ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

GARLEND ARMSTRONG

An interview conducted on

May 17, 2016

Interviewer: Christine Lamberson

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 Garlend Armstrong are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on May 17, 2016.

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LAMBERSON: Okay, so today is May 17, 2016. I'm in Uvalde. And my name is Christine Lamberson and we are doing a *War Stories* interview. So, to start, can you just tell us your name?

ARMSTRONG: So . . . name?

LAMBERSON: Yeah, your name.

ARMSTRONG: All of it?

LAMBERSON: All of it . . . whole thing.

ARMSTRONG: Garlend Ansel Armstrong.

LAMBERSON: All right. And when and where were you born?

ARMSTRONG: Hollis, Oklahoma, right on the border of the Red River. We used to go to the Red River fishing and get . . . you get on the other side, you're in Texas.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

ARMSTRONG: That's where I was born.

LAMBERSON: And where did you grow up?

ARMSTRONG: Mostly around Little Field, Texas. Levelland, Little Field were the two towns we lived about halfway between. The school was halfway between. They had them in them, but if you lived out here on the ranches and farms, that's where everybody . . . They didn't want to drive ten miles. It was about ten to twelve miles to Little Field or Levelland. Lubbock was about thirty miles from there.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And how do you define West Texas?

ARMSTRONG: How do I define it? Well, it's pretty good now, but West Texas during those Dust Bowl days was terrible, horrible. And the sand piled up around your house like snow. You know how you can walk right up next to the house, there's no snow there? It's kind of like this out here. I don't know what makes it . . . wind or whatever. And . . . And that's the way it was, that sand packed up there. And if it rained on it, it packed down. And you had to get bulldozers or some kind of front-end loader and scoop it all up and take it out there, and dump it further out, you know. It was usually in the springs, and they don't hardly even have those Dust Bowl days anymore. They . . . because . . . let me see what. Because of irrigation. A lot of irrigation up there now. And of course, that's . . . that's playing out. What are we going to do when we get another 100 million people? They're already having water problems up north . . . somewhere there. It's contaminated with something that got in there. I don't know. I can't . . . I remember hearing it on

the news, you know. But . . . my mind don't remember yesterday, but I remember a lot back yonder.

LAMBERSON: Sure. So, did you grow up on a farm or a ranch?

ARMSTRONG: Grew up on a farm and a ranch. We had . . . We had both, and we raised a lot of cattle out there, white-faced cattle mostly, for beef. There's two or three kinds of beef: Angus, and . . . I can't even remember what some of them were. Milk, you know, from milk cows.

LAMBERSON: Sure, dairy cattle

ARMSTRONG: I milked a many a cow.

LAMBERSON: [Laughs]

ARMSTRONG: Many a gallon of milk.

LAMBERSON: And so then, when and where did you enter the armed forces?

ARMSTRONG: I lived at . . . we had moved to Granbury, Texas and bought a ranch there and some farm. And I went to school—nearly all the way through school—there. I think I started in first grade up there.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And so you were in Granbury and then you were in the ROTC? Is that right?

ARMSTRONG: Well, I wasn't . . . Actually, you wasn't in there just kind of . . . I mean, it was that type of a deal there but, later on, they got them all organized. You know, then it was mainly a deal to make you patriotic and so they could draft you soon as you got to be eighteen.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

ARMSTRONG: Or you could volunteer, but you couldn't . . . unless you deliberately failed your last grade . . . If you deliberately fail . . . failed your test so you wouldn't have to go to war, they got you. But I graduated and my main problem—well, I guess I had a problem—was everybody was a year older than me because I started school in Oklahoma at five-years-old. In Texas, you had to be six. I'm talking about if you was six tomorrow and school started today, you've got to wait.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

ARMSTRONG: I imagine they'd cut you slack now, but back then, they didn't.

LAMBERSON: Um-hum. I see. So, you were a little bit younger than everybody.

ARMSTRONG: Yeah.

LAMBERSON: So . . . So in high school, you were a little bit a part of this program. What branch of the armed services was that for?

ARMSTRONG: For the . . . the United States Navy. We shipped a lot of cattle and stuff, you know, for food and whatever. Raised corn and stuff like that.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And so, when did you graduate from high school?

ARMSTRONG: Nineteen forty-four.

LAMBERSON: Okay. So, in 1944 . . . and you were seventeen-years-old then?

ARMSTRONG: Yes.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And so . . . then when did you officially join the Navy?

