

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

**ROY E. SUBERA**

Composite Squadron 78, USS Saginaw Bay, Navy, World War II

2002

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**Subera, Roy E.** (b. 1925). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 55 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 videorecording (ca. 55 min.); ½ inch, color.

**Abstract:**

Roy E. Subera, a Hillsboro, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as an aviation ordinance man aboard the USS Saginaw Bay. He explains the course of his ordinance training for arming an airplane with napalm, torpedoes, and bombs, in detail. Subera discusses and reflects on tactics and weapons used in the battles and invasions in which he armed airplanes: Normandy (France), Palau (in the Pacific), Okinawa (Japan), Luzon (the Philippines), Leyte Gulf (the Philippines), and Iwo Jima (Japan). He discusses at length the Battle of Leyte Gulf in particular, including kamikaze attacks. Subera details mixing napalm and common airplane maintenance issues and errors. He also discusses the relationship he holds with the people he served with after being discharged.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Roy E. Subera (b. 1925) served as an aviation ordinance man on the USS Saginaw Bay from 1943 to 1946. He armed airplanes for Normandy (France), Palau (in the Pacific), Okinawa (Japan), Luzon (the Philippines), Leyte Gulf (the Philippines), and Iwo Jima (Japan). Upon being discharged he joined the VFW and raised a family.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2002.

Transcribed by Alison Carriere, 2012.

Transcription checked and corrected by Amanda Axel, 2012.

Abstract written by Rebecca Cook, 2015.

## **Interview Transcript:**

McIntosh: Talking to Roy Subera and it's the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2002. Where were you born, sir?

Subera: I was born at Hillsboro, Wisconsin.

McIntosh: What date was that?

Subera: That was June 6<sup>th</sup> 1925.

McIntosh: 6-'25. Okay and so when the war began, you were still in high school?

Subera: That's correct.

McIntosh: Okay, and when did you make a decision as to whether you were going to wait to be drafted or did you try and enlist in the Navy before that?

Subera: Uh, I turned eighteen on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June and I got notice of draft and I notified them that I would rather go to the Navy so they allowed that as long as I enlisted. So then I went to Milwaukee where I enlisted and left from there.

McIntosh: Did you go with a bunch of guys or on your own?

Subera: Uh, no. I was pretty much by myself at that particular time as far as my hometown. I was the only one at that time.

McIntosh: You did this when? When did you join the Navy? What year?

Subera: 1943.

McIntosh: '43. That was right after you finished high school then.

Subera: Right, uh-huh. I helped my father, on the farm, finish up. As soon as I got the crops in, well, then I went into the Navy.

Jaems: Well, who was going to help him with the farm now?

Subera: Well, I had an older brother at home so he got a permission to stay home to run the farm.

McIntosh: He got deferred?

Subera: Yeah, he got deferred, yeah.

McIntosh: Oh that was help for your father.

Subera: Oh yes, yes.

McIntosh: That's good. So then you went to Farragut, Idaho, for your boot training, right?

Subera: That's right. Uh, I thought we would be going to Great Lakes. That's normally where most of us went, but we went to Farragut, Idaho.

McIntosh: How did you enjoy that?

Subera: I liked that. I was never out in the mountains like that.

McIntosh: Pretty country isn't it?

Subera: It was high and they had a big lake up there. But of course, in the wintertime it was not much fun being on that lake, but it's beautiful.

McIntosh: So then after your boot camp, you had to pick a specialty. And they started training you into something, what was that?

Subera: I think it went pretty much because of our size. They picked five of us to go to Norman, Oklahoma. We were all like 5'6'' to 5'8'' and around 140 to 150 pounds. And this is what they needed for aviation ordnance men to fit into these turrets on these torpedo bombers. So they sent us to Norman, Oklahoma, to study chemistry because we were going to be aviation ordnance men.

McIntosh: Not a mechanic, but an ordnance men?

Subera: Ordnance men, yes. We handled everything mechanical including all the bombs, rockets, anything pyrotechnics, anything explosive we had to work with so--

McIntosh: How did they teach you that, for goodness sakes?

Subera: Well, we had very good instructors. Of course, the main thing was learning how to take apart any kind of a gun, machine gun—

McIntosh: To not get blown up, right.

Subera: Yeah, and there were various chemicals that we had to learn how that was put into a firing mechanism to explode a bomb. A bomb, a hundred pound bomb or a 1000 pound bomb wasn't anymore than a chunk of concrete here. But that fuse, that's what detonated the bomb off. And that fuse

contained many different kinds of powder, which I happen to had to sign a paper--I don't remember what it said on there for sure--but the FBI made us sign a paper that we'd never divulge to anyone how to make a bomb. Although recently you can find—

McIntosh: You can pick it up on the internet overnight.

Subera: Right, but at that time they did that.

McIntosh: You had to sign that.

Subera: Right, we signed a paper and so I'm on the FBI list. [both laugh] Yeah, it was very nice though. We spent in the mornings on campus. In the afternoons, they had a naval air technical training center there where they had bunkers [in] which they had guns, and ammunition and things; and so we worked. As soon as we graduated from this course, they sent us to Corpus Christi, Texas, where we actually got into a turret and we would be firing at moving targets.

