

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
CHARLES V. GOMEZ
Shipfitter Second Class, US Navy
2012

OH
1723

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1723**

Gomez, Charles V. (1923–), Oral History Interview, 2012.

Approximate length: 34 minutes

Contact *WVM Research Center* for access to the original recording.

Summary:

In this oral history interview Charles V. Gomez discusses his service in the United States Navy during World War II. A shipfitter second class, he was stationed aboard USS *Mississippi* (BB-41) in the Pacific Theater.

Born in Kenedy, Texas, Gomez's father, a railroad gandy dancer, settled with his family in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in the early 1920s. He talks of living in a Mexican neighborhood, subsequent moves in town and the death of a sister. Gomez learned welding and found work at a metalworks firm and then a shipyard. He states that he next volunteered to serve his country.

Gomez entered the service in March 1944. He states that the Navy wanted his skills as he was already working in a maritime trade. He took his basic training at Farragut Naval Training Station in Idaho. After training he arrived in Bremerton, Washington, aboard USS *Mississippi*. Although he was trained to work with sheet metal, Gomez found himself initially doing "the lousiest job" in the Navy, finding himself on hands and knees with paintbrush and scraper scraping decks.

The USS *Mississippi*'s first stop was Hawaii. They were there to get supplies and Gomez noted that the ship's officers escorted women down to their quarters. In September 1944, the USS *Mississippi* took part in the bombardment of the island of Peleliu. Gomez notes the ship was at Leyte in October 1944. The USS *Mississippi* voyaged throughout the South Pacific. Gomez notes that during the Battle of Okinawa it bombarded Shuri Castle in May of 1945, a major fortress on the way to invading the Japanese homeland.

After every bombardment, shipfitter Gomez had to go around the ship making repairs. The shipfitter shop was his responsibility, and he talks of the barter that led him to weigh the most he ever did. He speaks of the unique scare of experiencing an air raid while in drydock during shutdown. The ship was involved in five major battles and endured kamikaze attacks. Gomez recalls the crucial scramble to reach his battle station upon hearing the call to general quarters. Gomez alludes to the sinking of a Japanese ship and the downing of eleven planes at one time. For years after the war, he kept a piece from an attacking plane in his possession.

He admits that he never got used to sleeping in a hammock with its hazards for those below and knocking out one's own teeth. He talks of the scourge of dysentery and the need for quarantine in the Philippines. He witnessed a man removed from ship who had been totally burned. Out early because of the point system, Gomez was discharged at Great Lakes Naval Training Center in April 1946, but the hearing loss he had sustained during his service received inadequate treatment and was not recorded.

Gomez returned to Milwaukee and received his high school diploma. He found it hard to get hired. Through his mother's friends from the old country he got a job at the Armour packing house skinning calves in the cooler. Later he went to the union to get a job in his specialty as a sheet metal worker, a skill he had pursued in the Navy. Thwarted by the seniority rules of the union, Gomez saw the street sign of a local metalworks that needed an aluminum welder. He tells of how he got the job, joined the union, and found himself never out of a job because of that membership. Gomez met his wife after the service through an old Army friend. He refers to Milwaukee's Mexican neighborhood, his own genealogy, and remarks that his sons have all served their country as well. Gomez shares his experience of the Badger Honor Flight program, when approaching the age of ninety he took a trip to Washington, DC. Wondering about the fate of his old ship, he remarks that a hat bearing USS *Mississippi* is the one souvenir he wants.

Biographical Sketch:

Charles V. Gomez was born in Texas and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In March 1944, he enlisted in the United States Navy and served until April 1946. A shipfitter aboard the USS *Mississippi*, he participated in campaigns in the Pacific Theater. Post-war he returned to work and to marry in Milwaukee.

Archivist's notes:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. It is strongly suggested that researchers directly engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by George F. Banda, 2012.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2020.

Reviewed by Jeffrey J. Javid, 2020.

Abstract written by Jeffrey J. Javid 2020.

