

Interview of George Thompson.

Interviewer: Okay, well, George, we're glad that you were willing to come up this afternoon and appreciate your time and glad that you -- and also appreciate your service to our country.

George Thompson: I'm glad I survived the war.

Interviewer: Could you kind of go back to where you -- what you were doing and what life was like for you when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and what your thoughts were at that time?

Alden Rigby: Well, my father had died and I was living with a foster mother who was a janitor for the Phoenix Second Ward. And I was out on the patio and the news came over the radio. We heard it and we couldn't hardly believe it that anybody would have the gall to attack the US because we hadn't had that kind of attack since way back when, back when the English attacked us. But I was 16 at the time, and a couple years later I turned 18 and decided I was going in the Air Force. I went down and took their test and they said, "We don't take color blind people." I said, "That's too bad, because I wanted to fly these planes," and they said, "Well, I think that the Navy is taking some volunteers if you want to go down to the next place there." So I went down there, they said, "We don't take any seamen, we take people who have rank." I said -- well; I was working as a mechanic at a service station, so they gave me the rank of Machinist Mate, Third Class. I drove trucks and cranes and lifted off those heavy stuff and hauled it. I was driving trucks. At one time, I had four different jobs. And I had to drive so fast

that the shore patrol cop caught me driving over the speed limit, and the CO gave me an extra job putting rocks around the tent that the officers lived in.

Interviewer: Let's go back to, uh, when you first enlisted. Uh, and where did you take your basic training?

Alden Rigby: At Camp Peary in Virginia. I was there for six weeks. Got on a box car and drove back to Camp Peary and unloaded there and stayed there for my basic training. While I was there, I thought I was real strong and real smart and I challenged the Judo instructor and he put me in a full nelson. Even today I have pain in my neck because of -- he crushed five of the intervertebral disks in my neck. And, uh, after that, our unit went to Port Hueneme in California, and right there is where we got fitted out and ready to go overseas. The, uh, day before we loaded, the officer in charge told the guys, "If any of you don't want to go, you just step forward." About six guys did, and they left them behind. When we got to New Guinea six days later, here they came on another ship, the same ones that didn't want to go.

Interviewer: I was going to say --

Alden Rigby: So, we all got over there, but they got there just a little later.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Well, uh, any eventful things on the way over? How long did it take you to get over? You went directly to New Guinea, huh?

Alden Rigby: We went right past Australia and all we got to do was wave at it as we went by. We went to, uh, the big gulf that's in there that -- where they built the big air base where the stevedore gets unloaded and helped put together. They had that matting, you know, that they laid down on the swamp land so that the ships wouldn't sink into the mud. We had to unload tons and tons of that. One day, there was one of the guys that worked was walking along the edge of the airport after it got built, and one of the planes came in and landed and blew

a tire and what we call a "ground loop" and turned around and the propeller just cut him in half. It was a sad sight.

Interviewer: Now this, the weather in New Guinea is just hot and humid, isn't it?

Alden Rigby: Hot and, well, it's wet. Arizona had about five to six inches of rainfall if they were lucky. But we got a report that New Guinea had 384 inches on average every year. And one week, we got seven inches a day for seven days. We had a little stream that was about sixteen inches wide right close to our chow hall, and by the time that week was over, our chow hall was doing like this on the roof on the 16 feet deep river that was running right out to the ocean. And we'd driven some coconut logs in and put wood on top to make a dock to unload stuff, you know. And that whole dock, including the coconut logs, was floating out on the bay by the time that we got through with that rain.

Interviewer: Did they decide that you were going to be a CB when you were in basic training?

Alden Rigby: No, that's what I signed up for.

Interviewer: You signed up to be a CB.

George Thompson: Yeah.

Interviewer: So what were your duties there in New Guinea? Just to start with.

