

WILBUR WRIGHT

Amthor: This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri in the 1940s* program. The Nodaway County Historical Society Museum is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council, and with support from the National Endowment of the Humanities. Today is April 3, 2009, and we are at the Fairfax School, in Fairfax, Missouri, in Atchison County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor, and assisting is Margaret Kelley. We're here to interview Wilbur Wright. He was born on December 29, 1919. He served in the Navy during World War II and was at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked. His highest rank was First Class Boatswain mate. He's going to tell us about what happened at Pearl Harbor and he got into the Navy and he's just going to tell us his story.

Wright: Thank you.

I want to thank everyone that came here today to hear about Pearl Harbor. I appreciate it and I feel honored to be able to come here to you and tell you about what happened during Pearl Harbor.

I graduated May 10, 1938 and the very next day I was enlisted in the Navy. I had three examinations before I ever got to San Diego; one in St. Joe, one in Kansas City, and then one in San Diego. I had three physical examinations before I ever got into the train station. I was in training for three months, and after the three months was over, we were given fifteen days leave before we were assigned to a ship. When we had our fifteen days leave and came back into San Diego, why I was assigned to the U.S. Naval Mine force in Hawaii. I went up to San Francisco and got on the U.S.S. Brazos, and I went to Hawaii.

I arrived in Hawaii in September of 1938. During that time, when at Pearl Harbor, there were only eight ships in Pearl Harbor at that time. It was all the mine force. We had four destroyers, fast mine layers, and we had four mine sweeps, and then we were the flag ship of the – we called the Pineapple Fleet at that time. I spent from that time in 1938 to 1942 in Hawaii and we were the only ships in the Pearl Harbor up until 1939. In 1939 Roosevelt sent out to Hawaii what they called the Hawaiian detachment and in that detachment, there were some battleships and heavy cruisers and light cruisers and destroyers. I think there were one or two aircraft carriers at that time. Then as time went by and Japan was showing a lot of aggressiveness down in through the [West Indies {sic}] and down into China, why Roosevelt sent out the whole Pacific fleet. At that time there were more carriers, more supply ships, and battleships all came out. Now you can see all – this is all destroyers here; these are destroyers, and these are tenders that take care of destroyers.

Here's a battleship and some support ships. These are all battleships in here and here we are right here; this is the ship I was on and then this is the Navy yard where they work on ships and this is the dry dock. This is the *Pennsylvania* and the *Caisson* and *Downes* in the dry dock. Now the Admiral of the fleet, Kimmel, was on this ship here. He was not aboard the ship December the 7th. He was out playing golf, and the same way with the General in the Army. They were playing golf. So they weren't there when the attack happened. But anyway, coming up to that time – before that time, why when we were the only ships in the harbor, why our mine force we

would go to Midway Island. That's where the big battle was in 1942 when the United States sank all four carriers of the Japanese. We would go out there once or twice every year and we'd take supplies out there and we went to Johnston and Palmyra Islands. There were islands out in the Pacific next to the Midway Island. We spent most of the time there before the war on drills. Every time we'd go to sea we'd have a fire drill, collision drill, man overboard, and all kinds of different drills. You had a particular, specific job to do at those drills, and you trained to do that. That's why they were all – when something happens on the ship, they are very efficient, because they train for that every day. That brings us up to about the time of November of 1941.

The *Oglala* was sent back to Mare Island, California, to get a load of mines and we left and went back to Mare Island, California, and we got a load of mines. Now a mine is about that big around, and they are full of TNT, so we loaded about 400 of those mines on our ship. On our ship we had four doors in the back, and they had big tracks all the way the length of the ship, and those mines laid on there, and then you just dropped them off the back of the ship. We returned back into Hawaii December 5, 1941 and all the Pacific Fleet was in the harbor at that time. When we came in, we docked right up here; that's us right here right now. We docked there and this was on – we came in on Friday; that'd be December 5 and December 6, on a Saturday, they ordered us to take and go over here to this island here and here, and we had to unload all of those mines and it was a good thing we did, because if we'd had those on there on December 7 and got hit, we'd had a terrible explosion; probably kill everybody on the ship. But anyway, they were off and we came back we docked right back here on December 6. Well, the *Pennsylvania* – that's the *Pennsylvania* right here, the *Caissons* and *Downes*, this is in the dry dock. They were supposed to come out of the dry dock and dock right here; we were supposed to move back here on Tin Tin Dock. Well, the *Caissons* and the *Downes* did not have the anti-fouling paint on, so they couldn't flood the dry dock, and so we stayed there on December – we were there December 7, that morning.

