

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

Rodney E. Reagan

An interview conducted on

May 17, 2016

Interviewer: Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Rodney E. Reagan are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on May 17, 2016.

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WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, let's start with your name.

REAGAN: Rodney Reagan.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK. And where were you born and where'd you grow up?

REAGAN: I was born up in Leaky. Leaky, Texas.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK, where's that?

REAGAN: Forty miles north of Highway 83.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: You probably . . . You came from San Angelo?

WONGSRICHANALAI: We did. Actually, we came from Del Rio.

REAGAN: Oh, Del Rio. Well, if you go to San Angelo, up 83, you go through Leaky.

WONGSRICHANALAI: We're headed up towards Sonora next, so . . .

REAGAN: Well, you'll go through . . . You'll go up 83.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK. And how would you classify the area you grew up in? What part of Texas would you classify that as?

REAGAN: It's Hill Country.

WONGSRICHANALAI: It's Hill Country.

REAGAN: Ranching. And that area was just ranching. There was no industry or farming or anything like that much. Just ranching.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: It's Hill Country.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK. And your . . . Your family is from that area?

REAGAN: Well, my family was originally from up in North Texas somewhere but they moved down to Leaky and my great grandfather Cooper was a merchant up in North Texas. And he moved the whole family down there to Leaky. And that's where I grew up.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you have any siblings?

REAGAN: I had a brother that was older than I was.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: And in 1944, I graduated from high school. And I previously volunteered to go into the Air Force and they closed it while I was taking the test. They wouldn't take any more pilot trainees. And so I was drafted after I got out of school and I went down to San Antonio. They were putting everybody in the Army and when they asked me . . . They did the favor of asking what you wanted, you know, but then they put you where they wanted you. They said, "What do you want in?" And I said "I want in the Navy." And they said, "Why you want in the Navy?" I said, "I want submarine service." And he just reached over, picked up the Navy stamp, and stamped "Navy" on my papers. I was the only one that got . . . in our draft from Leaky, the only one that got into the Navy. The rest of everybody else went in the Army. And went from there to San Diego to boot camp. From boot camp we came home for leave and then came . . . Went back . . . Went back to San Diego and they shipped us to New London in Connecticut via Mare Island up in San Francisco to . . . to New London in Connecticut to the submarine base. To sub school.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Why did you want to be a submariner?

REAGAN: I don't know. I just did.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: And I guess God made it possible for me to get . . . not be in the Army.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did your family have a history of military service?

REAGAN: No, no, no, we didn't have any military service in the family. And so I went to sub school. Nimitz's son was the commander of the submariner school while I was up there. And then when sub school was over in April of '45, they sent us back to San Francisco, to Mare Island. And from Mare Island they . . . on my 19th birthday, they loaded us on transports at Mare Island and . . . Not Mare Island but . . . What's the name of that . . . It'll come to me in a minute. Anyway, it's where they shipped everybody out. They loaded us on my 19th birthday, May 1, 1945. They shipped us out into the Pacific. We went to Hawaii, unloaded seventy-five WACS . . . WAVES, not WACS, WAVES there, and then latched the ship up and went back and went to Enewetak. From Enewetak, we went to Ulithi. From Ulithi, we went to the Philippines. Then we landed at Somar in the Philippines first, and that's where I was with that guy in there.¹ Can't even think of his name now, but I . . . Anyway, from there, they took us up to Subic Bay. You may know where Subic Bay is, I don't know.

WONGSRICHANALAI: It's a famous place.

REAGAN: It's simply . . . Anyways we had a submarine. They were building a submarine base there. And we were over on the upper side, north side of the bay. And they were building this base there. And waiting for assignments. But at that time, the submarines weren't getting much

¹ Mr. Reagan was referring to another gentleman from Uvalde who came into discuss his World War II experiences.

ships to shoot at. They'd sunk just about everything that the Japanese had. And I stayed there and the war was over. And then when they started shipping everybody home, they said . . . They shipped all the blacks first. And then they started working on us. And then they shipped us back to the States. Well, in the mean time, they sent us up on rest leave to Shanghai, China. Took two destroyer escorts that had been trans . . . been transferred or converted troop carriers that carried 100 troops on it. These would . . . And they sent us up there on rest leave. I think there was seven of us, and we had a meal in a café in a restaurant in the hotel there. It cost \$47,610.. Chinese dollars.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Which was how much in American dollars?