ARMSTRONG: We had a naval kind of . . . they had an Army and a Navy deal in school that you could join. And they . . . they more or less had a class because they knew the war wasn't probably going to be over for three or four years anyway, and it wasn't. And so, they . . . they kind of got you orientated to . . . They's going to get you anyway whether you were signed up in the reserve deal or you got . . . Eighteen-years-old, they's going to get you. And if you deliberate failed . . . If you deliberately failed your eighteen-year-old last year in high school, you're going to war anyway. But luckily, like I said, I started when I was five, so when we moved there from Oklahoma there, everybody's a year older than me. And so, when I graduate, they couldn't get you unless you deliberately failed. Well, I was seventeen-years-old. And . . . and I got . . . a week before the school was out, then, they sent me a deal and everybody in that school that was, you know, eligible to be drafted or something. They sent . . . sent you to Lubbock, and you took a physical and you went back home and set your house in order with your family and everything. And in a week, you's going to be off to boot camp in an old steam engine train with no air conditioning. Then you had to cross the dessert, you know. I went to boot camp in San Diego, naval boot camp.

LAMBERSON: Okay. So, were you drafted then as soon as you graduated? Or did you enlist? Did you volunteer?

ARMSTRONG: Well, most of us is patriotic and already enlisted, and they couldn't get us unless you deliberately failed.

LAMBERSON: Right. So, you enlisted? You volunteered?

ARMSTRONG: Yeah, I was a volunteer.

LAMBERSON: So, you volunteered right after high school. You took the train over to San Diego.

ARMSTRONG: Yeah.

LAMBERSON: So, what was the training like?

ARMSTRONG: The training there?

LAMBERSON: Um-hum.

ARMSTRONG: Oh, gosh, it was in July and August. School's out, you know, somewhere. And you know, June . . . when is it out here?

LAMBERSON: Yeah, late May, early June.

ARMSTRONG: Yeah. And it was out and you . . . they were going to get everybody. At least you's going to get to take a physical to see if you's able to take it. And of course, at that age, ninety-nine percent of them are able, you know. They're not . . . by then, all the medicines they had for typhoid fever . . . in fact, they had typhoid fever epidemics then and my dad died, and I had one little brother that died. And I never did . . . Me and the brother next to me, we never did get nothing.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

ARMSTRONG: Get . . . get . . . older.

LAMBERSON: Sure. So, what did you think of San Diego when you got there?

ARMSTRONG: Well, I went through boot camp and they mainly just the disciplinary training, marching and learning to follow orders. And they'd treat . . . you know, there wasn't any . . . You wasn't going to shore, or what they called going to shore. If you's on a ship, they call it "going ashore." They said . . . Well, actually, they said it if you were on land, you know, that you were going into town, San Diego. We were there six weeks before we got . . . and about a week before we got to go home . . . you know, for ten days. It took five days, five days round-trip. You know, two-and-a-half going to Lubbock from San Diego, two-and-a-half days to get back. So, you barely got to stay home. If you happened to have a girlfriend there . . . which I didn't. Being I was younger than all of them in there, it was, "I'm not going to date him." I said, "Y'all'll be sorry one of these days."

LAMBERSON: Sorry later, huh?

AMRSTRONG: Yeah.

LAMBERSON: And so, then were you deployed overseas after that six weeks and then back home? Where'd you go?

ARMSTRONG: After I got to leave and went back, they sent me over to . . . There's an amphibious base in Coronado, which is a suburb of San Diego. And of course, the bay comes up in there, and we trained on landing craft. I drove a landing craft in World War II.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

ARMSTRONG: I mean, but at that late in the game . . . that was 1944. I graduated, and the war was over before 1945 was over. Maybe . . . wasn't in there, but if you was single, they could hold you up to six months if they needed to, and they did. Because we had . . . We had hundreds of ships [laughs] and all that stuff had to be stored somewhere or something too, because you didn't really know what was going to happen next. Even though Russia was our ally then, now they're one of our bitter enemies. And . . . and they never have paid all the money back. We built . . . you know, America had all this productive power of airplanes and everything else. And they called it "lease, lend," and . . . but you're supposed to pay for a lease and they never done nothing after . . . after. They started out paying it but, after they got all the stuff over there . . . I don't care whether you all like us or not but being . . . You know, they were a sorry army and the Germans just beat the tar out of them, you know. I mean, they killed them by the millions. And nobody was as well trained as the Japanese or Chinese. I mean not the Chinese so much, but as Americans.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

ARMSTRONG: And so, anyway, that . . . After I came home on leave and went back . . . and then I trained at that amphibious base. They called it "amphibious base." And in landing craft, they sent a brand-new ship down there and all the group I graduated with, they had to have enough to operate twenty-six boats on that ship. And I . . . And I trained and was . . . They call them coxswains. I don't know why that word—almost sounds vulgar to me—but that's what they call you. And when you . . . You don't say this in the Navy: "You drove that landing craft." You don't "drive" it, you . . . You "guide" it.

