

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WARREN GABELMAN
Communications Officer, Navy, World War II
2002

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Gabelman, Warren. (1921-). Oral history interview, 2002.

Master Copy: 1 video recording (ca. 73 min.); ½ inch, color.

User Copy: 2 audio cassettes (ca. 73 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Warren Gabelman, a Madison, Wis. veteran, discusses his World War II service with the Navy serving aboard the USS Nicholas (DD 449) in the Pacific theater. He talks about postponing his wedding to enlist in the Navy, midshipman school at Notre Dame (Indiana), torpedo school at San Francisco (California), assignment to destroyer duty, and transfer to Noumea in the South Pacific. Assigned in 1943 to the USS Nicholas as the communications officer, he comments on mine sweeping missions off Guadalcanal; destroying floating mines with rifle fire at Corrigedor; and transfer to the United States to work on a newly commissioned destroyer. Gabelman mentions his marriage while in the U.S., joining the USS Glennon in Boston (Massachusetts), shakedown cruise to Guantanamo Bay (Cuba), discharge in 1946, and finishing his education at the University of Nebraska using the GI Bill.

Biographical Sketch:

Warren Gabelman was born in 1921 in Tilden (Nebraska) and served aboard the USS Nicholas and USS Glennon in World War II. Prior to enlisting, Gabelman earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska and engaged in ROTC training. After graduation, Gabelman enlisted in Midshipmen's School at Notre Dame University and had torpedo training. In 1943 Gabelman was assigned to the USS Nicholas and served as a communications assistant, then officer, in the Pacific Theater. After the war, Gabelman and his wife spent several years in New England, where he used the GI Bill to earn a PhD in botany and microbiology. Gabelman then accepted a position at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and became a noted professor and director of the horticulture department.

Transcribed by Dan Hudson, Valerie Wyer, Mike Hahn, 2010-2012.

Interview Transcript:

McIntosh: Okay. Talking to Warren Gabelman?

Gabelman: Gabelman [pronounced with short first “a”].

McIntosh: Yeah, I said it right.

Gabelman: Right.

McIntosh: On the 24th of July, 2002. Where were you born, sir?

Gabelman: Tilden, Nebraska.

McIntosh: I missed that.

Gabelman: Tilden.

McIntosh: Tilden? T-I-L-D-E-N?

Gabelman: Nebraska.

McIntosh: And when was that?

Gabelman: April 18th, 1921.

McIntosh: April?

Gabelman: Right.

McIntosh: On Pearl Harbor Day, what were you doing?

Gabelman: I was celebrating. I was a senior at the University of Nebraska. I’d been going with this girl for three years, three and a half years. We decided that we were going to get married. And I gave her a diamond ring on the 6th of December with the general understanding that as soon as I had something that seemed like a reasonable, stable job we’d get married.

McIntosh: Had you been in contact with any service—

Gabelman: No.

McIntosh: With regard to your draft status or anything like that? You must have—

Gabelman: Well, I was signed up for the draft, sure.

McIntosh: Signed up for the draft, yeah, but you hadn't done anything with it or had made no plans in that regard?

Gabelman: No. You know, in college, I'd had two years of field artillery as a requirement.

McIntosh: ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps]?

Gabelman: ROTC, that was a requirement of all freshmen and sophomores but, ah—

McIntosh: Two years ROTC?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: At Omaha, Nebraska?

Gabelman: No, in Lincoln.

McIntosh: In Lincoln, Nebraska?

Gabelman: Lincoln, yeah.

McIntosh: And, ah, so, now Pearl Harbor's arrived, and now there's panic in the streets.

Gabelman: [laughs] Well, sort of, we didn't really know what to do. So, we sort of made the basic decision that we'll decide on what part of the armed services I'll get into 'cause there's no ducking it. And then when the war is over, essentially over, and you know what happens to me—or to us—why, then we'll pick up on the wedding plans.

McIntosh: That was a tough decision?

Gabelman: Sort of.

McIntosh: Sort of? It was certainly the adult decision.

Gabelman: Well, you can credit my wife I think [both laugh].

McIntosh: That wasn't your idea, huh?

Gabelman: Well, not necessarily, it was a joint idea.

McIntosh: Well, women are good at big issues anyway.

Gabelman: Well, my first thought was that I'd like to be in the Naval Air Corps. I didn't really want to be in the Army. I didn't want to be land based or whatever, and she talked me out of that. That was another mature decision [laughs]. I was around too many aviators that went down. So, then I decided to sign up for Midshipmen's School. So, I went over to Omaha and took my physical—signed up—and I had a choice of going to Midshipmen's School here in Chicago, or at Notre Dame, or they had one up in New York on the wharf. And I chose Notre Dame because it was August, September, October, but September was the Notre Dame one. I thought, what the heck, I can watch football at Notre Dame, and so I did.

McIntosh: Good for you. Now, tell me the deal. When you joined the midshipmen do you sign for "x" number of years?

Gabelman: No.

McIntosh: You just signed in?

Gabelman: For the duration.

McIntosh: Just for the duration?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: And there wasn't any guarantee about how long you'd be in Midshipmen's School or nothin' like that?

Gabelman: Well, Midshipmen's School is a fixed four months really.

McIntosh: Oh, four months.

Gabelman: Yeah, and, uh, the only requirement—

McIntosh: Since you went to college that you—

Gabelman: Well, you had to have a bachelor's degree, and you had to have math through trig at least at college level.

McIntosh: And you'd done those?

Gabelman: I'd done those, and so—

McIntosh: What was your degree in?

Gabelman: Plant sciences at the University of Nebraska

McIntosh: So that put you at the upper level right off the bat.

Gabelman: Well, at least I got in.

McIntosh: No, I mean you got in at the officer level.

Gabelman: Well, yeah. You were a seaman for one month, and then you were a midshipman for three months, and then you were an ensign, and you'd never seen any ocean [laughs]

McIntosh: Oh, that's a detail.

Gabelman: [Laughs] It is, isn't it?

McIntosh: I know two guys who were in the Navy and never saw—one never went to sea.

Gabelman: Never?

McIntosh: Yeah, well, that's not true. On summer [training] cruise they went. That's about it. So, off to Notre Dame we go.

Gabelman: Yup.

McIntosh: How'd you enjoy that?

Gabelman: It was fun. It was a challenge, but it was fun.

McIntosh: Was the school difficult or no?

Gabelman: Not really for me. Uh, I did quite well.

McIntosh: Generally speaking, the trade schools head for engineering type degrees.

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did they give you engineering type classes?

Gabelman: You had to—oh, what? I've forgotten the classes we actually took, but you had to take rather general course work. You did take some math, you did have a little bit of navigation, but in the three months you really didn't have enough time to do anything but wet your whistle. It was interesting that first month. At the end of the month, I would guess that about fifteen percent of the fellows were dropped, bing.

McIntosh: Grades?

Gabelman: Kicked out--I assume it's grades. It might have been evaluations on the basis of the company commanders in each case, but I have no way of knowing. But there were four of us in this one room, and two of them disappeared at the end of the first month.

McIntosh: They never said anything?

Gabelman: Well, they didn't know. You were never told. You just didn't make it. You were then an apprentice seaman.

McIntosh: I mean, what did they say to you as a roommate? Did they say—

Gabelman: Yeah, that was basically it.

McIntosh: You said, "What's going on?" And—

Gabelman: Well, they just came and said, "We've been bilged out."

McIntosh: Bilged. And that means?

Gabelman: Oh, pushed out, which meant they weren't out of the Navy, but it meant that they were in for the duration as an apprentice seaman

McIntosh: [inaudible] in the same situation.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: If we flunked out of the [UW-Madison] Medical School [Gabelman laughs] [inaudible].

Gabelman: Yeah, I know what you're saying.

McIntosh: [Laughs] And they studied hard.

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: So, anyway when you finished that then?

Gabelman: Well, about a month before we finished we were given a little form to fill out or check off about possibilities where they needed ensigns.

McIntosh: Oh, you had some choices.

Gabelman: Yeah, we had a lot of choices. It was an interesting set of choices.

McIntosh: Yeah, tell me.

Gabelman: Well, some of them were like harbor patrol, San Francisco Bay, you know that sort of thing. And a lot of these kids signed up for it in a hurry, you know [McIntosh laughs]. And I talked to one of the fellows who'd been in the regular Navy for about four years and had gotten the opportunity to come back to Midshipmen's School, and I said, "What about these things?" He says, "All those good things are gonna be in Antibes [France], I can tell you right now." [both laugh] And I said, "Well, what's the best kind of duty to really sign up for?" And he said, "Combatant ships." And I said, "Are the comba—"

McIntosh: That was just a general term?