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of OH1723.Gomez_tape1_A_access.mp3]

- Banda: I'm with Charlie Gomez, World War II veteran. Date June 8, 2012. Okay, Charlie, where were you born? Were you born here in the ——
- Gomez: Yeah, I was born here in Kenedy, Texas[?]. And according to my mother I was already on my way over, came across the river. And my dad came up as a gandy dancer working on the railroad. They went all the way up to Ohio and on the way back I guess she got pregnant again, and we had a sister that died someplace out here in Oak Creek. That's how we ended here.
- Banda: Okay. So you've been here for—because you were born just—
- Gomez: Yeah, I was born [inaudible] in Milwaukee. We've been here since, oh God, '23 or '25.
- Banda: Nineteen twenty-three or 1925.
- Gomez: Yeah.
- Banda: That's a long time. What do you remember about your childhood, and did you live in this area? And [inaudible].
- Gomez: Oh yeah. Well, yeah, we came over here, and the first place we moved to some place on Kinnickinnic. There used to be a lot of Mexicans in there. And then from there we went over to Tony Piano on North Water and Broadway. Used to have a saloon there, and right across the street used to be Frenzy's[?] market shop, butcher shop. Frenzy there, that's [inaudible] also know because he married the girl, married. I knew them all. So we stayed there for a while. Then we went to—then we moved again, and we moved on North Water and—right across from the Pfister[?] [inaudible].
- Banda: Okay, I know where that is.
- Gomez: It's in there, and I had a sister that was born there. And she's died already. Then between there was a—they took me to Thomas Jefferson School. I went to Thomas Jefferson School for—I stopped eighth grade there. Then I went to Lincoln High School, and I graduated from Lincoln High School. I did graduate. Matter of fact I got [inaudible] graduated. They do a lot—people don't believe. I said I got trouble speaking English anyway. You know, [foreign language]. Oh, that's what they want to hear, okay.
- Banda: So what did you do after high school then?

Gomez: After high school I—oh, in between there I went to that school of engineering, and I took welding there. And I passed all the tests there, and they got me a first job at Western Metal.

Banda: Excellent.

Gomez: That's how I got the—into the trades that way. And then from—that guy didn't want to pay me, so then I went down the shipyard there. And from the shipyard there he was teed off because I didn't tell him that I got—that place was a firm, and I didn't really have to go. I really could have made a big stink not to go. And I just, when we started, looked like a human being was making some big money.

Banda: Good, good, good.

Gomez: Yeah, I mean, I was getting on. And they started me out a buck and a quarter, and then they—I got a raise for another quarter, and then I was getting a buck and a half. At that time, that was good money.

Banda: Good money. So what time did you graduate from high school? What year was that? Remember?

Gomez: Oh, I graduated after the war. I didn't finish. I went, and I got when—I need about, in that last year—it was in the same time I graduated—I graduated at the same time I come out of service. because they give you a certain amount of—

Banda: They do.

Gomez: They do. That's how I got—I got the diploma.

Banda: So when did you go into the service? Were you drafted, or did you volunteer to go in the—

Gomez: Oh, it was a matter of both. Because I got shook up with the FBI[??].

Banda: So the war was going on, and then—

Gomez: Yeah, the war was going on, and so I just said okay, I'll volunteer. Then I'll go.

Banda: And what made you decide to go into the Navy?

Gomez: Right away I—they more or less insisted I go into the Navy because I was working at the marine[??] building.

Banda: And they needed your trade, your skills.

Gomez: Yeah, and they needed my—

Banda: Sheet metal.

Gomez: Guess what they gave me when I went into it and they took me?

Banda: What?

Gomez: Lousiest job you could find. What was that in the Navy?

Banda: What was it?

Gomez: They put you on, and they gave you a paint brush and a scrapper, and you scraped the decks. Stripped everything in the ship as in a, oh, like an apprentice seaman.