Now, I'd like to have you turn to number 1, if you can, and I'll show you the beginning of the attack. Have you got that number one? Most of you? Now what I want to show you on this, if I can, I don't know whether all of you have got that or not, this picture is made by the Japanese. They took this picture. Here is the harbor, just like I was showing you; here's all the battleships here, here we are right here. You can see where the Japanese torpedo attack just started; here a torpedo hit here, a torpedo hit here, here's one here. Here is a streak, see, going into the battleships? None of us have been hit yet. Here we are right there. We've already been hit by a torpedo, so we were the first ship in Pearl Harbor to hit. That torpedo came right across right here. I'll tell you about that – what happened.

Now that morning, I had the duty, and I'd taken the men and I told them to come up on – get up on the forecastle of the ship and to clean it up because it was Sunday morning, and if they didn't cleaned it up and get it in ship-shape, the First Lieutenant would come around and if things weren't in ship order, he'd make them work all day. So I told them to get up there and get everything cleaned up, so when he came around, they could have the day off, they could sleep, or play cards, or whatever they wanted to do. They got up there and got up early and on that picture I'm sitting right on the outside of *Oglala* here, they got a big boom there and I was sitting there watching the guys work.

The whole sky was full of airplanes – up high and I was watching them, and I thought they were our planes, because, in the past, whenever a carrier would come into Pearl Harbor, why they would launch their airplanes, far out at sea, and they would fly in and then they would attack the harbor, strafe it and practice, a practice run just like it would be in war. So that's what I thought that our carrier was doing. Well, when the planes came in, the first things that came in were the dive bombers and they came in, and they came in right here, and they dropped their bombs right here.

Well, the first bomb fell – it hit the water out here and a big splash came up and I thought – there's two or three guys there and I said, "Gee, they must be dropping sand bags," because of there's a big splash, and we were watching and pretty soon here came another one, right down behind and he dropped into the water right there. I said, "Gosh, they're going to hit somebody and hurt them if they don't quit that." About that time, the third one came down, and he hit the PBY's right here; the PBY is a patrol bomber and they were great big. They'd get out here, they'd go on the water and take off, and then when they'd come in, they'd land and come back here and go on Ford Island here. Well, that third bomb, when it hit, it hit right in- they were loading the planes with high-octane gas – a terrible, terrible explosion – it killed everybody that was in that area then. So then I noticed it was a Japanese ball, so I ran over to the deck where the opening down into our first division and I hollered that the Japanese were attacking Pearl Harbor; everybody, General Quarters.

Well, they must have – my voice must have warned them because of the way I said it, because they all came out and on our ship, we have a three inch, 50 caliber gun, on the forecastle and it was my job to run that gun. It had a pointer, and a – I can't think of the other one right now, but anyway, it takes six men to run that gun. So we took the cover – started taking the cover off and swinging the gun around because there were more ships coming in here. When we started taking that off, this airplane – the torpedo bomber came right through here – and he dropped his torpedo right there and you could see the torpedo – the motor starting and everything – and he came right at us.

We were all on top of the gun, trying to get it ready and I turned to them and said, "Hang on, because it's really going to jar us." The torpedo went underneath us, because we had just unloaded our mines the day before, and our displacement wasn't as much, as if all that weight, down in the water. The torpedo went underneath us, and went and hit the *Helena* here, why it blew a hole- the concussion blew a hole in our ship, over on the port side. Well, our ship was an old ship; our ship had laid mines in the North Sea back in 1919, so we were an old ship. All these other ships are pretty new; they've got water tight compartments, but we didn't have that. So we began to take water very fast and our ship began to list, so we undocked from the *Helena* here, and a yard tug came by and they picked us up and took us back here, where we capsized.

