

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
STANLEY GRUBER
Gunners Mate, Navy, World War II.

2001

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Gruber, Stanley, (1919-2009). Oral History Interview, 2001.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 45 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Stanley Gruber, a Butler, Wisconsin native, discusses his Navy service as a gunners mate in the Pacific Theater of World War II, including surviving the attack on Pearl Harbor. Gruber talks about choosing assignment to the USS Maryland (BB-46), having his tonsils taken out by the Navy, duty as a gunners mate with five-inch anti-aircraft guns, and having an admiral aboard who would frequently pull inspections. Based at Pearl Harbor, he reflects that his crew was aware of poor relations with Japan but never expected an attack. Gruber details the attack on Pearl Harbor: being on the boat deck of the Maryland, which was tied up at Ford Island, noticing heavy air traffic, realizing they were Japanese airplanes, breaking into his cache of firing pins, getting hit by flying paint chips, and perforating his eardrums by firing at the enemy planes without ear protection. He describes putting on his gas mask after seeing a wet deck, worrying that his guns could not hit the high-altitude bombers, and being initially unaware that surrounding ships had been sunk. Gruber states smoke from the damaged USS Arizona, West Virginia, and Tennessee helped screen his ship from enemy aircraft. Mid-battle, he recalls the admiral coming aboard to give a powerful speech but still feeling depressed about the number of damaged ships. After the attack, Gruber talks about helping survivors from the sunken USS Oklahoma, and he reflects on the casualties aboard other ships. He describes getting the Maryland patched up, the sailors on other ships cheering to see her leave Pearl Harbor, and repairs at Bremerton (Washington). Gruber recalls seeing the USS Nevada sail out of San Francisco loaded with B-25s. Reassigned to the USS Cabot (CVL-28) with Task Force 58, 5th Fleet, he talks about duty on a 40 mm gun, never sleeping below deck, and seeing action at the Marshall Islands. He characterizes a friend who was killed by a kamikaze plane and seeing him buried at sea. Gruber details the bombardment of Truk Island, hearing the USS Intrepid get hit by a torpedo that night, and talking with a survivor from the Intrepid. He touches on action at Hollandia, Palau, Saipan, and a second attack on Truk. Gruber reflects on seeing a kamikaze plane coming towards his ship and states, "You can't spend all your time worrying about whether you're gonna make it or not." He discusses a gunner under his command who accidentally damaged a bomber and defending him from being court-martialed. Gruber mentions brief service aboard the USS Trego. He speaks of hurting his shoulder from a fall, recovering from surgery at the Naval hospital in Norfolk (Virginia), complaining to a captain there about the terrible hospital food, and writing letters about the food to his Congressmen. Gruber describes his efforts to get disability pensions from the VA and to prove his eardrums were perforated during the attack on Pearl Harbor. After getting married, he talks about being transferred to gunnery school in Washington, D.C. and

living there with his wife, Lorraine. Gruber mentions joining veterans' organization such as the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and American Legion, and he talks about attending USS Maryland reunions.

Biographical Sketch:

Gruber (1919-2009) entered the Navy in 1939 and, during World War II, served aboard the USS Maryland, USS Cabot, and USS Trego. He worked thirty-six years at the Pabst Brewery Company and settled in Menomonee Falls (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001
Transcribed by Jeff Slauson, 2011
Edited by Joan Bruggink, 2012
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Transcribed Interview:

- Gruber: [Interview begins in mid-sentence] So what that meant, when they put a list of ships up, you could pick any one that you wanted if you were in the rooster [?] company. We didn't know one ship from another, so this fella that went in with me, we picked the Maryland. We didn't know one ship from another.
- James: You actually chose your ship?
- Gruber: Yeah. But then, you know, you had to have your tonsils taken out, everybody.
- James: Tell me about this.
- Gruber: Well, and that's the best thing that ever happened because prior to me having my tonsils taken out, I'd always get a sore throat living here and then the doctor—you'd line up on a wooden bench and he had a thing like a dental chair. And this guy was full of blood like a butcher. And he'd say, "Stick your tongue out and pant like a dog." And he'd reach in there and jerk out that tonsil [laughs] and then you couldn't swallow, holy man. [laughs] It was really terrible; they'd give you ice cream, cold ice cream. You couldn't swallow. And that held us back from going on the ship for, I don't know, a week or so before we got back out to Long Beach, California; that's where the battleship was at that time.
- James: Okay, so where did you go on the Maryland? Where did you go to?
- Gruber: In Long Beach, California we went aboard the Maryland, and then we went down—that card I showed you—in April just before the battleships and that went down to Hawaii we went down to the equator, Christmas Island or something. I was a recruit. There weren't too many people going aboard the Navy because they weren't spending the money, and if you were six foot tall you went in the 6th Division, which was the anti-aircraft division. Five-inch were the biggest guns as far as anti-aircraft. They had eight five-inch guns on there. And that's where we went in the 6th B Division, and five-inch anti-aircraft. I was a gunner's mate.
- James: I can see that.
- Gruber: When I retired—not retired, when I was discharged I was only a first class gunner's mate because I got hurt. I wasn't wounded, I got hurt, and I had two shoulder surgeries. The first day of the war I had my eardrum perforated. The blood was running down the side of my neck.
- James: We'll get to that; don't get ahead of your story here. [laughs]

