

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WILLIAM "JINGLES" O'BRIEN
LCI(M) (Mortar), Navy, World War II
1999

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O'Brien, William "Jingles". Oral history interview, 1999.

Master copy: 1 video recording (ca. 45 min.); ½ inch, color.

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

Abstract:

William "Jingles" O'Brien, discusses his World War II service with the Navy aboard a LCI(M) (Mortar) ship providing close support for troops in the Pacific Ocean. O'Brien talks about the short length of his boot camp in Texas, assignment to base at Galveston (Texas) where he escorted sailors from the railroad station to the base, and assignment to the LCIM (Mortar) ship. O'Brien comments on the slow speed of the ship, his role as a gunner, trip from Texas to Hawaii, and sailing to Ulithi Atoll. Participating in the Marine landing at Okinawa, O'Brien describes witnessing kamikaze attacks, firing at Japanese positions at Naha, and seeing Japanese soldiers on the shores. At the war's end, he mentions assisting in mine clearing operations of the Japanese shore and seeing the preparations for defending the Japanese shore like large guns and suicide boats to attack Naval ships. He touches upon seeing the destruction of Hiroshima and return trip to the United States.

Biographical Sketch:

William "Jingles" O'Brien was born and raised in Madison (Wisconsin) and joined the navy in 1943. O'Brien served in the Pacific Theater during World War II on a landing craft infantry mortar vessel (LCI[M]). After the war, O'Brien returned home to Madison where he owned Stadium Bar (Jingles') for several decades, and was a member of the American Legion and the VFW.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999

Transcribed by Linda Weynand, 2012

Reviewed and corrected by Amanda Axel, 2012

Interview Transcript:

O'Brien: When I left the States we went down through Gulf of Mexico. We only had one radio man. He got sick, so they told us to come back to Tampa, Florida, because we were right in that 1944 hurricane. We were going to Panama and they thought we got dumped. They didn't expect us. They thought we sank.

McIntosh: You were born in Madison, Wisconsin?

O'Brien: Yup.

McIntosh: And you went in in June '43?

O'Brien: Mmm, hmm.

McIntosh: Where did they send you? Where did you go from Madison?

O'Brien: From Madison we went to Milwaukee. Being in the Navy, they were going to send us to Great Lakes; they were filled. Then they were going to send us to Idaho, Farragut; and they were filled. They ended up sending us to New Orleans, Algiers, which it's right across the river from. They thought we were already through boot camp, so the first three days we had to live in the clothes that we were in and we didn't have no mattress or anything 'cause they thought we were all— So they had to give us the whole ball of wax, our mattresses and sea bags and all our clothes and all that. Boot camp only lasted about two and a half weeks so that was pretty nice, instead of six.

McIntosh: Right. Then where'd you go?

O'Brien: From there I went to Orange, Texas. I was assigned to ship's company. They had DEs [destroyer escorts] and mine sweepers.

McIntosh: What was your job?

O'Brien: I was more or less in transportation because where the barracks were, we had to go down where the ships were. One of my jobs was to drive the bus down that would take them back and forth and then go to the railroad yards and pick up their luggage with a truck. From there I went to Galveston. We were in ship's company again, and we had DEs and LCIs [landing craft, infantry] come in there for shake-down. I think I was there about four months or so. Then I got aboard a ship and that's when I left.

McIntosh: What was the ship?

O'Brien: LCI: landing craft, infantry. We got to California—

McIntosh: LCI. I saw some of those when I was in Korea.

O'Brien: Yeah. They switched us over to what they called an LCI(M)-mortars. We had three gun placements for mortars placed on our well deck. As we went along, our main object was Okinawa. We went in there at Yellow Beach. We were in the first wave. They figured that if they get Yontan airstrip in three days, well, they had it in three hours. We went in Easter Sunday, '45 at 8:00 o'clock. By 11:00 o'clock they had the airstrip under control.

McIntosh: Did they pull you guys out then?

O'Brien: I stayed at Okinawa from April 1st until we left there to go to Japan about September 10th.

McIntosh: If your object was shooting mortars onto the beach, the line was well past—

O'Brien: Yeah, well after that they sent us down to Naha, the capital [of Okinawa]. Our ship alone threw 800 mortars in there. There was eight of us in a group. When the Army got down to the southern end, they had about 10,000 prisoners that wouldn't surrender, so they brought us around with destroyers and we threw some in there. I don't know how many rounds I threw in there.

McIntosh: What kind of mortars? Are these 81mm?

O'Brien: No, I don't know exactly. They must have been twenty-five inches long and weighed forty-two pounds, because I don't think they were forty-two inches long and twenty-five pounds. They were only about like that there. They were supposed to throw shrapnel for a 150-yard radius.

McIntosh: How far would that shoot?

O'Brien: They went by powder rings. And that's why I think we might have killed General Buckner. [laughs]

McIntosh: [Laughs]

O'Brien: You know when you had three guys that had the magazine rack here and the guy would take it out of there. Then you went to another guy and the other guy would give it to me. I was a gunner. I'd put it down the tube and away she'd go. Well, sometimes when I'm putting it down the tube you could hear on the radio, "Cut your powder rings down from four to three," or four to two. Well, it's too late now, it's already-- we were firing.