REAGAN: I think it was around \$1,800- \$2,000 for American dollars. It varied every day.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: It fluctuated constantly. And while I was in Shanghai . . . We stayed there about 5 days or so, maybe a week. And when I was there, the communists had a parade in Shanghai. And you couldn't get across the street because they were . . . The street was full of people marching and the two outside lines of people were holding batons, wooden batons in front and behind them. You couldn't cross the street. And that's about it. I mean war was over and we finally got to come home.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Very good. Well now let's go back a little bit. Let's go back. So, do you remember growing up? What was growing up like in Leaky, Texas?

REAGAN: I grew up on a goat ranch.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: And we worked goats, and nobody had much money, but we made a living. And I still own the ranch I grew up on up at Leaky. In fact, if you go up 83, you'll drive through it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: Eight miles north of Leaky.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How much land is it?

REAGAN: Well, now it's only about 200 and something acres that I have. But, originally, when the Coopers, my grandfather . . . great grandfather Cooper moved everybody down there, they owned several thousand acres.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Wow.

REAGAN: But he had given it to his children and my grandmother died in childbirth and my grandfather had to divide it all up with the kids that were married. And my dad had a block of

land and since . . . When dad died, I only had 200 and something acres that I got out of it. But she probably had 3,000 or so acres, my grandmother had.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Wow. For goats?

REAGAN: Yeah, goats. It's all rock. When you go eight miles north of Leaky, you'll . . . you'll see rocks. Mountains are rather steep and . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: That's why they call it the Hill Country, right?

REAGAN: Yeah, Hill Country.

WONGSRICHANALAI: That's right. And so you were in . . . You were just entering high school in 1941.

REAGAN: Yeah.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you remember the start of the war?

REAGAN: Oh yeah. Yeah. Remember the . . . We were all up in the auditorium when they had the draft drawing. You know, the first draft. And I heard this woman scream when her draft . . . her son's draft number was called on the radio. You could hear her over the radio that she was screaming because it was her son's number that they pulled out of the hat or box or whatever they had it in.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How large was the high school?

REAGAN: Oh it . . . I don't know. There was probably 40-50 . . . No, let's see. Twelve? Probably twelve or fifteen people in my class, in the senior class. It wasn't great big.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Mmhm.

REAGAN: But patriotic.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right. So the auditorium would broadcast the . . .

REAGAN: They . . . They had the . . . The superintendent had set up a radio to where we could . . . everybody could go up there and listen when they started the draft.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: When they started drawing the numbers.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you remember hearing about . . . learning about Pearl Harbor?

REAGAN: Oh yeah, yeah. In fact, one of the . . . One of the victims of the *Arizona* was a friend of mine. His name was John James. You can see his name on the plaque at the memorial there in Hawaii now. John James was his name. And he was down in the powder magazine. He was a powder loader or whatever they call them. That was a duty on the *Arizona*.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Huh, and so he . . . He's also from Leaky, Texas?

REAGAN: Yeah, yeah. We rode the same vehicle to school together. But he was ahead of me, and when he joined the Navy then they . . . He got assigned to the *Arizona*. It was in Hawaii and he was aboard it when the Japanese attacked.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Mmhm. Where were you when you heard the news of the attack?

REAGAN: I don't remember.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Was there a sense that the United States was going to get involved in the war sometime soon? Or was it a sudden . . .

REAGAN: Well, there was . . . There was a man that lived up there . . . his name was Fate Crawl. And he bought scrap iron. And he said . . . He said, "Yeah." He said, "I'm buying this scrap iron to sell it to Japs, and they'll be shooting it back at us." That was before the war started.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: And sure enough, they did.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK. Alright. Now, OK . . . So, you attempted to join the Army Air Corps.

REAGAN: Yeah, I volun . . . I came down to Uvalde.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: And went out to the air base out here and took . . . was taking the test. And I wasn't through, and this secretary came in and said, "Let's go eat. You can finish this later." When we went to eat, she took me to feed me and we came back, she said, "They closed this while we were over there. They got word to not accept any more pilot trainees." And said, "I'll go ahead and . . ." I lacked fifty questions being through. She said, "I'll go ahead and grade it and, if they open it up, I'll call you back." They never did open it back but I passed the test. But I explained that down at San Antonio when . . . when I had been drafted.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: And he just reached over picked up the "Navy" stamp and everybody else that was with me got Army.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What did your parents feel about your being drafted?