- Gruber: Alright, okay.
- James: When did you arrive at Pearl Harbor?
- Gruber: Well, I'm not sure of the date, but I think we left Long Beach in April of '40. The whole fleet went down to Pearl Harbor.
- James: Yeah, and then you stayed there, didn't go anywhere else but Pearl Harbor?
- Gruber: Well, ships would go out of the harbor and have exercises, you know? Have you ever been to Hawaii?
- James: Yes.
- Gruber: You know where Maui is?
- James: Yes.
- Gruber: Lahaina Roads? Well sometimes we'd go to Lahaina Roads and anchor, then most of the time you'd come into Pearl Harbor, and when we first went down there you couldn't go around Ford Island. They had to wind ship because it wasn't deep enough. And they'd wind ship and they'd push up where we were at the attack of Pearl Harbor. That's what we did.
- James: Did you enjoy the Navy at that time?
- Gruber: Well, you know—
- James: Was it what you expected or was it not what you expected?
- Gruber: No. See, we had an admiral aboard our ship, and he was in charge of the battleships. He would pull an inspection all the time. So that wasn't too good; I mean, almost every Saturday you had admiral's inspection. And when he'd come through you better make sure that everything was snug because if it wasn't, you weren't going over on the beach for a while.
[both laugh]
- James: So tell me about the Pearl Harbor experience now. Start right at the beginning, tell me.
- Gruber: Okay. That morning, December 7th.
- James: Right.

- Gruber: Well, you know that just prior to December, I'm not sure what date, when it was, July or something, Roosevelt stopped sending oil and—
- James: I know about all that.
- Gruber: Alright. Well, then things start changing right away and we start doing more shooting and training.
- James: Did they say to you we have to look out for some Japanese, or did they say anything? Did they say we have to start looking out for some problems?
- Gruber: No, but we were aware that relations with Japan were not very good. We were aware of that aboard ship, but nobody expected that the Japanese were gonna attack us at Pearl Harbor. And that morning, it was Sunday and I could have went ashore on liberty, but I got sick and tired of going to shore. So I'm gonna stay aboard, and after chow, which is about 7:30 breakfast, I went up on the topside on the battleship; the boat deck with the five-inch, that was topside. And that's where the guns were that I was on. That's the highest deck on the battleship. And we had a cubbyhole there where we had our spare parts for those five-inch guns. The day before we had this admiral's inspection. We had an admiral by the name of Walter Anderson, he was in charge of the battleships. When he come to inspect the guns, you had to take those firing locks—they were about that big around and that long—and remove the firing locks, and you'd drop the breach, and when that admiral would come along, he'd look through that gun. Well I took a wooden box, I did, and I had eight firing locks from all eight of the five-inch guns in this wooden box and I hid it where we're sitting in this cubbyhole up there on the boat deck, right off of gun one.

And there was a guy—and you know, I had no idea where Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin was—but that other sailor and I that were sittin' in there reading the morning paper, Honolulu Paper, and we had a pot of coffee going. And I said to him, "Seems like an awful lot of planes flying overhead." He said, "Yeah, they're holding bombing practice." Well when he said that, I took the newspaper that I was reading in my hand and I walked over to gun one. I was on gun three, I was the gun captain on gun three, starboard side. I walked over to gun one, and we were tied up to Ford Island. And when I walked out towards gun one this plane come over, but I didn't pay any attention to it until that bomb hit where these PBVs come up on the ramp there at Ford Island. Well when I looked up, I seen it had a red ball on the wing. I wouldn't have known it was Japanese, but when we were in Long Beach, California if I didn't go ashore I'd swing that gun around with the telescopic sight and I'd see them Japanese ships over there that had their flag flying and they were loading scrap iron and steel on the ships, and I seen that flag. So as soon as I realized it was Japanese, I ran down the mid-ship ladder—our living quarters are on main

deck on the battleship, mid-ship. I ran down and there was a fellow by the name of Walter Anderson. He was a coxswain from Iowa, Waterloo, Iowa. I says, "Andy!" They're not aware that we're being hit. I said, "Andy, sound battle stations, the Japs are attacking us!" And he started to laugh. And I didn't have time to argue with him, [James laughs] and I turned around and I ran up this mid-ship ladder because I wanted to get the firing locks. We can't fire them guns without a firing lock. And I ran up the mid-ship ladder and I found this wooden—I had hid this where we were making that coffee, when I found that there was a lock on there. So we had these heavy crowbars in the corner, and I took and I smashed that box. Every firing lock had the number of the gun, and I was on gun three.

So I got that firing lock in my hands, and we were wearing white shorts and t-shirts. When I start steppin' out to go toward my gun, I felt sharp pain in my chest. The planes were comin' in over Ford Island real low, and they were strafing, machine gunning. And those machine gun bullets were hittin' the steel bulkhead and the paint chippings were hittin' me in the chest. I stepped back inside like this and I stood there to see if blood is gonna come out. Because it really stung, and the blood didn't come out, so I go to make another attempt to get out there. Same thing! I stepped back. Now I'm gettin' madder than all hell; I'm going out. And if there had been another plane coming I wouldn't be here. [James laughs] And I went and I ran over by the gun and I got the firing lock hooked up. We had some ammunition in the Ready Box and we had those fuses. I don't know if you're familiar where you put fuses? That was fixed ammunition on them five-inch, it wasn't a separate projectile like on the five-inch 38. So you set fuses. The first thing I did was take a dog wrench and bust that stop on there. I wanted them shells to go off [?] as soon as they got out the end of the barrel because these guys are comin' in real low, I didn't want that shell to go way out. And we start shootin'. The guy on the pointer seat—and I couldn't remember his name for about fifty years until I went to Kansas City, Missouri in 1978 [James laughs]—and this guy hollered to me when we're shootin' at them planes, "My ears, my ears!" We didn't have nothing on our ears, that's why we were traumatized here. I said, "The hell with your ears! This is your ass!" [both laugh]