McIntosh: How long was that course?

Subera: Only two weeks. But it was every day. And you probably made three or four flights a day, because that was a rush affair.

McIntosh: I mean your beginning course at Oklahoma.

Subera: That was six weeks.

McIntosh: Six weeks.

Subera: By June 6<sup>th</sup> of '44, I was already on the aircraft carrier heading west.

McIntosh: Only two weeks in Corpus?

Subera: Yeah.

McIntosh: And what did they teach you there, tell me again?

Subera: It was live ammunition in a turret, fighting other airplanes that were pulling a sleeve, and we would be shooting at that, practicing.

McIntosh: And what kind of aircraft would have a turret like that?

Subera: Uh, the torpedo bomber. The TBM—

McIntosh: The torpedo bomber is the only one I can think of—

Subera: Yeah, TBM-3C is the torpedo bomber. There were actually two different models we had after that. They kept making newer models.

McIntosh: Pretty slow though.

Subera: They were slow, but they were very durable. In a tough plane, we lost very few. They had excellent engines. Probably the most dangerous part of that would be lowering a torpedo towards another ship. You had to fly so low. You could fly this plane within ten foot of the water. Lot of times, I seen the vapor flying behind.

McIntosh: Were you in charge of dropping that torpedo?

Subera: Uh, no. I had to load it, and fuse it, and that. But as far as I personally, I never dropped a torpedo. I loaded them for others. On the carrier, we had two fighter planes and a torpedo bomber that we had to [load]; each ordnance men had two fighter planes and a torpedo bomber that you had to maintain with the guns, unarmed rockets in the wings, napalm. At that time napalm bombs weren't made, we made them. They'd send us the napalm in a bag and we mix the aviation gas the night before, and droppable fuel tanks, and then they just hooked underneath the wing.

McIntosh: Now these torpedoes and the rockets, now you say you put them on airplane, unarmed. How did they get armed?

Subera: The way they got armed is that there is a little hole in the propeller in that fuse and the wire went into that little hole. And then a little slip tight copper piece slipped in there, so that when it dropped that would slide off. So then the pilot—

McIntosh: So that armed them, then, when it dropped.

Subera: Yeah. Well the pilot had the opportunity do whichever he wanted. If he wanted to have them armed, he pulled the lever that the wire stayed in the airplane. So when the bomb dropped it slid out of there; that little propeller would turn and arm it. Say for example we had engine trouble or something and we had to land back on the ship or something—

McIntosh: With the torpedo?

Subera: Yeah. We could drop them unarmed and then they just dropped in the water like a stone, nothing happened.

McIntosh: They didn't want you back on deck with that then?

Subera: No, no, no they don't.

McIntosh: [Laughs] That'd make everyone very nervous.

Subera: Well the ships were very important, more important than I ever realized at that time. Uh, I think of different things. I think at Normandy, if they would have had the Navy there, with all those carriers and had twenty-four hour vigilance over the air, I think we could have saved a lot, a lot of people.

McIntosh: You mean on D-Day?

Subera: Yes. Yeah, because from England there, that was too long a distance to have—

McIntosh: To cover the beach.

Subera: That's actually why, if you see here, I got six stars. That consists of five invasions I participated in, and one sea battle.

McIntosh: We'll take them all in order here.

Subera: Right, so I spent a big share of my duty overseas, from the invasion of Palau on to Okinawa. I took part in every invasion.

McIntosh: Where was your ship?

Subera: Where was it?

McIntosh: San Francisco or?

Subera: Uh, no, Los Alamitos, was our home port.

McIntosh: You changed from Corpus Christi over to California and picked it up?

Subera: I went to Los Alamitos and I was there three or four days. The ship came in. I boarded the ship and the next—

McIntosh: Had it taken all day?

Subera: Yup, and the next day we left and we were on our way to the war zone. It only took less than a year and I was all done training.

McIntosh: Tell me about your first experience at sea. Was that surprising, you hadn't done that before?

Subera: For me it was a terrible experience. I was sick all the way from Los Angeles to the Hawaiian Islands. I couldn't get over it. I just couldn't get over it. They were very nice to me. They just tried pills and everything they could think of and they just kind of let me rest and sleep most of the time and try to get me to eat different things that might cure. Eventually I just got used to it. Although today if I would go out in the ocean I would probably get sick again.

McIntosh: Start all over.

Subera: Oh yeah. During the invasion of Luzon we were in the China Sea and it was a hurricane came upon us. That little ship was just tossed around like—

McIntosh: You got it all back?

Subera: Oh yeah, I got sick again. But I worked right on through. Lot of other guys did too.

McIntosh: So what was your first experience aboard ship? Where did you go?