Banda: Yeah, so you had to scrape the metal and paint the—

Gomez: Yeah. Well then—and I was there. And then—and we got hit. You know we got two—we got hit twice.

Banda: Okay, what ship was that that you were on, the first one?

Gomez: USS *Mississippi*.

[00:05:00]

Banda: Okay, that was—

Gomez: No, from right after that I—they took me over to—for training. Farragut, Idaho for training. They wouldn't even want me around here. I went for—that's in Iowa—Idaho. And then from there—

Banda: So you didn't go to Great Lakes?

Gomez: No.

Banda: Okay.

Gomez: Farragut, Idaho. That's right on it, Farragut, Idaho. And then after that they put—they said, Well, you're all done. We're finished with you, yeah. They sent me home, and then they send me right out to the boat[??] that took me right into Bremerton, Washington, aboard ship.

Banda: Okay. You were out in the West Coast then?

Gomez: Yeah, on the West Coast, on the Pacific.

Banda: And your first ship was the USS *Mississippi*?

Gomez: And all my time I spend on the USS *Mississippi*. And from there we first—

Banda: And that was in 1944?

Gomez: Yeah. And the—from there, the first thing, our first stop was Hawaii. We got loaded up in Hawaii. You know how they say that there's all the officers are supposed to be, what you call them?

Banda: Gentlemen.

Gomez: Gentlemen? No, they were all taking women to Hawaii down in their quarters. Well, that's right.

Banda: That's—you're right. You're right. So how long were you in Hawaii?

Gomez: Not long, just—

Banda: Just to load up and get supplies?

Gomez: Just to load up the provisions, and out we went. You know when Japanese lost the bad battle of, what the hell was that? In the Pa—they were trying to come down on the West Coast up through—

Banda: The Aleutian Islands.

Gomez: —the Aleutians. But once they'd lost Guadalcanal—that's what it was. Once they'd lost that battle in Guadalcanal then they took all the troops back and put them back into the union. That's what the—

Banda: So what was your next stop after Hawaii? You know, you left Hawaii, and you went more into the Pacific.

Gomez: Oh, we went to all the little islands. I didn't even—I never even cared to know them.

Banda: So there were battles there though?

Gomez: Oh yeah. Oh, there was always battles. That's how we got all them men in[??] We got Shuri Castle. I don't know if you heard. That was the Japanese's stronghold before you get to Tokyo. Well, we—this ship was called on for firing power to knock down Shuri Castle so the Marines would come in. And then we went to Palau.

Banda: Oh yeah.

Gomez: Philippines. I went to—Palau and then—Leyte in the Philippines, all through the South. We were all through the South Pacific. That ship never stayed in one place. It just—yeah, it kept moving. And then I was a shipfitter, so after every bombardment then my job was to go around and besides this other one I was to go around and check, fix up all the stuff that was loose.

Banda: From the bombardment?

Gomez: Yeah, yeah.

Banda: You mean from the shockwaves from firing all those guns.

Gomez: And we had forces in men[??] and 30 millimeters for shooting down them planes. That's how we got 11 planes down. And in between there we went into dry dock. That's something. That's scary. You get into—comes in there, and it brings all the ship down. And if the—and we had an air raid, and you couldn't do nothing. Everything is shut down. Turn off all the lights, and went to—and then before that—but that ship that we sunk, the Japanese battle we was in about two days in general quarters in the—down in—just stationed in—and aboard ship, you know, you're got a certain spot. If that ship hits—

Banda: That you're assigned?

Gomez: That doesn't open up for you. That's it. That's—

Banda: Oh my goodness.

Gomez: They got—they're all sealed. And that's—that's part of the Navy.

Banda: So did you go into general quarters and you sealed everything off, and you're—

Gomez: Yeah, everything is sealed off. Everybody's got a station, and if you don't happen to get down there in time, well then you're shit out of luck. You have to—I don't know what they were going to do.

Banda: Whatever you got to do.

Gomez: Wherever you're at, that's where you stay.