Gabelman: Yeah, which would be destroyers, cruisers, carriers, battleships, and I said, "As a group which would you prefer?" He says, "Get on a destroyer. They're a lot less formal." He says, "You're not going to have to have a tie on when you eat dinner every night."

McIntosh: Right, dungaree Navy.

Gabelman: That's right.

McIntosh: Yeah, okay.

Gabelman: And so that was my first choice, and I don't know, my second was I think carriers, and third one was battleships, but I got my first choice. And there were forty of us—this was a class of about 1,300—1,100 and some got--

McIntosh: Thirteen-hundred at Notre—

Gabelman: Notre Dame in that class, and then there about 1,150 that got commissions. And out of that 1,150, forty of us got to go to either—well, we got the same set of orders: proceed to Nouméa, New Caledonia and report to [Admiral] Halsey's command for assignment on a destroyer. Delay en route for one month in San Diego. Half of us were in torpedo school, and the other half was in gunnery. And so we just assumed then once we got aboard ship we'd be an assistant torpedo officer or something like that. When that was over—so we got out at Notre Dame in late January, and so this—March through—end of March, why, we took the train up to San Francisco where we had transportation out. And they let us starve to death, you know, in there for about ten days [laughs] before I was in the last group of about seven or eight, and we were put on a Liberty ship, *The Benjamin Ide Wheeler*, bound for Nouméa, New Caledonia, and we left under the Golden Gate Bridge about sunset, and the next morning we—and we were all alone, you know—and the next morning we looked

around to see where the convoy was, and there was no convoy, we were out there by ourselves [laughs] for twenty-six days.

McIntosh: At nine knots.

Gabelman: Nine and a half—ten knots [laughs].

McIntosh: [Laughs] Right.

Gabelman: And about the fifth day out, or the sixth day, we were fairly well out from west of Panama Canal Zone. We were awakened with—they —had a three-inch gun on there, and it was firing away, and there was a Japanese sub on the surface, and it dove. And, uh—

McIntosh: You all alone?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: You're dead meat.

Gabelman: We coulda been. But—

McIntosh: Jeezus.

Gabelman: But there was about seven or eight ships reported that same Japanese sub that day, and the assumption was that he was just trying to track and get some idea of numbers of ships coming or something like that.

McIntosh: Well, that was lucky.

Gabelman: Yeah, that's luck number one [laughs].

McIntosh: One on one you had no chance.

Gabelman: That's right.

McIntosh: Jeezus, that must have scared the shit out of you [laughs].

Gabelman: Well, I don't know. It happened so fast, and there was [inaudible] and one thing-another, It was minor compared to a lot of other things later.

McIntosh: [Laughs] Okay.

Gabelman: And about twenty-six days later we got into Nouméa and—

McIntosh: That's where you found your ultimate goal of your—

Gabelman: Yeah, had to wait about—

McIntosh: Nicholas?

Gabelman: *Nicholas* [USS *Nicholas*, a *Fletcher*-class destroyer].

McIntosh: *Nicholas*.

Gabelman: We had to wait about six or seven days and then you got called in that one morning, they said, “Your orders are here. You get on the *Nicholas*.” And I said, “Where is it?” and they said, “It’s out here in the harbor.” And I said, “But that ship’s underway.” “Yeah, she’s on her way to Sydney, Australia for rest and recreation for ten days” [laughs]. So, I had to wait.

McIntosh: And you missed it?

Gabelman: I missed it by about a half an hour. Anyway, that was minor. And then later on they put me on another ship to go up to Espiritu Santo [the largest island in the nation of Vanatu in the Pacific archipelago of the New Hebrides]—

McIntosh: Did you know what you were going to do before you got aboard ship?

Gabelman: No, I got aboard ship and—

McIntosh: You just had generic training?

Gabelman: That’s right. Well, with the exception of the specialized training in torpedoes.

McIntosh: Oh, you didn’t mention that.

Gabelman: Well, yeah, when I was at San Diego I was in the group that took the month of torpedo training. So, we just assumed we were going to be assistant torpedo officers. So, I reported aboard, and the exec says to me, “You’re going to be our new assistant communicator.” And then I said, “But I haven’t had any training.” He says, “We know that.” And I said, “Well, my training’s been in torpedoes.” “We know that too, but you’re the fourth one that’s come through school. We only needed one.” [both laugh] And so, fortunately for me the communications officer was very good.

McIntosh: The services are all the same. Everyone I’ve talked to had similar experiences.

Gabelman: Sure, I'm sure.

McIntosh: You'd think it's gonna be [inaudible]. No way at all [laughs].

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah, I'm sure. But anyway, when I went aboard ship it was alongside a tender, and the night before then bombarding up in the Guadalcanal area, and—or the day before, and the number three gun had a hangfire and it cooked off and blew, and so the gun was destroyed. But fortunately they got the men out of there. Nobody was hurt in that particular case. So everybody was happy as a lark alongside the tender when I got aboard because they were sure we were going to go back to Pearl [Harbor] and get a new gun. And you know what they did? They pulled up a brand new 2,100 tonner that had never seen any action, took the gun off of our ship, put their number three gun in place, kept the crew that had the experience out there, which is logical, really.

McIntosh: Right. Yeah, sure saved a lot of money for the government.

Gabelman: We'll, I'm sure.

McIntosh: So they had you moved on right away?

Gabelman: Yeah, then we were off and at 'em.

McIntosh: Communication, did you have a lot to learn?

Gabelman: Oh, it was a funny thing. It wasn't that difficult to learn. You don't really get into learning code and signal flags and that sort of thing. You have specialists that do that.

McIntosh: The guys, the enlisted men do all the work on that.

Gabelman: They're the specialists, that's right. But you see in communications we had sonar, we had radar, we had radio, we had the yeomen, and a couple of other groups.

McIntosh: How big was the *Nicholas*?

Gabelman: Physically? Well, it was a 2,100 tonner. It was 276 feet long and thirty-nine—

McIntosh: Two-seven-six?

Gabelman: In other words, almost like a football field, and, thirty-nine feet six inches at the widest.

McIntosh: What class was that?

Gabelman: *Fletcher*

McIntosh: It was a *Fletcher*-class.

Gabelman: Yeah, it was the first of the *Fletcher*-class to be commissioned.

McIntosh: Oh, really?

Gabelman: Yeah, the *Fletcher* was being built at the same time, but that was in Kearny [New Jersey, a WWII shipyard] and they weren't quite as fast as Bath, Maine, and so the *Nicholas* was first, the *O'Bannon* was second, and then the *Fletcher* was third.

McIntosh: They had twin screws?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Diesel?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Diesel power.

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Well then that could travel how fast?

Gabelman: Thirty seven point six knots on the shakedown cruise [Jim laughs]. That's fast; that's pushing a lot of water.

McIntosh: I was gonna say that's humpin' right along.

Gabelman: But it's interesting, see, that was in June of '42 when they did that. The ship went out to the Guadalcanal area, and that first squadron was assigned to [Admiral] Halsey 'cause he needed ships of that type. I went aboard in May, May 14th of '43, and at the time of the Battle of Kula Gulf, which we'll probably talk about later, the *Radford* [USS *Radford*, a *Fletcher*-class destroyer] and us left there with the survivors of the *Helena* [USS *Helena*, a St. Louis class light cruiser]. Went back to Tulagi [a small island in the Solomon Islands] which was about a four hour run, and we averaged over thirty-six knots on the way back, had no air cover.

McIntosh: Didn't need it.

Gabelman: [Laughs] Well, we weren't sure because when we were bombarding up there, when the *Helena* got sunk one of the key objectives was to neutralize the air base there which was functional at 5:00 o'clock that afternoon. So the admiral told us to get the hell out of there [Laughs]. We did.

McIntosh: What else did I want to ask you about that ship? Oh, how bout riding the waves, did you become accustomed to that rather quickly?

Gabelman: Eventually, it's either that or die.

McIntosh: You had two choices?

Gabelman: Yeah, I think so. Now a lot of us had problems holding our cookies at the beginning, but eventually learned to take the roll in your knees and not lean on things, and pretty soon your head's okay.

McIntosh: Stopped spinning and then once your head stopped moving around then probably the nausea left, right?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: How long did that take?

Gabelman: Oh, for me, about two months.

McIntosh: You got pretty thin [laughs].

Gabelman: No, it wasn't that. It wasn't as if you were sick all the time either. It was just occasionally. It wasn't so much the roll of the ship, but it was that lift and roll. And you come up here, and your stomach stays up here, you know? And your body goes down here [laughs].

McIntosh: I was on a hospital ship for a year.

Gabelman: Those are like floating hotels, you know [laughs].