So my wife and I, to get back to this, I go to a reunion in 1976, Maryland reunion in Kansas City, Missouri. And this guy comes up, and you wear a tag and it says Stanley Gruberman, Menominee Falls, Wisconsin, 6-B Division. He says to me, "You were in the 6-B?" I said, "Oh yes." He says, "So was I." When he said that, I said, "What the hell were you doing on December 7th?" He said, "I was the pointer on gun three." [James laughs] I said, "God damn you. You ran off of the gun and I had to kick 'em!" You know you can fire them five-inch 25 with a pedal, or on the thing. I said, "You ran off of the gun!" Well he says, "I ran off and ripped up my t-shirt, stuck it in my ears." And so the blood started running down

the side of my head because my eardrums were perforated right away. And we kept shootin' at these planes comin' in, and they'd come in, they'd drop their bombs and torpedoes and then they'd come in strafing. I think they were mostly either torpedo planes or fighter planes that were strafing us. And we kept shootin' and then there was a lull, after I don't know how long.

James: Two hours?

Gruber: Yeah, maybe. Well, there was a lull. They had them high altitude come over. That Fujita led that attack, and I'm standing on the deck by the guns, and I'm looking up like this. And there's no way we're gonna reach them planes up there with them five-inch, no way. And I'm standing there and I'm thinking to myself, if that sucker drops that bomb, I'll never know what hit me. [laughs] So they dropped two 1750 pound sixteen-inch armor piercing shells. Both the Tennessee that was astern of us and the Maryland. Now this was after the torpedo bombers come in first and they fired their torpedoes, and the Arizona turtled right away. I wasn't aware of it and I see a wet deck on the starboard side. And they used to teach us that when you've seen the wet deck it'd be gas. So everybody had a gas mask. So I put a gas mask on, and this little old ensign, I forget what his name was, he's shouting in my ears, and I don't hardly hear him, "What's with the gas mask?" And I pointed, "Wet deck!" He took me by the shoulder like this, pulled me, the superstructure was there by gun three. He pulled me over to the side and when that Oklahoma turned over, that water went way up in the air and come over on the starboard side. I wasn't aware that the Oklahoma was down, you know?

So we kept shooting at 'em, but those high-altitude bombers, like I'm saying, we weren't a good target because all of that smoke from the Arizona, West Virginia, the Tennessee was astern of us and coming towards us. And then after the war, I realized there was a gasoline barge right in front of by us, the Maryland. If that thing would have got hit I wouldn't be here either, because—but the guy that was—I read this now since then, the captain of that gasoline barge, the aviation gas, he cut the line and got out of there. So we didn't—that saved us too.

But after the attack was over, we started helping people on the Oklahoma, she was rolled over, and those Oklahoma sailors were all coming aboard our ship and they were all in the nude, maybe just shorts, and they had grease and oil all over them and everything. And there were four hundred-fifty of them that we couldn't get out of the Oklahoma. I wore a telephone from the Maryland and we'd try to get them people out. Well we got people out, but four hundred-fifty of them stayed in there. And I guess over eleven hundred on the Arizona, and then the California, she sat down in the mud ahead of us. And a good buddy of mine—my wife and I, this is

the first year that we didn't go to Arizona in the winter—a guy by the name of Bill Raewoo[?] was on the Pennsylvania, battleship Pennsylvania, and she was in dry dock, the battleship Pennsylvania. But they really hit the battleship pretty bad. I guess if you can believe what you read, there was about twenty-four hundred died in a couple hours. And I don't know, fourteen or sixteen hundred were wounded, and so the battleships got it because the carriers weren't in there. And they thought that that Utah on the other side, [laughs] they thought that was a carrier because they had heavy timbers on there. They used to use that for a target ship, and so they were attacking, they sunk that Utah over on the other side of Pearl Harbor where we were, on Ford Island. But that was a day, when people ask me, I said, "It was like a nightmare." You couldn't believe it!

And then, in the middle of the attack, this admiral who was over on the beach, he had to come on the Jacob's ladder, rope ladder. The Oklahoma's down and we walk over, there was a lull in the shooting, and I walked over to gun two and this Admiral Anderson, he came aboard up on the Jacob's ladder and he made a real powerful speech about "They got the first lick in but we're gonna get 'em!" And us guys got together and said, "Get 'em with what? All these ships are down." And you know that was very, very depressing.

James: But you were tied up to the dock?

Gruber: We were tied up to Ford Island; Ford Island is in the middle of Pearl Harbor.

James: I know that.

Gruber: We were up against Ford Island and the Oklahoma was tied up to us. And the Tennessee was directly astern of us at Ford Island, and the West Virginia outboard. West Virginia's a sister ship of the Maryland.

James: Oh, uh-huh.

Gruber: Yeah. The Maryland, at the time of Pearl Harbor, was the first battleship, American battleship, with sixteen-inch 45 guns.

James: I never knew that.