REAGAN: Well, you know everybody was apprehensive about their children being sent off to war.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: You know, that World War I, father and them, that was it, their time. So, but you know we always managed to be in a war perpetually. Humans just can't get along.

WONGSRICHANALAI: That's the lesson of history.

REAGAN: Yeah, and I mean you know, I mean they just can't get along. And they get too many population . . . they have to have population control and that's the way they do it is kill them off.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, what was boot camp like?

REAGAN: Very rigorous. They kept you busy and taught you what you needed to know and gave you your shots and everything. Got you ready. It . . . It was a busy time.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you remember the most challenging part about boot camp?

REAGAN: It wasn't hard. I was eighteen-years-old. There wasn't anything challenging about it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK. Fair enough. What about submariner school? What was that like? What did they teach you there?

REAGAN: Well, they teach you how to operate a submarine. And teach you how to escape from a submarine with the facilities that are aboard the sub to escape. They have this tower there at the sub base. One in Hawaii and one in New London, Connecticut. And enlisted men went into the 50-foot level. And officers had to go in at the 100-foot level. And then you used what they called a Momsen Lung. It was a thing you put on your chest with straps and put it in your mouth. You had it full of oxygen and you breathed it as you went up. You'd go up this rope that had knots on it. Every knot you had to stop and take a breath until you got to the top. And we had to do that. And they taught us how to escape. Of course, I don't know of anybody that ever escaped from a submarine that had been sunk, but . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: Possibly they did but I never did know about it. Most submarines that got sunk were permanent.

WONGSRICHANALAI: They were probably too deep to escape.

REAGAN: Too deep, yeah. But anyway . . . Anyway, they trained you for it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: Taught you how to operate a submarine, what to do and how to do it. Just like they teach you how to fly an airplane, they were teaching us how to fly a submarine.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, do you remember the size of the class that went to the submarine training? It's probably smaller then.

REAGAN: I think there was about thirty or forty in each class. Thirty maybe. When you went . . . went to New London, it was winter time, and when you're first there, you spend the first month in mess hall cleaning and feeding the previous . . . the ones that are ahead of you. And then you get to go to school, and somebody's behind you getting to do what you did. But that's the way it worked. And when I was there, Chester Nimitz's son was in command of the base at that time. It was very cold. Ice, chunks of ice floating around big as this thing out in the . . . You're out there in that submarine traveling around, and chunks of ice floating around. It was cold.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Coming from Texas.

REAGAN: Very cold.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, OK. So . . . But there must have been people from all over the country that you met in boot camp and at this training school.

REAGAN: Everywhere. From all over.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Any other Texans?

REAGAN: I don't remember any.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK, was there a . . . Did people ask you about being from Texas? Were they curious about that at all?

REAGAN: Not really. Not that I remember they were.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK. And the Navy was not integrated then, was it?

REAGAN: No, the blacks were servants. Steerage mates, they called them.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: The blacks were steerage mates. They waited on the officers hand and foot.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK. But none of them would have been in boot camp with you?

REAGAN: In boot camp. Well, the thing . . . In . . . In boot camp, where I was, there wasn't any blacks in that area, you know, where I came from.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: There was Hispanics but the blacks were not . . . I don't think they were integrated. I think they were separate.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And what was the interaction like with Hispanics?

REAGAN: Just another person.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK, fair enough.

REAGAN: You know, I was raised with a few Hispanics, but we never thought anything different about them.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you speak Spanish?

REAGAN: No, then I didn't. Not then. I do now.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: Some. *Un poquito, no mucho.*

WONGSRICHANALAI: Fair enough, OK. Alright. So, from New London, then they sent you back over to San Francisco.

REAGAN: Yeah.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And then on a transport ship?

REAGAN: Yeah, on May 1, 1945, I went aboard the transport.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: *General R. L. Howze*, I think, was the name of the transport. We had seventy-five WAVES on it that they unloaded in Pearl Harbor.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How long did it take to get to Pearl Harbor?

REAGAN: I don't remember. The first day out, they took all the mess tables down and strapped them down because it was so rough that day, and we ate sandwiches.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: It was rough.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So . . . But you must have heard about the end of the war in Europe when you were in the Pacific. Right? Did . . .