George Thompson: Well, mainly I was in charge of the tire shop. After they found out that I had extra abilities because I took the driver training program, we had to load a whole bunch of guys in the back of this truck to -- they rode along as each driver got in and they checked them out to see they could handle the wheel okay. And, uh, after I passed that, I got to

drive and deliver fuel and oil to the mosquito control, take the fuel to the cranes and other equipment that needed it. But I still had the same job with my, with being the tire shop manager because that's the kind of work I did in the service station. I worked that before I went in.

Interviewer: And what were your living conditions like in New Guinea?

George Thompson: Well, it was pretty bad. But, the worst part was the mosquitoes. I mean, we had to sleep with mosquito netting down all four sides and tucked under our cots, you know, our mattresses. And we'd take this little aerosol bomb and spray inside the netting before we got in and hope there weren't any mosquitoes left. Some people got malaria, but not many. We had some Australians come and visit us while we were there, and they said that nearly everyone in their unit had got malaria. One day, I decided to leave the camp and climb up towards that plateau where they called it "Shangri-La." There was a little stream that came down and as I reached up, after I got about half way up the mountain, I felt my fingers pop apart and I grabbed and I pulled out a great big bug and it squirted blood because it was sucking my blood out. So I turned around and went back to the camp.

Interviewer: And, uh, did you -- this was in 1943, I guess. Is that right?

George Thompson: That's close. I think that's right.

Interviewer: And, uh, did you -- you said something about torpedoes?

George Thompson: Well, they came in with torpedoes that had to be fueled and they unloaded them there and then we put them back on the ship and took them out to where they were needed.

Interviewer: And so, you would arm these torpedoes --

George Thompson: Oh, no. We just loaded them on the trucks that took them where they needed to be serviced, you know.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

George Thompson: We weren't the, uh, torpedo experts. We were just stevedores that loaded and unloaded stuff, you know.

Interviewer: Okay, and then what else? How long were you in New Guinea?

George Thompson: Oh, I was there about six months. I spent five months later on in the Philippines.

Interviewer: All right, now, let's talk about -- when you left New Guinea, did you have your orders that you were going to the Philippines?

George Thompson: We had orders to go on liberty for two weeks. And we all had our sea bags with clean clothes packed and many of the guys had bought extra cigarettes to sell to the Australians because they couldn't get any, you know? But we wound up with some of them having a couple dozen packages or cartons of cigarettes that they couldn't sell because they were selling the cigarettes over there for ten cents a carton. They wanted to get the GI's smoking so that when they came back, they would have a habit, you know? So they would give them to the Navy practically free and they sold them for ten cents a carton. And, uh, MacArthur changed his mind about the time we were ready to load on the ship to go to Australia, and all these were canceled and we headed for the Philippines. And we got on an LST and loaded on and went up there.

When we got within Leyte Gulf, we saw the planes coming in and bombing the airport at Leyte, and one of the old guys had been there about 30 years, he got so frightened that he took a gun and put it to his head. I never knew whether he shot himself because I had to, to duck because the shrapnel from the bombs that were dropping close to our ship were hitting

the side of the ship. And one of our men was lying right next to the gunwale and the paint popped off and hit him in the side of the head and it started to bleed. We thought he'd been hit with a bullet, but it was just some paint that was going so fast, it cut him like a knife. But this, uh, I don't know what his rate was. But it was -- he had a whole bunch of stripes on this sleeve. You know, he was standing there with a gun to his sleeve. He was so frightened. He saw these planes dropping bombs and shooting at each other. It was a scary scene. We went in four days after MacArthur landed. And we sat out there and watched the bombing where they were softening up the area for our people to get in without everybody getting killed, you know. And then after we got ashore, why, the CB's got their bulldozers and as our planes came back from the ship that had been sunk, one of our aircraft carriers got sunk and they was landing in the mud and the mud would catch their wheels and the planes would go tumbling down the -- and they'd go out with their bulldozer and push that one off and another one would come in and the same thing would happen. We saved nearly every one of the pilots, but we didn't save not even one plane. They were all totaled, a bunch of junk after the tumble in the mud.