Gruber: Yeah, and the West Virginia was the same thing. The battleship Colorado was a sister ship, but she was up in Bremerton. And when we left I never remembered what day it was, but they had to blow up these concrete, uh, that they had us tied up to on Ford Island for us to get out because we were wedged in. And they blew up these concrete—it was number five that we were tied up to, and we went over to the Navy yard and they

welded steel plates up in the bow because we got hit in the bow. Well that didn't do much good because we left there on the 20th of December. I didn't know it at that time, but since then the Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee were our only three battleships and the Colorado was still stuck in the mud. Until they put me in the ground, I'll never forget that.

I'm firing on the number three gun and I could see to the entrance to the harbor, and I see this ship—I didn't know which one it was—like she's going out of the harbor, and there was only one entrance in Pearl Harbor, you know. I don't have to tell you that, you know. So I'm lookin' and I see a ship, and I didn't know which ship it is. It was the Nevada. And when I looked the second time it was just a big ball of fire. They're firing their guns and all these planes were attacking her, trying to sink her to the entrance of the harbor, then we couldn't have got out of there. And I guess I read that they gave her a signal to go into the mud. And that's what they did. So when we left Pearl Harbor, and the Maryland, and the Tennessee and Pennsylvania, these guys are all running back on the fantail giving us a big cheer like we're going after the Japanese [laughs] and we weren't going anywhere but back to Bremerton, Washington.

James: That's where you went?

Gruber: Yes. Well, the Tennessee and the Maryland, and the Pennsylvania went to San Francisco, Mare Island. It took us ten days! That's a three-day run, but we were pushing water, them sixteen-inch guns were under water. We only made about seven knots.

James: Because of the front damage?

Gruber: We had those sixteen-inch guns underwater. The bow was all full of water where them bombs hit, where the shells hit. And when we got back to Bremerton, we had to take all the ammunition off, and a British battleship, Warspite, who had lost all of her guns at Crete—she was in the battle of Jutland in World War I, the Warspite—she was in Bremerton. We had to wait for her to get out of dry dock, then we went into dry dock.

James: How many guys got killed on your ship?

Gruber: We were one of the luckiest battleships there. I think there was only five guys killed. And also on the Tennessee because we were inboard, see, that's the reason; we were lucky. We were lucky. Where all the rest of the ships lost quite a few people. We were lucky. There was only about five that I know of.

James: Where did you go out of Bremerton?

Gruber: We were there January, February, and I think in April we came down to San Francisco. And I could tell you a story about that. One morning I get up and I'm going on the topside, and when I get up on the boat deck where the guns are I see an aircraft carrier coming under the San Francisco-Oakland Bay bridge, and it's got B-25s on it. And I made a remark to nobody in particular, "Hey, look at that carrier with them Army bombers!" And some guy said, "Well they're probably taking them down to Hickam Field." Because they blasted everything on Hickam Field, I don't have to tell you, it's right there at Pearl Harbor. Well that made sense; those B-25s couldn't fly from San Francisco to Hickam. The B-17s could, but not the B-25s. That made sense. Within a week or two, you heard they bombed Tokyo.

James: That was the Hornet?

Gruber: Yeah, Hornet, and the guy that was the captain of the Hornet at that time, Mitscher, he was from Wisconsin.

James: I know that.

Gruber: He was one of the first Navy flyers. Later on when I went aboard this carrier, the USS Cabot, I got a presidential citation on the Cabot. We were Task Force 58, 5th Fleet, and he was commander of all the carriers. Admiral Spruitt was in charge of the task force and Mitscher was the head of the carrier. He's the guy when they picked up the Japanese ships, late in the afternoon, he sent all the planes out and he turned on the lights at night. Well, they lost quite a few.

James: Tell me what you were doing.

Gruber: Oh, what I was doing. I was shooting out of—I had a buddy, I gotta tell you this one, because when my wife and I went to Hawaii in 1971 for a reunion, thirtieth anniversary, I had a buddy on the carrier who was a boatswain's mate first class, I was a gunner's mate first class. And his battle station was right off of the catapult on the port side, almost in line with the bridge. And he says to me, "Grube, if we make it"—we didn't have Major League baseball here—"we go to Wrigley Field, we get a case of beer and a bottle of booze." [laughs] And I said, "You're on!" He said, "If we make it." His name was Dagger and he lived in Chicago. Well, he didn't make it. A kamikaze was coming in from over the starboard side and he overshot the island, and we had a torpedo bomber on the catapult and Dagger was on the gun right off of the catapult. And when that sucker just skimmed that, and it took his head off.

James: Oh my.

- Gruber: So we buried him at sea, and when Loraine and I went down to Hawaii, down to the Punchbowl, I said to her, "I'm going down to that administration building." It's got that big book. I gave them the name of Dagger and they gave me the plot number and everything. They got a cross in the Philippines, but we buried him at sea because the Marines fired, and we had 'em, you know, put a shell on him and down in the water. When I got back I went to see his folks in Chicago and let them know that he and I were very good buddies. But he was one of my best buddies on the carrier. And I stayed on that carrier—
- James: Wait a minute, you're not off the Maryland yet.
- Gruber: Okay.
- James: You took the hit. How did you get off the Maryland?
- Gruber: I got transferred off the Maryland, I think it was either December of '42 or January of '43. And then I went aboard this aircraft carrier, not right away.
- James: How come? Why did they transfer you?
- Gruber: Jim, I didn't know that, but reading that book told me. Admiral Kimmel was very, very upset when they took the New Mexico, Mississippi, and Idaho just prior to our attack at Pearl Harbor over on the Atlantic to fight those submarines. So they were stripping Kimmel, and then he said that he had all these people trained and we're gettin' new men, and you gotta send these men that are trained to new construction.
- James: Ahhh, that's why.
- Gruber: So they'd take guys like me and a lot of other guys, and they built—like that carrier I went on, I could tell you a story about that. When we were going, we went across the equator and the International Dateline. Of course, I'm a shellback now. I was in '40 [laughs] when there was only a handful of us that were shellbacks because all these other guys just came into the Navy. They were new people, you know. So we had a hell of a time. But I went aboard that, I put it in commission, I was a plankowner on the Cabot.
- James: The Cabot is not a full fleet carrier?
- Gruber: It's a fleet carrier, but it was a cruiser converted.
- James: That's the difference?
- Gruber: Oh yeah. If you weren't a fleet carrier you didn't operate in the task force.