And the same thing with the Army with their 155s. They were dropping some shells out in the water around us.

McIntosh: Hard to tell.

O'Brien: No, you can't tell.

McIntosh: Did the Japanese attempt to attack your ship?

O'Brien: Nothing. Nothing. They were just like I say—

McIntosh: They had nothing. How far off the beach were you? A hundred yards?

O'Brien: I would say at the most. We were right in close. You could see the people down there milling around. We had some sulfur shells that they'd throw. I swear to God, I hit one guy right on top of the head with one, 'cause he— [laughs] I looked and he was gone after that.

McIntosh: Sulfur?

O'Brien: Sulfur.

McIntosh: Yellow?

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: What was the purpose of those?

O'Brien: It was kind of a burning thing, if it hit you.

McIntosh: Oh, oh. Yeah, that'd be pretty bad.

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, I saw that. They're like phosphorus shells.

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: I saw those in Korea. I took care of a lot of GIs that were burned with that. Jeez, that's bad stuff. Burned the shit out of 'em.

O'Brien: We didn't use much of them. Every once in a while they'd say, "Throw a sulfur shell," so we hit 'em.

McIntosh: You didn't have trouble getting supplies? They kept re-supplying you?

O'Brien: Oh, yeah. We practiced the invasion of Okinawa at Guadalcanal. We stayed at Mount Tulagi and we'd go across over to Kailala [?] and go in and—

McIntosh: Sure.

O'Brien: Then we came back and then we went through Ulithi and we kind of met up with the other ships coming from the Philippines. We went in Easter Sunday. It was supposed to 1,900 ships on that invasion.

McIntosh: How many other LCI(M)s were there?

O'Brien: There was only a total of eight of us.

McIntosh: Not big ships. Each with three mortars?

O'Brien: Yeah, each with three mortars. We had a crew of fifty, five officers.

McIntosh: How in the hell did you get that little thing across the Pacific Ocean? I think that's the smallest ship they--

O'Brien: It was 157 feet long, twenty-five feet wide, and it drew three to four feet of water. I was in one hurricane; I was in two typhoons. [laughs]

McIntosh: With no draft underneath it, I would think that thing would go flip-flop in the--

O'Brien: It would tip over at ninety degrees; the most we ever rolled was sixty-eight. So sometimes we were walking on the bulkheads. [laughs]

McIntosh: I'm sure. It's the smallest ship I think that's sea-going.

O'Brien: Sub-chasers might have been a little smaller, but they were a lot more durable.

McIntosh: Well, they had a better keel. You were flat bottomed; that made you very vulnerable.

O'Brien: They had a better keel. Plus they had better speed. When we came back from Japan we had to stop at Eniwetok to repair our engine. One of them conked out. We picked up a sub-chaser. We went so slow they had to leave us because they could only carry so much fuel. So they had to go into Johnson Island and refuel again.

McIntosh: How fast would that thing go? Fifteen knots?

O'Brien: Thirteen to fifteen knots at the most.

McIntosh: Took you a long time to cross the ocean. Jesus.

O'Brien: Yeah. I think it took us about fourteen, fifteen days to go from San Pedro to Hawaii.

McIntosh: That's a bunch. You picked it up in the United States or in Hawaii?

O'Brien: I picked it up Galveston.

McIntosh: Galveston. You didn't bring it back there, though?

O'Brien: Yup.

McIntosh: Did you?

O'Brien: Yup. We went through the Canal and up to San Diego. At San Diego, they pushed us up to San Pedro to get converted. Then we went to Hawaii. On the way back we came in to San Diego and went back through the Panama Canal again and ended up in Galveston.

McIntosh: Boy, your quarters must have been small.

O'Brien: Yeah, but of course, like I said, we only had fifty men.

McIntosh: What was your rank during that time there?

O'Brien: I went in as a seaman and I came out as a boatswain's second.

McIntosh: Boatswain's second?

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's good.

O'Brien: I was in for two years, nine months.

McIntosh: When you left Okinawa you came home? You didn't go—

O'Brien: No, after Okinawa we went to Japan. We went through the Bungo Suido straits. They had a bunch of mines in there. It was all mountains on the side. They had these marine railways where they'd run a gun out, fire it, and run it back in. They also had what they called suicide boats, like a runabout here but then they'd have dynamite in them. So they'd run into

you and they'd explode. They'd always be back in these little bays. Most of them had Chrysler engines in them.

McIntosh: Wow, they must have gone like hell.

O'Brien: Yeah. We blew up 390 mines and that got to be nerve-wracking. One time you could hear it on the PE that the other ships had backed down and you're right on top of a mine. They'd cut them loose and they wouldn't fully come up to the surface because the prongs are stuck out a little bit.

McIntosh: Wow. So how'd you deal with those?