Subera: Uh, we had a room between the flight deck and the hanger deck. There were sixteen of us, ordnance men, on that ship. We had one room that was, well, we had bomb sights stored and other secret things. We had another room that was kind of like a little work room. Every once in a while, I'd have to take a gun out of an airplane and take it down there, and I had a little place there where I had a light and some tools and things where I could work on it. Most times we worked on them right on the airplanes.

McIntosh: What was the common problem with the guns?

Subera: The biggest problem was, uh, pilots, and these were all fighter pilots, getting a little bit too excited and hang on to that trigger and then it blow up.

McIntosh: They leaned on the trigger too long. Then too much heat build up. Then they are going to jam.

Subera: Right.

McIntosh: That would not be un-jammed by the pilot then?

Subera: It couldn't no, because the guns were in the wings, see. Then he couldn't do nothing about it.

McIntosh: When the gun jammed like that what was it? It swollen—



Subera: It would get so hot that that shell exploded before it got in the chamber and it'd bend the cover up so no other shells could get in there.

McIntosh: That's the end of that.

Subera: It ruined the whole gun, believe me.

McIntosh: I was going to say, there's not much there to repair there. All you'd do is replace that.

Subera: I had problems with only one person, and I can understand him. We lost our commander; he got shot down at Leyte Gulf. Right after Luzon they sent Squadron 78 home, all the pilots.

McIntosh: All aboard the ship?

Subera: Yeah and we got a new group. They were VC-88 pilots and one of those men, they were quite new in the Navy, they were pushed fast. They were officers, I was an enlisted man, and they didn't think that I had any right to tell them what to do. Their first battle was Iwo Jima and for a new pilot that was kind of a bad one. I could see where there were a lot of Kamikazes and lot of Japanese planes and they'd get trigger happy. After about the second gun, I finally told him, "You've got to learn. You're going to get killed if you don't learn to lay off of that trigger because you have no weapons."

McIntosh: In other words, so the ideal way to shoot the gun is in short bursts.

Subera: Yeah short burst, very short.

McIntosh: That would keep them from getting too hot.

Subera: Oh yeah. They get very hot because we had incendiary tracer, high explosive, armor piercing all in there. Oh yeah, they get very hot and you had to keep them cool. It was the very thing. The commander of the ship talked to him and explained to him that, "The ordnance men that arm your ship know exactly what's going on." And he said, "You have to listen to them, even though you are an officer. This is war. You don't make a difference." Yeah. For example our admiral, he joined us many, many times. In order to not have to be saluted, he'd come out there in just his shorts. No shirt or hat or nothing and sat around and talk with ya.

McIntosh: What color suits did the ordnance guys wear?

Subera: We wore just regular blue dungarees.

McIntosh: That's all?

Subera: And short sleeved—

McIntosh: I thought they had different colored shirt for the different jobs they had.

Subera: No. No. Everybody wore pretty much the same. There was very little difference within the officers or the enlisted men. Most of the pilots wore a different colored pants but it was a very interesting experience because these people were my brothers. We are brothers to this day. We have reunions. Our first reunion was like about forty years after the war. I could be sitting here like I did in Chicago at a desk making out some report and I could hear somebody talking in the lobby and I could tell by his voice exactly who—

McIntosh: By their voice. [laughs]

Subera: Exactly. I could tell them by their voice, that long. We are still very close.

McIntosh: I believe you. How many are left from the service [unintelligible]?

Subera: It's getting down to about sixty people.

McIntosh: That's pretty good.

Subera: Uh huh [affirmation]. The squadron, I'm counting somewheres around maybe fifteen left.

McIntosh: From the pilots.

Subera: Pilots and crewmen, uh huh [affirmation].

McIntosh: And originally, I mean when you were at sea, what was the census then? Crewmen and so forth.

Subera: The amount? Okay, we had sixteen pilots that flew TBMs and thirty-two fighter pilots. We had sixteen torpedo bombers, so we had sixteen ordnance men and sixteen radio men. There was also a radioman in the belly of that plane.

McIntosh: And those CVE were a little smaller than the regular fleet carrier, right?

Subera: Yeah, considerably smaller. The large carriers they had just about once as many airplanes.

McIntosh: Twice as many.

Subera: Uh huh [affirmation] about twice as many.

McIntosh: So the first place you went to, where you went to sea was what?

Subera: The island of Palau.

McIntosh: That's when the Marines landed there?

Subera: Right yeah.

McIntosh: Terrible place.

Subera: Oh yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: That was a mistake I think, there was just [unintelligible].

Subera: Actually, I think they were outnumbered. I don't believe they realized how many Japanese were holed up in the caves.

McIntosh: So what was your job there? Your ship's job there, just ground support?

Subera: Mostly we were ground support. That was a very important part in all these invasions was that from sunrise to sunset there were airplanes over the Marines or the Army at all times. We were a squadron of four carriers and then about another hundred miles off there was another squadron of four carriers. We would alternate three torpedo bombers over the island all the time.

McIntosh: What would a torpedo bomber do over a land base?

Subera: We carried uh—

McIntosh: Cause they weren't dropping torpedoes.