Now there is a picture of the *Oglala* on page twelve; on page twelve – some of you may have that, and some of you may not. There are four of us standing there on that, and one of those four is myself. Years later, not years, but oh, I imagine ten or twelve months, when they got the other ships up, why they raised the *Oglala* and I went and asked them if I could go aboard my ship when they raised it, and they told me I could. I went down to my locker and I got my class rings, and I got some money out of my locker, so the money I've got – I've got a keepsake now, but it

was money that was in my locker at that time. It wasn't very much, because I wasn't making very much money in those days. I only had a couple quarters, and a couple nickels, and some pennies, and my class rings were in there, but I received all those and we keep those now as keepsakes.

When after our ship had been brought back into Tin Tin Dock here, why we didn't have any place to go, so we went across the *Helena* and came down on Tin Tin Dock, and we stood there while the attack was going on. Now in the Navy you have – everyone has a certain duty – all the drills that you have, you have one special duty, and it is your job to take care of that, so with our ship being sunk, we couldn't do anything. We couldn't help the *Helena* out, or any other ships, because we wouldn't know what to do because we weren't – we didn't have a duty assignment on that particular ship. As we were standing back there and they brought the *Oglala* back there and it capsized there, then the war was in full swing.

While I've got this here, if you'll go to 2 or 2A, that will show the *Arizona*. I'll explain what happened. The *Arizona* is right here; here it is right here – here's where the *Arizona* is sitting. Now the picture you'll see will be that ship right there. That ship wasn't hit by torpedo, it was hit by a high level bomber had dropped a bomb on it. This bomb that they dropped was an armor-piercing bomb, and it went completely through, and went into the magazine on the *Arizona*. When that ship blew up, it killed over a thousand men as quick as you can click your finger; that's how fast they died. They never knew there was a war, or never knew what happened.

Now the *Arizona* - here it is right here – and it is still there today; I think you folks were just out there just last year. Those people that were all killed on that ship is right at a thousand persons. They tried to go down; they sent drivers down, they were going to try to recover the bodies, but they were in such bad shape that they decided that they would leave them where they were and to make that a tomb for them. Now today, anyone that's a survivor off of the *Arizona* and was on it that day, and they survived it, or if they were ashore at that time, they can request that they be buried back on the ship with their shipmates and a lot of them are doing that. What they did do, they request the Navy, and the Navy will embalm them and encase them, and they will take a diver and take their body and put it back on that ship. There was such a bond between the people on the ships, just like on our ship, that they want to be entombed with those people for eternity. It's very touching when you see that, or hear that.

Now, let's see what I've got here. Have you got page seven? Can you go to where it says March 7? Now maybe all of you don't have that, but most of you do. That will be the *Oklahoma*. The *Oklahoma* is a battleship. The *Oklahoma* capsized so fast, that the people didn't get out. Most of them were still in their bunks, sleeping, and they hadn't even gotten up for breakfast. They'd been out on Honolulu the night before, and they were probably tired, so they were sleeping in on Sunday morning. It's the only morning you can sleep in. When it capsized, they were caught in the bowels of the ship and when something like that happens, and they have a torpedo hit them, the first thing they do, they close all the hatches on all the compartments down below, on that ship so that it won't take on any water. They are all electric, so when this happened, the people in all those compartments, they shut all those doors, and there is no way they could get out; it entombed them in the *Oklahoma*.

The next day and for the next week or two weeks, you could hear the people down in that ship, beating on the side to try to let people on the outside know that they were entombed down there in that ship. Well, I had a friend on the *Oglala* who was a diver, and his name was Festus; and he went over and they dove and they dove to try to save those people. They took – at first they took torches and they tried to cut through all the armor into those compartments, but they found out that the fumes in the thing was poisoning them and gassing them and killing them before, they could ever get to them. So they had to quit that, and then they took air hammers and they tried to cut and they did get down and they saved some, but you can imagine how many was lost down in the *Oklahoma*, and what a horrible death that was to be down there in complete darkness, no air, and never know what ever happened, because they didn't know what was going on.