O'Brien: At first it was fun. You get out there with rifles and—

McIntosh: --hit the guy.

O'Brien: Yeah. But after a while, every time one of them would go off, your whole body was like a bunch of needles; you just tighten up.

McIntosh: Because of the pressure—

O'Brien: The pressure. The noise it would make. It would really be a bang.

McIntosh: That's right. You were pretty close. I mean what, twenty-five yards?

O'Brien: Something like that. There was times pieces would fall on the deck after they exploded.

McIntosh: [Laughs] Sure. Wow.

O'Brien: It was fun for a while but then after it got to everybody.

McIntosh: You shot them with an M1?

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: Where they hard to hit? Didn't you have to hit them in a certain place, or not?

O'Brien: They all had prongs on them. I think you mostly had to hit one of those. I don't think if you put it right in the mine itself—

McIntosh: It wouldn't touch it.

O'Brien: No.

McIntosh: Oh my God. None of those speedboats ran at you?

O'Brien: No, 'cause see at this time the war was all over. But when we did pull into Kure, when we finally got there, there was a hospital right there. They didn't know the war was over.

McIntosh: The personnel in the hospital?

O'Brien: Yeah, they still didn't know the war was over. When we got there, there was some GIs already there. They said at that particular time, when the war ended, the Japs were using wooden bullets. I never saw one, but that's what they said. When we were back in Okinawa we went to Ie Shima. That's where Ernie Pyle was killed. That's where they brought the plane in from Japan, painted white with a green cross on it, that they were supposed to land there and pick up whoever they were supposed to pick up to go to the Philippines with MacArthur. But when they left Ie Shima they flew over the whole island of Okinawa from tip to tip and they were just amazed at the stuff that we had stock-piled there.

McIntosh: I'll bet. Yeah, that was a terrible battle. I know it was awful. Who talked to these people in this hospital who didn't know the war was over?

O'Brien: We had talked to the Army GI guys.

McIntosh: They were first ones to get there?

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: You didn't go ashore in Japan?

O'Brien: Oh, yeah, we went ashore. When we got to Kure we went ashore. They also loaded us up on trucks and took us to Hiroshima. We had to stay on the trucks; we couldn't get off the trucks. But that was really a flattened mess. There was, I think, only one or two buildings that were still standing partially. They were buildings that the Army engineers built in 1934.

McIntosh: When were you in Hiroshima?

O'Brien: It had to be the latter part of September of '45.

McIntosh: About six weeks afterwards.

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: And you still picked up a lot of radiation.

O'Brien: I suppose.

McIntosh: But you weren't there long, so—

O'Brien: No, we just drove through. We went up there by boat and got on army trucks. They drove us through for probably a half hour or so.

McIntosh: I was in Nagasaki.

O'Brien: Were you?

McIntosh: Yeah. That was certainly flattened, too.

O'Brien: That was the first one, wasn't it?

McIntosh: Second.

O'Brien: Second one.

McIntosh: Pretty bad.

O'Brien: We were in one of those coves up there when they had that typhoon that hit Okinawa, must have been early '45.

McIntosh: Tell me about the typhoon you were in. How did the ship deal with that?

O'Brien: It's really funny, you know. You go through, and you're in it. It's really rough waters. It would be like I'm sitting on top of Edgewood Hill and I could look down and I could see the bottom of the hill. And the next thing I know I'm on bottom of the hill and here is the big wave up here.

McIntosh: Jesus.

O'Brien: They had to be, it was enough that you could ride them. It wouldn't be like Lake Michigan where it would be choppy. You just went with the swells.

McIntosh: As long as you didn't turn sideways you were probably okay.

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: Sideways was—

O'Brien: But I'll you what, if I was there today I'd sure be scared. [laughs] But then all of a sudden you're right in the middle of the eye and it's just as flat as this right here. But you know—

McIntosh: It's coming.

O'Brien: You have to go out the other side. I went through two of those. The first one was really bad. Then you got to kind of know what to expect for the second one.

McIntosh: You never got seasick on that thing?

O'Brien: I never got. Out of the whole bunch only three of us never got seasick. The old man was seasick, and we had an engineering officer that never got out of the—the worst was when we were in the Gulf of Mexico. I had one guy with me that was steering; you got a four-hour watch. You got the compass like this here and you steer it. He was sick. He was heaving in a bucket. I had to stand there for four hours; I had to stand that watch. And no help for this. You're already worried when you got a tube up there from the conning tower if somebody was going to heave down that tube that they talk back and forth in. [laughs] Yeah, there were two boatswain's mates, one first class and one second class, and myself; all the rest had been sick at one time or another. We couldn't cook anything. Everything was either cold cuts or oranges or apples.

McIntosh: Or nothing.

O'Brien: Yeah, or nothing.

McIntosh: Any of these guys regulars, or are they all reserves as far as you know?

O'Brien: I would say right offhand they were all reserves.

McIntosh: Have you kept in contact with these guys?

O'Brien: I have one guy that I run into. He's in Rockford. Ed Moeser [?]. I see him once in a while. He comes up for a football game or something like that and he stops, especially when I had the Stadium Bar.

McIntosh: Sure.

O'Brien: I saw him here about a year or two ago. He stopped at the other bar—the Coliseum Bar on the way back from a game.

McIntosh: But not the rest of them.

O'Brien: No, I don't have idea where they—

McIntosh: You don't have any associations or—

O'Brien: No. I just don't think there's enough, out of fifty guys, or fifty-five. There was an officer, Ray Garillo [?], from River Forest but I lost track of him.

McIntosh: That ship only carried what, two officers?

O'Brien: No, we had five officers.

McIntosh: I see.

O'Brien: We had the captain, the exec, and the communication, and the engine room, and what the heck was the other guy?

McIntosh: Speaking of the engine room, you had two diesels?

O'Brien: Two diesels.

McIntosh: Seemed to work alright?

O'Brien: Well, on the way back that's when we had to stop at Eniwetok to repair one of the quads.

McIntosh: Otherwise they were pretty reliable?

O'Brien: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: Did you think the Navy prepared you for any of this?

O'Brien: No.

McIntosh: Doesn't sound like it would be anything they could teach you beforehand. You had to learn right—

O'Brien: When we got to New Orleans, they put us on some boats and took us across the river. It was about midnight when we got in. They brought us down from Milwaukee by train.

McIntosh: So you learned everything right on the job?

O'Brien: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: You say you were on the watch. What, on steering?

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: Was it hard to steer that thing?

O'Brien: No. It was just a little handle that you went like that. Then you had a compass here that was magnified with a glass so you could point it out. Then they'd tell you the course.

McIntosh: What your heading was.

O'Brien: Yeah. So there it was. You just stayed on it.

McIntosh: I keep thinking with that flat bottom you'd have trouble keeping it on point.

O'Brien: No, not really. You had twin screws, so that kind of balanced it out.

McIntosh: You didn't lose anybody off the side in the storms?

O'Brien: No. The only guy we lost is some stupid guy who got syphilis in Venice, California, before we left.

McIntosh: You just put him on the beach.

O'Brien: They took him off, yeah.

McIntosh: I was going to say, you must have strapped down pretty much when that wind was up.

O'Brien: Well, there wasn't really too much to-- Everything was more or less secure all the time.

McIntosh: But you weren't in a harness or anything like that?

O'Brien: No, no. We had railings that were just cable, probably one that high and one about half-way down. You more or less stayed up inside quarters.

McIntosh: You slept in three-tier bunks?

O'Brien: That's how we started out, when we left. But then as we went along we had the foc'sle deck [forecastle deck] and then there was another hole, and then there was another hole where the crew was all supposed to stay. Then there was an aft hole. Well, between the second and third they kind of split them up. They eliminated being all together. So, at the most, there

was only two. One guy would be on top and the other guy would be on the bottom, so there wouldn't be anybody in the middle.

McIntosh: You stood four-hour watches?

O'Brien: Yeah. All four-hour watches, port and starboard.

McIntosh: You could get three of those in a day, then?

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: In a ship this small they let you eat whenever you could, or whatever you want?

O'Brien: Not really.

McIntosh: Not really.

O'Brien: They usually had some fruit out if you wanted an apple or something like that. I can't complain about the food that we were on. We had a chef that was from Sioux City. He was a chef in a big hotel. He made the menu up and it was really--

McIntosh: You were lucky.

O'Brien: We had really good food.

McIntosh: And the supplies were okay?

O'Brien: Yup. Matter of fact, I got sick of steak. We had steak at least four or five times a week.

McIntosh: [Laughs] Oh my.

O'Brien: He would make beans and he'd put the beans in there, and then he'd interweave bacon across the whole top. I tell you—

McIntosh: You guys were really lucky to have _____.

O'Brien: Yeah. They all kind of said, hey, why can't we have this more often? Saturday was the only day you could get it: Saturday morning. We had ham and chicken and—

McIntosh: Where would you be re-supplied, from a larger ship or at a base?

O'Brien: Mostly a larger ship. But it would be at a base. We'd go over to a supply ship.

McIntosh: LSDs [Landing Ship, Dock]?

O'Brien: Well, no.

McIntosh: Oh, like a regular supply ship.

O'Brien: Yeah, like the ones that Fraser made, a regular supply ship. When we got to Okinawa, we had to take so much mutton for beef, from Australia. He tried to do something with the mutton; nobody liked it. So the next time we had to take so much we'd just take it on one side, walk across the ship, and drop it in the water.

McIntosh: [Laughs] You know, that was one of the things that Richard Jordan said. He said that on the line they got nothing else, except the only meat they had was this mutton and nobody could eat it. So he said they didn't eat anything.

O'Brien: We had to take so much mutton to get so much beef. That's the same thing—

McIntosh: And you'd just deep six it, that's all.