Banda: You stayed. My goodness.

Gomez: And I couldn't get used to sleeping on a hammock?

Banda: No?

Gomez: Did you ever sleep on a hammock?

Banda: No.

Gomez: Well, you got to sleep on your back. If you happen to roll, then you fall down. You're up about—and then you get—in the morning you get a number of—you got a hook with a number on it. At 6:00 or 5:30 you take that thing off, and then you roll it up, a pen mark[??], and your [inaudible], and then you got a little hole in there where you put your thing, and at 6:00 at night they'd let you put it back up. A lot of guys would—fell down and broke their teeth. After a while they wouldn't get up. They'd rather sleep on the bottom right down to the men[?]. And if you stepped on them, well.

Banda: If you slept on the floor then, you know, I mean.

[00:10:01]

Gomez: Yeah, that was—that was that. And then they—

Banda: Did you run into any people you knew or any Latinos?

Gomez: No. No, no, no, no.

Banda: Any other Gomez or Gonzalez or Lopez?

Gomez: No. One guy that was a—he was from Texas someplace, and when our ship got hit he got all burned, and they took him off.

Banda: Oh.

Gomez: Oh yeah, there was a couple of African—well, I don't know where the hell they came from. Where they picked them up, there was a Pilo[??] and another young guy. And we picked one up that was all off in the water. There was—what do you call it—were hit, and then on our way back we came to—oh, we picked up a quarter of Marines, and we came through the Panama Canal. We come to—we were stationed over at Louisiana there at the foot of Canal Street. To top it off, the first day I got there I had to go in, and being an officer I had to go on shore patrol.

Banda: Oh really?

[break in audio]

Gomez: We came into New Orleans, and then I was—being a [inaudible] they sent me out on shore patrol. And I was down there. I just got back and my mother comes down with my youngest—my youngest brother was there. I'm trying to find him. a hotel that—[inaudible]. Anyway, we got in, and how she did it, I—for a woman

that didn't know how to speak English, I don't know how she ever got to move around and find everything that she wanted to do. And then Red Cross got ahold of her or something. Then they sent me home with her for my leave. I hadn't been off the ship for all the time since I went out.

Banda: Wow.

Gomez: And after two weeks I guess they sent me a letter over there that I shouldn't go back there. The ship had already gone over to Norfolk, Virginia. So from here I went to Norfolk, Virginia. Norfolk, Virginia, we was there for short time. Oh, I didn't tell you about when we was in the Philippines we—our ship—there was so much blood in the water we got quarantined. We got what they call the dysentery. You know what dysentery is?

Banda: Yes.

Gomez: Anyway, the whole ship was what you call—a couple of guys died because there was the bleeding from behind.

Banda: Yeah, oh goodness.

Gomez: Yeah. Then you couldn't touch nothing. Everything had to be boiled. They had to be—

Banda: Oh my goodness.

Gomez: But then—

Banda: How many were on that ship?

Gomez: There was about a grand, a thousand people on that ship.

Banda: Oh, that's a lot of people.

Gomez: Over a hundred officers. The rest are—

Banda: You know, during these battles was anybody injured or killed on the—

Gomez: Oh yeah, there was always—there was always, what do you call, when the ship got hit I guess about a hundred of them died. That first week got hit twice the first time.

Banda: What did you—were you torpedoed or an airplane?

Gomez: No, planes come, they come down. They were kamikaze planes. They were the ones that come.

Banda: That crashed purposely into your—into the ship?

Gomez: Yeah, it just went—nothing left though[??] Matter of fact, I was carrying a piece of that plane that hit us. For a longtime it was I always carried around, and toward the end after my ma died, and my sisters got in there, everybody starts grabbing.

Banda: You lost it, yeah.

Gomez: Yeah, it got lost.

Banda: You lost it, yeah.

Gomez: It didn't get lost. It just got misplaced, and they didn't know what it was, so they probably just threw it out.

