet your first wife [Barbara Jean (Callister) Peterson]?

WP: We were working in the same office.

RB: How long were you married to her?

WP: [For] ten years.

RB: You had two [children] with her?

WP: [With] my first wife, two children.

RB: What kind of work were you doing when you first got out of the Navy?

WP: It was restaurant work when I first got out.

RB: At that time, Vietnam [had] built up, but you were done with the military.

WP: As far as they were concerned, I had an honorable discharge.

RB: Somebody else had —.

WP: At that age, I had talked about it, but it was not [very] appealing. I have kicked myself in the butt many times for not going back and getting the full twenty [years]. I should be in a good place. If I had only stayed in, this is where I would be and this is what I would have. More than once, I have said it.

RB: You were twenty-four [years old] when you [were discharged]. At that age, you were thinking about other things than your retirement. That is the way it works. When you are twenty, you are going to live forever.

WP: Yes, my high school sweetheart did what all of them do —found somebody else while you are in [military] service.

RB: Really?

WP: He was — I do not say this in a derogatory [way], but she met him in jail. She was doing work with people in prison. She was teaching them to read and do their education. They ended up getting married and divorced after she had her first baby.

RB: It did not work out.

WP: No, it did not.

RB: You separated from your first wife after ten years?

WP: Yes.

RB: You were married again, to Alyse. How long have the two of you been married?

WP: [For] twenty-six years.

RB: Did she have [children] from her first marriage?

WP: She had two and I had two.

RB: Were you raising four [children] at that time?

WP: They were older. When we married, they each had their own apartments.

RB: They were past the raising and the rearing ages.

WP: My daughter was older than her son, so my [children] were — my daughter was married. I do not remember if my son was married at that time or shortly after. It had to be shortly after, because they are only two years apart.

RB: Did you and Alyse live in Salt Lake [City] until you moved here?

WP: [Yes].

RB: What caused you to move to St. George?

WP: One of my ambitions was golfing, until my knees got screwed up. We used to golf all the time. Every spring and every fall, in Salt Lake [City], my golfing partner and I would go to one of the mountain courses. It was Billy Casper's course; I [do not remember] which canyon.

RB: Is that on the way to Park City [Summit County, Utah]?

WP: No, it is on the way to Provo [Utah County, Utah], coming this way south. We would come down every year in the spring and in the fall to play our last rounds of golf because it was time for snow.

WP: I loved St. George [and] said, "Someday, I am going to live in St. George." It took a few years, but we were given such an opportunity, that we could not refuse it. People that had the house had to be out. The people who were taking over our house had to be out. We had the weekend of Thanksgiving [to move] and that is the Thanksgiving we were blanketed down here with snow.

RB: Was [it] five years ago you came down here? Kate [Ourseler, the Veterans Home Activities Director]] said you have been in [the Southern Utah Veterans Home in Ivins, Washington County, Utah] home for about one year.

WP: It will be a year on December 18, [2018].

RB: What happened that you had to come here? Is your wife still living in St. George?

WP: Yes, she is still in the house. We live on Brigham Street. There are schools there, the junior high and high school. One of the school yards backed up to ours. She is still here and sees me twice a week. I lost my balance and she is not strong enough [to] handle that. We talked about it. I told her, "I want to go down and check out this veteran's home and see if I like it." We came down, knowing that there was a two-year waiting list, so we did not bring anything. We talked with them and with the doctors. The doctors told my wife that I was not going home because of my balance. I messed up my knees; I had problems with my knees, other than arthritis.

RB: I see some scars on your knees. Have they tried to replace your knee?

WP: They did something and I do not know what it was. Whatever they did, did not take. This one is so bad they went in a second time. This was in 2006 and over the years, little by little, one of those things that all of a sudden, it is there. I spent a month in a rest home in St. George, working with them and their balancing programs. I got to be pretty good and they sent me home. Within two weeks after I got home, everything we had spent a month doing was gone. I do not know if that influenced the doctors here or not, but I have been here since then. I would not trade it.

RB: Do you like it here?

WP: It is the most beautiful place you could ever [live].

RB: What do you like about it?

WP: The outdoors, the clean air [and] no smokers. I do not mean to offend anybody if they do smoke, but [since] I do not smoke, the fact that you can go into someone's house and do not have to smell that smoke. You can go out on the grounds and not have that dirty smoke. The landscaping is beautiful; it is gorgeous. The temperatures are good most of the year.

RB: Yes, it gets a little warm in the summer.

WP: It will get around 108° F. It can be a little warm, but that is only for a short period of time.

RB: That is true and you can stay inside when it is [excessively] hot. Are there activities here?

WP: There are a lot of activities that we have every day.

RB: That is good.

WP: Every morning, I do “Get Up and Go.”

RB: What is that?

WP: That is an exercise program designed for your muscles and your joints. Next, I work with the riding-type machines, twenty-five minutes a day. That is to try and build up what strength that I can in my legs, knees and back. Unfortunately, in all the time I have been doing it, it has not fixed the problem; it continues. It is not the same now. It has delayed it, instead of getting worse, but it is not the same now as it was when I —

[END OF RECORDING ONE.]

WP: — came. If I have to be someplace, I am more comfortable here than I was in our home. [Laughter] Everything is furnished to us.

RB: People are here to take care of you, whatever you need.

WP: Everybody is brother and sister. I have been here less than a year and I am sure over half the people [here] can tell you who I am. That is my character; I am a people person. At home, I would not have any of this. With the living conditions the way they are here, and at my age the way it is right now, I could live to be 100. I have people that I have — we are all in separate roles — ninety-three-years old and walks with only a walking stick. We had the code giver [Navajo code talker] —

RB: Sam Holiday?

WP: — yes. He was in the first place that I lived in. What a [man]! I was honored to meet him.

RB: I am happy for you.

WP: Thank you.

RB: You have a good place. This has been fun for us to hear your experience. I do not know a lot about the Navy having been [in the United States] Air Force. It is fun to hear about life on the ship, some of the fun things that you did and some of the things that you still remember that almost caused your early demise. [Laughter]

WP: The memory was better than what it is. I know there are other things; I have had things pass through my head, but by the time I get ready to say something, it is gone. I do not start it because I know I will not be able to finish it.

RB: That is all part of this life and journey we are on. You think you are going to live forever, and you will remember everything perfectly, but something [happens] with the brain, it tends to forget.

WP: It does.

RB: We will end this now and thank you very much. From this —.

[END OF RECORDING TWO. END OF INTERVIEW.]