McIntosh: Yeah, except when you're underway [Gabelman laughs]. You know, they're built on a C-5 hull; it's a Liberty ship hull. And it would ride up, and then when it went down it would turn, and so you got—

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: I really—

Gabelman: It takes a while, doesn't it?

McIntosh: It sure does. Yeah, I didn't enjoy that part.

Gabelman: It's still better than being land based.

McIntosh: Well, yeah, of course most of the time we were tied up so it was never a problem, but we did go back to Japan several times and Korea for R&R. It was two days it took us usually to get from Inchon [South Korea] to somewhere in Japan. And then of course when we came home, we came home aboard that thing. Eighteen days, Jesus. And going through the odd (??) 30th of October twice.

Gabelman: You were in Japan at the time of the signing?

McIntosh: No, no, no. I was in Korea.

Gabelman: Oh, you were in Korea. I see. I missed that, thank goodness. I got out of the Reserves in time. A bunch of our group got called back in because they needed destroyer officers.

McIntosh: Sure. Probably got distracted on [inaudible] you there.

Gabelman: That's all right.

McIntosh: Now, this communication job, did you have a lot of work, busy type work?

Gabelman: Well, there was always work to do. You know all the radio messages come in. They have to be decoded, and you have a—usually the ensign's standing coding watches, which is like typing, and then those had to be routed, and one of the radiomen would do the routing for the thing. But we had to take care of all the classified publications and one thing another.

McIntosh: For the squadron or just your ship?

Gabelman: Just my ship.

McIntosh: I was wondering how tied in you were with your—how many were in the squadron?

Gabelman: There were ten ships.

McIntosh: Ten ships? You stayed pretty much together or not?

Gabelman: Well, at the beginning they kept dribbling out, you know, a month or two apart, and we lost three of them: one about ten weeks before I came out and then two shortly after I came out. So then we were down to seven, and once we got to that level, why, we were pretty much together all the time.

McIntosh: That's what I'm getting at, is your communications between ships was more or less continual?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: So everybody knew what everybody was doing?

Gabelman: Yeah, most of it was by voice communications. TVS, I don't know what TVS stands for, but it was a high frequency type.

McIntosh: You didn't have to worry about any codes or anything like that?

Gabelman: Not on that, but if you were going to send a message of "I see Debbie" then you did. Then we would have to encode it which we could, and our ship was the squadron leader. So we had a squadron commander aboard, and he had his own staff which was not large.

McIntosh: The squadron commander was a three striper?

Gabelman: Ah, he was a four striper. Yeah, [Vice Admiral Francis] McInerney.

McIntosh: But your ship commander was what?

Gabelman: Two and a half.

McIntosh: Two and a half, yeah, that's what we had.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah, lieutenant commander. Yeah, and the squadron had a chief of staff, the commodore had a chief of staff, and a communications officer, a recognitions officer, and then later on a couple of other officers. But they had enough so that there was always one of them on the bridge standing watch with our group.

McIntosh: Your squadron was what?

Gabelman: Squadron 21. Still exists, in fact we're going to have a reunion—

McIntosh: Squadron 21?

Gabelman: Yup, ComDesRon 21. Commander DesRon 21 was on our ship. And I think the *Stennis* [USS *Stennis*, the seventh *Nimitz*-class nuclear powered

supercarrier] is coming into San Diego this month, and early September they're going to have sort of a get-together of people from all the ships of the squadron, the original Squadron 21.

McIntosh: Is there a publication that goes around from Squadron 21 on a yearly basis?

Gabelman: No, as a matter of fact we weren't even aware that they were still operational as Squadron 21 until David McComb picked this up. He's the fellow that's doing this material on the web. So, he's been sort of the focal point behind it.

McIntosh: That will be pretty nice.

Gabelman: Yeah, but I'm not going to go.

McIntosh: Oh, oh.

Gabelman: I'd love to go you know, but I've got some responsibilities at home.

McIntosh: I understand, we have to make choices. So, now you're based at Nouméa most of the time?

Gabelman: No, most of the time we were operating out of Espiritu Santo at the beginning until the Guadalcanal area was secured. Then we were operating out of Tulagi, and we just kept moving forward. When I first went out there, of course we had some very heavy serious battles in which battleships, carriers and stuff had been lost, heavy cruisers.

McIntosh: That was before you arrived.

Gabelman: That'd be before I arrived. And so, the decision had been made by either CINCPAC [Commander in Chief Pacific] or Halsey's command, one or the other that they would only make available a division of cruisers and a couple squadrons of destroyers to do whatever had to be done from then on. And the cruisers we had were the *St. Louis*, the *Honolulu*, the *Helena*, and then the HMS *Warramunga* and *Shropshire* from Australia. And the first week in Ju--

McIntosh: Was that you call a task force?

Gabelman: Yeah. And the first week in July or first ten days in July, the *Helena*—

McIntosh: Of '44?

Gabelman: '43. The *Helena* was sunk, and the other four of them had all been torpedoed in action, and two of our destroyers in our squadron at that point had been sunk.

McIntosh: Off Guadalcanal, right?

Gabelman: Really up off of New Georgia Island [of the Solomon Islands] just to the west. And at that point—

McIntosh: That was a low point in U.S. Naval history in World War II.

Gabelman: It was, but you see then at that point the decision was made, well, we've gone through the cruisers, now you are the striking force.

McIntosh: [laughs] That's wonderful news.

Gabelman: So—yeah, and then they brought out the DesRon 23 [Destroyer Squadron 23] which was also *Fletcher*-class destroyers. And every other night we would go up, get in general quarters all night, and sweep the slot for any boats coming in, one thing another, then back. And it was like going to Chicago. It was about a six or seven hour run at about twenty, twenty-five knots.

McIntosh: The whole squadron?

Gabelman: Yeah, and then when you got back if you got into anything you had to replenish ammunition and stuff that day, so that you'd get underway that night again for the next, you know, the alternate night. And it was [laughs]—

McIntosh: You only had a five-inch gun?

Gabelman: Yes, five of them.

McIntosh: Five five-inchers?

Gabelman: Yeah. Well, then at early—

McIntosh: Three forward and two aft, right?

Gabelman: Two forward and three aft.

McIntosh: Okay.

Gabelman: Two forward and three aft. And then we had a quad mount of 1.1s when I first went aboard.

McIntosh: Oerlikons?

Gabelman: I'm not sure. And then we had about six or eight 20mm for antiaircraft. And when we did get back into the States for repair and replacement of the guns they put 40mm Bofors on and took the 1.1s off. They were a lot better.

McIntosh: Had more range.

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: And more power.

Gabelman: Yeah, but, see December of that year we had—

McIntosh: '43.

Gabelman: Of '43, or early November already, we had over a 100,000 rounds of ammunition out of the five inch 38s.

McIntosh: You used that much?

Gabelman: Over 20,000 out of each, yeah.

McIntosh: Oh, Jeezus—

Gabelman: And the Navy regs said they will be replaced once you get 20,000 through them.

McIntosh: You mean the guns?

Gabelman: The guns, and so they sent us back to the States and that's when they did the remodeling.

McIntosh: Hadn't you just replaced one—

Gabelman: Oh, it went off, too. They started them all off alike then.

McIntosh: Well, then you had a chance to go home for a bit.

Gabelman: Got two weeks.

McIntosh: Did your fiancé come to the West Coast to meet you?

Gabelman: No, no, I came to Nebraska to meet her. She was teaching, so as soon as—

McIntosh: Get married?

Gabelman: Not then.

McIntosh: She held you up [laughs]?

Gabelman: Oh, I don't know about that. We just decided there were things going on. It was—

McIntosh: At that point it was—

Gabelman: You know, it was sort of a low ebb in things.

McIntosh: Damn right [Gabelman laughs]. Damn right it was. Okay. Did you have trouble getting mail aboard ship?

Gabelman: No, no. Well, every time we'd get into port, sometimes if you were out on a longer period you might be out for as much as—well, a couple of times almost a whole month.

McIntosh: Was there always a tender near your squadron?

Gabelman: No—

McIntosh: So that you could get provisions like food and things.

Gabelman: Well, we always had access to a tender, but sometimes we were a couple days away. If we really needed to we could go back for torpedoes.

McIntosh: Water?

Gabelman: No, we made our own water. We had enough food aboard to—we could survive for about thirty days.

McIntosh: The crew was how many?

Gabelman: About 325 enlisted men and about thirty officers.

McIntosh: And you could last for a month?

Gabelman: For a month. Towards the end of the month we were on some C-rations, but we could last.

McIntosh: Sure, how was the chow, generally?

Gabelman: Pretty darn good.

McIntosh: It was?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Most Navy ships put out good chow.