REAGAN: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. The Pacific was a mad place to be. Fighting the Japanese. They . . . They were trying to survive too you know.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: Wars are all about getting room for all your people. Pitiful.

WONGSRICHANALAI: That's what . . .

REAGAN: People are against birth control but wait until they get grown up and they shoot them. I mean, that's the way it works. Been that way since the beginning of time.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: Never has changed.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Common lesson in human history there.

REAGAN: It's, it's . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, OK, and so did you ever get on board a submarine?

REAGAN: Oh yeah, you train aboard submarines.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: I wasn't . . . I wasn't a crew member of a submarine, but they . . . When, When . . . When we got on the submarine tender—this is the ship that tends to submarines. We had six or eight submarines tied up alongside the ship and you serviced them. You worked on them or whatever they needed. And there was a boy in my draft that was with us. His name was Poncy. And the ship's captain was a former submarine captain. And Poncy's father was a chief petty officer aboard this ship, this ship's captain when he was a submarine commander. And as soon as Poncy got on the ship, this captain of the ship saw the . . . He saw his name. I guess he looked to see who I was. And Poncy. And he called him up and says, "You go onto that submarine." He got a submarine the first day he was there because the chief petty officer that was the chief of the boat for this captain, when he was on submarine, was his friend and he was the chief of the boat.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: All of the submarines had a chief of the boat.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: He actually ran the thing, the chief of the boat.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right, and that's a non commissioned officer.

REAGAN: Chief petty officer.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Exactly, right.

REAGAN: Then the next step up is warrant officer. But he was a chief petty officer. And he was chief of the boat. Chief of the boat was . . . You didn't ever cross him. He was the chief of the boat.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right. Fair enough. And so what . . . Which submarines . . . Do you remember the teams of the submarines you trained on?

REAGAN: No, I don't remember the names. We had six or eight submarines tied up in the area all the time alongside us.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How did . . . Had they come up with a way to classify the types of submarines at that point? Different classes or . . .

REAGAN: Well, they were just fleet type submarines. And one of them came in one day and he . . . They had a prisoner, a Japanese prisoner. And he was a short heavy-set guy. They took him of a sampan that they'd sunk. But the submarines ran out of ships to sink. They . . . They got them all sunk and the Japanese were running their ships all in the shallow water up against China where the submarines couldn't get to them in shallow water.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: The *Wahoo*, I think is the name of the submarine they . . . they sunk. And the commander of the submarine's brother was a lawyer here in the United States and, sometime since, then he has gone over there and located the *Wahoo*. That's where his brother's tomb is. But that shallow water's not a good place for a submarine to be.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: They nail them.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So . . . And then you ended up in Subic Bay.

REAGAN: Yeah.

WONGSRICHANALAI: That's where . . . That's where the war ended? Was that where you were when the war ended?

REAGAN: Yeah. When the war ended, all the Navy ships across the bay from us were shooting their guns up in the air. And the captain, Dick Hawes was his name, Captain Dick Hawes. And he didn't let anybody shoot anything on that ship. It was very quiet. We have a Seabee battalion that was building the submarine base on the bay you know, on the land. And one day Dick Hawes, Captain Hawes, went a boat over on the land. And this bunch of Seabees—the Seabees were building it. And they were . . . Had a big pond over there they'd dug out where they were getting dirt for making fields out to the ramps out to the docks they were building. And it was full of water and all these Seabees were in it swimming. And old Dick Hawes went over there and he went over to where they were swimming and cussed them out and told them they ought to get out and get to work, not be playing. One of . . . One of the Seabees crawled out of the water, put his cap on, and had just as many scrambled eggs as Dick Hawes had on. He said, "Now, you old son of a bitch, get back on that ship where you belong." He didn't let him do anything. And they had these . . . I don't know, you've probably seen them before, these big square things made out of steel that they put stuff in to a ship. You know you can just pick up the whole thing. Big as this room.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Sure.

REAGAN: And they had some of them stacked back there and they wouldn't let anybody bother them. Well some enlisted men got a cutting torch and went back out there and cut a hole in one of them and they were full of whiskey.

WONGSRICHANALAI: There was some celebration going on.