Banda: They threw it out, right, right.

Gomez: That's how we got that one.

Banda: Did you meet good friends there on the ship? Some good friends, close buddies?

Gomez: Well, I was in charge of—towards the end I was in charge of the shipfitter shop. So I got to be like a—like about the most I ever weighed 175 pounds. Anybody that want anything they'd come to me, and I'd let them have it, and then—and in return, you know, they bring me—I was eating nothing but steaks, a bunch of steaks and stuff. [laughs]. Ice cream that you never get. They brought me ice cream. And of course they were doing battles.

You know, you were always four on and four off. Four hours on, and then you get your four hours off, and that—that's—and a matter of fact, you get so that I'm used to it. [inaudible] stay awake that way. I wake up and [inaudible].

Banda: Four hours, four hours on and—but it looks like you were in five battles.

Gomez: Yeah, five major battles.

Banda: And kamikazes and everything else.

Gomez: Oh, and then you always had submarine alerts right along with that.

[00:15:00]

Out at sea you always get that stuff, you know. You just [makes siren sound] and then everybody runs out, and—

Banda: General quarters.

Gomez: Yeah, general quarters. On the whole I'm here. And then when I—from Norfolk they sent me over to the Great Lakes for a discharge. And I told them, Hey, I don't hear too good. You know what they did? Took a bunch of hot water and a big silver spoon[??] [makes noise]. But that somehow got never put it down on my discharge.

Banda: Okay, so never recorded.

Gomez: Never were recorded, and to this day I—and right after that, you know, you start—

Banda: Losing your hearing

Gomez: —losing more and more and more. And I told them. Well, they said, “It's not on your record.” I say, well, I can't tell you what to put on the record. There's no more or less than I could tell you. What's your record? I don't—you write whatever you think you want to write. And that's it.

Banda: So you got discharged what year then? Was it '46?

Gomez: I think it was in '40—'46 or '45. Right after the war.

Banda: Okay, right after the war.

Gomez: Because it's—I got out early because of the point system. It's always—for each one of those stars you got so much. So I had way more than enough to come out.

Banda: Yeah, every battle you get so many points, you know.

Gomez: Right, yeah. Yeah, we got way more than—

Banda: So you were in a lot of battles, or five, so that gave you a lot of points, so you could—

Gomez: Come out.

Banda: —rotate home. So then what did you do when you got out, when you got discharged? Did you go back to school or work, celebrate for a while?

Gomez: Well, I think that I—I think I needed to—I need a couple credits for what you call. So then I said to go get them, so—

Banda: For high school diploma?

Gomez: Yeah. And they said, well—actually, they said you could have it without it. My luck. [laughs] It was my luck. I got to do everything the hard way. That’s the problem.

Banda: You got your diploma?

Gomez: Yeah, I got the diploma. I think I still got that one upstairs someplace. And then I—

Banda: When did you start working? Where’s your first job after the service? After because you went to school.

Gomez: Oh, I couldn’t find no job. Nobody would hire me. I had—my ma had some friends from the old country. Maybe you heard of them, Juan Zarate[??].

Banda: Yeah, Zarates, yes.

Gomez: He’s a—he used to be the foreman in our—in the packing house, Armor’s packing house.

Banda: Armor’s, yes.

Gomez: Right down on 16th and Nevada.

Banda: Yes, 16th Street, right on.

Gomez: I couldn’t find a job, so he gave me a job. [laughs] He almost killed me. He put me in the coolers trying to skin calves. Cold, oh God, I think I only did four all day. By the time I got out I was skinning calves ten an hour. But I didn’t like it. I said I’m sheet mill worker. I like that. [inaudible] I went over to the union. I went, and then I told them I’m a sheet metal worker. I did—I’m’ a specialist. That’s what I was in the Navy, a specialist.