Interviewer: You had Japanese airplanes dropping bombs and stuff on your boats and --

George Thompson: Yeah.

Interviewer: -- stuff, while you were landing? This was two days, did you say, after --

George Thompson: Four.

Interviewer: -- four days after MacArthur landed?

George Thompson: Yeah, well, he sat out there in his ship and, uh, waited till they did the bombing of the airport to keep the Japanese from getting all their airplanes in the air,

you know. But, yeah. When we landed, we brought a rolling galley in. And we had some real good cooks, and they were cooking bread and there was some black fellows up on a nest of guns, just above where our ship was, and they left their guns and came down because they smelled the bread that our cooks were baking in the ovens we had. They weren't there trying to defend the base, they just wanted something good to eat.

Interviewer: So, uh, then, what mainly did you do in the Philippines as far as your job goes and, I understand you had some dangerous situations going on?

George Thompson: Well, yeah, we -- we unloaded 19 tons of dynamite, stacked it in two rows, and the Japanese apparently heard about it. I suppose there was some Filipinos that were either coerced or voluntarily told the Japanese where it was, and they tried to bomb it. I was on duty guarding the dynamite to keep someone from coming in and blowing it up, you know. And the -- the day before, well, I'll go back a little. I was out there, waiting for my turn to go. I was on night duty, and, Captain Kritz, our commanding officer, said, "Thompson, you've been sloughing off long enough. Get a shovel and dig a trench around the officer's tent so the water doesn't come through under our cots." I said, "That's fine with me." So I started shoveling and, my friend that I played Ping-Pong with, he took my place that night and he was standing between these two rows of boxes of dynamite and they dropped a fragmentation bomb and one of the fragments hit my buddy in the chest, and he lived for about 23 hours. His name was Bill Coates. And there's a little monument at Port Hueneme to William F. Coates as the one CB that was killed during that battle by enemy action.

Interviewer: And he was actually taking your place?

George Thompson: Yeah, I figured that the Lord was looking after me. He felt I had to stay here and do something, I don't know. But Bill Coates died in my place. And

another night, I was asleep in my cot and I heard a whistling sound and the Japanese had tried to bomb one of our gun emplacements that were on the coast, and the bomb had gone right over our head and just barely missed the gun emplacement. And another night, there were, well, every night they came in with their fighters and were strafing the area and we'd dive in our fox holes. We had one buddy that, he says, "I'm not going to lose any sleep over this." He stayed in his cot for about six nights in a row without going to his fox hole. And then, one night, he got frightened and he jumped in his fox hole and when the zero came in, it -- they shot him right in the chest while he was laying in the fox hole. If he'd stayed in his bed, he'd probably still be alive.

Interviewer: Yeah, so you had your beds separate from your fox holes, obviously.

George Thompson: Oh, well, the fox hole is right close to our bed, but we had -- underground, you know? The cots were on plywood setting so that we could sleep above ground.

Interviewer: Yeah.

George Thompson: It's too wet to stay under there too long.

Interviewer: So, he got hit right and he was in his fox hole, huh?

George Thompson: Yeah, and while he was in his cot, he never got hit at all.

Interviewer: Yeah.

George Thompson: Just the luck of the draw, I guess.

Interviewer: And what was your duties there in the Philippines, mainly at this --

George Thompson: Well, I guess we were mainly waiting for an assignment. But we had to take care of things like keeping the camp clean and so forth. One of the things we had to watch out for was the Filipinos because they were hungry, and they'd come in at night and steal food from our galley and we had this one -- Phillip Mopp, was his name. He was the best marksman in the whole bunch of us. He was on duty one night when a young Filipino came in and tried to steal some food. He waited till he got about 50 yards down the road, he took careful aim and shot him right below the knee. We didn't have any more food stolen, that guy hobbling around was the best advertising we could do. I don't know whether he did it on purpose, but it surely worked out that way.