James: Okay.

Gruber: The Cabot was a cruiser converted. They built that thing [unintelligible] former President Bush was on the San Jacinto and former President Ford was on one, I don't remember which one. They were 11,000 ton.

James: Those are escort carriers.

Gruber: No, no, they were light carriers. They called them CVL Light Carrier. The regular carriers were about 25,000—of course the Lexington, the Saratoga and them were bigger, but they were converted from being battleships actually, those ships there. But when they come out with the Essex and them they were about 25,000 ton. And we operated with all them ships.

James: The Cabot carried how many planes?

Gruber: I really couldn't tell you an honest answer on that, Jim. I know it wasn't as many as the larger carriers.

James: Well no, I'm sure.

Gruber: But we had F6Fs and we had torpedo bombers, and we had hell divers. We had practically all the—

James: Your job was still a five-inch gun?

Gruber: Yeah, it was 40 mm.

James: 40 mm?

Gruber: Yeah, and I never slept below deck; I had a bunk on that carrier, because I remembered those guys that we couldn't get out of the Oklahoma. So when I was aboard that carrier [Jim laughs] I had a folding cot. And we were always around the equator, I'd open up that cot, I'd kick off my shoes and take my cape off the life jacket for a pillow. And the night that the Intrepid got a torpedo—we were the first ship to attack Truk.

James: Oh.

Gruber: We bombed with the B-24s and B-17s, the Army Air Force, the Navy. We were involved when we landed the Army and the Marines in Marsh Island. And the captain says the night before, "We're gonna go between these Japanese-held islands up to Roi, R-o-i, to Kwajalein. And at 0300 we started launching aircraft. And we went up there and I did not know it, that my former battleship Maryland was bombarding there.

James: Oh my.

Gruber: But I go to a reunion in Peoria, Illinois I don't know how many years ago, and I meet a boatswain mate that was aboard ship with me, he was first class boatswain mate on the Maryland, and he told me a story that I like to tell people. The Maryland was flagship when they landed the Marines at Tarawa. Maryland was a flagship, she had Admiral Hill on there and the Marines, and they took a terrible beating. They lost a lot of people.

James: Oh, yeah.

Gruber: Well, the Maryland was bombarding, and they were using bombardment. So they'd learned something. So when they went up to the Marshalls—I was on the carrier now, not on the Maryland—and this boatswain mate friend of mine says they're gonna use armor piercing on those concrete steel blockhouses. And they knocked the hell out of 'em, and they lost way less men than they did in Tarawa. And after they secured—now I'm telling you what this boatswain mate told me—this one chief turret captain up on the forward turret, sixteen-inch turret, he asked the captain if he could go over there and see what them guns of his did over there. “Oh absolutely!” So they got a motor launch and he went over there and he seen what them guns of his did, they just knocked the hell out of it. And this is supposed to be a true story. On the way back to the ship he said, “If I die tomorrow, I'm gonna die happy.” He died the next day.

James: Oh my.

Gruber: Yeah, he was a turret captain, he was an old timer. But he died happy because he'd seen what the guns did over there. [laughs] But on that carrier—you know on the carrier you're always in action on the carrier. And then after the Marshall Islands we went into Majuro, and I forget, all those islands. They had anchorages where you'd go in, and I got a calendar here somewhere, and the day before we were gonna attack Truk—now nobody's ever attacked Truk, but we heard about it; that's where the Japanese Navy operated out of. And the captain got on the P.A. system and he says, “If you men have been wondering where we're going, tomorrow we're going to repay them for Pearl Harbor.” Well when he said that, it was just like if he hit you and it was fists and a gun because you know you're gonna get a lot of air attack.

James: Right.

Gruber: So we went in there, we started launching aircraft early, and you know you can hear these pilots talking, but they caught 'em with their pants down. The planes were on the deck and they were blowing up them

planes, shootin' them up. And the Iowa, she caught a Japanese ship trying to beat it out of the harbor, and they claimed that it was—well, you know on a clear day out on the ship, if it's a clear day and you get up on the flight deck, you could see about twenty miles. And that Iowa fired—on a battleship you always gotta fire the first one over, you never fire in front of the target, you'll obliterate the target. You gotta fire over, then you're stepping back, the salvo. She fired the first salvo, and the next one she stuck back; when she fired the second one, it was just one big explosion and fire, you know. They claim it was about twenty-some miles, and that projectile weighed a ton on that 16. Iowa had sixteen-inch 50; ours were sixteen-inch 45, and she blew up that ship way out there.