I did aluminum work, brass work, and anything in the line of—and they say, “Well, we’d like to hire you, but we got to go. We got to take seniorities.” He says, “According to seniority you can’t.” I said aw shit. I come back. And I said—I’m coming down walking, you know, thinking what the hell? Then I saw this [inaudible] Super Seals Sheet Metal Work. I thought, ah, what the hell. I stopped in there, talked to the guy, and the guy said, ‘Well, I don’t know.’ He says—he called somebody else. And I told—I told them don’t take my word. I said, well, I can do anything, any kind of welding that you have here at your shop.

That perked them up. They needed an aluminum welder. At that time that was a big thing, and not everybody could do that. They called in there, and the other guy—because I don’t think they believed me. And he said, “Take him into the shop.” Tell the guy move, let him do it. The guy said, “Okay, you’re hired.” I

said, "I can't." I just a union—just a—I can't work. "Come in tomorrow. I'll talk to the union." Talk to the union. The union said, No, you can't hire him. He says, "Well, then you send me somebody down here either today or tomorrow or he's hired." [laughs]

Banda: They didn't have anybody else, so they had to hire you.

Gomez: Yeah, that's what it was. That's how I got into that union. And then they kept me.

[00:19:59]

And like I say, talk is cheap. I got all kinds of letters. "You're part of the—part of this family." You this. And they gave me a bonus at Christmas and then, you know. The old man sold it. He sold it. Then the guy that bought it says—I was getting fifty cents over scale. He says, "We can't—we're not going to do that. We took on [inaudible]." I said, "No, you can't do that."

They said, "Yes, we can." He says, "The union says I don't have to pay you extra." Okay. I said, well, if you don't what you going—I'll quit. I quit. And I come over and work for Hoffman. Willie[??] Hoffman [inaudible] take it anymore, but I [laughs] but just [laughs]. And then he starts sending me out, and then he—he was a good old guy to me.

Banda: How long were you there at Hoffman and—

Gomez: I've been there now on and off. That's all I ever did after the war. I just worked for a different office. The last one I—and then I never was out of a job. All you had to do when the job was done, you go to the union. The union would ask you, well, we got this job. That job. They say what you want? What do you want? I go—I usually want—I go to the closest one. He says, "You're a journeyman?" Put down a journeyman. This is the journeyman scale. This is the top pay. Then that's—that was it.

And I—the last job I worked for was for Kumanick[??] over here on 43rd, and he's got that shop on 43rd and Burnham, I think. And then my wife's mother was always sick. And she couldn't handle her, you know.

Banda: So how did you meet your wife? Right after the service? Or did you—

Gomez: No, I met her—yeah, right after the service. Me and her brother were buddies. He was in the Army, and he—I was in the Navy. I had a real close buddy that was a German guy. He was in the Navy, but he always wanted to get—he wanted to get together, but he was always on the Atlantic side. And then, matter of fact, this—two years ago we was going to go Germany. You know, I was a kid, so I could speak halfway decent German. I always could speak a little bit, but not that good, you know. And then he died on me. We never went.

Banda: Never got to go. That's too bad.

Gomez: That's—

Banda: So you met your wife then right after the service and—

Gomez: Yeah, I met her in right after—

Banda: Where'd you meet her, here or in—

Gomez: Yeah, in Milwaukee. Yeah, now they on [inaudible]. They used to have a armory hall [??] where they had all that little Mexican festival across the street. They had a jail house. I don't remember if you remember that. Anyway they had a—right across from the Army they had the jail house. What you call—and they had that other one on 6th Street after we moved up on 6th Street. And they were always involved. And then—well theirs, that's how they got—that man was [foreign language]. They were always in Mexican what you call it. They always wanted to organize, have a little Mexican gathering for all the Mexicans. And they did.

Banda: Yeah, made the David Valdez Post. He's an Army—what was—

Gomez: He was one of the first ones that got killed. He got killed over in Austria or Hungaria. Whether his plane was shot down or something. And that's why it was named after him.

Banda: David Valdez Post. So that was formed right after the war then?

Gomez: Yeah.