Interviewer: Now, did you stay right there mainly near the beach?

George Thompson: Well, we stayed there for about five or six weeks and then Captain Kritz got an idea without any orders. He wanted to move over to Samar, and I guess nobody told him, "No," so he headed over there and we were watching as we went down the shore, heading for, uh, this other island. Samar is a little bigger, but not as populated as Leyte. Anyhow, when we got there, we set up camp and, by the way, one of my tent mates was a guy named Larry Miller. There was six of us in a tent, and Larry and I both got what they call "jungle rot." It's a very severe case of what's similar to athlete's foot, only it's more like that flesh eating virus, you know. He got it. It came up his legs, went up -- when it got to his chin, they sent him home. I don't know if it's the same Larry Miller or relative that owns all these things we have here, but he was a little thin skinny guy. And that guy we have here does look thin like that.

Interviewer: Was this Larry Miller from Utah?

George Thompson: I don't know where he was from.

Interviewer: Yeah.

George Thompson: He only stayed there for a few weeks and the jungle rot kind of wrecked his chances of staying because if it reached his eyes or his brain, he would have been dead.

Interviewer: And, uh, did you witness the big naval battle on Leyte Gulf?

George Thompson: I did.

Interviewer: Tell us about that.

George Thompson: Well, the Japanese were sneaking down one side of the island while Bill Halsey, the Admiral in Charge of our Navy ships was going up the other way, and one of our pilots was flying over and spotted the Japanese hanging close to the coast, not to be detected. So Halsey turned around and, he hauled butt and came back, tearing down, got there and stopped them from getting in the gulf. And all night long, we could hear these shells whistling overhead. I'll tell you, there was a lot of fancy diving for the fox holes. And one time, I jumped in a fox hole, you know, and I heard a guy say, "Urhh," and I looked down and I recognized the base commander and I said, "Sorry, Sir." And he said, "You stay right where you are, seaman." He didn't want me to leave because he thought it might be a little protection for him.

Interviewer: Hmm.

George Thompson: Yeah, the battle at Leyte Gulf kind of broke the back of the naval power for Japan. We'd been giving them some trouble, but this is where they no longer had the ability to mount serious attacks.

Interviewer: And did you move around at all on the Philippines or did you stay in that one spot?

George Thompson: We stayed mostly on Samar. I was there when the war ended. But, uh, there was one guy, not from our unit. He got one of those, they had six, uh, of those big cubes tied together and made into a boat, you know. It had a motor on it and he took it out and went over to another little island and he dropped anchor and jumped off the pontoon barge and, uh, he looked around. He didn't recognize anybody. And finally, he did recognize that they were all Japanese. So he got the heck out of there, got on his pontoon barge and came back. He was lucky he didn't get killed.

Interviewer: I guess he was. So, you stayed on Samar until --

George Thompson: Until the end of the war.

Interviewer: -- the end of the war.

George Thompson: I was offered the opportunity to go to Japan, and they said I'd get a re-rate if I promised to stay at least a year in Japan as an occupation force, you know, part of the occupation force. I said, "No, thanks. I'm tired of this. I want to go home." So, we got on the USS Tulagi and President Kennedy was on that same boat. And that's when he gave his famous, "The atom bomb is going to stop the whole war," speech. And that launched his presidential candidacy. But he was on that boat when we came back home to San Diego. And then I spent six weeks in the naval hospital because of the injury to my back. I told them it was hurting and they said, "Well, stay here and we'll treat it." After six weeks, they wanted to operate and I said, "No, thanks. I'm all better," which wasn't very true, but it still hurts. But I, I wanted to get out. I didn't want a surgery on my back. I heard too many bad stories about that. So, a chiropractor is keeping me from suffering too much. But, that's the only serious injury that I got during the war.