Gabelman: Yeah, and I remember when we came back in for an overhaul in December of that year, we took—they had some money available for, oh I don't know, for R&R things for the crew. We put it all into an ice cream machine [laughs].

McIntosh: Neato (??).

Gabelman: It was important.

McIntosh: Oh, yeah. When I was in Korea, during a lull in the Korean War when we medical people from our ship with some counterparts in the Army who were out in the field. So me and another medical officer and ten corpsmen, we got off the ship and got in trucks and drove into the middle of Korea and met the Army Seventh Division and the medical unit, one of the medical units. And those guys were put on the truck and taken back to the hospital ship. And so we lived with the Army for three days, and they lived aboard ship.

Gabelman: Did you enjoy those three days?

McIntosh: Not much.

Gabelman: [laughs] I'll bet.

McIntosh: Cold as hell and wandering around, but I got a chance to drive a tank. Did some interesting—

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: We got back to the ship, and we had trouble getting those Army guys off [laughs]. You know, all of a sudden they had, there was women, there was warm food, and ice cream.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah. It's important

McIntosh: They were tryin' to stretch it, "Can't we make this permanent?" [both laugh] [inaudible]

Gabelman: Yeah. I have a neighbor who lives next door to me who was a corpsman in Korea, got shot up in the process of taking fellas off the battlefield, and I think he was in the hospital for a couple of years from it.

McIntosh: Well, I've interviewed a lot of 'em, and I knew a lot 'em. Now in the first part of '44 you've been home now, and now you're back to finish those guys off.

Gabelman: Yeah, an now I'm the communications officer, I'm no longer the assistant communications officer. We lost about two thirds of the crew to new construction because they needed that experience for new ships. So we leave port with about 200 people.

McIntosh: You got another stripe?

Gabelman: Well, eventually I was. I guess I was about a JG [lieutenant, junior grade]. by that time. It was mostly by time, not by responsibility.

McIntosh: Sure. Almost, right.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah [laughs] that's right.

McIntosh: That's how I got promoted (??) [inaudible].

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: Okay, so did that change your duty at all?

Gabelman: Well, instead of being assistant officer of the deck of general quarters I was the officer of deck of general quarters [both laugh] for seventeen months. And I stood one of the OOD [officer of the deck] watches or one of the three continuously.

McIntosh: But your responsibilities are essentially the same?

Gabelman: Well, except you were fully responsible for the communications department section unit then. See, when you were an assistant somebody else had the overall responsibility.

McIntosh: I understand, but I just wondered, did they change your job much?

Gabelman: Not a heck of a lot.

McIntosh: The fact that—

Gabelman: You still stood eight—

McIntosh: Your name on your rear end if someone [inaudible].

Gabelman: Yeah, but you still stood eight hours of watch, and then you probably had four or five hours of work to do as a communications officer every day at sea.

McIntosh: Your watch time is the same?

Gabelman: Well, it varied a little bit based on general quarters and things like that. Some days you might have fourteen or fifteen hours on the bridge, but you still had these other jobs to do.

McIntosh: When you were on the bridge, in other words, you were watching the corpsmen? I mean the radioman work his radios and that sort of stuff?

Gabelman: They were down one deck. The sonar was up there, navigation was up there, signalmen were up there, the quartermasters were up there. Down one deck you had the radio shack and some of the radio and radar equipment, and then down another one **[End Tape 1, Side A]** you had the yeomen. So when I was up there on the bridge I really didn't see much of my men except as was incidental to my watch section.

McIntosh: Well, that's good. That's a nice place to view the war from up top.

Gabelman: It's the best.

McIntosh: It's the best, right.

Gabelman: You sort of knew what was going on. You didn't have to live by scuttlebutt [laughs].

McIntosh: Right, I would say [both laugh]. You were on top of things every minute.

Gabelman: Yeah, both from the standpoint of communications and from the standpoint of being officer of the deck. When you were both, why, everything sort of funneled through you 'cause you were probably next to the captain in terms of communications.

McIntosh: Did you get along with the captain okay?

Gabelman: Yeah, I should have brought you the picture.

McIntosh: What was his name?

Gabelman: Well, I had three of them. First one was Andy Hill. He eventually became a rear admiral in charge of the amphibious forces for the Pacific.

McIntosh: Oh he was a “trade school boy” [Annapolis graduate].

Gabelman: Oh yeah, all of them were, all of the skippers were.

McIntosh: They all were?

Gabelman: Yeah. And the second one was R.T.S.Keith—

McIntosh: That’s the one you sent me the history of.

Gabelman: Yeah, and when he retired—that was in mid- sixties or something like that—he was the commander of the Pacific fleet at that point.

McIntosh: Oh, my.

Gabelman: And he was a vice admiral, and I got a picture, a full sized colored picture of him at that time. And with a thing “Gabe, Gabe,” “To the best OOD any commanding officer ever had in general quarters during World War II.”

McIntosh: Terrific.

Gabelman: That was twenty some years after the war was over.

McIntosh: [laughs] Well, that’s wonderful.

Gabelman: Yeah, and then the third one I had was a fella by the name of Dennis, oh, that’s awful, I can’t think—anyway he passed away as a rear admiral shortly after the war, had a heart attack.

McIntosh: Okay, and have you kept in contact with any of the other guys that you were aboard ship with?

Gabelman: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I exchange Christmas cards with about twenty-five every year.

McIntosh: That’s pretty good.

Gabelman: Yeah, and they have reunions every year.

McIntosh: You said you haven’t gone to any reunions.

Gabelman: I haven't gone to any reunions for about three, four years now. But they just had one about a month ago in Portland, Maine. And it was celebrating the 60th anniversary of the commissioning the ship.

McIntosh: You should arrange to have one here in Madison. Then you wouldn't have had to travel, and you could have it right here.

Gabelman: Well, I did one here in 1970.

McIntosh: Oh, hey, great.

Gabelman: Yeah, we had almost 300 people here, counting wives and children.

McIntosh: Sure, fantastic. Okay. And so in '44 you went back to the wars, and that went on till the end?

Gabelman: Yup. Yeah, we were assigned to the central Pacific group for a little bit, and then we went back to [Gen.] MacArthur's command in New Guinea. And so we followed up all the landings in New Guinea, and we were in the Philippines, and then after the Philippines—

McIntosh: You were at Leyte Gulf then?

Gabelman: Yeah, we were at Leyte Gulf. We were there the night of the Battle of Surigao Strait. It was the only time in the entire war when we were anywhere near action, and we were right in the middle of it. At that time our group had been decimated, and we only had about three or four functional ships.

McIntosh: From the kamikazes?

Gabelman: No, this was before the kamikazes had really started. And so we were asked to bring up some logistic ships, which we did. We got 'em into Leyte Harbor, and we were at anchor that night in Leyte Harbor. And we listened to all this, and then we were in a sort of modified general quarters. Then about at 3:30 in the morning we were told to get under way and take off to the mouth and patrol there, and then we headed up north to try to help out the group that came around the north and trap some of our CVs [aircraft carriers] and so on. So you can imagine that, we finally were able to sit there and sort of like watching television and listening to it. Glad we weren't in it, for once.

McIntosh: As you moved up did your situation change aboard ship? Did you just move into that area and wait for something to happen which never happened?

Gabelman: No, not really, because we were on the offense most of the time. See, after Leyte, then we went around to Subic Bay [Island of Luzon, Philippines], and we operated out of Subic Bay for a while, and we covered a close up landing on Corregidor [Island, Philippines]. And then after that we went down to Zamboanga [Mindanao, Philippines] and covered the landings.

McIntosh: What could you do outside of Corregidor? Just make sure the guys—

Gabelman: Well, the army was going to land paratroops on it, and we were there to help pick up those that missed the island [both laugh] It happened. There were some of them for whatever reason, it wasn't that it was windy, but for whatever reason, I think they were trying to land 'em close to the edge. And so if they're fifty yards short they're out in the water. And I think three of our ships that were in there got—hit mines during that period off Corregidor. Fortunately, we didn't.

McIntosh: Did you have minesweepers in your squadron?

Gabelman: No, no, no. We had minesweepers around, and there were some minesweepers with us in the Corregidor area.

McIntosh: Did you have paravanes [underwater glider minesweepers] aboard your ship to sweep your own mines?

Gabelman: Nope, no. But off of Corregidor we had I think four fellas with rifles to shoot the mines that floated to the surface, and they popped off three or four that could have hit us. You know, you sort of take that as part of the day's routine. [both laugh].

McIntosh: Shooting mines?

Gabelman: Well, whatever. Whatever has to be done.

McIntosh: Was it hard to hit?

Gabelman: They are. But you know, you put a good rifle in the hands of somebody.