REAGAN: No, you could get \$50 for a bottle of whiskey. But that's what . . . That's why they wouldn't use them. They were floating dry dock. They were floating docks is what they were. You bolt them together and then you'd have a dock. . . . I didn't have much . . . a very glorious career in the Navy. I mean just . . . just a seaman.

WONGSRICHANALAI: That . . . So, that was the rank you attained? Just seaman?

REAGAN: After the war was over I got in the laundry and I was a petty officer third class.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK. How long did you stay in the Navy after the war was over?

REAGAN: Just as quick as I could get out.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: They rotated you. The time you'd been over there and then you got to go home at a certain time.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And when did you go home? '45? '46?

REAGAN: '45. Sometime in '45.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: They just rotated you as you, you know . . . Everybody had to stay about the same amount of time.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Now, do you remember interacting with any of the Filipinos?

REAGAN: I had about twenty something Filipino women working in the laundry. And me and another guy were in charge of the laundry. And they were always setting around picking . . . When they were eating, you'd pick cooties out of each other's hair. And so one day I got some DDT spray bombs . . . We called them bombs. They were spray cans. DDT. And I lined them all up and I said, "Lift you hair up." And I sprayed them and I got rid of those . . . those cooties.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Were they grateful?

REAGAN: Well, I guess they were. They quit picking cooties. They . . . I've heard that the DDT would affect people physically or something.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right, but during World War II they didn't know that.

REAGAN: We had a DC-3 that flew over our base at least every two weeks. Sprayed everything with—just like it was raining—with DDT.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Get rid of the mosquitoes.

REAGAN: Yes, mosquitoes.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Yeah. But they didn't know the effects of it.

REAGAN: Anyway, they quit picking cooties.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you remember encountering any wildlife while you were at sea or while you were in the Philippines?

REAGAN: No, but six of us hitchhiked across Bataan Peninsula to Manila to go to Aggie Muster. And we didn't see anything. Up on top of Zig Zag Pass there was a Jap tank that was still up there that'd been knocked out. And the whole jungle there was only about six-foot-tall because it had . . . That's how much it had grown back. All the big ebony trees were still standing. But everything else had been cut by all the bullets, you know. And it was about six-foot-tall, the jungle was. You couldn't stick a knife in it, it was so thick, but . . . But it was just like it had been mowed.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: And it had grown back six feet from the time they had the battle up there. And this Japanese tank was right up on the top of Zig Zag Pass. That was the road to Manila. Across Bataan Peninsula.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What else did you see on the trip? Do you remember any other sights of interest?

REAGAN: Well, the old city government buildings. They . . . In the old . . . In the city, they had piled up 35,000 Japanese bodies and burned them with gasoline. Incinerated them. And all of the government buildings, the steps were not steps anymore. They were ramps. They's been shot so much, that they'd chipped all the concrete, all . . . All the steps had chipped off. They just . . . Just a ramp, a concrete ramp.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Wow.

REAGAN: They had completely demolished it. You know, MacArthur didn't want to tear up Manila but the Japanese wouldn't give it up. So, they, they tore it up. But . . . And the . . . The big hotel and stuff, it looked like they dropped a bin that went all the way through this wall. The outside was . . . was still standing but nothing inside. And the Chinese cemetery, the Filipinos were . . . They had . . . The Chinese were wealthy that were in the Philippines. And they had mausoleums or whatever you want to call it where they bury their dead. They were . . . I mean, fancy stuff. And these Filipinos were living in them.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Wow.

REAGAN: Just everybody was living in those places.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Because their homes had been ravaged.

REAGAN: Well, every . . . Everything had been destroyed. Because the Japanese wouldn't give up. MacArthur tried to get them to . . . to leave Manila alone but they had to tear it up to get them out. But they . . . They tore it up. I mean it, all those steps into those old government buildings were just . . . just ramps. It . . . They shot them till it was just a ramp. But they said there was 35,000 Japanese that they burned in that. Incinerated them, cremated them.

WONGSRICHANALAI: In the center of the city?

REAGAN: Yeah, in this walled city. The walled city was inside Manila, and it had a wall around it, a thick, heavy wall.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Wow.

REAGAN: Stone wall. Course, when you got that many dead people, you gotta get rid of them some way. For health reasons.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Exactly. Do you remember any . . . Do you remember anything about the cuisine?

REAGAN: The what?