Subera: Nope, nope. On my airplane, we never dropped torpedoes. We had eight 250 pound bombs or four 500 pound bombs. We carried six rockets, five inch rockets which would be, depending on the object they were going to destroy, whether they were high explosive, armor piercing or-- what do you call it, catch everything on fire-- incendiary type bomb.

McIntosh: What would it be, to burn faster?

Subera: Yeah, a lot of things they had. We used incendiary a lot. Then napalm. Iwo Jima was one of those that where it was kind of like Palau.

McIntosh: Now you told me about making that napalm. You took a regular aluminum tank and you filled it full of gasoline.

Subera: It was a hundred gallon tank. During the night we would, on the hanger deck, we would have fifty gallon barrels and we would put gasoline in that barrel and then dump the napalm in there. It looked like oatmeal. It looked like oatmeal.

McIntosh: That's what I want to know.

Subera: Very dry. Come in bags, and we had an oar, and we'd mix it. We had to be pretty completely dressed up, because once that—

McIntosh: Because it'd burn your skin.

Subera: Well at that time it wasn't burning, you know, but even then you'd have to take a knife to get it off. It stuck right on ya.

McIntosh: I was going to say with all the jelly gasoline they really did that.

Subera: Oh yeah, it really stuck. You never wanted to get it on your skin.

McIntosh: Did you ever know what the stuff was, the napalm stuff?

Subera: Not before that I didn't, no, never knew that. And then we would mix it up—

McIntosh: Had to be mixed up by someone. Was it like peanut butter?

Subera: Oh we'd mix it up kind of like jelly-like type.

McIntosh: When you stirred it then it became—

Subera: Yeah, yeah we would mix it with the gasoline until it got to a jelly type and then we—

McIntosh: Then you knew it was ready.

Subera: Then we would pump it into these tanks.

McIntosh: Hundred gallon swing[?] tanks.

Subera: Yeah, and then we hung them on the outside of the hanger decks. There was a little door there. We had a rack that we hung them there. They were electronically hooked to a switch in the cab. The captain, if we had a

kamikaze attack, he could throw that switch and they would all drop into the ocean, because otherwise it was too dangerous to have them there.

McIntosh: They were pretty heavy then?

Subera: Oh yes.

McIntosh: You couldn't pick one up.

Subera: We had little carts that had a hydraulic hoist.

McIntosh: That's what it lifted.

Subera: Yeah, and we'd wheel them out there.

McIntosh: And then who put them on the airplanes?

Subera: We did, that was our job.

McIntosh: You attached them to the wings, one on each wing.

Subera: One on each wing. We'd load up the bomb bay doors.

McIntosh: Just lock on there and then he could unlock them when he wanted to.

Subera: Right, they had shackles that had the controls in the cockpit and they could drop them one at a time or however.

McIntosh: But you had to be careful doing that, make sure that didn't drop it on the deck.

Subera: One of the lessons I learned in life, is that you learn to have patience. You had to be patient because you were loading these things, and all these airplanes were starting up and they were maneuvering around. We had two of our ordnance men backed into a prop and it happens, it just can't be helped, but you learned to have patience and you make sure you do everything right because once you started that fuse, you had to cross thread it. You had to screw them in, that was the last thing we did with the fuse.

McIntosh: You attached them and then screwed the fuse right over what would be the arms, right?

Subera: Yeah, there was just a hole there, in a little chamber. Some of the fuses were that long, that big around, and they were threaded and if you cross threaded them, you were done; you had go out and destroy that. Take that

off and lower it down in the ocean because you could not unscrew it, it explodes.

McIntosh: How did that explode, just by contact? I mean, what made the thing fire?

Subera: Actually it works the same way as an ordinary, like a shotgun. You have a primer, only these had more control to them. They had a series of explosives, like pencil size in a steel thing. They were in different sections of that, so then when that propeller turned it would lined all those explosives into one, so that when it hit the firing pin it would be just like on a shotgun shell. It created like three sticks of dynamite.

McIntosh: So in other words, that wouldn't explode and flame just on itself. It had to be ignited.

Subera: Yeah right but the chances are, of just falling out of the airplane, chances are that that fuse could go off, it could.

McIntosh: I was going to say, if you were fixing that to the wing and if that thing fell off on the deck.

Subera: Oh no we never—

McIntosh: It may or may not explode.

Subera: It could, it could if the fuse was in it. It could, it never happened to us but we've never—

McIntosh: After you got the thing fixed on the wing, then you put the fuse in it?

Subera: That's right, after it's already in the wing or in the bomb bay.

McIntosh: So you're sure it's not going to fall.

Subera: That's the last thing you do. That's the thing you do, you put those fuses in and then you put that little wire in that prop so it can't turn.

McIntosh: Tell me about this prop. You mean the prop—

Subera: The prop, the fuse, the little propeller on the fuse. When that wire is pulled out, when the pilot drops that, the wire pulls out—

McIntosh: Automatically?

Subera: Yeah, because he has it fixed to its face in the shackle. So it pulls out of that prop and then that propeller turns and it lines up all these, what they

call the explosive train. So that it would explode. But it can explode without that being lined up too. They found that can happen.