McIntosh: I know, but you had to hit those spikes.

Gabelman: Yeah, but you shoot ten, fifteen rounds at it more than likely gonna get one.

McIntosh: [laughs] One of 'em will do it.

Gabelman: That's all it takes.

McIntosh: [laughs] Turn your ship around if you get too close.

Gabelman: God, wouldn't want that.

McIntosh: No, it's a big explosion, those mines

Gabelman: Yeah, it was interesting, the three ships that hit mines, none of them sunk, the destroyers.

McIntosh: Oh, really? I'm surprised.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah, but it—

McIntosh: Just took the bow off?

Gabelman: Either that or if it was back by the stern it put a hole in the stern, you know, whatever, and they were able to get 'em all back into port, but that sort of terminated their activities for the next three or four months in sense of the war.

McIntosh: So you were in Subic Bay till the end of the war?

Gabelman: No, we were in Subic Bay, and then we covered the landings in Zamboanga on the lower end—

McIntosh: Mindanao?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Is that [inaudible]?

Gabelman: No, it's below Mindanao. What's the large island? Southern island? Mindanao.

McIntosh: Mindanao. I knew it was [inaudible].

Gabelman: And then after that we went back to Subic Bay, and then we were sent back down, I think it was sort of a diversionary thing, to cover a landing in Tarakan, Borneo. And I think what they were trying to do was get the Japanese forces they had in Hong Kong to stay in Hong Kong rather than coming back up to help defend Okinawa. And when we were down in Tarakan, Borneo covering that landing, my orders came in to come back to the States. So that meant I could come back for new construction and a marriage. And so we get—

McIntosh: New construction?

Gabelman: A new ship.

McIntosh: A new ship, a new wife.

Gabelman: Another destroyer. Well anyway, so as soon as we got back to Subic Bay which was about ten days later, then I got off the ship.

McIntosh: Was that routine, to pull a guy off a ship like that?

Gabelman: Well yeah, because after all there's an assistant communication officer, and he better be ready to take over.

McIntosh: So your job, what they wanted you for was to teach communications to a new ship?

Gabelman: Well, what they wanted me to do was be a member of a new crew as a communications officer, just like I was on the Nicholas.

McIntosh: But by now you're ready to take over the whole ship all yourself.

Gabelman: I was qualified to be an exec at that point, but this is all right. So we came back after we got married en route from my coming from the West Coast, stopped in Nebraska for four days and saw the relatives, got married and headed for the East Coast and spent six weeks in Bath, Maine and six weeks in Boston, then went down the shakedown cruise.

McIntosh: What were you doing in Maine?

Gabelman: Bath, Maine is where most of these good ships were built.

McIntosh: Ah, okay.

Gabelman: During their Depression days they made pie tins and things like that, and toward the end of the Depression they started making destroyers again.

McIntosh: Where is that from Portsmouth, New Hampshire?

Gabelman: North, north.

McIntosh: I know its north, but I mean is it a hundred miles—

Gabelman: It's about 50-60 miles is all. But Bath, Maine still today is one of the best shipyards we have for building destroyers.

McIntosh: Yeah, I knew that.

Gabelman: Yeah, well then you know the Bath Iron Works.

McIntosh: I know about it.

Gabelman: Yeah, it's right there. But anyway, we were there for six weeks.

McIntosh: And that's when you got a new ship.

Gabelman: New ship, the—

McIntosh: What was the new ship?

Gabelman: The USS *Glennon* DD-840.

McIntosh: G-l-e-n-n-o-n?

Gabelman: Right.

McIntosh: D-D?

Gabelman: DD-840.

McIntosh: And you got that when? In '45.

Gabelman: '45—

McIntosh: January, February?

Gabelman: No, no, no, no. You see, I came back, we got married the end of June, July, so I reported to it in early August, about mid-August.

McIntosh: August of '44?

Gabelman: Yeah. But it took about six weeks before it was ready to sail, and then we sailed it down to Boston, to the Navy Yard there and finished putting in radar and stuff there. And it was actually commissioned in Boston.

McIntosh: But this was not a *Fletcher*-class, or it was a *Fletcher*-class?

Gabelman: No, it's not a *Fletcher*-class. Don't ask me what class it is now, but it was twin guns.

McIntosh: How much bigger and better were they?

Gabelman: Well, they called them 3,200 tonners, and they were sluggish and slow, and you know they could only do about thirty-two knots doing full bore [laughs].

McIntosh: Where's the improvement here?

Gabelman: Well, supposedly they had more gunnery.

McIntosh: Same engines?

Gabelman: No, I don't think so. I think their engines were different.

McIntosh: But they were still diesels?

Gabelman: Oh, yeah. What is interesting in this regard, they didn't keep any of those of the 840 type for the Korean conflict. Those were old Fletchers that they called back, particularly because they wanted that extra speed that they could work with carriers and stuff. The *Nicholas* was actually decommissioned after World War II, recommissioned for the Korean conflict, decommissioned after the Korean conflict and recommissioned for Vietnam. We got sixteen battle stars in WWII. There were only four ships that had more. We got five in Korea and nine in Vietnam. And that's why David McCowan got started doing all this because he decided it was the most decorated ship in the Navy.

McIntosh: I was going to say, do you have other ships that compare with that?

Gabelman: Well, in different ways obviously. It was either the *Enterprise* or *Essex* carrier has a tremendous record. And other ships in our squadron, the *Taylor*, which was in our squadron. It had fifteen battle stars in World War II, and it had two or three in Korea, and had four or five in Vietnam. So there are some in that twenty-two, twenty-three range. But we were up there at thirty [laughs].

McIntosh: Incredible, that's incredible.

Gabelman: Yeah, but I was told by several people that they could do enough speed with two engines to keep up with the carriers, and actually we had four engines, I think I said at the beginning that we had two. We had four when we were in full bore.

McIntosh: Four diesel engines?

Gabelman: You had four diesel engines. Normally we cruised with two.

McIntosh: Right. Then two were a spare.

Gabelman: But when we had to we had those other two.

McIntosh: You had a lot of power. And then this new class, whatever that is with the *Glennon*, apparently didn't turn out to their satisfaction. It was too slow or something?

Gabelman: Well, I don't know whether it was too slow, but in terms of the nature of warfare I think they felt that the *Fletcher*-class actually was probably a little better.

McIntosh: Tell me about your situation. Did you have more room, better quarters?

Gabelman: No, about the same.

McIntosh: So it really wasn't much different?

Gabelman: No, the organization of the bridge and that sort of thing was quite different. And toward the end of the war you had situations where there were certain areas where people could go that you as a communications officer couldn't go on their own.

McIntosh: What do you mean?

Gabelman: I don't know [McIntosh laughs]. Some of these things were crazy, and I didn't worry too much about it at that point. But anyway, we were on a shakedown cruise down in Guantánamo. Then Thanksgiving Day, why, we went over to Port Au Prince, Haiti and spent Thanksgiving Day there, and then we're getting ready for Christmas, and they sent us back to Norfolk. And the shakedown cruise wasn't over yet. As we were going into Norfolk, why, this thing came in indicating if you had earned so many points you were eligible for release.

McIntosh: So long.

Gabelman: So long, I went home. And so I got out of—

McIntosh: Out of service when?

Gabelman: Well, I came to Great Lakes at the end of December. Officially I was out of the service the last week in January.

McIntosh: Of '45?

Gabelman: That would be '46

McIntosh: Oh, it was after the war then?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. Because you said you went on the *Glennon* in August of '44.

Gabelman: Yeah. '45. I'm sorry, '45.

McIntosh: You corrected me when I said '45 because I didn't understand.

Gabelman: I'm sorry, I misunderstood I guess. That makes more sense. Yeah, but I missed out on a lot of excitement you know, toward the end of the war not being on the *Nicholas*.

McIntosh: That's where you should have been.

Gabelman: Yeah, at that point there were only three of the original ten operational at that point because of the mines and stuff.

McIntosh: Sure, lost the rest of the squadron.

Gabelman: And so Halsey is sort of a [inaudible] to the DesRon 21 that had the *Nicholas* designated pick up the Japanese, and destroyers brought out the people who sued for surrender, took 'em to the *Nicholas*. And so when I was—

McIntosh: You missed that?

Gabelman: I missed that.

McIntosh: You mean you brought the Japs who signed the decree—

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah, and so when I'm in Bath, Maine with my new bride, here come these wire photos, and I could recognize all these people you know, and she'd look at me, and she's "Now which place would you rather be?" [laughs]. But anyway—

McIntosh: [laughs] That was a test.

Gabelman: Yeah, that was test number one.

McIntosh: Right. That's one [laughs].