And after that night I'm laying in that cot, I put the cot up against the firewall under the flight deck. And I'm just about ready to go to sleep, and there was a terrific, terrific explosion. I had no idea what time it was until—my wife's cousin who lives over on the Mill Road, her husband, I didn't know this guy from Adam, he was a torpedo man on the Intrepid, and that's the one that got hit with an aerial torpedo at night—and they sound battle stations and they announced that the Intrepid had been hit by a torpedo. Well we went to general quarters, and when it got light we were still at general quarters, but the rest of the task force was gone. And we, the Cabot and a couple of cans[?], took her into Pearl Harbor, and this guy comes visiting over here, this Mel Benson. He was on the Intrepid, and I didn't know him, and I says to him, "Were you on it when she got the fish at Truk?" He says, "Yeah." He says, "You know, we were tracking that damned thing for an hour, that torpedo bomber, but they wouldn't allow the carriers to fire at night." They did after that, and they wouldn't let us fire either at night because they didn't want to expose—

James: The position?

Gruber: Yeah, and they had those powerful torpedoes, and it hit starboard side and that's what killed all the chiefs. Then it sheared the catwalk—on the carriers you got a catwalk right below the flight deck. These guys are running to their battle stations, they're all running out in the sea, they're gone, lost. And it did so much damage that it ruined the rudder and the screws. We took her into Pearl, and he was telling me—

James: You towed it in?

Gruber: No, no, no. We didn't tow it in. I don't know how the hell they got it working, if they used—I forget what the hell they used. We never towed it in, and I guess we went into, was it Majuro or some other island and gave 'em minor repair to get it back. And then Mel says when they got into Pearl they did some work on it and they went outside of Pearl, kept going around in a circle. So they went back in again and did some work. They

finally got back to Mare [?] Island. They spent about three or four months at Mare Island because that ship was really ruined. Them Japanese torpedoes are powerful, you know. And I said to him one time—he belonged to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, that's Mel—"How come you didn't get a Presidential Citation?" After I was discharged over a year, I got an official letter from Washington D.C. and it says that Harry Truman and Secretary of Navy Forrestal present you with a Presidential Citation, and then they list all the action that I was involved in on that carrier. You know, from the first time on. Well, I never expected that. When I asked Mel, "How come you didn't?" He was in our same—"Well," he says, "Stan"—and I forget what the hell they called the nickname—he says, "she was the unluckiest carrier in the Pacific fleet. She'd either get hit by kamikaze or she'd get torpedoed and she'd be winding up in the Navy yard." [laughs] And you know where she is now, she's in New York.

James: I know where it is.

Gruber: People go and see it in New York, yeah.

James: So after Truk where did you go?

Gruber: From Truk we went, MacArthur wanted us in Hollandia, New Guinea. He was having some, I don't know if he was having a problem.

James: I know about him; tell me what you did.

Gruber: Well, I was on a carrier.

James: I know, but what was your job?

Gruber: I was gunner.

James: What'd you shoot?

Gruber: Well there we didn't have to shoot anything; we didn't get no attack from the Japanese at Hollandia. We were sending our planes over, and the thing that I remember, I guess there was a—from what I remember, there was a body of water, a lake. And MacArthur had landed and these Japs are trying to get across that lake somewhere. And the pilots are coming back and gettin' rid of those torpedoes and putting depth charges. And they were having a ball just like shooting fish in a barrel. [laughs] And these Japanese, there's hundreds of them Japanese in boats and they're trying to get away from the northern part, and these guys are bombin' the hell out of them. Then from there we went to Palau, where my brother, that Marine, wound up on Palau. We went there, then we went to—I can't remember. After we came back we made the second attack on Truk and

you could see the island, [laughs] when we went back the second time. Then after that we went to Saipan; preparatory to them landing on the beach we were hit and run. We go in there and we bomb the hell out of them, you know. [laughs] We didn't have landing forces then at that time; later on they landed on Palau. That's when they had that Mariana turkey shoot and they shot down about three hundred or four hundred Japanese planes.

James: Were you ever attacked by Japanese planes?

Gruber: What?

James: Were you attacked by Japanese planes?

Gruber: Oh sure, absolutely, yeah. And you know the guys down below deck—I was on a 40 at that time, a Quad. And then we had 20s too. And that battleship at the time of Pearl Harbor only had five-inch 25s and we had .50 caliber and we had 1.1 on the Maryland. Then when we went back in the Navy yard, they put in five-inch 38s, dual enclosed, in a turret. At least you were protected from machine gun, you know. And then they put a whole flock of 40s and 20s on those ships. And what I remember about Truk, I can remember that torpedo, a twin-engine bomber coming real low, and it had to go up like this to get over the bar to the Iowa. Everybody's shooting! That wasn't the only plane, but I remember that one. He went through that whole task force and he went all the way, and the sun was coming out from the southwest, and we had about two or three brand new anti-aircraft cruisers. That's all they had on 'em was anti-aircraft guns, I don't remember the name, and I'm looking, I'm watching that plane; it's starting to come up towards us from the sun. And when them anti-aircraft cruisers opened up, you didn't see no plane coming through there. [laughs] God almighty, they really set up a barrage, you know. But we were—uhh, that carrier I was on was in that task force and we'd seen quite a bit of action all the way through. And I was lucky that I never got killed, but you know, when you're on those ships, I don't have to tell you Jim, if you're in the task force and you're day in and day out, day in and day out, you just—I don't know how to say that you kind of resign yourself to the fact, well I hope I make it. But you know, you can't spend all your time worrying about whether you're gonna make it or not. God almighty, you got work to do; if you're a gunner's mate you got tons to take care of.