O'Brien: Yeah. I know that after we were there so long, when the Marines would take prisoners, they'd bring them back and they'd have them in a fenced-in area. They kept the Marines off from hot food—had to go back to K-rations. So there was no more prisoners brought back; they shot them. You know, they say, here they give the Japs, instead of giving them K-rations they give them all the hot food. And the Marines, they had nothing. So they said that's the end of that stuff.

McIntosh: That solved that food battle. How about fresh vegetables and fruit? No problem getting that?

O'Brien: No. I think I'm right, we had eggs that were two years old that were froze. Is that possible?

McIntosh: Jeez, I don't know. Two years is a long time. Did they taste alright?

O'Brien: Yeah. They weren't powdered, neither.

McIntosh: No, you mean regular eggs.

O'Brien: Regular eggs.

McIntosh: I didn't know you could freeze them that way.

O'Brien: I didn't know neither but I swear to God that they were 'cause it had stamped right on— you know they come in those big crates?

McIntosh: Yeah.

O'Brien: And shipped by the year would be right on there.

McIntosh: Yeah. In Korea on our hospital ship all we got was the powdered eggs. Jeez, they're awful.

O'Brien: Yeah. The only thing we had— our ship made bread. And the only trouble we had, we had weasels [sic] in the flour. So you take your bread and hold it up to the light to see whether the—[laughs]

McIntosh: Yeah, but those might give you some protein. [laughs]

O'Brien: Well, probably. [laughs] Nobody ate em.

McIntosh: I'm sure, I'm sure. [laughs] Boy, I bet he took a ribbing for that.

O'Brien: Yeah, well it just got to be customary.

McIntosh: It was in the flour?

O'Brien: Yup. But then he'd make sweets for us and cake, you know like pan cake, and chocolate brownies. But we were really lucky that we lucked out to have him as a chef, 'cause everything he made— you know he'd make the menu up and it was à la carte this and that. Half the time you wouldn't even know what the hell you were eating because he had such a fancy name for it.

McIntosh: [Laughs] Where'd he go afterwards? Do you have any idea?

O'Brien: I haven't the slightest idea. I'm sure he went back to where he'd been.

McIntosh: Jeez, that sounds great. Did you ever see any Red Cross way over there?

O'Brien: No.

McIntosh: Have you seen the USO shows on some of the bigger ships?

O'Brien: No.

McIntosh: You were never in contact with them?

O'Brien: We left Tulagi sometime in March and we went to Ulithi and we picked up a _____ ship. I never touched land from March until August. We were aboard ship. Finally sometime in August after the war was over, they let us go ashore. I always stayed awhile because some of the guys I went with, they were going to these caves. There were hand grenades in there that hadn't gone off; they were kicking em. I says, that's enough. They were getting _____. For that length of time—

McIntosh: They could lose their foot.

O'Brien: Yeah. We never had no movies.

McIntosh: No movies?

O'Brien: No, no movies.

McIntosh: Did they tell you a reason?

O'Brien: No, just "No movies. We don't have em."

McIntosh: I thought all ships had movies.

O'Brien: No. A couple times we went aboard cruisers for Mass. They had a priest there and he'd have Mass for us. We received Holy Communion and all that. But that was it, take us over there and bring us back. Other ships are around there.

McIntosh: I would think you could go and see some of their movies. They're bigger ships.

O'Brien: The ships were so close together, they wouldn't. On top of that you had those kamikazes. That was another deal.

McIntosh: Tell me about that.

O'Brien: When they started out, apparently they marched them around the square in Tokyo or something like that. They were going off as heroes. As they came to their target they'd try to hit the ship where they were pointed out to and then they'd jump out before they hit. Well, the Japanese found out about that so they welded the doors shut. [laughs] They were going to die anyway so you might as well make a mark. I saw the one that hit the Birmingham. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. He was up there about 10,000 feet and he was circling around. They couldn't shoot at him because it was just a ways. So finally, he just came down like this. He

came and he hit the foc'sle deck which was part of the medical center. A nice big powder ring just came up like that afterwards. I mean it was gruesome but it was really something to see. The West Virginia wasn't too far from us. I saw that one take in one down along the stacks.

McIntosh: Jesus. Pearl Harbor all over again.

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's what they did to the Arizona; that one went down the stack, right into the engine room. Jesus.

O'Brien: Yeah. I know that one that hit the Birmingham killed fifty-four medical personnel. Although they probably weren't all, because there was probably some patients in there.

McIntosh: I'm sure.

O'Brien: Yeah. One of our jobs was to make smoke. We had a machine that made smoke. [laughs] Sometimes that would foul up and wouldn't work and it just threw out pure oil. So you're walking in that grease and oil.

McIntosh: [Inaudible] Oh! Everybody screaming and hollering I'm sure. Making that smoke, did you have to heat something up to do that?

O'Brien: I think the machine itself did that. You got it hot enough and the oil went through it and it would turn it into a smoke.

McIntosh: There was a fan or some kind of thing to blow it out?

O'Brien: Yeah. It was really something.

McIntosh: The smoke was black or white?

O'Brien: No, it was white.

