

Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series

Henry Ahola Interview

Conducted by James Newberry

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Transcribed by Christopher Ford

Born in Massachusetts in 1925, Henry Ahola was the son of Finnish immigrants. He volunteered to serve in the Army Air Corps during World War II and after completing a communications training program, he shipped out to Guam. There, he worked in a telephone office circulating messages among individual companies stationed throughout the Pacific. Ahola recorded his oral history interview at Kennesaw State University in March 2017.

Full Transcript

Interviewer: This is James Newberry and I'm here with Henry Ahola on Thursday March 23rd, 2017 at the Sturgis Library at Kennesaw State University. And Mr. Ahola do you agree to this interview?

Henry: Yes. I do agree. Yes.

Interviewer: Well, thank you for sitting down with me. Could you tell me your full name?

Henry: Uh, Yes. It's Henry Edwin Ahola.

Interviewer: And what's your birthday?

Henry: May 11th, 1925.

Interviewer: Okay and Mr. Ahola where were you born?

Henry: I was born in West Wareham, Massachusetts.

Interviewer: Okay. Now your parents were originally from Finland.

Henry: That's correct yes.

Interviewer: So, I want to sort of talk about how your father first came here and then later your mother came. Can you explain that?

Henry: Yes. My father had some brothers came here before him. So, it was just before World War I and uhm they were gonna have taken people into the military there and he was about 17 or so and he decided to come here to be with his brothers. So, he did. And uh he started—they were carpenters, and he was a paint—he decided to be a painter, so they did a lot of construction work building homes and he did the painting. And he went back to Finland in 19 [pausing to think] 21 and met my mother. And she came back with him and they were... they were married then.

Interviewer: And where were they living at that point?

Henry: They were living in Massachusetts.

Interviewer: Okay.

Henry: With the cape. Down by Hyannis Port which is where the Kennedy's have their place at the beginning of the cape.

Interviewer: So, when he went back to Finland and met your mother can you describe how they met? Do you know?

Henry: Uhm... They were both members of the Lutheran Church. In fact, nearly all of the Scandinavian area tends to be Lutheran. And they met at the church and uh I guess they just went from there. Meeting at the church.

Interviewer: Well did he go back with this sort of purpose of finding a wife?

Henry: I would sort of think so, yes. I'd say yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Henry: I'm not certain but I feel that was his idea because he was... he was in his early twenties then.

Interviewer: So, what do you know about your parents' early lives in Finland? Where did they live? Where did they grow up?

Henry: My mother lived in a small town about 50 miles from Helsinki, which is the capital of the country, and my father lived in uh East of there near the Russian border which is not too far from St. Petersburg. They had a big farm and there were four boys in the family, and I believe three girls. So uhm, he was uhm, the third of the boys and the two older boys had already come to United States and that's why he followed them here later.

Interviewer: So, can you tell me about your parents sort of: They're married. They're both living in the United States in Massachusetts. And uhm, how did they get by? Did they make a comfortable living?

Henry: Oh yes, yeah. He was uh, the two older brothers worked with a big construction company and they were building homes all up in the around the Cape Cod area of Massachusetts, which is East of Boston towards Provincetown's way, and he worked with them as a painter for many many years. And uh, mother stayed at home with... well they were married two years when my oldest sister was born and then uh uhm two years later I was born and my mother she did some sewing for people she liked to sew a lot. So, people did a lot of sewing at home in those days. So, she sewed a lot of clothes for me and for my sister and people liked it so well that people asked her if she would sew clothes for their children and they were, and I don't know if it was cheaper from there or from the store, but there were probably made better. So, she did well, and my father was painting so we made just average living. We had a pickup truck. We had an average house, but we weren't well-to-do, but we were the average income in the Northeast.

Interviewer: And can you describe the neighborhood that you lived in?

Henry: Oh yes. The neighborhood was uh, all but one-third of the people were of Finnish background, and the rest were. English. A real... A lot of them were ancestors of some of the original people to come here in the 1700s. And they were real uh real British, real British ha-ha.

Interviewer: Was... was there any sort of discrimination against these Finnish people who had immigrated?