McIntosh: So generally it was the impact of hitting, of falling, is what made the smaller explosions into bigger explosions.

Subera: That's right. The smaller explosion is like three or four sticks of dynamite and that—

McIntosh: Wow, that's a pretty good size.

Subera: That explodes the bomb. The bomb is full of TNT, but that's actually uh—

McIntosh: For this you're talking about napalm, it doesn't actually—

Subera: No, well yeah. The napalm or either one. On the napalm bomb all those fuses were incendiary. They weren't so much explosive as they were fire to start. When this tank hit, it just fell to million pieces and this stuff flew just about two hundred yards in every direction.

McIntosh: I've seen it in movies a hundred times, but I didn't know what made them go off.

Subera: It's the fuse that creates that. It's that explosion in that fuse. Instead of having a lot of tetrone and stuff like that in bombs, this had more black powder and stuff that would create a fire.

McIntosh: Because you really didn't need a lot of explosives.

Subera: No, the bomb itself would splatter—

McIntosh: All you needed was a [unintelligible]—

Subera: Right, just a light aluminum tank, you know, would just completely—

McIntosh: [unintelligible]

Subera: Matter of a fact, if the airplane didn't land in the lake here, those tanks blew apart too, you know, but they just had fuel in them. But they still—

McIntosh: That's just the wing tank yeah.

Subera: Yeah, they just ripped about too, just falling in the water.

McIntosh: Sure, heavy stuff. Okay and this at Palau. How long were you in Palau? One week or?

Subera: Uh no, we were there longer than a week, approximately a month or two months.

McIntosh: Oh really?

Subera: Most all of these, yeah. We had to **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** stay until they could build an airfield. Although on the island Palau, I don't think they ever did build an airfield there. But on the rest of them, on Leyte Gulf, Luzon, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, they all built airbases there. But we couldn't leave until—

McIntosh: You were the airbase until they got that one.

Subera: Yeah, right. That's what I'm talking about. At Normandy, if we could have had all day long air cover, we could have had a dozen aircraft carriers there; I think we would have saved a lot of lives.

McIntosh: I think they should have put that napalm on those bunkers along those coasts.

Subera: That would have helped a lot.

McIntosh: Instead of trying to drop 150 bombs on each one, which didn't help because they were too thick.

Subera: That napalm spreads so far that—

McIntosh: That you put inside of a structure though, it just takes all the arsine out in a flash, so its very effective. So then between the Palau and Leyte did you have some rest time?

Subera: We generally did have, but that was only a few days, yes. These invasions were pretty steady, because we then would reload. The squadron of course wasn't operating the ship in atoll. We generally had a little island someplace. We'd get a landing craft of some type and a few cases of beer and we'd go on an island—

McIntosh: Go out and drink there.

Subera: and we'd probably each have two beers and then go back. [laughs] So yes, we had a little break between every invasion. Then we would start preparing for the next invasion. And so we would go, like Leyte Gulf-- of course this is very important because this is where MacArthur was going to come back to the Philippines-- so we were there I'd say approximately two months before the invasion. To—



McIntosh: To soften it up.

Subera: To soften it up, yeah, and drive them back.

McIntosh: Now did you see any zeros?

Subera: Oh, yes, yeah there was—

McIntosh: That's when they first started using the Kamikazes was at Leyte Gulf.

Subera: Uh, yes. Uh-huh.

McIntosh: So tell me about it. Did any of them attack your ship?

Subera: Uh, yes. We, the coast, we had one that just missed us and it ended into the Bismarck Sea, which sunk that one. That sank. We had one that uh, that hit the top of the antenna, which was like about 300 feet up in the air. Uh, we had another one that hit the water about 200 yards before he got to the ship and uh, it created some damage but nothing major. But I've seen a lot of them. I've seen a lot of them shot down too. We had one gunner, a ship gunner that was very, very good. Most people didn't even know he was coming and all of a sudden this guy started, "There he is, there he is, there he is." Boy you knew right away after a while that he'd seen it. Bang, bang and all of a sudden a big explosion out there, he'd get them. Yeah he was real good. But they were, I don't think they were very good pilots.

McIntosh: No, they were taught how to take off; they didn't teach them how to land.

Subera: Yeah they, well they weren't taught to come back either. No I don't think they were great pilots. A lot of them tried to hit a ship but missed.

McIntosh: They killed a lot of people off Okinawa.

Subera: Oh yeah, yeah they did. Lot of--throughout the whole Pacific War, there were those suicide bomber was Kamikazes were number one enemy.

McIntosh: Was it different in Iwo Jima compared to Okinawa? Because in Okinawa they didn't contest landing, so I was wondering if that made a difference.

Subera: Uh, no. Everything's pretty much the same as far as we were concerned. We went about our business. We had to drive the enemy out of there—

McIntosh: Your supplies were always okay, you never ran out?