WONGSRICHANALAI: The cuisine, the food in Manila or the Philippines?

REAGAN: Well, we didn't . . . I don't . . . Let me think. We didn't . . . We . . . We were eating American food. We didn't venture out into the other kinds of foods.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: And, of course, our base was isolated. It was just American only. Filipinos, there were just the ones that worked on the base. We had a mess hall that . . . Of course, submarines had steak and apples and oranges and . . . We had all the nice things to eat. We could get steak. It had everything. I mean ice cream, whatever. The submarine, they took care of it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Yeah.

REAGAN: And, of course, we were on the base and attached to it. The reason I was in the laundry- They had a ship coming in. They were building this . . . The Seabees were building this submarine base. And they had a shipload of cement in bags. And that's a lot of cement, a shipload. Well, I was helping unloading. I was stacking in the building. And I thought there ought to be a better way and I got transferred over to the laundry.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Fair enough.

REAGAN: Fair enough, because that was rough. I mean, you could put your clothes off and you'd be soaked with cement powder and sweat and then you could stand your clothes in the corner. And in the morning they were still standing there.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Wow.

REAGAN: So, I . . . I thought there was a better way.

WONGSRICHANALAI: A more efficient way to do that. Yeah, OK.

REAGAN: Better way to make a living. And then in the laundry you could . . . We had steak, and we had whatever we wanted, because all we had to do is tell the cook or whatever department wanted something, "Well, we'll do your clothes individually, you know. But we need so and so."

WONGSRICHANALAI: Ah, OK.

REAGAN: What do they call it, [unclear]? So, we had steak and apples, and oranges and all the good things.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, good. Do you remember any new types of technology that you trained with, preparing to be a submariner?

REAGAN: We wouldn't know if it was new or not.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: We just, you know, whatever . . . Whatever you used, you used it. They didn't have any "Now, this is new."

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: But just whatever was available we . . . That's what we used, what was there.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And did you have any problems reintegrating back into civilian life?

REAGAN: Nah. I don't know why people have those problems.

WONGSRICHANALAI: A lot of people do.

REAGAN: I know they do, but I don't know why. Maybe, maybe . . . I don't know. I don't know why. Maybe that's a question I never thought about. I don't know why. You know I was in the Navy one day and the next day I was out.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And that was just fine.

REAGAN: It was wonderful.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you stay in contact with your family while you were overseas? Did you write letters or . . .

REAGAN: Oh yeah, you write letters but the ones you wrote would be shredded practically. The sensors would . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: Of course.

REAGAN: You know, they . . . They . . . They took out everything that would even indicate if you were trying to tip somebody off or tell somebody something. The submarine service was very secretive and they didn't want you to know . . . Didn't want you to know where those subs were and what they were doing or anything else. It was very, very secretive.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And then after you returned, what did you do?

REAGAN: What did I do?

WONGSRICHANALAI: You came back to Texas.

REAGAN: Went to work.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: Went to . . . Went to . . . Went to help build the Legion Hall in Leaky and went to work and fell in love and went up to A&M and decided I didn't want to be there. I wanted to be back home where my sweetheart was and came back to Leaky and went to farm in small acreage. And got married and still married to the same girl. We have two sons and one of the sons has a son that was in the Air Force when 9/11 happened in New York and he's been to . . . Flew overseas nine, ten, twelve, I don't know how many times. And he was in Iraq during the . . . And he went to A&M after he got out. Just . . . Just, I went to farming. I farmed . . . Left Leaky and came to [unclear] over here and bought a farm. And ended up being associated with Dolph Briscoe. In fact, I still work for the Briscoe Ranch. And that's the way it is. Ninety years old. May 1, I was ninety-years-old and still work every day.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What's the secret?

REAGAN: Don't ever stop working.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: Retirement is the curse of the world. People retire, they shut down, they lose interest, and think "What am I gonna do tomorrow?" I know what I'm gonna do tomorrow. I'm gonna get up and go see about the cattle and work. You can't quit.

WONGSRICHANALAI: You do not look like you're ninety.

REAGAN: Well, I am ninety. 1 May.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Many happy returns.

REAGAN: Thank you. But you don't ever want to quit. The day they quit, they start going downhill. God didn't make man to sit around and do nothing. He gave him a job to do. When he quits doing it, he has to quit being around.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Would you have any advice for young men and women who are joining the service these days?