Gabelman: And then on the day of the actual formal signing they had forward ships that were designated for special things, and the *Nicholas* was asked to pick up all the Allied signers, like General Wainwright and people like that. And of course all that got documented, and then after that she did some

routine duty over there getting prisoners of war from up in Hokkaido [Japan] and stuff and then came home.

McIntosh: She was decommissioned when? Or do you know?

Gabelman: Well, the first decommissioning would have been probably about six months after the war.

McIntosh: Six months after the war?

Gabelman: Something like that.

McIntosh: And then they tuned her up for Korea and then tuned her up for Vietnam.

Gabelman: Yeah, and they modified her, too and put a helicopter on and took a couple of the guns off and—

McIntosh: Put a bigger radar and—

Gabelman: Yeah, and they put—instead of—

McIntosh: Probably put some missiles on it.

Gabelman: No, I don't think so. I think that started later after the war when they had things like the *Mahan* [USS *Mahan*, an *Arleigh-Burke* class destroyer], some of those which were quite a bit bigger destroyers.

McIntosh: Sure. Now, I noticed since that destroyer incident, you know with the *Colby*, that is a big ship. That doesn't look like any World War II destroyer—

Gabelman: Well, they're not 2,100 tonners, they're more like 6,000 ton. Well, they're like the small cruisers used to be.

McIntosh: They're cruiser size, and I just was impressed when I saw the first Cabrini destroyer. I said "Jesus Christ. That's no destroyer."

Gabelman: Yeah, I was invited back to the commissioning of the new *Nicholas*. There was another *Nicholas* built and that's one of the frigates.

McIntosh: Yeah. Well, that's something different.

Gabelman: Yeah, they got one little antiaircraft gun out in front of the—

McIntosh: [laughs] I know it.

Gabelman: Bridge, and I think—

McIntosh: It's sort of symbolic.

Gabelman: It had the capacity to put out something like 3,000 rounds a minute or something like that. It was unbelievable.

McIntosh: It was one of those mini guns.

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Jesus, do they go [laughs]. But they don't need much of that.

Gabelman: No.

McIntosh: Right behind is this huge missile deal down there.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah. I remember visiting San Diego in '63, and at that time Admiral Keith was there and so was our former engineering officer and executive officer Jim Coleman. He was then at that point a four striper, Jim Coleman was, and he was the commodore for a new squadron of destroyers, and had had his flagship was the *Mahan*. And so the old skipper and Jim and I were sort of touring the ship. We had dinner there with Jim that one day. And Admiral Keith said there's more firepower on the *Mahan* than there was in the entire US Navy [McIntosh laughs] in World War II. They had these little guided missiles with nuclear tips. They could fire two of them every ten seconds.

McIntosh: Jesus Christ. Scary.

Gabelman: Yeah, well you know, it's a wild world out there. I'd rather be a professor of horticulture [both laugh].

McIntosh: So after you got out of service then did you use your G.I. Bill?

Gabelman: Yup. I got out, let's see, in January, and Alberta had been living in Boston when I was on shakedown cruise so she met me in the Chicago area, and I had a sister living in Blue Island, Illinois, and we went out there, and so we were asking ourselves, you know, here it was over Christmas time, what we're going to do. I hadn't cracked a book for three and a half years, and I really wasn't very useful to anybody. And the G.I. Bill was there, and so we thought what the heck, let's go back and sort it out for a semester. So I called my old professor at Nebraska and said, "Can I come back and just be a student for a semester and decide what I'm going to do?" And he was glad to have me back, and by the end of that semester I actually was offered two assistantships. One was at the University of

Chicago in plant physiology, and to me that was too much like being a stand up chemist and I didn't think I wanted that. The other one was to join the staff at the Connecticut Experiment Station where they lost one of their staff. You couldn't go out and find a PhD in those days. They were going to get some young person that they thought showed some promise. And part of the deal you had to be acceptable for entrance into the graduate school in botany and microbiology at Yale. So I fell into that. And so I then went back there and got my PhD.

McIntosh: At Yale?

Gabelman: At Yale.

McIntosh: PhD in?

Gabelman: Botany and microbiology, and my field was really genetics.

McIntosh: In botany and what?

Gabelman: The Department of Botany and Microbiology. There weren't a lot of us there but it was really quite an interesting group. But you remember Josh Lederberg [Nobel prize-winner; founder of Dept. of Medical Genetics, UW-Madison] who used to be here?

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Gabelman: Josh was one of us.

McIntosh: Oh, is that right?

Gabelman: Josh and I took the same majors.

McIntosh: I never forgave the University [of Wisconsin-Madison] for lettin' him get away.

Gabelman: Yeah, so Josh and I had the same major, same department.

McIntosh: Yeah, we don't have many Nobel Prize winners.

Gabelman: No.

McIntosh: But we got one potentially right now that Jim what's-his-face?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: I hope they don't let him go. He's going to win a Nobel Prize.

Gabelman: He's certainly got the possibility, I think.

McIntosh: Oh, he sure does.

Gabelman: He'll probably share it with a couple others in that area, I think.

McIntosh: You think?

Gabelman: I think.

McIntosh: Yeah. Well, that's okay.

Gabelman: Of course.

McIntosh: Still goes to WARF [Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation].

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: So now that you a botany and microbiology specialist, what are you going to do with your talent?

Gabelman: Well, I of course could have stayed at the Connecticut Experiment Station.

McIntosh: You stayed there?

Gabelman: I could have stayed there, sure. But I was working on a problem on pollen spill in corn that where the hereditary units were not just nuclear, they were both nuclear inside of plasma. In those days that was a big black box in genetics. And I had some very interesting data that nobody back at the Connecticut station at Yale had really bumped up to. And so, I kinda wanted to have a little reassurance before I printed my thesis that I wasn't completely off the deep end. So I asked for permission to go down to Columbia and visit a Dr. Marcus Rhoades who had done some original work in this area about fifteen years earlier and also go to the USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] in Beltsville, Maryland where a Dr. Henry Jones had done some—which was really the classic work on cytoplasm and sterility in onion. And it turns out I had a day and a half down there with him. What I didn't know was that about six weeks later - this is my last year at Yale, and I was writing my thesis, and about six weeks later he was called out to the University of Wisconsin to sort of do a one-man review of the Department of Horticulture. The College of Agriculture was very much concerned about the graduate level of instruction here in several departments, particularly horticulture and poultry. And so I suspect they probably tried to get him to join the staff as a chair, but he didn't obviously. So one of the questions I asked him was, "How would you proceed to change the department?" And he said, "I

would go out and hire some of these young people that are just getting of graduate school now. They're better trained than we ever were." And he says, "They're available." And so the next question I asked him, "Would you have any suggestions?" The way it turns out he had two names: mine and one other [laughs]. So it was probably fortuitous that I went down to visit him.

McIntosh: How nice.

Gabelman: And they invited me to come out, and I really didn't expect to join the University of Wisconsin staff because I knew something about the department here at that time. They only had two graduate students, and it was kind of lousy. And I came out largely because I had a brother-in-law who did a masters here in the late '30s in geography and he taught down at Blue Island, Illinois. He and my sister always said a lot of nice things about Wisconsin or Madison. So I came out sort of on a whim, but by the time I left they'd convinced me that there were some real opportunities here.

McIntosh: You've not mentioned an important factor here. How did you get this past your wife?

Gabelman: Well, that wasn't too difficult because she's an only child, and her folks were living at home on a farm. She didn't like to fly, and that's a three day drive in those days, and now this is a one day drive.

McIntosh: Closer to home.

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: A good compromise.

Gabelman: But she liked New England very much. We enjoyed it. We were only two hours from Broadway and go down to see plays and—

McIntosh: Right. In the big [inaudible] [laughs].

Gabelman: Yeah. Not bad.

McIntosh: Not bad at all.

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: So then, by this time you had a family?

Gabelman: No.

McIntosh: Why not?

Gabelman: We don't have any of those problems [laughs].

McIntosh: Oh.

Gabelman: No, we didn't have any children.

McIntosh: You never?

Gabelman: Never.

McIntosh: Oh, okay. Well, there's nuthin' wrong with that either.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: Okay, so then you're off to Madison, and then you've been here ever since?

Gabelman: Yup.

McIntosh: And you run a department?

Gabelman: I was chairman of the department for eight years.

McIntosh: Of?

Gabelman: Horticulture.

McIntosh: One of my patients whose son and I went to West High, Iltis.

Gabelman: Hugh?

McIntosh: Wild man, Hugh Iltis.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: He was a patient. Wild, wild guy.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: I tried to treat his urology problems at the same time listening to him tell about growing corn down in Mexico, and, "We gotta do this, and we've gotta get these people to do this." And I said, "Jeez, I don't know anything about this." "I know, but this is important." What a guy!