LAMBERSON: So, then did you . . . On that ship, were . . . Did you then go into the Pacific? Were you deployed from there, or you did some more training?

ARMSTRONG: We did some more training because they had . . . What the training was for was not primarily to learn to hit the beaches. It was primarily to put them in the water as fast as you can and let them get away from the ship. Because the enemy had airplanes, and they'd come out there, and they didn't want to stay that ship there any longer than they had to. Because they not only might sink the ship, they might tear up a bunch of landing craft. They probably couldn't get one of them. There's a lot of raiders . . . raiders, you know. And so, I mean, at that time until we got the Army and military built up, them other countries been doing it for years before that happened. And I mean, Russia didn't . . . They didn't have nothing. In fact, we trained them. But now, they're raising their dirty head up again and they need to . . . of course, everybody has the atomic bomb or nuclear bombs now, and that makes it pretty nasty. They can sit out there, you know, 100 miles off of the West Coast and probably get this town here if they wanted to get it. And it's just that kind of stuff all the way through. I never . . . Like I said, I went all the way to Seattle, Washington where we picked up combat troops and took them all the way to the

Philippines. And we trained there for a little bit, hitting the . . . because every beach is different. Some of them got rocks, but most of them are sandy. [Coughs] Excuse me. I'm going to have to slow down and not talk so much. I'll get hoarse.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

ARMSTRONG: I just got over a hoarse spell.

LAMBERSON: Oh, no.

ARMSTRONG: And I . . . and I've never hardly sneezed in my life and now I can sneeze, boy, and blow that thing off the table there. And it . . . I have to be careful when I'm eating because she's sitting over there, you know. You know, you women are so sanitary, and they think we're kind of crude and whatever.

LAMBERSON: Doesn't want you to sneeze on her, huh?

ARMSTRONG: Well, you don't want us to be sissy, but you don't want us to be so crude either. Anyways.

LAMBERSON: So, you went to the Philippines, and . . .

ARMSTRONG: I went to Pearl Harbor first and we trained there for about four or five weeks. And then they . . . by then, the . . . you know, the Pacific War had been backed all the way up to the Northern Philippines and Okinawa and them. And we went to the Philippines and left some replacement troops there and we came back to the West Coast and picked up another bunch of troops. And we trained with them for a while, and then we went back over there, which it ain't no easy deal to get back. I mean, it takes . . . Well, it takes nine days and nine nights from the West Coast to Hawaii, and that's the nearest one. Then it'd take about four days to get to the next group of islands, [unintelligible], then about four days to get to the Philippines from there. And we only went to China a couple times. Went to Korea more than once at the end of the war . . . I mean after the war was over a while. But we were putting replacements there, so they could bring all the one's that'd been in combat home. And so, those ships were just running back and forth like this to the West Coast. And, of course, they had airplanes but, gosh, a lot of them airplanes wouldn't fly from the West Coast to Hawaii. They will now, these jets, and they had just came out with jets right at the end of the war. And they were still . . . "imperfect," I'll call it.

LAMBERSON: So, you were carrying troops back and forth from the West Coast to the Philippines . . . Do you need water?

ARMSTRONG: That might help.

LAMBERSON: Let me pause this.

[Audio pauses and resumes.]

LAMBERSON: So, you were primarily taking troops back and forth from the West Coast to the Philippines, Korea, and China? Is that primarily what you were doing then?

ARMSTRONG: Yes. We only got really involved with the . . . with the . . . Let me get . . . My mind's getting old. It's skipping . . . skippy.

LAMBERSON: That's okay.

ARMSTRONG: She said, "How come you remember all that?" Because I remind her of things, you know. "Well, you'd better remember it when you're in the military."

LAMBERSON: That's right.

ARMSTRONG: Your question again?

LAMBERSON: So . . . So, what were you primarily doing in the Pacific? Were you moving troops? Were you . . . ?

ARMSTRONG: We were moving troops a lot of time . . . or replacements or bringing wounded back to the West Coast or somewhere where they could be treated, Hawaii or somewhere. And we only came back to the states one time. Because those type ships I's on had thirty-six of those landing craft; two pretty big ones and the rest will haul about thirty troops. You know, the one with the ram that drops down in front. And the steel on the side of them is about that thick. So, if you get shot at, if it don't go through it, it'll make a big . . . kind of like it almost goes through. A bulge out there like that. And so, you know, we . . . Luckily, none of them in our ship ever came through except . . . I mean, one . . . one hit the edge of that metal thing. It didn't go down into the water. It went down, you know, to the water, and it was on the side of it, and it wasn't about that high. And the soldiers were all squatted down like that. But you're . . . They call them "coxswains." Why, I don't know. That doesn't even sound a good word to me. But that's what you were doing and you were the only one that's actually exposed.

That ramp was, you know, three or four feet higher than the rest, so you had to look out around it to you . . . you know, going into the beach or you might—and it happened a few times—run into another boat or something, especially if you don't have lights on during . . . during the invasions. No lights until they get a secure beach there. Because if the enemy shoot them big guns and they aim them at that light, they'll get the whole ship or whatever . . . or boat or whatever it is. But . . . But anyway, we came back once and mainly because those wenches, called them, they picked the landing craft up and swing around like this and let them down in the water, which was about twelve or fourteen feet down there. And they come back and get another one. There's usually three of them to the place. And there was four of them hanging out over the water where you could let them down in a hurry. And then that big arm went up and picked these two up. They were stacked one on top of the other. Pick up another one, go over there, lay it down, and come back and go over there and pick the third one up. And you wanted it in the water as quick as you could because they like to shoot at them ships too. Basically, we're up on them like round camp. The mountains weren't real big right there and they had a lot of big guns up there, like sixteen-inchers. That's pretty big.

LAMBERSON: Right.

ARMSTRONG: And them battleships had a sixteen-inch gun . . . I mean the barrel. That hole in there, shoot that. When that thing hit something, boy, if it hit it just right, your ship was going down. Because man, you can't patch all the big holes quick enough and it may hit the engine. It may hit the driving mechanism or something, and you're just drifting in the water at the mercy of the enemy, especially if his aircraft are up there. And I can remember one . . . one time off of Okinawa, there after the invasion that . . . We were out there, and they had what they call "smoke generators." And it was on the back of every ship, and it would screen the one behind them. I don't . . . I don't remember what they made the smoke out of but it was just like that black right there. And it'd drift, and it would make them obscure where the enemy couldn't see it. But sometimes, they could shoot in there and get it.

Well on Okinawa, every . . . You're always blacked out. During war, no lights, because radar will pick up anything if you're going to run into it or something. And . . . And then they got sounding gear that tells you how deep it is because you don't want to run into any sand bars. When you get close to a beach, you know, there's sand bars out there, and they may be four, five, six, ten-foot down there, but you don't know where they are and how they are. And after they get it settled, they check it out. And it may be floating buoys there to tell you to stay between those buoys because you'll probably hit it. But anyway, I can remember at Okinawa, you're 300 miles from Tokyo. And they was . . . By then, they was using suicide planes. That's a good trade. One man, one bomb, for a ship. That's a pretty good trade. Because they's going to dive into it. But a lot of times, they would . . . You was shooting at them and those tracers—mostly at night—were coming so close to them they might raise up and miss your ship and get the next one down there. Because they had to, you know, try to dodge a little bit. And . . . and of course, them bullets are traveling a lot faster than you are and especially them huge suckers.

But . . . but anyway, I started to tell you about this one night in Okinawa there, the last invasion. Japanese hadn't surrendered. They hadn't given up. And they were landing thousands of American troops there and you're only 300 miles from Tokyo. And every night, we had to fight off those camouflages because they were going to crash into you. They just loaded it with TNT and they sacrificed their life, maybe two of them in there, and they . . . they would crash into a ship. And that's a pretty good trade. One, two, maybe three or four men, and one little airplane. It's a good trade for a big ship to knock out a bunch of production. I mean, you know . . . and protection. And anyway, we didn't like to . . . They had a flashlight you could flash. And you're laying in the smoke screen. It looks just like that right there. You can't see nothing. And . . . and a lot of times, you'd better slow down because you may crash into somebody. You can't have no lights on. And anyway, they had what they call smoke generators. On the back of every ship, there's one. And they get . . . when the wind changes, they all swing around, and they stay more or less behind. [Coughs] I had a bad throat problem and I'm still hoarse from it. They say it's not spreading anymore, but . . . anyway, we . . . We was afraid to drive up close to our own ship because they didn't know whether you were—you're 300 miles from Tokyo—there was suicide boats or whatever they had that'd crash into you. So, we would . . . we would . . . we's afraid to drift up on our own ships or they'd start shooting at us.

And so, we stayed out there, and two of those suicide planes came right over that smoke screen that's over all the ships. And there was two of them out there that was unloading. The merchant marines weren't part of the military; they just carried supplies back and forth. They had guns and stuff to protect their self, but . . . but their job was to get it over there, get it unloaded,

go back and get another load. And anyway, we got out there, and there's one merchant ship and one destroyer which is capable of defending itself if gets a chance. One of those suicide planes, they hovered right over the top of that smoke screen. Because once in a while, one of them generators would conk out and leave a spot where it wasn't covered, and they would dive into it. They's flying right over the top of all those ships and one of them . . . two of them came over. And one of them got that destroyer over there and . . . and the other one got that cargo vessel. That was because they had lights on and . . . anyway, I ain't kidding you, those two ships sunk within five minutes. And so, we went over there to pick up survivors.

That's one of the things we had to do outside of the smoke screen, trying to pick up those survivors. And most of them are exhausted. A lot of them didn't even have their life jacket on. Some of them probably drowned. You're in the dark and we weren't really in the real smoke screen. It kind of cleared out out there where we was. And the merchant marines, they didn't turn their lights off. And one of them suicide planes went down that big cargo hold that's about this big where they haul stuff out—tanks, jeeps . . . whatever . . . ammunition—and one of them crashed into that. And I'm not kidding you, within two minutes, those ships flopped over like that and they were gone. And . . . and we were . . . we were out there to help pick up survivors. And we rushed over there, and I'm not kidding you ma'am, them sharks learn pretty quick that there's a meal. For a while, they were scared of all that noise. Scared, "skeered;" my grammar teacher would really pick on me for that, but that's been fifty years ago so I don't think I'll worry about her. She's probably dead anyway, isn't she? But anyway, that . . . Those sharks, as soon as they heard that noise, they were there. And of course, we went there as quick as we could to pick up survivors. That's one of the reasons we was out there.

And I can remember one old boy, he was in there. He was laying down on this side of the landing craft and the other's laying on the other side. And I was driving, and he said . . . He said . . . So, I squatted down as low as I could and . . . Anyway, he said, "Boy, are you praying?" I said, "I been praying a long time before now." But . . . But anyway, we picked up some of them. But gosh, those sharks got some of them before we could even get to them. And man, that's terrible when the war's nearly over and you're knocking on Tokyo's door and the B-29s are flying from them bases. They were the only aircraft that could reach that far and get back to their base. And those big, big planes that they had made . . . Them others, if you carried enough fuel to go round-trip—I mean, that far—you couldn't carry no cargo. I mean, it's too heavy. Couldn't . . . It wouldn't fly. I mean, you might get off the ground but you're not going to get very far. And there's islands sticking up out there and everything else. But anyway, where else were we?

LAMBERSON: So, like when you were at Okinawa, was there . . . there were the planes, the suicide planes, but then were you in active combat on the ground as well? Or you stayed in the ship?

ARMSTRONG: No . . . Well, they were fighting on the ground over there but we were out there to just pick up survivors mainly. Sometimes you'd get the dirty job. It'd been better to be over there in that fog screen but that was . . . wasn't safe because your own people didn't know that you wasn't a suicide boat. They had some little-bitty submarines. They wasn't . . . I doubt if they was this long—two-man—and they had to lay down in them. And they loaded them with TNT in the nose of it and they'd just ram a ship. They may not sink it but they can hit it back there in the

rudder and where the propeller was. You . . . you was disabled and another ship can't pull you over five miles per hour.

LAMBERSON: Right.

ARMSTRONG: And it's . . . because we've had that experience, too, trying to get them far enough. Luckily, we got . . . they wasn't close enough to get us or anything, you know.

LAMBERSON: Um-hum. And what did you find most challenging about your time there? What was . . . ?

ARMSTRONG: What was the time?

LAMBERSON: Yeah, what was the hardest part there?

ARMSTRONG: What part? Making landings on beaches. Because when that ramp goes down, there's nothing in front of you. In fact, I made some of them mad. I said, "Hurry up and get out of here. I've got to go get another load." And they . . . One of them took his rifle and pointed it toward me. One of our own men. They didn't want no . . . There wasn't no time to joke because they was fixing to . . . You could hear them firing up in the hills and mountains there.

LAMBERSON: So, you were taking people to land to get off and go?

ARMSTRONG: Yeah. Well, I was stationed on one of them ships that carried those and we only . . . Like I said, we only come back one time to be repaired and that's because some dummy left some wrenches on top of one of them generators that created the power to run all the . . . lower the landing craft and pick them up and unload the cargo. And it just . . . What it did, it put all the pressure on one thing and the ship was disabled.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

ARMSTRONG: You used all the power and blew up a generator or two or whatever and then you couldn't get your own boats back on.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

ARMSTRONG: Or you might take one at a time but this wench back here can't reach where you want. These boats are up here where it's disabled. If it was right next to it, maybe you could, you know, but there's all kinds of handicaps and . . .

LAMBERSON: Yeah. So, you remember being . . . or you mentioned being at Okinawa. Were there other places that stood out to you or other particular vivid memories that you have?

ARMSTRONG: That was the last one. A lot of times we were just re-suppliers, you know. And we . . . We went into a combat zone in total darkness and unloaded and come back to Pearl Harbor or somewhere. A lot of merchant ships there. They didn't have landing craft. They just

had the big thing to hoist it up and put it over . . . and unload it over on the dock or on another ship or whatever. So . . . but we only came back to the states one time and we thought, "Man, we ain't leaving." You're supposed to get leave once a year and . . . And we said, "Boy, it took them two weeks or three to repair our generators before." It didn't, but that's what it usually took. And because they was . . . They were there waiting on that barge with a big old crane. They was having them things on there and we was going back out under the Golden Gate Bridge pretty quick.

LAMBERSON: Was that in 1945?

ARMSTRONG: Yeah. The war ended in 1945. I can't remember when.

LAMBERSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It ended in 1945.

ARMSTRONG: I can't remember the exact date.

LAMBERSON: Sure, yes.

ARMSTRONG: My mind is . . .

LAMBERSON: That's okay. And so, were you in the Pacific when the atomic bombs were dropped?

ARMSTRONG: Yeah, but I wasn't that close.

LAMBERSON: Did you hear about that?

ARMSTRONG: I was in the Philippines. Yeah, we were too far away to see it.

LAMBERSON: Sure, but did you hear news about it?

ARMSTRONG: Yeah. We . . . They had . . . We had a newspaper deal and there was some radio communication but, most of the time, they didn't radio it because they didn't want the enemy to know where . . . that they were doing damage or what. They didn't want them to know nothing, and they didn't want to discourage us by telling us. So, you just . . . you know, [laughs] you was doing what you do. And those . . . those big bombers were flying all the way from Guam or somewhere there. I think it's . . . Guam and Saipan are there real close. And they were flying all the way to . . . they was the only planes big enough to make a round trip. And they couldn't . . . couldn't have refueling flights out there because that was too much . . . a lot of trouble. If you got, say, 100 big B-29s, it takes probably more fuel than is right here in this thing. You know, it takes a lot of ships to supply that.

LAMBERSON: Yeah. And so, after the war was over, you were still in the Pacific. What were you doing then?

ARMSTRONG: We were bringing ones that was . . . If you were drafted, say they could only hold you for six months and a lot of them got out quicker than that. And . . . but they had to get you back here before, you know, you could get out, even if your time had already elapsed. Well, then it'd take you whatever time, distance it'd take. And there was so many ships on the West Coast. They were stacked up like this, abandoned more or less. And some of them they took out and sunk them but some of them . . . our ship when we come back, we went to the West Coast and let those troops off. And then we went down through the Panama Canal and they had things under control pretty good. Panama Canal . . . went through the Panama Canal all the way up to Norfolk, Virginia and then they decommissioned the ship I was on. And I got on a train and come to Galveston and then a bus to . . . My girlfriend met me there. She . . . She had a sister that lived in Houston, which is only, you know, across the bay there, Galveston is. And she just couldn't wait. Well, it'd been two years since I seen her anyway. So . . .

LAMBERSON: Um-hum. And where had you met her?

ARMSTRONG: When I was in high school.

LAMBERSON: Oh, okay.

ARMSTRONG: We was kind of sweet in high school and she didn't want me to get in the military. I said, "Well, I can choose where I'm going if I volunteer."

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

ARMSTRONG: And that's why I took . . . and all my . . . my one brother older than me and one younger, they were all . . . one was in the Army and my sister was in the Army. She was stationed in Seattle, Washington.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

ARMSTRONG: In fact, our ship come back to the states there and I went over there to see her. And on the ship, you just got your tables about this wide. And there's a guy sitting over there, and you got room enough for that tray . . . that metal tray that you . . . and I went over there where my sister was on that army base. That's where she was kind of highfalutin and was married to a lieutenant or some officer. And I was late getting there. And . . . and in the Navy, they got a bench to sit on. You got to step over the bench. Well, I come up there, come over there like that, and they were already setting down starting to eat because I was a little bit late. So, I just pulled the chair back like that—and it wasn't that heavy a deal—and stepped over it like that. Boy, she . . . like having a heart faint, all her highfalutin friends and officers and stuff. So . . . But she just didn't last too long until she passed away. So, I had to forgive her. I had to forgive her.

LAMBERSON: Sure. So, when did you get out of the military, then? That was in 1946? You were in for two years?

ARMSTRONG: Yes, I got out in 1946. They could hold me. Being that I was in the reserve, they could hold me for six months. It was five months, and it happened to be a leap year. Five months and . . . and two days or something like that. They lacked about a week.

[Audio cuts off and resumes]

LAMBERSON: Well, we can continue our interview. Can you tell me your name one more time, so it's on the recording?

ARMSTRONG: All of it?

LAMBERSON: Yeah, one more time.

ARMSTRONG: Garlend Ansel Armstrong

LAMBERSON: Okay, great. Thank you.

ARMSTRONG: You ever hear of Ansel Adams, some famous guy?

LAMBERSON: I have, yeah.

ARMSTRONG: That's where my mother got the name.

LAMBERSON: Oh!

ARMSTRONG: I said, "Where did you get that?" Years later, she told me.

LAMBERSON: Well, he takes wonderful photographs.

ARMSTRONG: Yeah.

LAMBERSON: Okay. So, you were telling me about your time after the war was over when you were still in the military, before you came home . . . when you were still in the Navy before you came home. So, what were you doing during that period of time? You were telling us earlier with the photographs you had picked up some prisoners of war maybe.

ARMSTRONG: Yeah, we . . . we picked up some and brought them back to the states to the West Coast because they . . . they didn't have no place to decommission our ship there because they already had them—like this—tied together all along the coast out there. That's why we had to go through the Panama Canal up to Norfolk, Virginia.

LAMBERSON: And did you pick up some Chinese prisoners-of-war as well?

ARMSTRONG: During the war, when we were over there. There wasn't any here. The Chinese prisoners we got was in. . . all along there, up to Korea. You know, down that coastline there. That's where [coughs]. Excuse me. I can't get over that cough from two weeks ago.

LAMBERSON: Oh, that's too bad.

ARMSTRONG: But anyway . . .

LAMBERSON: And what was that like, picking up the prisoners?

ARMSTRONG: Well, you know . . . Well, I showed you that . . .

LAMBERSON: The photo.

ARMSTRONG: The picture of the rice in the garbage can. That's what we cooked for them. And that's all they ever eat is rice and I think they give them a can of meat or something to go with it. They didn't even know how to open it up, those Chinese soldiers. And of course, they were . . . they . . . I would call them . . . They were crazy or scared or something. You know, they'd be . . . We would have to stand guard over our own compartments. I don't know. They let out one of those blood-curdling screams and you didn't know whether they's going to try to kill you or what. And so, we had guards to make them stay in . . . in the area. When we got to where we was going, they didn't know what the bathroom was for. Our bathroom was like a tin trough, like this, with some board kind of across it every so often to sit down on if you do a number two or whatever. Whatever you call it. But anyway, they . . . the deck was caked up with human waste about that thick all over. Before we could take on troops to come back to America, we had to disinfect everything. We had to take scrapers—like a hoe that's straightened out with a handle on it—and scrape that off the deck, and then take high-pressure water . . . and the ship, there's enough pressure on that water on ships because they . . . they can blow from here to that telephone. They can blow a stream of water that big around.

And that's why we had . . . It was to put out fire mainly. And do that and clean all that all off. Then we had to disinfect everything before we took American troops on. They didn't . . . They would stop up the drains in the shower and . . . and get in there and try to bathe. And there's a little old curb of metal about that high . . . maybe as long as this room. Maybe four-foot wide or something like that. And they were just . . . I mean, it was a wonder we hadn't caught diseases. Although before we went there, they gave us shots for cholera and everything else you can think of that they knew you might get. And man, I . . . I never had no use for Chinese since then. And all we were trying to do is get them back up, you know. The communists and the nationalists had to get together to fight the Japanese. Of course, the Japanese took whatever they wanted to because the Chinese were . . . They were just dumb. I mean, it wasn't . . . They couldn't help it because there was nobody there to train them anyway. And they just didn't know. And they just stopped up that drain in the shower and their poop was all over anywhere and it rolled as the ship rolled. It'd roll back and forth until, finally, all the water would dry up or something and start sticking. Man, humans waste would start sticking to the steel decks on there.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And so . . . so, those were prisoners you were picking up and taking? The Chinese you had on the ship that had been prisoners?

ARMSTRONG: They were our allies. They were the nationalists.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

ARMSTRONG: And then, you know, later on, the nationalists and the communists went back to fighting, and the communists took over. And then . . .

LAMBERSON: Right, of course. Okay. Okay. And so, when you got back to the United States in 1946, then you left the Navy, right?

ARMSTRONG: Well, I was in the . . .

LAMBERSON: Were you in the reserves?

ARMSTRONG: I was in the reserves, more or less. You didn't sign up for four years. You could sign up for four more years right there. They tried to get you to because they had all these ships they were trying to store somewhere. And . . . and that's why all the West Coast was full of them. They'd be tied up from here to across the street there, you know, maybe six or eight of them. And they'd be swinging around all back and forth on their anchor. And that's what they . . . They had to get room to get them in a, you know, kind of a place like that along the coast where they could . . . because they get out there, they'll . . . Gosh, I've seen waves. I've seen waves when I was on that ship. I thought it was going to capsize. You'd lay in your bunk here and that thing would roll way over there. And it'd set there, and you could feel that screw come out of the water back there and you'd say, "It's not going to go." You couldn't hardly sleep. You say, "It's not going to go back." And it'd sit there and quiver and finally, slowly, it'd get faster and faster. And it's not going to stop this time. And it'd get over there and it'd quiver. And I imagine some ships did capsize. But in that harbor, it usually is not as rough as it is out there. You could head into it and, you know, ride, and your bow would split the waves coming in.

I've seen them, gosh, as tall as that door, and it's scary. And I was like eighteen years old. Nineteen when I got out. Barely nineteen years old when I got out. But I . . . I drove one of them landing crafts. They thought I was capable. You know, they test you to see how you're going to handle everything. And I just wanted to do what you're supposed to as quick as you could and get out because they's going to . . . they's drafting everybody anyway. Even after the war, they still drafted them to replace because they couldn't handle all these activities, you know, to get things back in order. It was . . . it was a mess. You can't believe it. But I went to see my ship one time. They had it tied up, up there along with a bunch more over there. And they let you go in there. And they still had guards on that thing. And what for? Nobody's going to steal them.

Most of them have learned all our . . . we taught everybody our technology until they're almost equal. They could build a war machine. Like now, China's got the bomb and what else? Russia's got it and all them. And I just . . . I'm for helping the rest of the world to better it but if they're just going to take it and make war stuff out of it to come after you . . . and now it's all messed up over there. North Korea's raising . . . they set off an atomic . . . nuclear deal which is a same form of the same thing. And I keep up with the *Naval History* magazine. You can order it, and it's, you know, renewed every year, every two years . . . whatever. Whatever you want to at a time. And I got one the other day and it had the story of Okinawa on it. And you know . . . and I was interested in that. And she's always asked me about stuff, you know, because she don't remember. But she was . . . what did I say? Eight years? Nine years?

LAMBERSON: Yeah, she's younger.

ARMSTRONG: Younger. She was probably . . . I was just like nineteen when I got out of the military and she's . . . I mean, she's eight years younger than that.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

ARMSTRONG: I'm sure she was really . . . at eleven years old, I'm sure she was really interested. Or twelve something. Anyway . . .

LAMBERSON: Right, she doesn't remember. So . . . so, looking back, how do you feel about your military service?

ARMSTRONG: I'm glad I did it but I don't want to do it again. I would if the enemy was attacking. I think the sun's trying to come out. It's been strange, you know, lately, once it finally started raining. We've come through some dry, dry periods.

LAMBERSON: Right.

ARMSTRONG: Down there where we . . . Out where we live, where they got irrigation, you know . . . a lot of irrigation, but that's not going to last forever.

LAMBERSON: Yeah, no kidding. All right. Well, it's . . . I want to let you get to lunch, so I'm going to turn this off.

ARMSTRONG: Okay.

LAMBERSON: Unless there was anything else you wanted to say before we go.

ARMSTRONG: I think . . . I think we've covered everything, hadn't we? More or less.

LAMBERSON: Okay.