Banda: And that was—but mostly Latinos, Mexicans joined that post, right?

Gomez: Yeah, yeah, we had a lot of Mexicans. We had over a hundred Mexicans.

Banda: They were all veterans that joined?

Gomez: Oh yeah, mostly all of them.

Banda: Navy, Army—

Gomez: I don't think I met anyone from the Navy in there.

Banda: Just yourself.

Gomez: There is one. [inaudible] Juan Toto[??] I think was in the Navy. I'm not sure. But he married a guera [blond, light-skinned woman], and then like I say, once you

marry into a different what you call it—even my own kids. I'm not [inaudible] that one. That's my third one. That's Danny. He was in the [United States Army] Air Corps.

Banda: Yeah, you said your sons were all in the service.

Gomez: Yeah. And her husband is a big shot in the Army, in the air corps.

Banda: Yeah, he stationed out in Virginia.

Gomez: And she was a lieutenant, and—

Banda: She was a lieutenant?

Gomez: Yeah.

Banda: Okay.

Gomez: So that's about it.

Banda: It runs in the family then.

Gomez: Yeah, it does.

Banda: Serving your country.

Gomez: I'm the only—I'm the only dummy, George. [laughter] They're all college people.

Banda: Well, that's good. I mean, you taught them well that they figured, hey, I got to get some education, you know, to move up.

Gomez: My best one, the one that graduated from the University of Mexico, he died right after, about two years after he came home. He got cancer [inaudible].

[00:25:04]

Banda: Oh wow.

Gomez: Yeah.

Banda: That's too bad. That's too bad with that. So what are the things about the service, what sticks out in your mind the most when you look back and you—

Gomez: Coming out, getting home. [laughter]

Banda: It's a good feeling, isn't it?

Gomez: I didn't have no [inaudible]. I always been treated like [inaudible].

Banda: You didn't want to stay in?

Gomez: No, I—matter of fact, they offered me a chief's job.

Banda: Oh really?

Gomez: This was after [inaudible] says coming up real fast. He says, "You're already"—a matter of fact, I say I still got some of my stripes up there. I got a uniform. I wear the uniform. [laughs]

Banda: We'd like to have—we'd like to use it. We'd like to use your uniform. Now what—so you didn't want to? You know, they offered you the job, to stay in?

Gomez: Well, they talk to you. They're trying to get you to stay, you know.

Banda: Yeah, they do.

Gomez: And they ask you where do you want to go? We'll send you wherever you want to go. No, I want to go home. [laughs]

Banda: You were done with the service.

Gomez: Yeah [inaudible].

Banda: Well, you were in a lot of battles, you know. And you never know if you're going to make it or not, you know. And they're bombing you, and you never know when a torpedo might come, and the planes were coming in kamikazes, and you know, you were thinking, Boy, that's an out.

Gomez: Half the people don't believe that. I don't care. Don't make no difference to me. I'm here.

Banda: Yeah, you made it. You made it. How old are you now, Charlie?

Gomez: Nine—I'll be 91 just on July 5.

Banda: Ninety-one July 5, so next month—

Gomez: Next month.

Banda: —you'll be 91. Well, good for you. Good for you.

Gomez: I'd like to go to Mexico, but they tell me that I got to a cousin that's 90, that's in his—92 [??]. My curiosity now is partway where we're from is the central part. You ever hear of Querétaro?

Banda: Mm-hmm.

Gomez: That's the most historical part in Mexico.

Banda: Oh.

Gomez: That's where Maximilian and Carlota and their friends sent all the troops down there. That's Querétaro. And—

Banda: You like to go down there and visit?

Gomez: I'd like to see my uncle, if I could, before he died, yeah. Anyway, so they're French, most of—so I got a grandmother that's French, and I got one that's Spanish on my dad—[laughs]

Banda: That's good. That's good.

Gomez: Plus the regular Indian, you know. And—

Banda: Right, the Indian mix in there, yeah.