Subera: I'd like to make a remark about that because I think it's very important. I have people occasionally pat my back and say, "Thank you for being a veteran." And I appreciate it very much, but I tell most of them, "There's a lot of heroes besides veterans." We had supplies galore. We never had to worry about being short of airplanes or guns.

McIntosh: That's good.

Subera: The people in this country, the way they could mobilize so quickly and out-manufacture Japan, Italy, and Germany, in one year they outdid what they tried to do in twenty years. It's remarkable. It's because the people here really got behind us and supplied us with everything we needed. It was an important part of the war. I can see, probably not quite as much, but even after September 11<sup>th</sup>, I can see how it wouldn't take too much, we could be the same as we were then. We raise up and take care of the enemy quickly. I think we are doing that. Everybody's behind the President and they're working hard to stop this. Sure it's going to cost us, but we'll survive, we'll make out because we're a democracy.

McIntosh: Exactly. That's right. The first bunch of interviews, you know, I've put in a book and that just came out, that book. We'd tried to make that point because in another one that I talked to felt exactly the same way as you do.

Subera: They do, I'm sure they do.

McIntosh: You should read it, my book.

Subera: I haven't got it yet, but I'm going to get one.

McIntosh: You'll enjoy it. Now, after the landing at Leyte Gulf, there's a big battle that almost took out all of the ships. Were you one of those light carriers that was attacked by a huge force of Japanese Navy?

Subera: We were there, but uh I don't really know exactly how to explain everything that happened there.

McIntosh: Well I know all the details. All I need is your personal experience. I know where all the ships were.

Subera: We uh, we had the admiral aboard. And uh during the night, uh, we separated. Uh, and so we were not involved, the ship itself was not involved in the sea battle, uh, as was the air part was involved. Uh, our pilots still flew and bombed the Japanese ships, but we didn't. I could hear it, in the morning when we got up to start loading planes, I could hear the uh, the big, uh the big guns going, the sea battles. But we were far enough

away that we didn't get involved in that. We did have some, uh, some airplanes try to bomb us. But we shot them down.

McIntosh: But the big ship that came down the slot there, came after you, you weren't part of that group then?

Subera: No we weren't part of that.

McIntosh: So they attacked—

Subera: Uh, uh, you're talking about Task Force 58?

McIntosh: Yeah. They took them, all of them. Took the boys up north and the Japanese suckered him into going up there and you know.

Subera: For some reason or another, uh, and I don't quite understand all of it, but it was thought that these, this Japanese Navy was coming through the straights from the China Sea.

McIntosh: They were.

Subera: And they did. But why Halsey, when he was coming to Leyte Gulf, why he changed and went up to the north, I guess he wanted to come from behind them. I don't know.

McIntosh: He wanted to get rid of all the last couple of carriers the Japanese had. But anyways that's not important—

Subera: They had the two big battleships there too, that had those 21" guns and we sunk the one there.

McIntosh: But not your group, that didn't sink it.

Subera: Yeah, our group sunk the one there in Leyte Gulf. The other one got into the straights and Halsey's guys, they got that one then.

McIntosh: So anyway, how did this battle bother you? What were you doing when this was going on?

Subera: Uh, the same as always. We uh we everything up and we, see our job was support group for the army and that what we were for. So we did the same thing. We flew over the Philippine Islands and uh took, uh, took care of our army troops there that needed air cover.

McIntosh: So you weren't attacked by any of the Japanese battleships?

Subera: No, no we weren't.

McIntosh: They didn't bother you.

Subera: No they did the rest of the other three carriers and destroyers were involved. Out of that they sunk two of the carriers.

McIntosh: They sure did. Well you were lucky not to get sunk.

Subera: Our admiral actually was the only high ranking officer in that area at the time. Halsey and Mitscher were each far away from there. So they ordered him to withdraw back, so we didn't get involved into the actual sea battle.

McIntosh: So how long were you at Leyte before you left there?

Subera: We were there approximately three months. When we left there, it was only a matter of a few weeks. We got some repairs and then some supplies. Then off we went again to Luzon. That was a bigger army unit than at Leyte, yet. You can't imagine. Every place in the horizon, eleven miles, and every place you looked there was troop ships, as far as you could see. Some of them there was only a little part of them sticking up out of the water, you know. Yeah, so then we went up there. We were there only about two weeks and then the army troops came. Then we stayed there until, well we were there only about three months I think because they got an airbase going pretty quick up there.

McIntosh: Yeah, well now we're getting close to the end of the war.

Subera: That's right. Then there was, of course Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Both of these were rough battles for the Marines. They were really, a lot of Japanese holed up in caves there. That's where the Napalm bomb, really. All we had to do drop them right in the mouth of the cave.

McIntosh: I know about that. I've interviewed a lot of guys in Okinawa and Iwo Jima. Okay, so your duties did not change much at all.

Subera: Pretty much all through the war, as far as that goes. My duties were pretty much the same.

McIntosh: So when did you start home?

Subera: After the war, we had a little celebration aboard ship. We had some fireworks.

McIntosh: Oh really?

Subera: Yeah. I don't know exactly how it got into that room, but that one room we had locked up, but there was liquor in that room.