Interviewer: When you think back about your time there in the Philippines, what was the most harrowing experience as far as --

George Thompson: That battle with the Japanese Navy and our Navy shooting across the, from one side of the gulf to the other. They were outside the gulf, but they were shooting across the island at each other, you know.

Interviewer: And that was a decisive victory for the US.

George Thompson: It really was.

Interviewer: And then, um --

George Thompson: It didn't end the war, but it ended the Japanese naval power as an attack force. Before that, they could attack anything we had almost at will. And we had a lot of trouble keeping them contained and allowing our ships to supply the people that were on shore.

Interviewer: Uh, from a personal standpoint, the critical times when you were in harm's way and at risk, what, can you relate a couple more of those for us?

George Thompson: Well, I stood behind a palm tree in Leyte and watched, I wish I could remember his name, but he was one of the first aces that was made because he knocked down more Japanese planes. He had the ability to not have his blood surge away from his brain when he'd do these loops and he'd go along and they'd get behind him and he'd go, "Zip," and he was behind them and the next thing they know, they were on the way down. And I was standing behind a palm tree when they were shooting at each other and the bullets were hitting on both sides of the tree, but I never got hit there. Like I said, the worst injury I got was in boot camp when the Judo instructor put a full nelson on me and ruined my neck.

Interviewer: That was your biggest wound that lasted.

George Thompson: Yeah, but we lost, it was either six or seven men. One was to, uh, what they called a tsetse fly. It gives the sleeping sickness. And this young fellow was supposed to go on duty unloading cargo out on where we were storing it, and he said, "I don't feel well." And the officer said, "You get out there and do your job." By morning, they brought him back and the next day, he died.

Interviewer: From --

George Thompson: From sleeping sickness. From the tsetse fly.

Interviewer: Um --

George Thompson: We had another incident where, uh, we were unloading some of these great, big, D 8 cats you know, Caterpillar Tractors, and somebody had forgotten to set the brakes and put it in gear to hold it when they landed on the platoon barges they brought them ashore on. And, I wish I could remember their names, but 62 years a quite awhile. But anyhow, he jumped up on the track and it was already rolling, and his pant leg got caught in the track and he went down with the barge and went down with, not the barge, but with the Caterpillar Tractor, you know. And, they never did find him.

Interviewer: I guess, uh, there was a lot of harrowing jobs dealing with that heavy equipment and stuff.

George Thompson: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Um --

George Thompson: It was dangerous work.

Interviewer: Did you ever see the John Wayne movie, "Fighting Seabees" or something like that?

George Thompson: No.

Interviewer: Um --

George Thompson: Speaking of movies, the only movie star I saw was Bob Hope and his troop and they came over. We built a little stage and he -- I don't know who their ladies were, but they put on a show for us over there. I don't think many people were looking at Bob Hope, but they were looking at those girls.

Interviewer: I'll bet. Huh, that was while you were still in Samar then.

George Thompson: No, that was back in New Guinea.

Interviewer: Oh, in New Guinea. Um --

George Thompson: I'm not trying to put this all coordinated.

Interviewer: No, I understand that. Yeah, I understand. What are your thoughts of the war in general and, uh, do you feel it was a necessary war for the United States to fight?

George Thompson: Well, when I was about 15, I used to say, "Hip, hip, hooey." But now, I changed it to, "Hip, hip, hooray." And I felt, as we went overseas, that we were the tip point of the lance aimed at the heart of Japan, and it had to be done. And I'm very proud of what we did. I'm even prouder of what my little sweetheart did, to allow another man, like myself, to go overseas to do his job. Although, she just worked a typewriter, she was doing a job that he would have had to do. So that's why I wanted to tell her story, too.

Interviewer: She was in the Marines --

George Thompson: She was a Lady Marine. They emphasized, "Don't just call yourselves Marines. You are Lady Marines and you act the part."

Interviewer: And, uh, where did she serve? Did she go overseas?