Now, the *Oklahoma* – you've got a picture of where it's on its side there, and they did turn it over, it's the only time in the world that they have ever been able to turn over a battleship. It was in the papers about the salvage officer. The salvage officer that was in charge of all the ships that were hurt that day was the Admiral off our ship, he was Admiral Furlong, he was a nice person and I knew him real well, and he did all the salvage of all these ships during that time. It was amazing. There was quite a write up about him. Now the *Oklahoma*, when they got it up, they just – they didn't know what to do, it was damaged so bad, they didn't know whether they could reclaim it, and refurbish it, and make it like it used to be. So they decided they checked it real closely and they found out it was too much – they could build a new one better than they could do that one, so they decided to sell the *Oklahoma* back at Mare Island to a salvage group, and they bought it and they begin to tow the *Oklahoma* back to the United States. They got five hundred miles on the way back to the United States, and they lost it in heavy seas, so it's out there in the water, five hundred miles north of Oahu.

The next ship there; can you go to number eight? That's the *Saul* (?) – can you see that; the *Saul* and the *Nevada*. This is *Nevada*, right here; that's a battleship. That battleship was the only battleship that got underway that day. Now when they got underway, it came out and it started to go out through here; when they got down right along where I'm standing, why the Japanese attacked it. They saw that it was trying to get out to sea and they hit it with dive bombers and torpedoes, and it was really heart wrenching to see them hit that ship right in this area here. Well, it was hit so bad that they knew it was going to sink. The Japanese, what they were trying to do, was sink this big battleship right here in this harbor, and block it from anyone coming in or going out with this big battleship laying in the water there. So when they got about right here, this is what they call Hospital Point; there's a hospital right here – Navy hospital. They took this *Nevada* and they rammed it right into the beach right there, and it sat there for about six months until they could reservice it and work on her and get it back in service. But that's what happened to the *Nevada*.

Now you'll see a picture in there also, a terrible explosion. That explosion is right here and that explosion is the *Saul*. That's this right here. That was probably as big as the *Arizona*. I always thought it was, because I was standing right here when that blew up and the heat and the pressure from that would almost blew you over. That's how powerful it was. It was powerful, but you can see how big an explosion it was. Now on that ship, from the bridge to the forward, it blew it

completely off; it blew the whole front end off of that ship. Everyone on there was killed. They went and put that in dry dock after these ships got out and they patched it up, and there wasn't anything in front of that ship; it shows it going to sea in one of those pictures, and when it got to Merrill Island, back in California, they already had the whole front end made, and they welded that to that ship, and within a few weeks, it was back out in the Pacific, going in the South Pacific. It was amazing what they did.

You see the *West Virginia*. The *West Virginia* was right here. The *West Virginia* - I think I've got that on page eleven; let's see; no, page ten. Page ten - the *West Virginia*. The *West Virginia*. It didn't capsize, it just settled; they shut the water tight doors on it and the ship just went right straight down, just sat on the floor of Pearl Harbor. On that ship, there was so much fire, and all was burned, that the sailors just jumped out in that burning oil and that fire and they tried to go under and swim out into the Pearl Harbor to get away from getting burned up or just completely losing their consciousness or their air or anything. That picture was right here on the *West Virginia* and that was real bad. There it shows on the *West Virginia* - it shows a guy in a motor launch going alongside there picking up a guy. I got to tell you something kind of funny but it's not really funny. I was somewhere in Texas, or out in Hawaii, and I was looking at that picture, and he says, "See that picture right there, that guy?" And I said, "Yeah," and he said, "That's me." I talked to him and visited with him and talked to him and it was alright and then about a year later, I saw another guy he said, "That's me down there." So two of them were saying each one of them was there. Now what happened there, there was a lot that day in the water, in that fire, and that oil; a lot of them died, and they would - probably were both probably in the water but they thought that was them. It could have been one or the other but they were both - I believe both of them, but they didn't know which one was which.

Now let's go to twelve - I don't think all of you got twelve. That's the *Oglala*. That's the ship I was on. I went back that day, when our ship was sunk back there; capsized. I went back and I just stayed there all during the attack, because we didn't have - we couldn't go anywhere, didn't have any duty, so we just stood there and watched everything. It shows a picture there, there is an old kind of a little stanchion there. When the war started, why we had no place to sleep, no place to eat, and we slept on the cement there for two days and two nights, and to get something to eat, why we would just go wherever we could find somebody serving food, and they'd feed us. That's the way it was during that time.

I might bring up one thing of it: when this happened, the governor, his name was Pendergrass, [possibly Poindexter] of Hawaii, he declared martial law. Now I don't know if you know what martial law is or not, but he commands everything. You couldn't do - you didn't have the freedom to do the things that you ordinarily do. It was all restricted during all the time during the war, you couldn't have any lights at nighttime, you couldn't be out at night; you had to have no lights showing in your home or anywhere; total darkness. All the cars had their hood lights in the front all blacked out, and they had a shield over them. The opening on that was only about that big - your lights - and you could only see out about ten feet in front of your car. You weren't allowed to be out at night unless it was an emergency and then if you went out, you couldn't tell if there was a car up there at twenty feet. It was just right there real close. You went real close. It was that way all the time during the war. We worked twenty four hours a day at the - they never shut down. They had three shifts in Pearl Harbor all that time, and they

would work eight hours, eight hours, eight hours, and they worked around the clock, and they did that all the time while these ships were all being backed into commission.

That morning, oh, about ten o'clock or so, a Japanese submarine had come in the harbor behind one of our ships, and came in here and I think at one time it got up here and shot some torpedoes in here because it shows – I've seen where it shows maybe a submarine there. That submarine came back and came right over here. Now about ten o'clock that morning an airplane came off of Ford Island and I was standing right over there and I watched that plane and it went up in the air. It came right up there in the air, and it just did a flip-flop, and came right back and went down on this Ford Island tarp there. I thought "That's funny; I've never seen an airplane do that." Then the sirens went off. During that time, there were two sirens in Pearl Harbor: one was an intermittent siren and it goes "zoop, [pause] zoop, [pause] zoop," like that. The other one was a wailing siren. Now the intermittent means that you *could not* move. Where ever you were, you had to stay because if you moved, you could have got shot. Now the other one means that there were high level bombers and you could take shelter.

So I just happened to be standing right there on the dock; there were four of us standing there, and that plane that came back – after it came back, why here's a captain's boat launch; it came right down here to Tin tin Dock, right where we were, and it pulled up there and a black car came up – a Ford, four door, and it had some Marines in it. They had gotten in the car. Now, the *Monaghan*, that's the destroyer right here; it got underway and it came around here, going real fast, and I was standing there watching and I thought, "Gee, he's not going to make that corner because he's going too fast." In a harbor there's not all that much room in there. We were watching him, and when he came around here, why he dropped two depth charges, and the water splashed up there and that's pretty shallow right in there.

When those went off, it lifted the rear of that destroyer right out of the water. That submarine was – it just came up like a cork. It came right out of the water and just floated on top. Well, these two Marines got in this here motor launch, and they went over there and we stood there and watched them, and pretty soon they came back, they came right there as close as that table there to me, and they had these two Japanese submariners with them. They had a great big hood over their head, and tied around here; their hands were tied behind them, and when they got to that dock over there – that dock is probably oh, eight feet above the water – they just took those guys and just flipped them up on that dock and got a hold of them and put them in the car and off they went.

Now to this day, the United States never admitted that. They have never admitted that they captured two people – two Japanese guys – they never did do it. So the only thing that I can surmise is that at that time, the tension was real high after all this destruction that day, because just to be real frank, if I could have gotten my hands on them, I'd have killed them myself after what happened that day. They took those two and I imagine the Navy interrogated them and got all the information they could out of them, and then did away with them. I have to believe that, because never has word been said about it, and the United States will not admit it, that that happened, and I've talked to people, and a long time – for years they never would admit that that submarine was in Pearl Harbor. Now they have admitted it, and they've talked about it, but they say that these two guys got off and they escaped over here at Aiea. They captured one of them,

and one of them got drowned. Now the one that they sunk out here, that beached themselves, they didn't get in the harbor. Now one of those did get to shore and the other one drowned, but here, they got both of those guys, but the government has never admitted that. I've talked to them, and they won't even talk to me about it.

Let's see. Has anybody got any questions? This is a submarine base here. They didn't get hit at all. This here is all the repair docks here. This is a dry dock and here is where the *Shaw* [destroyer] blew up. Do you know of anything else I need to tell everyone?

Unknown: Why don't you tell them about Gene's brother?

Wright: Oh, yes. I got Gene Carter, here today. He had two brothers at Pearl Harbor. Now they don't list his ship; he was on the *Medusa*. Now *Medusa* is a very important ship; it's a big ship and it repairs and takes supplies to this whole fleet when they're out at sea, and they go with them and do a lot of work for them that they can't perform themselves. Now the *Medusa* and the *Ward* was outside of here. Now you've probably all have heard of that Japanese submarine that was sunk that morning. The *Medusa* and the *Ward* were the ones that were in that one where they sunk that sub. They sunk that sub – it must have been around five thirty or six o'clock in the morning and they reported it and the Naval brass, the people in charge, they more or less thought it was just one of our subs. And didn't do anything about it. Now if they'd done something about it, we would have been ready for them when they came in and they wouldn't have been able to cause the damage that they did. That's where Gene's brother was, was right on the outside here. Now he's not on here, because they only list here what was in the harbor, but they should have listed his ship because it was in the Pearl Harbor attack.

Joni: Did you mention the pilot? The Japanese pilot?

Wright: Oh, yes. When I got off the ship; when I got off our ship right here, and I went down on Tin tin dock, and stood right there, why after they dropped the torpedoes, I went down there and here came an airplane; right through here, and it was only about the height of a telephone pole. There were about four of us there just talking, real close, we were probably within two feet of each other and we were talking about things, and this plane opened fire on us right there. Well, the bullets missed us about as far from here to that chair right there; just splattered us, and I thought everyone of us were going to get killed. They guy in the second seat of that airplane – he was on the machine gun; they weren't more than about a telephone pole high and you could see his eyes just as close as I can see your eyes. He turned that machine gun on us and I thought, "Boy, that's it. We're going to die right now." But that gun never went off. He never pulled that trigger and he never fired that gun. I've often wondered why he didn't kill us right that morning.

This guy's name is Fujita and he was the leader of that attack on Pearl Harbor that day. He gave all the orders. Now he came back to the United States three or four times in the last two or three years. That's been some years ago, not just the last few. He always came to the west coast, or over on the east coast. I never did get to talk to him, because I wanted to talk to him and ask him if he remembered that, and I wanted to know why that guy in the second seat never fired those machine guns, but I never did get to see him, because he died. Here's the thing that I thought was kind of different. Before he died, he denounced his religion and he became a Christian. Isn't

that something? And one of the reasons why he became a Christian, it was said that he thought that our God was more powerful than his god, because our God defeated his god. That's what he said.

Now I think that pretty well – my time's up, and I tried to cover as much as I could, and I hope you got something out of that. If any of you want to join the Navy, I've got an application for you. Anybody want to go? Oh, there's a guy that'll go.

Unknown: I was thinking of it.

Wright: Good. That would be a good thing.

Amthor: I've got one last question for you before you finish up. If you could compare the war that you fought in and the war today, what would you say about that: the differences?

Wright: Well, the difference it's not – what the terrible thing about the war today is that you don't know who your enemy are, see? The guy that may be standing next to you looks fine, you're talking to him; he's liable to blow you up. In that day, we knew who our enemy was, and there wasn't any doubt about it. To me that's the difference. Today you don't know who you're fighting, in Afghanistan or in Iraq or any of those places; Pakistan, because those people are not in a unit, they are all individuals and they blow up things and you can't tell them one from another person. That's the difference, I think. It's a bad war. I'd rather be in this war than what they're fighting today. It's not fair.

Amthor: How long did you stay in the service? When did you leave?

Wright: When I was in Hawaii, I was there six years and one month – no leave. I never got back to United States for anything. I never got to go home or anything. And one day I went over to the Administration Building. The Administration Building is right up in here; right up in here. I went over there and the Admiral that was running that, Furlong, - I went in there and I talked to him and he asked me, "What would you like?" and I told him I said "I'd like to go home. I haven't been home for six years and I'd like to see my Dad and Mom." He turned around his aid and he said, "That guy is going back now!" He said, "What have you got in the harbor? As escort back to the states?" He said, "Well, we've got a ship by the name *Fontaine*," it was a French ship, and it's over here at the submarine base. He said, "You get on there, [and that was in the afternoon.] You be on that ship at eight o'clock in the morning, because you're going home." I said, "Hell, I can't get ready." He said, "I'm going to get everything for you. I'll have your stuff on that ship. All you have to do is be on there at eight o'clock and you're going back to the states." So I got on that ship the next morning, and by noon I was out to sea going home; that quick. That happens when you know somebody personally, and they know about you.