Henry: Well, the English always felt like they were the world's most reserved and worlds most educated of all people, but uh they get along good cause uh my dad painted and built houses. They had built houses for them, so they were accepted. They uhm, they were of the same income level so uhm there was no matter of one being more wealthy than the others so uhm there was cooperation and my mother sewed for some of those folks and uhm he painted their houses for them and, and later when they started building summer cottages for people rental stuff, he painted a lot of those houses and he finally had a couple people working with him so uh, no, there was no discrimination. They laughed a little about how both my mother and father spoke, sort of a chopped-up English, it was acceptable but there was an accent involved. They didn't have the vocabulary that the English, who had such a good control o the language, that uh they sort of joked about it some, but people accepted that it was just... people weren't sensitive about people joking about someone's language or the way they spoke.

Interviewer: Did... what language was spoken in your home?

Henry: We spoke Finnish at home. But there was some words, that uhm, as a vocabulary grew uhm, they picked up more English words. So, there was a sort of half Finnish half English talk, and once we started school, we started speaking more and more English at home and less and less Finnish. And then by the time I was in uhm say middle school or high school that more than 75% of our speak talk was English. It slowly evolved into less and less Finnish and more and more English.

Interviewer: Are you still bilingual today?

Henry: Oh yes, I speak quite well because I was over there with my wife just a year before she passed away and uhm they hear me speak and they said, “Oh do you live here in Finland?” and I said “No, I live in United States.” and they said, “Well you speak like a native here.” [smiles proudly]

Interviewer: Could you, uh, sort of, tell us your name in Finnish?

Henry: [Proceeds to introduce himself and give his name in Finnish]

Interviewer: Thank you! So, uh, what schools did you go to?

Henry: I went to the West Wareham Grammar School. That was 1st through the 6th Grade. Then in the middle school that was Pilgrim Memorial. That was named after some man gave them the land and he had a pilgrim; he had an ancestry that actually went back to 1620. So, he asked them if they would name it Pilgrim Memorial and they did. And then our high school was named Wareham High School.

Interviewer: What kind of a student were you?

Henry: Oh, let's say somewhere between an A and a B. Like if say B would be 80 and 90 would be 100, so say 85, 88.

Interviewer: And did you do extracurricular things?

Henry: I did a little. I uh... they uh... we had a class there that was optional where you could uh take carpentry. Take building and learn all that. And I, I built a chair set. They got us some cedar lumber and they showed us how to make the chairs and I made a pretty good one. My mother used it for years. And we sold the house and after she passed away nobody in the family wanted the chairs and I couldn't carry it back here, so I let it go with the house.

Interviewer: So, can you tell me when you became aware of uh tensions in Europe and sort of [is cut off]

Henry: Well, my parents, my parents used to always talk about when my father was young, they were under Russian control until 1917 when Finland became an independent free country. And then uh, in 1939 Russia decided to invade Finland because they were afraid the Germans were gonna have a military foothold there in Finland because Finland and Germany had a fairly close diplomatic relationship and business relations too. So, Russia invaded Finland and there was the Winter War and it lasted till the Summer of 1940. And they signed a peace agreement and gave a portion of the land, Russia got a quarter a part of the land of Finland, but then uh by then uh World War One, uh World War Two, had started. England and France and the other European countries so Russia, the following year, was invaded by Germany, so then there was friction again. And then uhm Russians... Germans sent troops into Finland and uh uhm in about 1941-42. And the Russians and the Germans were fighting each-other, and the Finnish Army was supporting the German side.

Interviewer: Do you remember what your parents' opinions on the matter was?

Henry: Well, they were strongly anti-Communist, but they were not pro-Hitler, but it was sort of like we were pro-Russian, but we were not Communists in World War Two. Sort of uh, sort of a strange situation where your potential enemy might be a friend at a given time.

Interviewer: Right. And you had relatives in Finland.

Henry: Yes, I did.

Interviewer: Was there communication back and forth?

Henry: Yes, we would get letters from them. And one time somebody called from there, someone in the family had passed away and there was a telephone call. That was the only time there was a telephone call between the two. Long-distance calls were very rare those days. People would send telegrams but very seldom ever made a phone call.