McIntosh: Oh my goodness!

Subera: I think probably, some of the officers. Because they had bomb sites in there, it was off limits to everybody, but the ordnance men and a few officers. As the war ended or we got the report it ending, one of the officers came into this room and told us and says, "Unlock that door, we're going to have a party." So yeah, we had a few drinks and then we went out and had some fireworks, but we were more delighted than celebrating because we lost a lot of friends and good people. The air craft carrier became a hospital ship then.

McIntosh: Right at the end of the war?

Subera: Yes, right after Okinawa. We were excess baggage. So that's how come I got to the Philippine Islands. We stayed there for about seven or eight months, I guess.

McIntosh: After you had the hospital ship?

Subera: So they took and welded the hanger deck full of bunks. They went into Japan and picked up the prisoners of war from the Philippine Death March. A lot of these army people from the Philippines were taken to Japan. They had to work in factories there and most of them were very sick and poor. They put them on this carrier, were it was very convenient and made a beautiful hospital ship really.

McIntosh: Yeah, what did you do?

Subera: Uh, I flew with the squadron to the Philippine Islands. We went to an airbase there.

McIntosh: Oh you stayed on the ground there.

Subera: Oh yes. That was because we had to take all the airplanes and ordnance equipment off, to make that into a hospital ship, see.

McIntosh: That was right after the war—

Subera: Oh yeah. They started getting us ready to take off right after the signing, the peace treaty signing. They immediately went to Japan.

McIntosh: So you didn't have a job anymore.

Subera: No, nope didn't have a job. We flew over there and all we did was loaf around and have parties and they—

McIntosh: And wonder when your turn was coming to go home.

McIntosh: Yeah, we were waiting for a ship to bring us home. There was a big supply depot there. Talk about supplies, I think this covered probably about six square miles and it was just loaded, twenty, thirty foot high with engines and stuff, you know. A lot of this stuff was outdated, so to give us something to do, they'd give us a forklift and "This over here and get this such a number and that number and pick it up and take it over to the dump." We'd do that and when we were bored doing that we would set up a pallet up in the alley and we would take a bunch of forklifts and group them wide open and see who could pick up that pallet without slowing down. [both laugh] We got pretty good with them. They had a forklift with big truck tires on them and they traveled about forty miles an hour. We had to have the forklift so high and after you marked in the dirt there, then you could lower it, lower it, and pick it up. Well we ruined a lot of pallets but it kept us busy.

We did get a party one time. One of the guys got some steaks, one of the officers, who knew a chef someplace there in the Philippines, he got a bunch of steaks. We went out on the beach and we had a big fire going and we had the steaks wrapped up in some big leaves and cooking them out there. We slipped all of our clothes off and went swimming and all of a sudden somebody yelled, "Our clothes are disappearing!" Here we found, they reported, natives were stealing our clothes. So we took after them and knocked some of them down and got our clothes back but not all of it. Anyhow I come back to the base, one of the guys had a big shirt and that's all I had but it was long enough. It went all the way to my knees, that's all I had to come back in. [laughs] The people stole all our clothes.

McIntosh: So finally they brought a ship to take you home?

Subera: Yeah, they did.

McIntosh: What kind of ship was it?

Subera: It was just a regular troop ship. We got back to the States, and this was probably February of '46.

McIntosh: Where did you land?

Subera: Uh, San Francisco. I was there for a few days. They put me on leave. I went home for two weeks then reported back to Wold-Chamberlain Field which is over in St. Paul. They didn't know what they wanted to do with me. Out of our group it was just me and Roy Vogel and he was from St.

Paul. Finally they put us on a train with sixteen other guys and went to Los Angeles which took about three weeks, I think. I know in St. Louis we sat there for a week in the yards.

McIntosh: You're not going home at all that way. [laughs]

Subera: Finally we got to Los Angeles, that's where I got discharged. There was so many people getting discharged they just—

McIntosh: Swamped.

Subera: Swamped. And they didn't know what to do with us. So they kept sending us here and there and so we actually didn't do anything.

McIntosh: By this time your mother was getting pretty anxious?

Subera: Uh, a little later than that. I intended to be a veterinarian. I was born on a farm and I studied agriculture and I was going to be a veterinarian. So as soon as I got out, I stayed in California and I was going to the University there.

McIntosh: The G.I. bill.

Subera: Right, so I was all set to go. This was April. By the 1<sup>st</sup> of May I got a telephone call and my mother said that my dad got very sick and there was nobody there to put the crops in, her and my younger brother was milking the cows, but he couldn't work and wondered if I could come home. Well I had a younger brother and a younger sister, they were still in school, so I thought it was my position, because my older brother was married then and living in La Crosse had a job. He couldn't do it, so I come home and actually spent six years farming. They finally found out what happened to my dad. He had an accident as a young boy. He got hit in the back of the head by a limb that fell out of a tree and it grew into a cyst and it would affect his brain where he just couldn't function. Once they got that out, he was fine but by that time I couldn't believe in going to school anymore, it was way too late.