REAGAN: It's a different world. Different. Everything's different. Too fast. And with these computers, there's no secrets. That's the worst thing that ever happened to mankind.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Hard to keep secrets on a submarine with one of those.²

² Wongsrichanalai was pointing to Mr. Reagan's iPhone.

REAGAN: You know, I mean they know where this thing is. I don't have to be using it. If it's turned on and they know where it is. No secrets. When we used to . . . When they first came out, you go to Mexico, when it was safe to go to Mexico . . . When you crossed the border, it turned off. I mean there's no secrets anymore. Other than from us. They know where we are, what we're doing, what we're thinking, what we're saying. Worst thing that ever happened to us. I don't know.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Fair enough. OK, well these are all the questions I have.

REAGAN: Well my . . . My career wasn't very glorious so . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: That . . . We are interested in everyone's stories. We're not interviewing famous folks. We're not interviewing generals or colonels. We're interviewing folks who had a part of . . . of service And so that's . . .

REAGAN: We . . . We had to . . . I had to stand guard before I got into laundry. And they put me on the garbage dump. We had a garbage dump that was about three miles down the . . . Down toward the ocean on the upper side of the bay. And they took all the garbage down there and dumped it. And the Filipinos would come over there and pick garbage and, you know, take it back over there and then they would feed it back to some of the other servicemen and make them sick. So, we had to guard it. Well, nothing to do. So I'd sit up in the tree with my gun in my lap reading. And nobody there but me. And the officer of the day came up and he gave me a dressing down for not walking my post in a military manner. And when the Filipino boat would come around, we'd shoot in the water and make them leave. We had to guard that. And our admiral . . . Admiral came up from Australia after the war was over. He moved to Subic Bay from down in Australia. And he came up there and I was hitchhiking one day. Just walking, and he stopped me and another guy and he stopped, picked us up, and gave us a ride. But he was Admiral Fife. And we had this radio station around toward the ocean. It was probably four miles or so. And we had to stand guard down there. But the admiral came up but he brought his chickens with him. He wanted to have fresh eggs. And so they took these chickens out to the radio shack and wanted somebody to take care of them. Well, the looked through the records to see somebody that was agriculturally inclined, you know. And they came up with my name. They wanted to know if I would go out there and take care of the admiral's chickens. And I didn't want to go take care of the admiral's chickens out there. And I can't remember how I got out of it but I didn't. I didn't have to go out there. But they wanted somebody to take care of his chickens so he'd have fresh eggs every morning.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, that's nice of him. That's a luxury for officers.

REAGAN: Oh yeah, Admiral Fife.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, now this garbage dump . . . This garbage dump didn't attract any animals?

REAGAN: I don't know if it did or not.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: I was out there during that day.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

REAGAN: But it had flies and stuff but . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: Birds?

REAGAN: Birds I'm sure but the Filipinos . . . It attracted the Filipinos from over on the mainland because they didn't have much to go on.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: And we'd shoot in the water to . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: To chase them away.

REAGAN: To make them go away.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: But I had nothing to do, you know. I mean I see . . . And I was sitting up there reading. And this officer of the day came out and he had me walking my post in a military manner.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK. So . . . So . . . OK, so you mentioned John James earlier, your friend who was killed at Pearl Harbor.

REAGAN: Yeah.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you know how many people from Leaky served in the war or how many lost their lives?

REAGAN: I don't really know. John was, of course, was the first one that lost his life. And I don't remember. [Unclear] was at, was at Midway. But he didn't lose his life. I don't . . . I don't remember any of them . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: Was the . . . Was the James family still in town when that happened?

REAGAN: Yeah, uh huh. Yeah, yeah, he was the grandson of one of the pioneers there. But he joined the Navy and was stationed aboard the Battleship *Arizona*. He was a magazine . . . down in the powder magazine. He was a powder handler you know with 16-inch guns. But the *Arizona*, you know, just blew up.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

REAGAN: Annihilated everybody on board.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK. Alright. I think that . . .

REAGAN: You can . . . I can . . . On television sometimes they'll show that plaque, you know, and you can see John James's name on it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Have you . . . Have you been back to Pearl Harbor since?

REAGAN: No, no I haven't been back. Nope. About all I do is work.

WONGSRICHANALAI: It keeps you busy.

REAGAN: Yeah.