And then I, I got into it with an officer; he was a lieutenant commander. And one of my young guys, I was first class gunner's mate, and you know on the carrier we'd have them planes overlapping over the gun tubs. And one of my men was working on the gun, and I think he was on, I'm not sure if it was a Twin or a Quad 40, and he turned on the motor, and it's

like a joystick. And when he was playing with it, he wasn't shooting, that gun, on the gun where you feed it, there was a cover and it started slipping and he turned his head. In the meantime he's got his hand on there and she crushed the wing on the TBF torpedo bomber. And I hear, "Gruber, gunner's mate first class, report to the bridge!" And I went up on the bridge, and he's a lieutenant commander, gunnery officer. And he said, "You instruct those men how to operate them guns?" I said, "Yes sir, I do." He asks how come I wasn't even aware of what happened, and he says that one of my men on the starboard side there I got transferred from the second to third division put that gun on, put the motors on, they crushed the wing or tail on that plane. And he said, "Somebody's got to be court-martialed." This kid working down there is maybe a seaman second or first. I said, "Sir, if you're going to court-martial somebody, you court-martial me." And him and I kind of got into it, and I said to him it was an accident. He said, "It could have been avoided!" I said, "Sir, you can walk down from this bridge and miss a step at night and break your neck. It could have been avoided!" And he was very, very upset, and so I went, I left him.

And we had our planes out attacking and I'm sittin' up on the flight deck with my feet hangin' over the side and I'm watching the guys working on the guns. All of the sudden there's a shadow, and this commander, he said, "Say, Gruber," this is a number of days later, "I want you to forget about that court-martial." I said, "Sir, this is not the first ship I've been on. And it probably won't be the last." And I says, "We're all here for one thing; we're trying to do the best we can. There's no question that young man didn't intend to do that," you know I said to him. "But we're all trying to do what we can," and it's true. You know, that young man didn't intend to do that. And well he says, "I just want you to forget about it." I says, "Thank you." That poor bastard gets transferred off the a ship, another ship, off of the carrier. Within a couple weeks, we find out he was killed.

James: Oh my.

Gruber: I forget how he was killed.

James: You mean the commander?

Gruber: Yeah. He got transferred on another ship and he was killed. I felt bad about that too, but you know, that's the way it goes during the war. You know, so—

James: How long were you on the Cabot?

Gruber: I was on the Cabot not that long. I put in commission in June 1943 and I got off in May of '44. So I was on there about a year.

- James: Then you went to the Trego.
- Gruber: Oh, I was on there before I even went on the—yeah, I think it was after the Cabot, yeah. I wasn't very long on there and I got hurt, and I wound up in the Naval Hospital. You know where shit city is, don't you?
- James: Which one is that?
- Gruber: Norfolk, Virginia.
- James: There's one on each coast.
- Gruber: Yeah, and the naval hospital in Portsmouth, Virginia. And I had surgery on my right shoulder there because I got hurt. I wasn't wounded, I got hurt. And I spent, oh, quite a while. That hospital that I was in was there during the Civil War, at that naval hospital. And they had a lot of black folks working there, and we were getting very, very bad food. They were taking everything out of there in cracker boxes like hams and everything. So my arm is plastered up against me and they're having an inspection. And this captain, I'm not sure if it was a captain or admiral, he had a whole entourage. I shouldn't have—I got up, instead of laying in bed I got up and I sit there when that inspection party come along. He says to me, "How are you?" I said, "Not so good." He said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Sir, I've been on battleships and aircraft carriers, those islands in the Pacific, and at Pier 92 in New York. I've never had it worse, as far as food, than here in this hospital." "What's wrong with it?" I says, "Everything. We don't get enough of it and it's terrible." He said, "You bring your food down by me in my office." I have to take the elevator down, and he's got WAVES working in there. So I come with the tray and I sat down. And he says to me, "I want you to know that I don't care for fish." Who am I to tell him what to eat? I didn't care for—what the hell was that?—I didn't care for was it kohlrabi or something else. And he says, "It's good for you." He was a medical doctor, and he's telling me all the vitamins. Well I said, "You don't like fish; I don't like kohlrabi." And I went down by him, all of the sudden they're taking the screens off of the windows, they're scrubbing the windows and taking the screens. We start getting chicken and pork chops during the week. They really shook it up. When I left that hospital I had like an entourage helping me leave. Because I'd go down for therapy after my surgery and you'd hear these people talk about that guy up in the tenth ward who complained about the chow. And then I wrote letters, which is against the law, to Senator Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin. And there was a Polish congressman in Milwaukee, I wrote them letters about the terrible food and that that I was getting there, but I didn't sign my name to them because it was against the

law, you're not supposed to write congressman or politicians when you were in the service, but I did.

James: Tell me about this ship.

Gruber: I don't know too much about it, I was on there such a short time. It was an attack—

James: What was it?

Gruber: Attack cargo. And I wasn't on there very long.

James: That's how you got hurt, on that ship?

Gruber: Yeah.

James: Falling down the ladder?

Gruber: Yeah.

James: When you said shoulder; I assumed you fell down a ladder.

Gruber: Yeah, I've had two surgeries. I had one in 1945—[**End of Tape 1, Side A**]—or '44, '45, I'm not sure. And then in 1950 or—when did MacArthur come back after they fired him, 1950?