When I got back to the States, I went up for assignment, and they sent me to Olathe, Kansas, Naval Air Station, and I was head of the security department at Olathe, Kansas. I had the main gate, I had the whole base, and I had the jail, and I had it all – everything was under me. Some things happened there that has always bothered me.

One guy was flying in from Arizona during the war, and he was going on emergency leave, like their mother or dad had died, or was sick or something, and he was going back. They got into Arizona, and they all got off the airplane to run and get something to eat or drink, and when he did, the guy in front of him – his billfold come out, and he had about 500 dollars in that billfold that just dropped out and he kept going into that place to have something -refreshments; the guy by the name that was behind him was named Boback and he saw it and he picked it up real quick and stuck it in his pocket, because he didn't have any money; he was poor. He didn't have any money to go back; he was on emergency leave, too.

Well, they radioed in to Olathe and they said they want that plane checked, because someone has stolen the money that this guy had. It was my job to do that, so I met the airplane, and I had about three or four guys that would take care of all them, put them in a room, just like this, and made them sit in chair all the way around like that; all the way around the room. A guy by the name of Stores that worked for me; he and I went aboard the plane, and we searched that plane. Well, when we got into the men's toilet room, we found the billfold that guy had picked up and taken the money out of. So we didn't say anything to anybody, we just took it and we that completed our check on that airplane because we found that billfold.

Come back over to where we had all these people; it was a room about half this size, but it had chairs all the way around it. I had everyone sit in that chair and face me then I had a guard on this side so nobody could do anything. This guy just happened to be the first guy and I got him up and I said, "Take off your clothes. We're going to have to search you completely. There can't be any feel – I have to have everything off of you." So we undressed everything and had everything off, and I said, "Take off your shoes." He said, "I can't take off my shoes." I said, "Well, why?" He said, "Well, I've had jungle rot and they're swollen." I said, "No, you're going to have to take them off." He wouldn't take them off. So I grabbed his foot, and just pulled it off, and there was the five hundred dollars. It made me sick that I had to be part of catching him. Well, my job was that I had to take him to Great Lakes for a general court martial. So I went up on a train with him handcuffed. I took him up there and he got a general court martial. That's the worst thing you can get in the Navy. That's the penitentiary for life or death, see? That's always bothered me.

That night I came back from Great Lakes into Olathe, Kansas, and I can't say too much for the Navy flyers, because they take too many chances; and there was a terrible storm when we left Chicago. You could see the big flashes down in the Midwest, and that raining! You could just see the lightening and everything and I thought, "Boy, he's got to drive into that." So we flew right into Olathe and he cut his motor and he went down, and boy, I was the only guy that had his seatbelt on; everybody else was pretty easy, but I wasn't relaxed. We got in there, and all of a sudden he has his engine cutting, and all of a sudden, the plane came up like that, and I sat on this side, and right underneath that, there was a conning tower. He was headed right for it. Well, I have to admit I made a couple of prayers: "God, let me on the ground, I'd never get in an airplane again." Well, I've gone in an airplane again; I've kind of got over that. But anyway, we made a big circle, and they came back and he hit the runway that second time. I'll never forget that.

I think that concludes that if everybody's getting sleepy, I think.

Amthor: Well, one more question about the atomic bomb. How did you feel about that? Did you agree with Truman?

Wright: Yes, I did. You can't imagine how many casualties we'd had if we would have invaded Japan. It is unbelievable. We'd have probably lost, and just probably seems unreal to you, but I would say we'd lose close to a million people. There was nobody that fought like the Japanese. You couldn't take them alive. They fought for death. They wouldn't be taken – if they were taken alive, they were shamed, and their family would shame them, the whole government would shame them. So they had to fight to the death, and that's the way they were in the Pacific. It was terrible. I feel sorry for all the Army and the Marines that had to take those islands. It was terrible. And the people – the atrocities that they committed was unheard of! Unheard of! What they did to our – I wish I could tell this crowd some of the things that they did to our men, but I can't. That's all. Thank you.

Amthor: Thank you for. . . .

[Applause]