George Thompson: No, she never did. She went back to Camp LeJeune on the East Coast and took basic training and she had to get out on a, the firing range and shoot at targets and that because they said everybody had to have that skill. But, she went to, oh, a camp in California. Oh, I can't remember the name. Anyhow, she spent the rest of the time there and then she came home. As I was cleaning house, I found a stack of letters that her mother had gotten from her while she was in service and I haven't yet had chance to read it because I just found it a couple of days ago.

Interviewer: Hmm.

George Thompson: But I was surprised, she must have written a letter almost every day to her mother. Her mother was very highly opposed to her going in the service, I guess she had her reasons, but Vera said she enjoyed it. And everybody treated her well and she felt that she had a necessary job to do and the gals on the home front that were sending supplies and sending boys overseas by taking their jobs. They did a service just as great as ours was. That's my feelings about it.

Interviewer: Did, how did those bulldozers work? Were they building the airport runways?

George Thompson: Yeah, and roads.

Interviewer: And roads.

George Thompson: I used to tell Vera when she dragged about being a Marine, you know, I said, "Your Marines advanced on the roads that we built with our bulldozers."

Interviewer: And did they have snipers over there, uh, occasionally that you had to worry about?

George Thompson: Oh, yeah, and they tried to shoot the driver of those bulldozers because, as we advanced into some of their areas, they used them like tanks. And they actually did advance along with the bulldozers, not building the roads ahead for them to advance on like I kidded her about, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

George Thompson: But, yeah, they'd tried to shoot the driver and if they did, then somebody else jumped up on the seat and took over and kept on driving.

Interviewer: Now, where were you when the war ended?

George Thompson: I was in Samar, standing next to a banana tree.

Interviewer: And, how did you get the word?

George Thompson: Well, I can't remember just how it happened, but, there was one guy that was there. He seemed too intelligent to be in a stevedoring unit, and I asked him what his job had been. He said, "Well, I was dispatch analyst." I said, "What in the world is that?" He said, "As you know, when they encode messages so they can't be read, I'm the guy that broke down the code." I says, "What are you doing here?" He said, "Well, I'm a dispatcher. I guess they figured that was close enough. Dispatch analyst, dispatcher." I said, "Well, why don't you correct the mistake?" He says, "I like it better here."

Interviewer: Huh.

George Thompson: When he was a dispatcher, he'd sign on a jeep to a man and he knew who had it and who had to return it and sign out a truck to somebody else or sign out a bulldozer. He was in charge of the equipment that was signed out. He was the dispatcher, the guy that put down on paper where the stuff was and how to recover it, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, and then when the atomic bombs dropped, you were still on Samar, obviously.

George Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you know that right away, or --

George Thompson: No, I guess we didn't. I don't know just when it got dropped, I guess a few days after they got the message that they could tell us.

Interviewer: And, uh, when VJ Day occurred --

George Thompson: We were extremely elated. We were glad it was all over.

Interviewer: And then, uh, how did you -- what happened after the war ended? Did you just --

George Thompson: Well, we just --

Interviewer: -- get on a boat and head home, or --

George Thompson: We just had to wait until the boat was available. But we just carried on with normal duties, you know. Like your home and had to keep your home clean and had to prepare food for the groups. It was more like home side than war at that time. But, we were in New Guinea when two major attacks were made on the base that we built there in (inaudible), that's in Leyte Gulf, you know. Not Leyte -- what am I talking about. In the big gulf there --

Interviewer: Around New Guinea.

George Thompson: In New Guinea, yeah.

George Thompson: But, they tried very hard to rush us out of that base after we got it built. But, uh, they made two major attacks. And we, who were just unloaded supplies and not on the front lines were flying over, bombing, why, we didn't know what was going

on, really. We were just doing the job and helping these guys that were on the front lines to do theirs.

Interviewer: Yeah, and what was that phrase that the CB's --

George Thompson: The one that I told you about?

Interviewer: Yeah.

George Thompson: We said, "The difficult we do immediately. The impossible, that takes a little longer."

Interviewer: Okay, Elizabeth, have you got any questions?

Elizabeth: I want him to tell me what exactly a CB is.

George Thompson: A CB is a man who is assigned to do construction work, all phases of it, from unloading and loading supplies, to building camps, building airports, and any other kind of work that's needed. They even filled in for some of the Army when they needed help doing the things they had to get done. But mainly, they were in the Navy.

Elizabeth: And did you, uh, were you in that typhoon at all around the Leyte Gulf?

George Thompson: Well, that --

Elizabeth: And talk to Rick.

George Thompson: Not at Leyte Gulf, but I felt like we were in the major typhoon or whatever you want to tell it when we had those seven inches of rain every day for a week because the water just kept rising when we landed. Somebody had already built some huts and they put them up on coconut logs about six feet above the ground. I said, "What in the world is that for?" Well, they said, "You can go underneath it, it's cool." But the underneath part is where the water went when the rain came.

Interviewer: That seven inches of rain a day, was that in Samar, or was that in New Guinea?

George Thompson: That was in New Guinea.

Interviewer: New Guinea. We've heard that there was a big typhoon on the boats, uh, when the convoys were heading to Leyte Gulf. And did you experience that at all?

George Thompson: No.

Interviewer: Terrible weather on the way there?

George Thompson: The biggest wind we faced with on the way home. On that USS Tulagi that I mentioned.

Interviewer: Yeah.

George Thompson: We had head winds that were 40 knots, and the boat was listing from right to left so badly that we were ordered to go below decks because they were afraid we were going to get washed overboard.

Interviewer: Hmm.

George Thompson: And that lasted for most of the trip, from, uh, Samar over to San Diego.

Interviewer: So, you went to San Diego, you didn't go through San Francisco then.

George Thompson: No, we went to San Diego.

Interviewer: On your way back, huh? How big was that ship that --

George Thompson: Well, it was, it was a small aircraft carrier.

Interviewer: That you returned on, huh?

George Thompson: Yeah, but it had the regular raising and lowering decks so they could put the ships up on the deck to take off and put them under to keep them away from the weather and to store them underneath after they folded their wings back and we didn't bring any airplanes with us. They just loaded people on them to get everybody that could to come home that wanted to.

Interviewer: Tell us about your experience of arriving in San Diego then.

George Thompson: Well, I can't remember a whole lot about it because I had had a broken tooth and they don't have dentists on the front lines. And my broken tooth abscessed and I took a pair of pliers and tried to pull it out and when I got to a dentist in Phoenix and had that tooth fixed, I told him what I done. He said, "If you pulled that tooth, you'd be dead." He says, the puss pocket on there would have broken and you would be dead within minutes.

Interviewer: Hmm.

George Thompson: And I was put on codeine and it literally, I was a codeine addict. And when we were half way home, I thought, "I don't want to be like this when I get home, living on codeine." So I took the half a bottle left and threw it over side and that night, I beat my cot to death and I guess I almost died myself, but I survived and I have been a survivor ever since and the when the doctor offers the pain killer, I say, "No, thank you." When I had my open heart surgery three years ago, the doctor said, "You got to take pain killers." I said, "No, I won't." He said, "But you've got to." And I said, "If I have to, I will, but I don't want them." But I had a strong aversion to getting on anything that took hold of me and held me in grip like that codeine did. But, I've never wanted to take anything, not even an aspirin unless I had to. It was a terrifying experience. I think I'm more frightened of drugs than I ever was of the war.

Interviewer: If you were to give any words of wisdom or advice to future generations, what would you say?

George Thompson: When you're young, get all the education you can. Do something hard to strengthen yourself and be loyal to your country. And that's all.

Interviewer: Well, that's good. Any other questions?

Elizabeth: No, I got what I need.

Interviewer: Well, George --

End of recording.