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: He was just full of it.

Gabelman: Well, he was an interesting person in many ways in terms of generating ideas. He's not always right. But none of us are. But, you can never fault him for not believing in himself.

McIntosh: Oh no, not at all. It was fun as a doctor to have a patient like that. He was very, very talkative and was always interesting, and, you know, bombastic in his attitude [laughs]. He's a sketch, that guy.

Gabelman: Yeah. No, you bump into these. I have a personal feeling about university staff people. I think basically most of them have a pretty big ego, whether it shows or not. Otherwise you—

McIntosh: There's a few in Madison, I tell you.

Gabelman: Yeah, and if they didn't I don't think you'd probably get into the rat race and the competitions involved.

McIntosh: Competitions for grants and that's what they had to be good at.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah, and if you couldn't believe in yourself, I'm sure that nobody else is going to back you.

McIntosh: I'm sure of that (??).

Gabelman: And so I suspect we can all be accused of it in one form or another. Some less though, thank goodness.

McIntosh: That's right, that's good. Well, you've done a good run here in Madison. You feel made a good choice?

Gabelman: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: I trust that you improved the department enormously?

Gabelman: Oh, I think so.

McIntosh: I'm sure you did. I'm sure you did.

Gabelman: One of the things that happened—

McIntosh: They haven't got a building on your name on it, have they yet?

Gabelman: No, they got two permanently endowed graduate fellowships with my name on though.

McIntosh: Excellent, excellent.

Gabelman: Yeah, that's not too shabby.

McIntosh: Well, that's terrific.

Gabelman: But not too long after I came here, I was having trouble getting graduate students that came out of genetics backgrounds to come and major in horticulture. They said, "Horticulture?" You know? And so, I found out that you could petition the graduate school for what we called a committee degree, where you could say this person doesn't really want a major in this, that, or this because he wants to major in sort of a general area that doesn't exist. And so you petition the graduate school, and you name five staff that would supervise the thesis and stuff. We called 'em committee degrees, and so I started offering this to several students that indicated they'd come on that basis. Eventually this became formalized into a degree of program. And in a recent study, this is about three, four or five years ago, the National Academy [of Sciences] indicated that there are more students coming out of the plant breeding, plant genetics major at the University of Wisconsin – Madison in the past twenty years than anywhere in the country. We're talking about against Iowa State, Illinois, and North Carolina, and Cornell, which is big. And it just sort of came out of necessity from that. So that's one thing.

McIntosh: Well, that's a real feather in your cap.

Gabelman: Yeah. It's not something that I did, but it's something that evolved largely because of the problem I had. We had a couple fellows that transferred over from the genetics department to horticulture, and they jumped on this right away. That's when we formalized it.

McIntosh: Are other departments doing the same thing?

Gabelman: Well, they're actually—Horticulture, Genetics, Plant Pathology, Agronomy, Forestry, and Botany all have students that take this major now.

McIntosh: That's nice.

Gabelman: Yeah, they had that option to take it.

McIntosh: I think it's wonderful especially wonderful for a kid who is not really sure what he wants to do. It's like going into general practice in medicine. Then after a while you kind of specialize in something.

Gabelman: Yeah, and again, this is not patting my back but for the Department of Horticulture. We changed the philosophy of the people that were being hired so that they'd be able to compete at these levels. Where we had two graduate students in 1949 when I came, this last fall they had fifty-seven graduate students. The grant support in the department was, I think, approaching four million dollars a year.

McIntosh: Well, the Ag school has always been the big deal at the University of Wisconsin.

Gabelman: Yeah, but I think this is third among departments, and we're talking compared with Bio-chem, Genetics, Plant Pathology, and Microbiology. Horticulture is sticking in there at third **[End of Tape 1, Side B]**, and you can't find that in many horticulture departments around the country.

McIntosh: That represents that big a percentage of the whole Ag school.

Gabelman: Yeah, and in 1976, I guess it was '77, I was elected President of the American Society of Horticulture Science.

McIntosh: Wonderful.

Gabelman: I got two honorary degrees, one from the University of Nebraska, Doctor of Science. I got one from the University of — I don't know the actual name now what it is—I think it's South—well it's the Agriculture University in Cracow, Poland. So, I have that. And, I am also the twentieth person to be selected into the Hall of Fame for Horticulture Science, HHS, in this country.

McIntosh: Oh, my, my. Boy, that's a—

Gabelman: That includes Mendel. He was one of the first.

McIntosh: And look what happened to him.

Gabelman: Yeah, he's dead. [both laugh]. Well, anyway that's —

McIntosh: We studied a lot of Mendel in medical school.

Gabelman: Of course, of course you did.

McIntosh: That was a big deal, in pre-med really.

Gabelman: So, the choice of coming to Madison was a good one.

McIntosh: Yeah, the University of Wisconsin should be overjoyed that you came. You've done an outstanding job, obviously.

Gabelman: Well, occasionally, you know.

McIntosh: [laughs] More than that.

Gabelman: It worked both ways.

McIntosh: Yeah, I understand, I understand. Do you do any teaching now?

Gabelman: Nope. I'm as retired as you can get. I retired in '91. I still have a lot of contacts. You know, when you – I was working on genetics and breeding primarily in carrots, beets, and onions. Those were three crops that had this type of pollen sterility. It wasn't very well understood in carrots and not too well understood in beets, and all three of these crops were of importance to the state.

McIntosh: Now, the beets that we have here in Wisconsin are just those red ones—

Gabelman: That's what I'm talking about, the red ones, yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Gabelman: But the first hybrid red beets and the first hybrid carrots produced anywhere in the world came out of my program.

McIntosh: Oh, excellent.

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: They don't do sugar beets here?

Gabelman: No. We used to grow sugar beets in northern, northeastern Wisconsin, but that sort of went out.

McIntosh: You know we, my wife and I, have become very fond of the Vidalia onions since we found out about them, which would be about ten years ago. And we have them frequently because they—Brennan's over there near where we live gets 'em, you, know, those big goddamn onions, boy, they're good.

Gabelman: Yeah, they're nice and sweet. But they don't take up much sugar, and the thing about Vidalia is they grow them on soils that don't have any sugar, I mean sulfur—and if they took up sulfur, they'd be more pungent.

McIntosh: Yeah, they don't have a strong taste.

Gabelman: And the Vidalia onion wasn't produced in Vidalia, Georgia, I mean the variety.

McIntosh: That's a myth?

Gabelman: No, it's a Texas onion. But growing them in Vidalia, Georgia, they don't have any sulfur in that soil where they grow 'em, and so that makes them ultra sweet. That's why.

McIntosh: That's why. But I thought we got these from Texas? We don't?

Gabelman: No, you get 'em from Georgia.

McIntosh: Georgia. They all come from Georgia?

Gabelman: I won't say they all come from Georgia, but they should all come from Vidalia, Georgia if that's what they are labeled [laughs]

McIntosh: Yes, I understand. I'm sure they have a lock on that name.

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, they're very good, they're very popular.

Gabelman: Well, there's some others. I want to say Texas 1020 or something like that that's quite sweet. There's the one from Maui. Maui's onion is sweet from Hawaii, very similar. And there's some others, but Vidalia is probably the mildest of the group.

McIntosh: I'll never say anything nice about beets because livin' on—the banes of my childhood—

Gabelman: Really?

McIntosh: Was having to eat beets. I grew up in the Depression, too, and—

Gabelman: Where? Here in Wisconsin?

McIntosh: Oh yeah, sure I've been here all my life in Madison. And I always remember beets and turnips and rutabagas, and I learned to hate those with an absolute passion.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah. Well, I—

McIntosh: Root vegetables just did never go for me.

Gabelman: One of the things we did in beets which is sort of an aside is that Clyman Canning Company, Clyman, Wisconsin came to me one time and said, "How much can you increase the pigment in beets?"

McIntosh: Increase?

Gabelman: Increase.

McIntosh: Jesus.

Gabelman: Make 'em redder [McIntosh laughs]. But what they wanted to do is that Food and Drug [Administration] at that time was interested in outlawing as many of the coal tar dyes as they could for food coloring. And Red #3 and Red #40 are coal tar dyes, and those are the two primary red colors. And you can use beets better than anthocyanins for coloring food because the colors are stable over a wider range of pH and will tolerate a lot more heat before it'll break down. And so I said, "I didn't know until we tried," but I said, "There are methods by which we can maximize it." And so they supported the research. So we, over a period of about two graduate students, this will be about eight years, we jumped the level of beet pigment three-fold. We now have something that's about five times what we started with, and it's being used as a food colorant.

McIntosh: Oh, my. They always looked intensely dark red to me.

Gabelman: Oh, they can get redder.

McIntosh: Yeah, I just couldn't believe it.

Gabelman: But if I showed these really intense red ones with some that you probably remember, you wouldn't, to the eye, they don't look much different. But when you start extracting, they are different. And the other thing I was going to say is that when you are working with crops like this, this isn't like corn where you may have sixty or eighty people working on it around the country or around the world.

McIntosh: Sure, everybody loves corn.

Gabelman: Yeah, well, you know, if you sort of totaled up the man years on onions in this country in the public sector, it's probably not much more than one man year. You know, about 20 percent of my time, 20 percent of somebody else's, and half of somebody else, that sort of thing. Iowa is essentially the only one that was involved in this kind of a program regarding beets, and there was less than one man year nationally on carrots. And so what happens is that all of a sudden you're sort of breeding not just doing this not just for Wisconsin but you're doing it really for the world. And, if you go to Hokkaido, Japan, that I fought [laughs] against during the war, you'll find over there that they are now growing hybrid onions, which they didn't use to do. All –

McIntosh: That's so far north.

Gabelman: Yeah, it's the same that it is here though in terms of daylight.

McIntosh: That's right. Tokyo is like St. Louis. I remember that.

Gabelman: But they were all open pollinated before we discovered a source of resistance to a fusarium that affected the bulbs.

McIntosh: Fusarium?

Gabelman: Fusarium.

McIntosh: What's that?

Gabelman: It's a plant pathogen, and it causes the bulbs to rot during storage. And their acreage had gone from about 20,000 down to about 12,000. We published a little short paper saying we found this thing thinking it was such a minor disease here, nobody's worried about. Two weeks later I get this letter from Japan, "It's a horrible disease. Send us over your germ plasm," which I wasn't about to. Well, to make a long story short, they shifted over to – they had me sort of outline a program for them which they followed. They shifted over from open-pollinated to F1 hybrids. They essentially doubled their yields, one mark of onions per acre. And from 12,000 and now to about 30,000 and they estimate the value of this to the onion growers of the farm [inaudible] in Japan is in excess of a hundred million dollars a year.

McIntosh: Wow.

Gabelman: And it was one of things that we sort of did just by chance, it wasn't a primary goal or—

McIntosh: Serendipity, right.

Gabelman: Yeah, that's the point when you start working with these things. Some of the things that seem very small here can be very huge in other parts of the world that they have never thought of. So you find our onions being grown all over the world, our carrots being grown all over the world, and now our beets are in Europe and everywhere.

McIntosh: The onions that you developed here, the only kind—the standard onion we get I mean, at the store? Are there any white onions?

Gabelman: No, not the white ones. The brown storage onions; the pungent ones, storage onions. No, we worked only with onions that bulb under short photoperiods such as Vidalia then long photoperiods, that you plant up here. If you—

McIntosh: Well, what does that mean exactly?

Gabelman: Well, the day length. If you take an onion that's adapted to the Rio Grande in Texas and bring it up north and plant it here, instead of getting an onion like that you'll get an onion about the size of your finger, and it'll start bulbing right when it's a little seedling. That's all it'll do. So it's under genetic control.

McIntosh: I'll be darned. Interesting. Did you ever join any veterans organizations?

Gabelman: Oh, I don't know whether I joined. I always contribute every year to DAV [Disabled American Veterans] and groups like that.

McIntosh: Well, then you get weekly things from the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars].

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Giving you your stickers and things for ten bucks.

Gabelman: Yeah, but then I support the USS *Kidd* down in Baton Rouge.

McIntosh: That's what?

Gabelman: It's a destroyer, a *Fletcher*-class destroyer. It's a museum down there.

McIntosh: Oh, it's a museum?

Gabelman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Where is that?

Gabelman: Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It's the only *Fletcher*-class that is now, I think, a museum. I think the others that were made into museums were different kinds. I can tell you a very interesting wartime story. We had a fellow by the name of Julie Becton [Frederick Julian Becton] who was a chief of staff during the 1943 period when we were having a lot of things going on in the South Pacific. He was one of these fellows that had a very nasal sounding voice. If you heard him on the radio, you'd know Julie anywhere. Well, it turns out he came back, and he was the skipper of the *Laffey* [USS *Laffey*]. The *Laffey* was one of the ships that had about twenty-some kamikazes come in on 'em off Okinawa didn't quite get the job done; they stayed afloat. Well, this is at the same time we were down in Tarakan, Borneo in '45, and he was up there. They had put a little radio, a UHF radio, on the bridge that we were supposed to use if we wanted a voice transmission and wanted it to be ultra safe because after all it was gonna go (??) a line of sight, you know. So we were pokin' along there and nothing much happening and all with this radio which we hadn't heard function except going in and out of port came screaming in one or two sentences, "Those S.O.B.'s are coming at us from every direction." And the commodore was on the bridge, and the skipper was on the bridge, and the commodore looked at the skipper and said, "Where did that come from?" The skipper said, "I don't recognize it." And I said, "That's Julie Becton's voice." I hadn't seen him for almost two years, see.

McIntosh: But you knew it?

Gabelman: I knew the voice. The commodore looked at me, and he said, "It can't be Julie Becton. He's the skipper of the *Laffey*. They're up in Okinawa: that's 3,000 miles away." But it was.

McIntosh: 3,000 miles? How in the hell did you ever pick that up?

Gabelman: We had no idea.

McIntosh: Some clouds?

Gabelman: No, no. Clouds wouldn't give you that long of a skip. We had no idea how it came [McIntosh laughs]. But, we get back into Subic Bay a couple weeks later, and so I'm leaving ship, I'm making my rounds, and saying goodbye to people, and I stop down at the commodore's stateroom. We had gotten in the night before, and he looked at me, and he said, "Gabe, you've got a good ear." He says, "We got in last night, and I went over and had dinner with Admiral so-and-so who was in charge of Subic Bay at that point, and I told him this story, and how they all said that has to be Julie Becton." And the admiral looked at him, and he says, "It was Julie Becton."

McIntosh: Incredible. I can't imagine how that transversed that. You were so well beyond the arc of the earth.

Gabelman: Yeah, sure. Well, you know, every once in a while you get these things of a hundred or two hundred miles, but not 3,000 miles.

McIntosh: That's incredible.

Gabelman: Does it come off the ionosphere in some form or another? You know.

McIntosh: Really.

Gabelman: Yeah. Anyway, I could tell you sea stories until the cows come home [laughs].

McIntosh: Well, now, you were supposed to do that at the beginning, not at the end.

Gabelman: Oh well, you didn't ask me the right questions then.

McIntosh: Oh, come on now. Like what? Hurry, I'm running out of tape here.

Gabelman: Okay. Well, the first action I was in was the only time in my life I can really say I was scared in the Navy. We had taken the *Monongahela* [USS *Monongahela*] which carried about three or four million gallons of aviation gas up to Guadalcanal, and we'd unloaded it. She had a little bit left and then they went over to Tulaghi [Tulaghi, Solomon Islands] with it. While we are at Tulaghi, we are topping off with fuel, and we get coast watchers that reported about a hundred or plus planes, dive bombers, coming down. So we chopped the lines and got under way in a hell of a hurry, but they dropped their bombs over Guadalcanal. And here I am sitting in this little coding room completely enclosed in, my first action, and all you can hear are these guns go BOOM – BOOM – BOOM – BOOM – BOOM. You know, I thought, I gotta get out and look at this. So I step out and close the door. I get out and look, and here's a WRT [water round torpedo] sprouting up, you know, about fifty, seventy-five yards out from the ship. And not too long—if I could've dug a foxhole in the steel deck, I would have because that was close. And so afterwards we secured from general quarters and one thing and another, none of 'em dropped anything that was damaging to us. And I was down in the ward room, and I said to the gunnery officer, "God, those bombs were close." And he says, "What bombs?" I tell him—he says, "the number three gun went out in elevation." [both laugh] But you know, then when I come to the Battle of Kula Gulf when the *Helena* got sunk, I'm involved in a little group where we were manning a number of frequencies they wanted manned because they knew that the Japs were sending down a lot of stuff.

You were so busy, and likewise later on when I was the officer on deck that time. You were so busy you had no time to be scared. And the fact that it was all at night, there wasn't anything you really saw. It was kind of an interesting thing, you were just sort of a member of a team, like a football team. You did what you had to do. When it was over—

McIntosh: Just follow your attention.

Gabelman: Yeah, and when you were over and secure you went back to take a shower and went to bed, if you could.

McIntosh: Another day's over.

Gabelman: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: Good. Thank you.

Gabelman: You're very welcome.

[End of Interview]