McIntosh: So what did you take up then?

Subera: So then I took on all the education the Veterans Administration had given me and I went into business on my own then. I bought a dairy products distributorship in Wonewoc, Elroy, Hillsboro, all those small towns around there. It was good. I was making money. It was hard work, most times seven days a week. In fifteen years I had one vacation which was four days. Then I'd seen that this was a business that was going out of business, I don't care where you are. So I sold it. I went out trying to get a

job with some large firm that had a farm, but nothing seemed to work out. So I went and I joined the U.S Post Office. I stayed with them for twenty-six years and retired as a Postal Clerk.

McIntosh: Did you get married then?

Subera: Oh yes, I got married. When I got home, of course, all the girls I went to school with they were all—

McIntosh: Married.

Subera: Married and gone. So I kind of had to pick on some younger girls and I married a young lady that I'm married yet today. In May, we celebrated our fifty-second year. Beautiful girl and still beautiful. She had a little problem. She had cancer. She had a lot of the body taken apart and destroyed, and radiation, and that, but she's a very determined lady and she fights like heck and this has been seventeen years ago and she's still healthy now.

McIntosh: She got over that.

Subera: Oh yeah, she got over that. She has no more cancer problems at all.

McIntosh: How about kids?

Subera: I had two daughters. I just kind of wanted a boy but then two kids, I think that's all I want. I don't know if I could support anymore than that. I have two daughters and they each are married and I have four grand-children and three great grand-children.

McIntosh: Do they live near you?

Subera: Uh, yes. Most of them live right around Middleton, Cross Plains, Madison. One of my, my oldest grandson, I have an older granddaughter, he's in the army right now. He's with the Military Police in Louisiana at Fort Polk. He's coming home the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July. I'm very proud of him because he's really getting up there in the military. I told him that if he takes military and spends most of his time learning all the details, he's going to make a good living and when he retires from there, he's going to have a great job. Well he's already got job offers and he's a long way from being—

McIntosh: Everybody likes to hire the ex-military because they are well disciplined and they come to work on time and they're responsible.

Subera: Yeah it is. It's a good position. He's already, the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], the government police department, what do they call them?



I can't think of their name now, the United States Marshal. They already gave him a certificate of the things he learned about police work. He's been to school on accident prevention and investigating accidents. So within a year and a half he became a sergeant. Which to me, I think is great and he enjoys it. He's married now and has a little daughter and she's right here in Madison with us now. He's in school right now again. So she and the great granddaughter came back to Madison and he's coming next week.

McIntosh: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

Subera: Oh yes. I'm a charter member of the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] in Hillsboro. Long as I was a charter member I didn't really want to rejoin anywhere else, so I stayed with them still.

McIntosh: Even though you live here.

Subera: Yes. I'm still a member there. Small towns like that, they need all the help they can get. If you ever get to Hillsboro, you go down there by the lake, you'll find a very, very beautiful memorial there.

McIntosh: Oh memorial. A World War II memorial?

Subera: Uh, they built it for all wars. They even have names of Civil War vets on it. Yeah, it's very pretty. There's a little area of land, there by the hospital and they rebuilt that. It was nothing but brush most of the time I was in high school and now it's just a beautiful place. They got this little building there and on the memorial they have all the names of people that were in the military and it's very nice.

McIntosh: What did you learn in the Navy that served you well as you went back to civilian life?

Subera: Well, like I mentioned before. Patience was one big thing I learned. I learned how to work.

McIntosh: But you knew how to work, living on a farm.

Subera: Yeah, well military is different. You have to be very careful in what you do. You can't be careless. It doesn't make any difference if you are flying a helicopter or driving a truck. It's very costly if people aren't careful and you have accidents. The military is very strict on those things. I think if in civilian life more of the young people had some military experience they'd be a lot better drivers, they'd be a lot better citizens because they learn that responsibility which you don't learn that in any of the schools here, even though they have driver's ed. and that.

McIntosh: You don't learn responsibility taking driver's ed.

Subera: When I went to school there was not such thing as driver's ed. I had to learn out in the cow pasture in the Model T-4 Ford. [laughs] I've never paid a speeding fine in my life yet and I'm seventy-seven. I've got to really be careful now not to break that. [laughs] Nope, I've never gotten a ticket. Not that, I did speed a lot of times but—

McIntosh: You were lucky.

Subera: I was lucky and I was always careful.

McIntosh: Alright. So, decorations?

Subera: I uh—

McIntosh: You got a unit certification I'm sure.

Subera: Yup. We have a Gold Star on our —

McIntosh: Unit citation?

Subera: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's what I thought.

Subera: Yeah.

McIntosh: For what campaign?

Subera: Yeah, we were in six actual campaigns, five invasions and one sea battle. They classified the sea battle, even though our ship, of course, was in charge of that unit but we weren't necessarily in the middle of it as some of the other ships were. So as far as medals, any type of heroism, nope we never got any kind of. As a unit we have medals for—[ends abruptly]

**[End of Interview]**