Interviewer: And there was no travel back to Finland during the war?

Henry: No, there was no, in fact the military had all the shipping tied up and no one went to Europe at all during the war years.

Interviewer: Were uhm relatives of yours or members of your family in Finland affected?

Henry: Oh, very much so yeah. The food supply got very limited and uhm the Russian troops wanted them to uh to anytime they had something they needed they would want them to give it to them. Like if they had wagons or something they would, if they needed them, they would felt like they had the right to take them. So, it was uh, America's allies, in this case Russia, was the Finnish enemy. And Germany was America's enemy, but Finland's ally. Sort of a not something that they chose but circumstances brought that about.

Interviewer: So, what are you memories of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

Henry: I've taught so many people and uh, I feel that they were negotiating with us at the time when they, when Pearl Harbor was struck, but we had been warned by Churchill and the British administration that Russia's gonna, I mean the Japanese, are gonna attack somewhere. And uh, we knew that the fleet had left Japan in the later part of November, but we didn't know whether they were going to Australia, Philippines, China, but we didn't have anyone track them. Apparently, our CIA in those days was OSS, was not very effective. They didn't, they didn't keep a track on uhm where was the Japanese fleet going. And once they got close to Pearl Harbor their planes was flying in American—Navy men on radar says that "planes coming in" and they were told him "don't worry about them, probably coming from United States", but they weren't. So, I've got mixed ideas about that. Did we know Pearl Harbor was gonna happen or not?

Interviewer: Do you remember how you learned of it?

Henry: Oh yes, yeah. It was Sunday afternoon. This other boy and I stopped at a gas station and the man there ran the station came out and says "Oh we just heard on the news. The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor!", and of course I was only

going on 17 then, and I say “Oh will beat within a year. We won’t have to go”. That’s how naive we were. We thought, and then we found out we had no military preparation at all, so it was a complete shock to us that we thought we were the big strong military power, but we were not. We became so in a year-and-a-half.

Interviewer: How did your... your high school, change after Pearl Harbor?

Henry: Well, out of my high school class, we all registered and by ’43 we were all turning 18, and uh we were all called up for the draft during the summer then. And everybody went in except there were three boys—One had a problem with his leg, one was shorter than the other, so he was not taken, and another one had diabetes, and one had very severe heart problem—And all the rest of us went in the Army, Navy, Marines. At that time Air Force was a part of the Army. We wore the regular brown uniform, but in 1947 the Air Force split off and so became an independent group that changed to a blue uniform.

Interviewer: Well for about a year there you were, you were still at home while the war was still going on.

Henry: Yes, mm-hmm.

Interviewer: How was your family affected during that time?

Henry: Oh, at that time there became tremendous shortages of everything. I know my father had two tires blow out on his car and it was his pickup truck that he used for his paint, and it was very difficult to get gas, you had to get these little coupons to buy gas and you could get three gallons a week on an A Stamp, and then for his business he could get something like five gallons per week, he was approved to get. And you had to sign papers to buy new tires, they were very difficult to get. And the sugar supply became very limited so people would only, grocery stores would only, sell you... they started putting sugar in two-pound bags and just sell you small amounts. Everything else tightened up. The Army started buying up a great deal of canned goods and uhm buying meats. There was all sorts of shortages on clothing and food in the grocery stores and of course they weren’t paying for shortages, there was still food, but lots of food that was commonly seen was disappearing off-and-on.

Interviewer: So, as the war was going on and you registered for the draft did you expect to serve by, you know, into 1942 and 1943 as the war continued?

Henry: No, I thought we would win the war quickly. I thought we had tremendous army and then as I got older, I started hearing more that “no we don’t have a trained army yet”, but we were training and we had very small air force, but suddenly there was a tremendous transition in the workforce. Women started working in the aircraft plants and even in the shipyards. We really came from a big depression where we had 20% unemployed to no unemployment at all.

Interviewer: Were there any factories or shipyards at all near where you lived?

Henry: Oh yes, there was a big, big one. