

# Orville Wilbur Skibbe

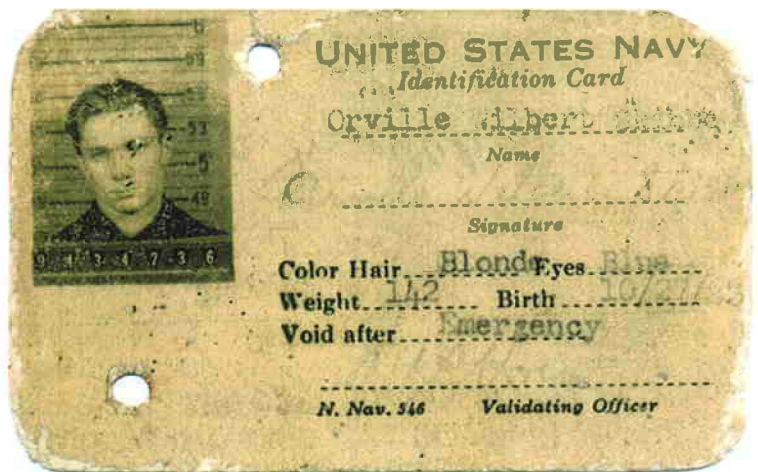
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U.S. Navy Seabees

World War II

Veterans History Project Interview

26 May 2005



Orville Skibbe Interview  
May 26, 2005  
Niles Public Library District  
Interviewer: Kate Wolicki

KW: This interview is being conducted on May 26, 2005, at Niles Public Library in Niles, IL. My name is Kate Wolicki. I am speaking with Orville Wilbur Skibbe. Mr. Skibbe was born on October 27, 1925 in Chicago, Illinois and now lives in Niles, Illinois. Mr. Skibbe learned of the Veterans History Project through the Niles newsletter. He has kindly consented to be interviewed for the project. Here is his story.

KW: The first thing we usually ask is when did you enter the service – when did you start?

***[005: STARTING OUT]***

OS: I went in the first month, the twelfth day of '44, and I got out of the service in the first month, the twelfth day of '46. I was in the Seabees, I was in the 81<sup>st</sup> Seabees and the 94<sup>th</sup> Seabees. And our job was to go over to Normandy, it was called Sugar Red Beach at the time, and we built a chow hall and an Army rest camp. And after a few months of staying there, I really don't know how long we stayed there, but then we were ordered to ship out, back to the States, and we wound up at the South Pacific. I went to Inoito [?], Okinawa, and we were stationed on Okinawa with Admiral Nimitz's Outfit. And we built an Army rest camp up there and chow halls. And that's about all, like I say.

KW: So what were you doing before you were in the service?

OS: I was in construction work, mostly. Whatever job I could hold, that's the job I took. But most of my jobs were always on the outside. Then, when I returned from the Seabees, I got a job with construction again, and then I applied for Civil Service job, and I went in when Mayor Daley went in, [Daley] Senior, and I had been with them ever since. [Then] I retired, I was a tree trimmer.

KW: Were you drafted, or did you enlist?

OS: I went in just before, I would [have been drafted], because my brother told me, if you want to go in the Navy, you better enlist, because when they draft you they usually draft you right into the Army. So I went down just before I was drafted, and I enlisted in to the Navy, but I heard about the Seabees, so we got transferred over to the Seabees. And that's how I became a Seabee.

KW: Just by accident?

OS: Well, yeah, actually it was just by accident.

KW: So there wasn't a reason that you chose that.

### ***[030: THE SEABEES INGENUITY]***

OS: No, no. But our outfit was made up with a lot of older fellas because they were experienced in building and construction work. And me and a few other ones were the youngest guys in our outfit, because most of them were a lot older than we were, you know. And, uh, we, I learned a lot in the Seabees. We used to wash our clothes in the helmet until we decided, some of the fellows decided, "Let's make a wash machine." So we made a wash machine out of a 55-gallon drum, a stick with a windmill. And when the windmill would blow, the stick would go down with a plunger on it, and we'd throw our clothes in, that's how we'd wash their clothes. Yeah. Then we decided, taking a bath, just with a helmet or anything, we decided to make a shower. So we got a 55-gallon drum, we had a shower head put on it, and we filled the thing with the warm water, the sun would warm the water, and we'd stand there, pull the chain and we had our showers.

KW: So did you do that, you were...the Seabees were part of the Navy?

OS: Yeah, first there were, when we first went in, not me but when the Seabees were connected with the Marines because one of our outfits got almost 90% of them got killed because they had no weapons. Then they decided "we'd better arm these people," you know, so the Marines took us and they trained us, and they gave us weapons. They gave us carbines. And [then] they had something to defend ourselves with, you know. And then after, I forget how long it was afterwards, they said the Navy was going to take us over, so then we went into the Navy. The Navy branch took us over, and that's why we'd be called the Navy Seabees.

KW: That's interesting. So what was it like at the beginning? What were your first days like, do you remember?

### ***[051: FIRST DAYS]***

OS: Yeah, I was all excited about getting in there, but after I got in there I really wasn't in love with it, because I figure, "what did I do?" you know. I was scared, you know, just turned 18, and we had our air raids every night, coming over, but it turned out to be pretty good. I met a bunch of nice fellows in there, got closer than brothers, after a while. In the old saying, they used to say, "Never hit a Seabee, 'cause you might have a son in the Marines." But it was mostly an older outfit that were in with me.

KW: And obviously you had a lot of engineering experience.

OS: Oh yeah. Most of my time was spent either in guard duty or I wound up in the kitchen. I love to cook, and to this day I enjoy cooking.

KW: So was it an accident that you wound up in the kitchen, or were you on some kind of rotation?

OS: No, the first I was on the, what do you call it, Mess Duty, and then I started making salads



and stuff, there, I never turned out to be a top chef or anything, but I used to work in the kitchen, most of the time I was there. But it was a good experience because I still love to do it today.

KW: So when you went over...Did you do any training in the United States?

OS: Oh yeah. We went to Great Lakes for our Naval training, and from there we went to Camp Perry, VA, and then it was Northlake, VA, and we shipped out from there, Camp Perry.

KW: So at first you went across...

OS: Across.

KW: And where'd you end up?

OS: We went to Normandy. When we went over, we went to England, I think it was England first, and then from there we went to Normandy. And I had a chance to ride on the Queen Mary. It was a troop ship they made out of the Queen Mary, and when I come back I returned back on the USS Hornet, the aircraft carrier. That was an experience.

KW: How come?

OS: Because the troops were all coming back, and they used that for a supply ship coming back, we came back on that.

KW: There were a lot of people?

OS: Oh, yeah, an awful lot of people on there. It looked like a football field up on the deck, there.

***[078: TOOK ME UNDER HIS WING]***

KW: So you were from Chicago, which was a pretty diverse place. Did you meet a lot of different kids of people?

OS: Oh yeah, yeah. There was one fellow that kind of took me underneath his wings, because he used to find out I could never get, I wasn't getting no mail back and forth. And he asked me the reason why, and I said I had a trouble with writing, you know, and he said, "How about if we get together" he said, "on a weekend," and he said "we'll send a letter off to your mother or your friends." And he said, "When you get 'em," he said, "call me and I'll help you with 'em." And I never forgot the man's name. His name was Cuppetti. And that's the only thing I remember. I don't have his first name because I've been trying to look him up to see if he's still alive. If not, God bless him, you know.

KW: We can take a look and see if someone put him in the World War II memorial registry.

OS: But I'd have to know the full name on him, you know, and the only thing I remember, we used to call him Cuppetti. It was an oddball name.

KW: Did people call you anything?

OS: Yeah, they called me Skip.

KW: How come?

OS: Nobody liked their first names. I was named after Orville Wilbur, but I was Orville Wilbur Skibbe instead of Orville Wilbur Wright. My mother always used to name us after famous people. You know.

KW: So you ended up being named "Skip." After the famous Skip.

OS: Yep, you know, all four – five brothers were called Skip. Nobody liked their first name so they took the name of Skip. And I did wind up at one of the major airports. Chicago O'Hare field. I was a foreman out there.

KW: Wait, all your brothers were called Skip too?

OS: Uh-hmm.

KW: How did you keep track of who somebody was asking for?

OS: Well, we really didn't need any names. My father used to just point at us and we knew who he was talking about.

KW: Had you ever been away from home before?

OS: No, that was the first time away from home.

KW: What was it like?

OS: Like I say, it was a little scary, but I got acquainted pretty quickly.

KW: So you had five brothers?

OS: Yeah, five brothers and four sisters.

KW: Oh my goodness.

OS: Four sisters and five brothers, yeah.

KW: So were any of your brothers and sisters in the service?

***[104: BROTHERS IN THE SERVICE]***

OS: Yeah, my first brother Charles, he was in the Pearl Harbor, on the Pearl Harbor attack, and I was in the Seabees, and I had a brother, he was in the Army, but he was stationed in Alaska, in the fire department. And I had an older brother, was too old for the service, but he was in the CC camp, I don't know if you remember [hearing about] that? He was in the CCs. So that was the experience for the boys.

KW: Any of your sisters involved in the war effort?

OS: No, they were all housewives.

KW: Do you remember, did you have any – boy, somebody put in here “drill instructors” – did you have anybody pushing you around?

OS: No, no, not really, they were all pretty good. They did what they had to do and I did what I had to do.

KW: You said the Marines taught you how to shoot?

OS: No, we had all that practice at Great Lakes when we went in, but the Marines were the ones that gave us the weapons and stuff. I forget what outfit it was, they were building an airstrip, and the Japanese came in there and they killed so many of them, because they had nothing to defend themselves with. And that's when they decided to give us weapons.

***[120: TRAINING AT GREAT LAKES]***

KW: Do you remember, did you, at Great Lakes or when you were training...where were you staying? Were you in barracks, were you in tents, or

OS: Oh no, we were in barracks. At Great Lakes we were in barracks.

KW: So what was it like?

OS: It was alright. I enjoyed that part, and to this day I don't swim, that's another thing I have to do before I pass away is learn how to swim because there's a few things I want to do in my life before I go on, and that's one of them. The reason why I never learned how to swim in the Navy (everybody can't understand, “How'd you go through the Navy without swimming?”) well, we were going through a Commando course, and we were going up a line 25 or 30 feet in the air, hand over hand, and by the time I'm coming down, another guy started up the rope, and I let go, and when I fell, I broke my ankle. I was in Sick Bay for I don't know how many weeks, and I figure, well, my outfit's gonna be moved out, I probably won't go with them. But no, they took me out, they carried me with them, and when I was on the ship over there, I made sure I stayed right by the lifeboat, in case anything happened.

KW: Did you have to do anything when you were on the ship?

***[135: I LEARNED AN AWFUL LOT FROM THE SERVICE]***

OS: Yeah, we had chores, but I got away from it quite a bit because I was laid up, you know. But it was a good experience, and I learned an awful lot from the service.

KW: So what did you learn?

OS: Well, for one thing, how to take care of ourselves. Cause fresh out of the young age that I was in, there was not much we did know. Until we got in the Service, and we knew what we had to do, and you had to do it when they told you, you know. But that's about all.

KW: So you left for overseas, and you went on a boat...a ship, sorry...and how did you travel once you were on land?

OS: We had our own equipment.

KW: Were you on trucks, or jeeps, or

OS: We were on trucks, they transferred us on trucks.

KW: I interviewed one gentleman who was in the Army and he said they moved them always at night, they were

***[147: SETTING UP CAMP AT NORMANDY]***

OS: Most of the time everything was moved at night, yeah. But we didn't, it wasn't too far off of Normandy that we set up this camp. I don't know how many miles from the shore it was, but it was in a cow pasture, I remember that, it was a cow pasture that we set up the base. We set up our field kitchen first, we had tents, and when we left, we were building Quonset huts and everything like that, for the wounded, you know.

KW: Did you stay once you'd built things, or did you move on pretty quickly?

OS: No, we stayed there for, I don't know how many months we were there. But then from there we got seven days of leave at home, and then they sent us back to the South Pacific.

KW: So did you actually get all the way home for your leave?

OS: Oh yeah, we got home.

KW: So what did you do?

OS: Well, not much in seven days, you couldn't do much in seven days.

KW: Where were you?



OS: I was in Chicago, I was living in Chicago then.

KW: Oh! So you came all the way back to Chicago.

OS: Yeah.

KW: And then went all the way back out.

OS: And then went back again.

KW: So you just hung out?

OS: Just hung out. I was too young to do anything else, so

KW: Couldn't make any trouble.

OS: Yeah.

KW: What did you eat?

***[164: EATING & PTOMAININE POISONING ]***

OS: What did I eat? Well, believe it or not, I used to like that stuff they called "dried beef." And on Sundays, I used to enjoy a meal on Sunday, because it was pork and beans on Sunday breakfast, and then we used to have cold cuts in the afternoon. And then one day we all got sick over in Guam, we all got sick, the whole base, we got some bad lunch meat and we all got ptomaine poisoning. It was a mess. We were all sitting in the outdoor theater, and all of a sudden we all started running for the head, and were all vomiting and everything. They found out we all had a touch of ptomaine poisoning.

KW: Goodness. So you were, I'm trying to figure this out. You were back in the United States and then you went to the Pacific Theatre. Where were you?

***[177: IN GUAM]***

OS: I was, well we went to a couple islands like Tinea, Saipan, and then we wound up on Guam. That's where our main base was, in Guam.

KW: What were you building in Guam?

OS: Well, they were building, putting up huts, Quonset huts, and my job was guarding a mine, there was a mine there with all kinds of dynamite and everything and that was my job. I used to stand guard duty there.

KW: Did you do that by yourself, or were there more guards?

OS: No, every three, four hours you'd get relieved. You stood there by the front cave, by the opening of the cave, with your weapons, and just guarded the materiel in there, that's all.

KW: So what did you do? What did you think about? Or did you just chat?

OS: There was not much to think about, when you, to be honest with you, so...I just did what I had to do, that's all.

KW: What did it look like?

OS: Guam was a beautiful place, it was beautiful. I used to watch them down there, the people down in Guam, they had not many horses, they used to use water buffaloes to plow up their fields and that, they used to use, they didn't have a lot of fertilizer so they used to, I think it was human waste they used to use for fertilizer in Guam. That's why I didn't eat too many vegetables. But, like I say, then from there, we just served our time out there, and then I went back, in 1946 I got discharged. And then I think it was six months later I married, a wonderful woman, and [had] four beautiful kids. And I've got two grandchildren, two grandkids right now, a granddaughter and a grandson.

KW: You've got a pair. You said about staying in touch with your family, right, did they send you letters?

***[205: I HAD NOT MUCH SCHOOLING WHEN I WENT IN]***

OS: Oh yeah, they sent me letters and this one fellow I referred to he used to read the letters and help me answer them back because, like I say, I had not much schooling when I went in.

KW: Did you stop going to school? Or did you...

OS: No, I just went as long as I could, until it was time for me to just walk away, and that's what I did.

KW: Do you know how old you were when you stopped?

OS: Oh, I had to be around 16, 17. I did any kind of job I could do – whatever I could hold I held. To be honest or not, I have never got fired from a job, all the while I worked. And I had whatever job it was – I don't care what it was, from garbage to sewer or anything, I did, because I knew I had a family to support. And then when I went on later in years and life, it just got away from me, and busy making payments on my mortgage, so I had to make sure I had a job. All I got to say is, if there's any kids out there today, make sure you go to school. Because you're going to need it today.

KW: Well, you're a legend in the literacy program here.

OS: Well.

KW: Everybody knows your name.

OS: I'll tell you, I have met so many wonderful people. Wonderful people.

KW: So you didn't go to school when you came back, you got married right away. Did you know your wife before you were in the service?

OS: Yeah. I knew...No, I'm sorry, I didn't. We went to school together, we started Kindergarten together, but she went on and I just fell down, I fell out. And then six months after I got out of the service, I met her at a bowling banquet. And a few weeks later, we got married. We did go to school together in Kindergarten. I knew her, it's almost, well, I would say 75 years I know her. I'm 80 and June 29<sup>th</sup> of this year we'll be married sixty years.

KW: A long time. I asked you what you did when you were on leave, I want to know, did you have any USO shows anyplace you were?

OS: Yeah, they had a few, but I never bothered with them. I was too shy. I used to stay by myself quite a bit, until later on in life. My father passed away when he was young, but I remember when I was a kid, he used to always tell us: "If you're going to do something, do it right, or leave it alone." And I always remember that.

KW: Hard to get anything done then, isn't it. So, you didn't go, what did you do instead? Did you...obviously you didn't read, but did you play games with other

OS: No, we went out, the fellows went out. We'd see whatever we could see over in England, when we were stationed in England. I was in London, and what was it, I can't remember the towns in [England.] 'Cause we weren't there that long.

KW: So did you go dancing? Did you make trouble?

OS: No, I was no ballroom [dancer]. No, I never got in trouble. I can honestly say I was never, I have never been in a fight or anything like that. I was kind of backward because, kind of, my problem. I used to stay by myself quite a bit.

KW: Were you afraid people would find out you couldn't read? Or did you just...

OS: No, in a way I was afraid that they might out, because in them days they'd find criticism right away. But, no, I used to have a couple of fellows I used to hang out with.

KW: So, what did you do with them? You know, if you say their names, you know, they're in the Library of Congress forever.

***[260: MORE FROM CUPPETTI, A GOOD PERSON (see 078)]***

OS: Yeah, like I say, I'd sure like to look up this one fellow if I could. He might be passed on, if he is, may he rest in peace. Like I say, he was a wonderful person. He was my age, you know,

but he just, he knew my problem, and I never – they tell you if you have a problem, go to the chaplain and everything – well, I had no luck with that. So I just stayed, and he just happened to spot me, and he asked “How come you don’t get any mail?” And I told him “I have a problem” back and forth, and he said “That shouldn’t be no problem,” and “let’s get together,” he says, “when you get a letter, I’ll answer it for you.”

KW: Such a kind person.

OS: It was.

KW: So you had a chaplain with you?

OS: Yeah, every outfit had a chaplain

KW: Did you ever talk to the chaplain?

OS: Not really, no. I was, like I say, I was too ashamed or whatever you want to call it. But when I got home, I says, I better put my pride in my back pocket and forget about it, because I used to, when anybody’d mention anything about any kind of records or anything, I used to break out in blotches. And I used to shy away from it as much as I can so they wouldn’t find out a lot of things.

KW: So, what did you do when you had holidays? What did you do for Christmas and

OS: Well, when we were home, we had our little get-togethers at Christmastime, but when I was in the service, to be honest with you, I really didn’t pay attention to the holidays. Everyday was a holiday. Everyday above ground was a holiday for me.

KW: So you were building things, and you said you built things for the wounded. Did you meet anybody who was wounded, did you ever spend time people who were wounded, ever talk to them,

OS: Yeah, I had a couple of good friends of mine, a big fellow, his name was Red Woods from Dallas, Texas. He was a [?] so he was a lot older than me. He took me underneath his wing and he used to tell me, “You’ll be my son, as long as you’re here.” He passed away in the service, he was drinking the stuff that they used to make for beverages, they were drinking torpedo juice and stuff like that.”

KW: And that’s how he died?

OS: Yeah, I guess that’s what they carried him out with. He was drinking some of the torpedo juice with grapefruit juice and it just got to him, and they carried him out that way. Now, I never had the guts enough to try any of it.

KW: Obviously he was someone you knew,



OS: No, I just met him there.

KW: You met him in the service, but did you have funerals for people who were part of your group that died, or did you

OS: No, no. After I got out of the service I never seen anybody after that.

KW: Not at all? Did you join a veterans organization at all?

OS: No, I used to, the Seabees had a thing out there, I used to donate to the Seabees a while there. For their children, you know. That's about what it was.

KW: They put in here: Do you recall any particularly memorable, humorous, or unusual event? I think that's a hard question.

OS: No, to me at that time, everything was a big event. No, not really.

KW: Do you think about it?

OS: Oh, yeah.

### ***[316: TELLING YOUR STORIES]***

KW: Did you tell stories to your kids when they were growing up?

OS: I just lately, and the kids are just saying "How come you never told? This is interesting." But, like I say, I kept pretty close to myself. I imagine quite a few of the fellows, when they came back, they didn't have much to say about it. I'm surprised that I'm here right now, talking to you about it.

KW: Well it's wonderful for people to know. Because they'll always be able to find out. And I think to know the everyday things that you did...

OS: My brother was involved, my brother Charles was in the Pearl Harbor attack. He used to get up. He's from Youngstown, Ohio. And he used to get up and make all kind of speeches to the schoolkids and everything. He'd go around and they wanted to know about Pearl Harbor and stuff like that. And he would make speeches. He was involved, he was a commander in the organization, you know, they call them chapters...

KW: Like a Veterans of Foreign Wars or something like that.

OS: Yeah. So that's about it, Kat.

KW: Alright, let me see what else I've got here...Alright. Do you remember what it was like the day your service ended?

***[336: THE DAY SKIP'S SERVICE ENDED]***

OS: Yeah. When I was coming home, I stopped at, well, I'm so used to calling them pubs, there was a tavern, and I was celebrating, and it happened to be Decoration Day. And I think I saluted every flag going down Division Street. And when I came home, she said, "Oh my God, what did they do to my son?"

***[346: WHY THE NAVY]***

KW: So you weren't in the service until later in the war. Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day? Do you remember what

OS: Oh, yeah, I remember Pearl Harbor Day. I wasn't in the service at the time. But I remember, and I was wondering what my brother was going through. And right after that is when I said "I'm going to be 18" and I talked to my brother, and that's when he told me, he said, "If you want to get into the Navy, go on and enlist, because you can enlist in the Navy, but if they draft you, they usually throw you right into the, you don't get much of a choice, you go right into the Army." And I wanted to be in the Navy.

KW: How come?

OS: Because he was a sailor, I wanted to be a sailor too, so. I thought he had a wonderful life until I got there. It wasn't that easy.

KW: They issued you uniforms. Did you have different uniforms?

OS: Yeah. No, right from the beginning we got the Navy uniform.

KW: Did you have a summer uniform and winter uniform?

OS: Yeah, summer, winter uniform and then we had our work uniforms.

KW: Oh, you had a work uniform?

OS: Yeah, our uniforms were green, you know, camouflage green.

***[363: WHAT THE SEABEES DID]***

KW: So you built rest areas in your green uniforms. What else did you build?

OS: Oh, the Seabees were involved in everything. Pontoons, they were building pontoons, they were...in Normandy, they sunk a row of ships, because the water is so rough, coming in, they made a break, what they call a breakwater. They took a line of old ships and they sunk them. It would keep the water from being so rough. And what we used to do was put pontoons together – a pontoon was 8 by 8 by 8, and they welded them together and put motors on the back, and we

used to go from shore to the ships to pick up the supplies and bring it back into the shore. That's what we used to do. Bringing the supplies in.

KW: So you had to do a lot more than just building stuff.

OS: Oh, yeah, yeah. We, they built bridges, canals, the Army rest, the Army camps they used to set up for them. No, we were involved in a lot of stuff.

KW: Was there anything you particularly remember making? Anything you think about, putting it together, anything you learned you use a lot.

***[384: SEABEES=GOOD MEAL]***

OS: No, like I say, most of my time was spent in the kitchen, in the galley.

KW: Now you said before I turned the tape on, you said your food was better than everybody else's food.

OS: Well, I wouldn't say better, but it seemed like it was better because we prepared it better, I guess. Because everybody talks, they say "If you want a good meal, you go to the Seabee base."

KW: Well, it was you!

OS: Well, no, it wasn't me, I was just in the galley part, I wasn't doing the actual cooking.

KW: So what did you have to do?

OS: I was peeling potatoes, washing the pots and pans, and whatever vegetables had to be cut up or stuff like that.

KW: So you never cut yourself?

OS: No.

KW: I'm not very talented with knives, so I always ask.

OS: No, I'm pretty good. I've got all my fingers yet.

KW: Good. So did you learn anything that you took with you when you went home that you used to find a job, or you used...

OS: No, not find a job. Just learned how to do hard work, that's all. And no matter how rough I had it, the dear Lord has been good to me. I've nothing to complain there. All I want is enough time to say thank you.

KW: Right after you were discharged, what did you do those first couple weeks?

OS: There wasn't much you could do, because the jobs weren't that plentiful. Everybody was coming back then. I got tied up with a construction outfit, I set up foundations, stuff like that, building homes.

KW: So you met your wife some time like five months after you got back, and then you got married about...

OS: Yeah, five months after I came out of the service.

KW: So quick!

OS: mm-hmm.

KW: So you went to work, you didn't go back to school at all.

OS: No, I didn't.

KW: You didn't take advantage of the GI Bill or anything.

OS: No, no I didn't.

KW: So, you were discharged after the war was ended?

OS: Well, yeah. Because it ended in 'forty-six.

KW: Do you remember the day that the war ended entirely?

OS: No, no I don't.

KW: Nobody stood up and had a party.

OS: No.

KW: Did you have anybody you kept in touch with that you met?

OS: No, I didn't.

KW: And you didn't join a veterans organization. Have you ever gone to any reunions?

OS: No. There were no reunions we went to, no.

KW: Do they have them?

OS: They have them, yeah, but they were always out someplace, and like I say, I wasn't much for traveling or anything.



**[429: GROWING UP IN BUCKTOWN]**

KW: So what part of the city did you grow up in?

OS: they call it Bucktown, Damen and Armitage.

KW: Well, see, now you're trendy! What was it like?

OS: It was rough. When we were kids I used to have to stay home from school quite a bit, because I wasn't doing any good in school, but I used to be the one to go out and get the wood and coal to keep warm. And me and my brothers used to go up on the track and pick up the coal that fell off the cars. It was, like I say, Kat, that's was it, I don't know what else I can say about it.

KW: You said you didn't talk much about your experiences, but your brother did.

OS: No.

KW: Now, your "notice of separation" says you got a victory medal. How come? What's that for?

OS: I really don't know, to be honest. The victory medal. I never paid attention to it.

KW: Yeah, it says you were in the European theatre, you were in the American theatre, you were in the Asiatic-Pacific theatre, and you got a victory medal. That's what it says. [pause] Before the war you worked for Great Lakes Plating?

OS: Great Lakes Plating company. That was the only – I think that's the only inside job I ever had.

KW: What did you do?

OS: They were dipping, plating different things, I don't even remember what they were, that we used to plate. Plating, they called it.

KW: For parts, or?

OS: For parts, for machinery, whatever.

KW: I always things that would be a very interesting thing to do, I don't know why. It seems so exciting to me.

OS: I don't know. I couldn't stand the job because I couldn't stand the four walls around me. All my jobs were mostly on the outside. I think I only had two jobs inside. That was Great Lakes Plating, and I worked for National Tea Company.

KW: What I'm curious about, when you entered the service, did they give you any tests of any kind?

OS: Oh yeah.

KW: To decide what you should do? Do you remember any of them?

**[481: LEARNING TO READ]**

OS: No, all they wanted was for you to get into the service. They needed men. They didn't give me much tests at all. That's why I say when I got in there, I realized what I did then, you know. I said, "Now how am I going to get letters back and forth to my family?" Like I say, things were rough, but they were good. There were good times. Nothing that I regretted. When I got back out, just lately, I started all of this here stuff [learning to read] when I was seventy, I think I was a seventy-year old, and I started thinking about it. No, seventy-three or seventy-four, I think it was. So it's only three years since I've been going now. But now, I can't get enough! I can't get enough, I want to keep going, go, go, go.

KW: So what have you been reading?

OS: Oh, they've got me reading all these here books, ah, I forget what the heck they call them, now. Adventures, that series on adventures and stuff like that.

KW: Do you ever think about reading anyone else's war memoirs?

OS: Oh, yeah, I go for all the Geographics, the tapes and everything, I love them. I love the geographic, and the history, I like all kinds of history. That's why I enjoyed when I went down to Springfield. I told my son that, I've got to see a few of things down here that I want to see. And I wanted to see the memorial, they've got a new memorial now, if you haven't seen the new one yet. No? If you get a chance, see that one. It is good.

KW: What's it a memorial to?

OS: It's about Lincoln, and it's about the Civil War, and it's in 3-D. They show you, they've got a tape, about a 20-minute tape, and about the War, and they have the sound effects. You feel the vibration and everything, of the guns going off. And I was sitting underneath one of the things that went off, I almost jumped through the ceiling when the bombs came! It was something beautiful to see, is the memorial and then the new library they put up, and then I went over to see the Capitol and then I went to see his tomb. We were only supposed to be there for the [literacy] ceremony and come back, but me and my son, we stayed two days. I wanted to see things.

KW: This is what I think is wonderful. That when you know how to read, you can learn anything you want.

OS: Yeah. I just hope I live long enough, now, to read some of the books that I want to read.

KW: Oh, nobody can. There's never enough time, even if you started when you were five.

OS: I know, right now when I start now, I look at the clock, I say, four hours? We've been monkeying with this four hours, I mean the time just flies. Probably once I start I'll probably never get anything done. But I do enjoy cooking. So, I like to cook.

KW: So now you can use the recipe books too.

OS: In the paper I told them there's a lot of books that I've got, that I'm dying to get into.

KW: Do you do a lot of boring food, or do you do cakes and fancy things?

OS: No, I'm not a pastry man. I do soups, stews, and boiled foods. I'm not much on fried, neither.

KW: No cold cuts.

OS: Well, cold cuts, but not very much. Mostly it's soups. I love soups. Give me a few vegetables and a piece of meat, and I'll make you a pot of soup.

***[552: SICK BAY AT GREAT LAKES]***

KW: It's because you had all that practice, cutting those vegetables. So you hurt your ankle, you were at Great Lakes when you hurt your ankle?

OS: Great Lakes.

KW: And you were in sick bay. Did you meet any doctors or nurses?

OS: No, nobody had time for you, they'd come in and check you, and out they went. There was too many.

KW: They didn't talk to you?

OS: No, no, not really.

KW: They didn't care, it was your fault you hurt your ankle.

OS: Like I say, it was a Commando course that we were going through. And the kid, the one below me, wasn't supposed to start climbing up the rope until I came down. Well, he was halfway up when I was halfway down, and when I seen it I let go. And I went down, that's how I broke the ankle.

KW: Did they have them...what were the ropes attached to?

OS: That was the Commando course. It was the ceiling, a two-inch line that you had to go hand over hand, you had to go up and come back down through one of the courses that they had. It was in the Great Lakes hall, assembly hall, where they have the Commando courses.

KW: And everybody calling you Skip.

OS: Yeah, we had that name. Had that name Orville! Nope. That's why they called me Skip.

KW: Nobody called you Orville at all?

OS: No. My wife is the only one called me Orville When I met her and she looked at me, and I looked at her, and I said "I know you" and she said, "I know you too. Your name is Orville." I said, "Aw, you must know me if you called me Orville."

KW: Did you, I always ask this, did you meet people from other ethnic backgrounds? Did you have a lot of people from different places? Like, I talked to one gentleman who knew he met people from a lot of different parts of the United States, he met people from Texas, he met people from the East Coast, and then he met people from all different ethnic backgrounds.

OS: No, the only time I remember different people like that is when I was in...well, at home, we met some people from Poland, in our neighborhood, because it was called Bucktown there, it was all Polish. The only other time I met any other people was when I was in the service, different nationalities, you know.

KW; But you didn't notice too much.

OS: I didn't. Because I stayed to myself quite a bit.

KW: Did you go out, when you were stationed in different places, did you meet the people who lived in that area?

OS: Yeah, when we went to town, I met a few of them, but there wasn't actually that much that you said to them.

KW: You didn't have to spend a lot of time figuring out how to communicate.

OS: No.

KW: So you didn't ever do anything with the service after you were discharged, ever.

OS: No.

KW: Didn't join the reserves, or anything.

OS: No, I didn't get involved.



***[617: Tape Side Changes – B]***

KW: Your service, your experiences in the service, how did that affect your life?

***[624: MY OLDER SISTER WAS LIKE A SECOND MOTHER TO US]***

OS: I think it affected it pretty good. Like I say, there were a lot of things that I learned in the service that I wouldn't have learned anyplace else, how to take care of myself, for one thing, and how to survive, and like I say, when we were kids, we just grew up. My mother, she had a pretty rough time of it because my father died when he was young, and she used to make ties, and go out and sell neckties to keep food on the table, and we, like I say, my older sister was like a second mother to us, she was always with us.

KW: It must have been very hard when she passed away.

OS: Yeah, it was.

KW: And it was after you came back?

OS: I think it was just a few, a month or so before I got married. She never even had a chance to go to my wedding.

KW: Had she been sick while you were gone?

OS: If she was, well, she was never a real big woman, she was always frail, and she used to get these attacks, and she'd tell us all, "Leave the room, leave the room." She would know when this was coming on her. Like I say, it was a few, I think it was just a few weeks or maybe a month or so after we were ready to get married, that's when she passed away.

KW: It's good that she was still there when you got home.

OS: And after, later on, we didn't even remember where she was buried. And my brother came in after we were all out of the service and everything, we went to see her thing, and she didn't have a tombstone, all she had was a little marker. And I said, you know, I said, before I die, I want to get a tombstone for her. And I had four oper -- I fell when I had a blood clot on my head, and I had to go for four different operations on my head. And the doctor said, "Skip," he said, "when you were underneath the anesthesia," he said, "you kept saying, you can't die, you can't die, 'I've got two things I gotta do before I die.'" He said, "What were they?" I said, "One, I gotta buy a tombstone for my sister." And I didn't tell him what the other one was. And the other one is I want to read before I die. So.

KW: It's a good thing you're sticking around.

OS: He's keeping me here for something, I don't know. But I did finally go over, and I got her the tombstone, so I took care of that problem, and now...

KW: Where is she buried?

OS: She's, uh, what is it, Queen of Heaven?

KW: Oh, all my family is there.

OS: Is that up on, is that York Road?

KW: Yeah.

OS: York Road and, what would it be

KW: in Westchester.

***[654: SEABEES CAN DO]***

OS: Yeah. Up there. I got her the stone, so that's one of the problems I wanted to take care of, and now I'm on my way with this, and like the Seabees says, you "Can Do."

KW: Is that what they say?

OS: That was the saying. You never say you can't. "Can Do." "Can Do." That's all we used to say. "Well, I don't know." "What do you mean you don't know? You Can Do." "Okay, I Can Do." We always did it.

KW: Right, you got your shower. When you did that thing with the shower, were you on land, or were you at sea?

OS: We were on Guam. The guys say, "Boy, what is this? I need a shower, I'm not going to stand there and wash clothes." And everybody was building all of them. Cause you used to take a shower or a bath in salt water. And after that salt water would dry... so what we'd do is throw throw fresh water in the 55-gallon drum, and after you took a shower in the salt water, you'd go over and then you rinse off with the fresh water.

KW: Where did the fresh water come from?

OS: They were bringing it in. They'd purified it and they brought the water in.

KW: You said before you had the washing machine, you were washing your clothes in your helmet?

OS: Yeah, you'd rinse your clothes out in your helmet, or they had buckets wherever you can, you know.

KW: So, when you came home and you got married, did you say to your wife, "You know, we should just do this with the helmet"?

OS: No. No. No, she wanted a washing machine. And I don't blame her, I did too!

KW: Did you ever say stuff like that to your kids when they were growing up, you know, "Oh, I had it much harder than..."

OS: No, no, that's what they say, "You never talked about anything like that dad, how come?" Now my grandkids, every time they come they say "Tell me about it. Tell me about it."

***[673: THINKING ABOUT WAR & THE MILITARY]***

KW: Did being in the military influence your thinking about war and the military? Did it change the way you thought about war?

OS: Oh, yeah. Sure did. I mean, I think it's not unnecessary to be in war, but a lot of it I don't see – why is it, why does it have to happen that way? You should be able to settle something besides all these kids going over there being killed for nothing. I don't think it's for nothing, but to me it's useless.

***[680: THE FORGOTTEN SEABEES]***

KW: Did you feel lucky you were in the Seabees? That you didn't end up in the Army?

OS: Oh, yeah, I was happy that I was in the Navy part of it, in the Seabees. But there's one thing that I can't understand is, if you watch, now this Saturday is Memorial Day, now you watch when they start mentioning all the outfits, the Army, the Air Corps, the Marines, Merchant Marines, you see if you hear anything about the Seabees. Just for yourself, just see if you hear them mention the Seabees.

KW: Why do you think they don't?

OS: I don't know, and I asked my brother. I said, "You're a, you do a lot of speaking in your different chapters and everything," and I said, "How come on the Memorial Day or something like that you very seldom hear anything about," and he said, "Well, the Navy." And I said I don't care if the Navy – it's the Navy Seabees, it's still a different part of the branch. And he called me up and says "You know, you're right," he said, "I didn't hear anything about the Seabees. They mentioned Army Air Corps and all of them, the Marines, and everything." No Seabees. Just for if you think of it, this Saturday when they have Memorial Day, and they start mentioning all the big outfits and everything, see if you hear.

KW: Do you think there weren't that many of them?

OS: Oh no, they're still there, they're still operating today.

KW: That's very curious.

OS: And now if they do, maybe they'll probably make a liar out of me now, they'll probably start mentioning them.

KW: Well, we told the Library of Congress.

OS: Did you?

KW: Right now, we just told them!

OS: Believe it or not, I used to tell my wife, I said "Virginia?" I said, "do you hear, are they?" She said "No, they didn't mention anything about the Seabees." I can't understand why. Because we were involved in a lot of this stuff. If you go back into the history of the Seabees, everybody knows. "Yeah, the Seabees," "Yeah, the Seabees." Why weren't we mentioned? Well, I'll call you, and I'm going to see if you hear anything. If you happen to think of it.

KW: I'll pay attention. I'll call around too. "Mention the Seabees." So, is there anything else you want to talk about that we didn't talk about?

OS: No, that's about it, Kat. It's just that I'm glad I made it to 80 years old. Well, I didn't make it yet. I've got a few more weeks to go.

KW: You planning on leaving before then?

OS: No, so I've got 'til October 27, so then I can say, "My life is alright."

KW: You made it to 80, and you know how to read.

OS: If I never get any further than what I am right now, I'm happy for what I've got. Thank God for my tutors, Barbara, Carol, and Jean, and Felix, and all the other librarians have been so good to me.

KW: Oh, do want to talk about going to Springfield at all? Did you want to say anything?

OS: No.

KW: Do you want them to know?

OS: No, no, not really. It's just that I was glad that I did go there.

KW: Well, I think you are very inspirational to people. It's good for people to hear.

OS: All my teachers, I says, geez, every time I turn around I give you credit. I said, "All I want is a halfway decent education." But like I say, I met some wonderful people. You couldn't get me in a room like this three years ago. You couldn't get me in here, I don't care what it would be. Even the wife says, "Where you going?" I said, "I'm going to the library."

KW: Well, that's what we're for, so people can learn and not have to go anywhere to do it.

OS: There's a lot of bad people out there, but I've met an awful lot of good ones.

KW: Me too. Including you. I want to thank you for doing this. It was wonderful of you. And it's not so easy to tell your story I think. And it's good to do it, because if you don't...

**[730: END]**