McIntosh: It was white.

O'Brien: Yeah, but it would cover that whole bay. Another thing while we were at Okinawa they put us on the line outside of all the bigger ships every morning and every evening. You'd just go back and forth. Then about twenty-five miles out they had the destroyers. If there was any air raids coming in we would know from them. All we had aboard ship was we had four 50mms and one twin-40.

McIntosh: You wouldn't shoot any of these airplanes.

O'Brien: We shot one down.

McIntosh: You did? I'd think that most the bigger ships had so many guns on them that—

O'Brien: We're out a ways, maybe a mile, so we'd get 'em before they come to the big ships. They wouldn't fool with us because we were just— they'd be looking for supply ships and destroyers and battleships. We were there maybe a week and the Missouri came in right behind us. I don't know if I ever saw the Wisconsin or not. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** There was quite a few battleships around.

McIntosh: I was aboard the Missouri on _____ visit over there when I was in Sasebo, Japan, in 1950.

O'Brien: When we came back after the war was over we went back into Pearl Harbor. We were underway on Christmas Day. We got in there and they let us stay probably for about a week. Bill Burns, the ex-judge?

McIntosh: Mmm hmm.

O'Brien: Bill and I went to school together at Edgewood. He'd never been aboard ship; he was a radioman. They flew him out to Hawaii and he was _____ up in one of those mansions up there for radio. He came down and he stayed overnight aboard ship. Then we went from where we were tied up over there by the Arizona over there to Hickman Field, I guess it was Hickman Field, to get fuel. So that was the only time he was ever on a boat.

McIntosh: He didn't care for that, I'll bet.

O'Brien: It was just like taking a ride on Lake Mendota. There was no waves or nothing. It was just sail right out there like nothing. It was funny. I visited him when we were in San Diego before we went overseas. We were sitting in the lounge and he says, "Watch this." So pretty soon a guy comes out with a cook's outfit on, a hat on. I says, "Where's he going?" He said, "He was a first class radio man in civilian life and the Navy made him a third class cook."

McIntosh: [Laughs].

O'Brien: They had to call him out of the kitchen to go fix the radio. [laughs]

McIntosh: Typical, typical. Jesus.

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: Oh my God. [laughs]

O'Brien: I don't know if he found out he liked cooking better than radio or not. [laughs]

McIntosh: I got a couple of friends who were training to become baby doctors, and they were in such a hurry to get these back in the Navy when the Korean War, this guy was a surgeon. He came to visit our ship and I said, "What the hell are you doing?" He said, "I don't know. I told em I don't know anything about that. They said, 'You'll learn.'"

O'Brien: When I went from New Orleans to Orange, Texas, we had Coast Guard down there would come and pick up ships. We had one chief petty officer that was a doctor. He hadn't got his commission yet. He said, "Well, I don't know. I'll get it eventually." But he hadn't gotten it. He was just a chief petty officer.

McIntosh: Crazy. They're in such a big damn hurry, you know, to get everyone moved here and there.

O'Brien: In Orange, Texas, before I got there the population was 6,000. When I left there it was 60,000.

McIntosh: Jesus.

O'Brien: The train ran right down the main street. It was just a small town. They had the shipyard there that wasn't very big, but during the war it employed one million people. One time they got a destroyer escort came down--it wouldn't run after it got out a little bit, going down to--here was a pair of woman's pants in the drive shaft. [laughs]

McIntosh: [Laughs]

O'Brien: So there was some frigging in the rigging going on there, you know.

McIntosh: Somebody got court-martialed.

O'Brien: I doubt that very much because they probably never figured out who did it.

McIntosh: Oh. Yeah.

O'Brien: It would be a civilian employee.

McIntosh: Yeah, sure. I suppose that's right. You didn't have to do anything with your ship afterward when you got back? When you got off that ship—

O'Brien: When I got back I had enough points, whatever program they went through, that I could leave. But they decommissioned it right there. The guys just stayed aboard.

McIntosh: So as far as you know they junked the whole thing.

O'Brien: I don't know what they did with it. They couldn't have left it at Galveston; they'd have to take it someplace.

McIntosh: Yeah. I'm sure there was so many of 'em they just— I don't know, 'cause they used them again in Korea, but at the time they didn't know they were going to need them in Korea.

O'Brien: I know the first run that came out they had the ramps on the side.

McIntosh: Yeah, that's the one I saw.

O'Brien: The one that we had, we had a bow door in the front and a ramp on top.

McIntosh: On the LST [Landing Ship, Tank]?

O'Brien: No, it was an LCI [Landing Craft, Infantry].

McIntosh: Yeah, but I say a back like an LST.

O'Brien: Yeah, like an LST. But they were smart enough to make that ramp going down small enough so you couldn't get a Jeep on it.

McIntosh: [Laughs]

O'Brien: You know what it was over there. If you could steal something you stole it. Whatever benefited you, or that would benefit you—

McIntosh: Oh sure. I've always laughed how smart they were; they never put a key in a Jeep, you know. You never needed to have a key.

O'Brien: No.

McIntosh: You just got in and turned it. Sure if they'd had keys in them they'd have been disabled before the war was half over because they'd lose the damn keys.

O'Brien: Sure.

McIntosh: That's great. No airplanes ever attacked you then?

O'Brien: We got strafed one night, at night. See, our appearance at night looked like a sub.

McIntosh: Oh.

O'Brien: In dark. Because when we were going from California to Hawaii, we were going along and a sub surfaced. We didn't know. All of a sudden—

McIntosh: Whose side that was on?

O'Brien: Yeah. Because we never had any sonar or anything like that. They shot up a green flare. Then right away we knew it was an American sub.

McIntosh: That was close.

O'Brien: That was close. You never know.

McIntosh: Of course they wouldn't have torpedoed you.

O'Brien: No.

McIntosh: They would have just rammed you.

O'Brien: Yeah, cuz it wasn't that far away. With the night glasses they had they could tell what it was.

McIntosh: You don't go over in a group?

O'Brien: I'm just trying to think--I don't think we did.

McIntosh: You went solo.

O'Brien: I think we went solo.

McIntosh: Wow.

O'Brien: Well, maybe there was a group over there. At most there'd be eight, if there was.

McIntosh: Was that considered a division? Eight of--

O'Brien: Yeah. We were called LCI and then we had an M with parentheses around it.

McIntosh: Mortar.

O'Brien: Yeah, for mortar.

McIntosh: No rockets, though.

O'Brien: No rockets.

McIntosh: I saw some of those ships, LCMs [Landing Craft, Mechanized]

O'Brien: LSMs [Landing Ship, Medium].

McIntosh: LSMs. Rocket launchers.

O'Brien: I'm trying to think if it was before we went to Ie Shima or afterwards, we went to another island north of Okinawa. We went up there and went in an invasion. They said they shot off a million dollars worth of ammunition; there was one Jap home on leave.

McIntosh: [Laughs]

O'Brien: So they just—

McIntosh: Yeah, jeez. The waste is just fantastic. Did you join any veterans groups when you got out?

O'Brien: I belong to the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] and the American Legion. I don't participate.

McIntosh: The American Legion didn't turn out to be much, did it?

O'Brien: The one I joined is a newer one.

McIntosh: Oh?

O'Brien: The reason I more or less joined them was the fact that they were holding their meetings at the Coliseum Bar.

McIntosh: Oh.

O'Brien: So I joined.

McIntosh: Good business, right.

O'Brien: Yeah. And the VFW. We used to have the kids at Franklin Field for youth hockey and then we'd always run over to the VFW that was right there on John Nolan Drive. So I joined there. It's like I belong to the Elks and I ain't been there in two years. I've been a member of the Moose since 1959, I think; I haven't even been in the new building out there. It's been out there for ten or fifteen years at least, or more.

McIntosh: I don't know. I've been in the Elks Club one time. But Moose doesn't have a dinner. Do they have a dining room?

O'Brien: No.

McIntosh: I don't know much about them. I don't know anything else left to ask you, except about that. When you got back did you use any of the GI Bill for anything? Buy anything or get a house or get an FHA [Federal Housing Administration] loan or something?

O'Brien: No. I'd worked for the city before I left, summertime cutting grass and all, so I went back there; that was the first offer that I had. When I went to buy the Stadium Bar I went to Wes Schwoegler, who was in charge of veterans.

McIntosh: Yeah, I know him.

O'Brien: He was in the group. There's twenty-six of us from Madison that all went together. There was 130 from the state of Wisconsin that went in at the same time; there was twenty-six from Madison. He was one of them. I went and asked him for a loan for a thousand dollars, you know, just to open the doors, and he wouldn't give it to me.

McIntosh: I thought with the GI Bill you could get loans—FHA loans.

O'Brien: He turned it down. That pissed me off.

McIntosh: Sure. It wasn't that you were asking for a lot of money.

O'Brien: No, I just wanted some money to put in the till and to buy some stuff. I had some money to buy beer and so forth. But I wanted a little overhead so I could—

McIntosh: What was there on Monroe Street there?

O'Brien: It used to be a grocery store.

McIntosh: I remember now.

O'Brien: Then they changed it into—

McIntosh: It was PhilCo Station, a gas station.

O'Brien: It was a Midland Station. Then Bates Endres had the tailoring up. In the next block going out Monroe Street up there where old Lincoln Mercury used to be, the garage—

McIntosh: On the corner.

O'Brien: Yeah. Dr. Pinky Stair [?] was on the corner, and then the bar was there. Some Italian guy owned the building and he'd only give them a year-to-year lease. Every year he'd raise the rent. So this building down here came available, so he bought that and made that the Stadium Bar then. That was I think in about '54. I took it over in '57.

McIntosh: It had already been named the Stadium Bar.

O'Brien: Well, he called it Bates' Stadium Bar. I just called it Jingles' Stadium Bar, but it mostly went right to Jingles'. People go there now after football games and they still say, "See you at Jingles'." They just call it the Stadium Bar because I wouldn't let 'em use my name, Jingles, on it.

McIntosh: That's right, you sold that didn't you?

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: You certainly had a great success there.

O'Brien: Yeah. And Mike's doing real well at the Coliseum.

McIntosh: That's your son.

O'Brien: Yeah.

McIntosh: The people you sold the Monroe Street to, are they Madison folks?

O'Brien: Yeah, they are more or less from Monona. Their last name was Franklin and they owned that mattress company right there on Todd Drive: Velco [Verlo]. Him and his brother and his dad, and then he sold his—He said that he'd been looking for a tavern for about three years. He went to school at Whitewater, tended bar a little bit. I told him, "It's here, all you gotta do is work it."

McIntosh: That's right. I was going to say you've got a built-in audience. Jesus. It's nobody's fault but your own if you can't make it go. They're doing alright, I think.

O'Brien: Oh, yeah. It hurt him a little bit when basketball left, but there was other things that come in there. They still got volleyball, and they still got some other things that use it for intramural sports. He's got the Shell there where people run.

McIntosh: Yeah, and he's got volleyball court in it. Is that the thing to do now in all these bars when you have a lot of students?

O'Brien: In summertime. Down there you lose your population when the students go home. It probably drops from 40,000 maybe to 10,000. Most of those people want to live down by the lake. So we put in two volleyball courts. We had eight teams a night five nights a week.

McIntosh: That's pretty good.

O'Brien: Yeah. So we played six, seven, eight, nine.

McIntosh: In the summer?

O'Brien: Just in the summer.

McIntosh: Oh, just in the summer.

O'Brien: Then in the wintertime we used it for parking.

McIntosh: And the other place out on John Nolan Drive: how's that doing?

O'Brien: The Coliseum Bar? He's doing real well.

McIntosh: What do you do now?

O'Brien: I go in the morning and I get things ready, answer the phone.

McIntosh: You working for him now? [laughs]

O'Brien: Yeah. I'm the gofer. [laughs] I do all the crappy jobs now. I cut the grass and shovel the sidewalk and run errands. And that's about—

McIntosh: [Laughs] That's a nice way to retire.

O'Brien: Oh, yeah. It gives me something to do. If I say, "Hey Mike, I won't be here tomorrow," or something like that, it's no problem.

McIntosh: Well, he'd better not say anything. You're retired.

O'Brien: Like I say, I'm seventy-five years old and I probably should be, but what would I do?

McIntosh: Well, I'm just a year older than you are, and I like to be busy doing something.

O'Brien: Yeah, yeah. But you're not really tied down to it, are you? I mean if you want to take off tomorrow, you just say, "I won't be here."

McIntosh: I'm off. Right. I'm just a volunteer. I don't earn a dime here. Well, that's fine, that's terrific. I think he should make a big success of that Coliseum Bar. The traffic must be heavy. I've been out there a couple times.

O'Brien: The most [Inaudible] is the RV [recreational vehicle] show. I'll bet you right now he's got at least 30% of [the year] 2000 lined up for weddings that are already in the book. See upstairs we can seat about 350 people.

McIntosh: That would be most weddings.

O'Brien: Between weddings, class reunions, retirement parties, birthday parties—we got a room downstairs—

McIntosh: You can set up a bar up there?

O'Brien: We have two bars set up. We got one in each corner, and in one corner we have a dance floor.

McIntosh: And room for a band.

O'Brien: Yeah. We also have it set up so that we can have a disc jockey.

McIntosh: Yeah. You don't run music on a regular basis?

O'Brien: No, we don't run any music unless somebody brings it in.

McIntosh: It's not like the Avenue.

O'Brien: No.

McIntosh: Of course, they have it only once a week.

O'Brien: Just Monday nights. Charlie Mayer's [?].

McIntosh: Crazy Charlie. He's a west side boy.

O'Brien: Yeah. He lived down there by Saint James. I think they run from six to nine, Monday night.

McIntosh: Well, I think I'm running out of questions. Can you think of anything you haven't mentioned, anything unusual or spectacular or wild or something?

O'Brien: [Laughs] I told you we went through the Panama Canal, that was in October. In the engine room it was 120 degrees. It was really hot for those guys. Other than that— I always figured my good times overshadowed my bad times. There was times like after Okinawa we went over in to Buckner Bay, a real small island. A couple times I'd heard "pwheet," you know you hear 'em go by you, bullets.

McIntosh: Bullets?

O'Brien: Yeah. [laughs] Whistle. When they go by you, you don't have to worry. [laughs]

McIntosh: They never hit anybody?

O'Brien: No. After they took that they changed that into a kind of recreational center for the guys.

McIntosh: That was on the island of Guadalcanal.

O'Brien: No, this was at Okinawa.

McIntosh: Oh, Buckner Bay was at Okinawa. Ernie Pyle was at--?

O'Brien: Ie Shima.

McIntosh: Ie Shima. Right. That should do it. Thank you.

[End of Interview]