Gomez: The Spanish woman was the crazy one. She [laughs] did all that [inaudible] and drinking. But the French one was very quiet. Matter of fact, I brought her here, and she died here. She—frankly, all my family buried over at Holy Cross except me and my wife. We're [inaudible]. Did I tell you how it happened? One of my daughter-in-laws, she was selling plots, and we go in there to help her out.

Banda: Sure. She's selling them. You're—

Gomez: It never, never dawned on me that—about us dying, you know. [laughs] We don't—otherwise I would have told her, well, hell, no, I'll give you some money or something, but I won't—anyway, that's what my wife is over here on Howard [inaudible].

Banda: In Howard? St. Adalbert [??]?

Gomez: No, no it was—yeah, it's right on—right off of Howard up where that school is. The worst part of it I was thinking of taking it off, but now I went over there, and guess what? There's a stone on there with my name on it and everything. [laughter] I said Jesus Christ, how did all this happen? Oh well.

Banda: Yeah, somebody put your name down there now. But you were in the Navy, and I—

Gomez: Yeah, I was in the Navy.

Banda: —I'm glad I got a chance to talk to you and interview you because most of the people I've interviewed have been Army or Marines or Air Force, and now [inaudible] I got a chance to talk to you.

Gomez: [inaudible] use that if you wanted to use it.

Banda: I'd like to do that, absolutely yeah.

Gomez: As long as it doesn't get—now, that's the original. That's still there, yeah.

Banda: That looks like it, yeah.

Gomez: That's the original.

Banda: Absolutely. And maybe I also like to take a look at your uniform. You said you have your Navy [inaudible]—

Gomez: Oh yeah.

Banda: —with your stripes.

Gomez: Just [inaudible].

Banda: What about your ribbons? You got your ribbons on your uniform too, do you remember?

Gomez: No, I think there might be. I don't even know. I got some of that, some in the drawer there with all the what you call its. I don't know.

Banda: Yeah, right. Ah, they don't want to wear it. You only act foolish because they'll say—they'll ask you—even at the flight over here, they ask me where the hell I get them. I don't know, I say. I guess they give them to me, but if you want them you can have them.

[00:30:00]

What I want with them? You want them you can have them.

Banda: So you went on that honor flight then?

Gomez: Yeah.

Banda: You know, they took you down to the World War II memorial in Washington DC?

Gomez: Yeah.

Banda: When did you go then? Last year?

Gomez: It was just about a year and a half ago.

Banda: Year and a half ago?

Gomez: Yeah.

Banda: It's a one-day thing, isn't it? You board in the morning. You go in.

Gomez: Yeah, it's a one-day. It's way too much. It's way too much. You have escorts to go everywhere, but you can't see everything.

Banda: No.

Gomez: Like you said in winter[??] I didn't see that. There were—this last war here, they didn't take us to that one either because it was too much time.

Banda: Yeah, you only have so much time. And it's—they take you there. You see that.

Gomez: [inaudible] be able to see all that.

Banda: And then they bring you back.

Gomez: But she's here all the time now, and I guess it was last time I heard there was a captain. I don't know.

Banda: Okay, okay. So yeah, you were on your ship, the USS *Mississippi* and in the Pacific.

Gomez: Take a [inaudible]. Find out what happened to it.

Banda: I'll find out.

Gomez: I think it's—last time I think they said they scrapped it.

Banda: Okay. I'll find out. I'll go on the computer and see what I can find of it. Again—

Gomez: I'm pretty sure that even if it's a abandoned[??] ship it's still—somebody should have some kind of record.

Banda: Yeah, I'm sure there's a record of—

Gomez: Because, like I say on this honor flight, I told them, I wanted a hat with the USS *Mississippi* on it. As long as I'm out here I might as well get one. It didn't happen. They said no, there isn't such a thing. Okay.

Banda: Right.

[End of OH1723.Gomez_tape1_A_access.mp3][End of Interview]