James: '51.

Gruber: Alright, in '51 my arm was taped to me and I had surgery at the old veterans hospital over here. They took me in an ambulance over there one morning, I was paralyzed, and they operated on me the second time over there at Wood. And now I had my eardrums ruined, and I'm a life member of Disabled American Veterans. So when I was in Arizona I—this is the first year in twenty years that my wife and I weren't in Arizona during the winter. We got tired of all that driving. And a shipmate of mine who was an ensign aboard the Maryland and he had the deck, his name was Gavitt, Severance Gavitt. He's a buddy of mine, well he was a shipmate of mine, he was an ensign and I was the gunner's mate, and he lives in Phoenix, Arizona. So I says to him, "Severance, would you do me a favor?" He said, "Why absolutely." He and his wife, my wife and I, we go out to dinner and then we go to the Pearl Harbor survivors reunions in Phoenix. I says, "I've been after this Veterans Administration"—[Interview cuts off for a short time] and on December 7th, 1941 Stanley Gruber was firing on a five-inch gun against the Japanese planes and wasn't wearing anything on his head and he perforated his eardrums. And he wrote that letter. I come back here about a year ago in April. I come back here and I showed

them that letter, but when I tell those people prior to that, that I had my eardrums they said there's nothing in the record. I said, "Who was keeping records December 7th?" So this last past October I was getting disability on my shoulder, twenty percent, so this last October, I got it here somewhere, they upped me to eighty percent disability, and they had in there that I was a—and this is the payoff, they had in there that I was going down to sick bay aboard the Maryland from December 7th until December 16th and having drops put in my ears because the blood was running down the side of my neck. My eardrums were perforated and I don't hear. So they had that on that report, it's somewhere in here. And they boosted me up to eighty percent; well now they pay me \$1225 a month. And then I was getting back pay from when I first put in about a year or two ago. So they send me a check for \$10,500. But I should have been gettin' that a long time ago, but they kept telling me there's nothing in the records. So I went back to the VA and I said to them, "Would you please tell me where did you get that record that I was being treated aboard the Maryland? The reason I'm asking you that is all this time you've been telling me there's nothing in the record. Where did you get that record from?" When they gave me that disability they, I don't know—

James: They won't tell you?

Gruber: No, no.

James: So after you got out of the Navy, what'd you do?

Gruber: I went to work for the Pabst Brewery Company. I worked there for thirty-seven years.

James: Never used your G.I. bill?

Gruber: Never. And you know, Jim, when I was in Washington D.C. —I got transferred to gunnery school in Washington, D.C., my wife and I. June 3rd it'll be fifty-seven years. I got married, so we went to Washington D.C., they sent me to advanced gunnery school. I lived only a short way from the Capitol and I would go to school; they had twenty-four hours a day school. So Loraine and I were married and we lived in Washington D.C. and there were others, too, and we would go to school from around four o'clock in the evening until about eleven or twelve at night. And Loraine and her lady friends, who were Navy too, they'd come to meet—but I'd go during the day to the Capitol, that short walk, and I'd sit up there. And I can remember these old senators, they're arguing that G.I. Bill of Rights in the Congress.

James: Veterans' organizations. DAV, what else? Is that it?

Gruber: Veterans of Foreign Wars, Maryland—

James: The Maryland.

Gruber: The American Legion.

James: That's not very good.

Gruber: Huh?

James: I don't like them. [laughs]

Gruber: Why?

James: That's just a political outfit.

Gruber: Yeah, I know. [laughs]

James: But does the Maryland Association meet every year?

Gruber: Yeah.

James: Every year.

Gruber: Let me tell you a story about that, Jim, if we've got a little time. In 1972 my wife and I went to New Orleans, Louisiana for a Pearl Harbor convention. When I go there I meet a fellow from Dixon, Illinois, Gene Story, and a fellow from Peru, Indiana, he was aboard the Maryland, both of 'em aboard the Maryland. And we were together there, and they said, "Why don't we start a Maryland reunion?" Well I said, "Okay."

James: Why not?

Gruber: Why not? So what we did, he'd either come up here or I'd go down to Dixon, Illinois and that guy from Indiana would come to Dixon, Illinois and they'd come here. In 1974 or '75, I'm not even sure what year, we started a first Maryland Reunion. There's been one every year. I haven't gone to every one, but in the last few years, like last September, we were in Denver, Colorado. The year before that in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The year before that in Monterrey, California.

James: How many are left?

Gruber: Well, not too many, not too many, no. They're dying off, ya know?

James: Yes, we're all circling the drain.

- Gruber: Well, you know these Pearl Harbor survivors, we had a meeting yesterday. Well, I forget how many he said there was, because I think he said that they average about forty-five, not sure if that was a day or a week, that die. Because we're getting up in years, you know what I mean. Like I'll be eighty-two in a few.
- James: Twelve hundred World War II veterans die each day.
- Gruber: There you go.
- James: Each day.
- Gruber: And you can compare the Pearl Harbor survivors because they were there day one.
- James: And they were a little older.
- Gruber: Yeah, that's right.
- James: Okay, alright. You've done it. Thank you.
- Gruber: You don't have time to look at that one that I interviewed in Las Vegas?
- James: No, I gotta get going.
- Gruber: Okay, it was a pleasure meeting you, Jim.
- James: Thank you for allowing us in here. I appreciate it.
- Gruber: Oh no problem, no problem at all. I enjoyed it.

[End of Interview]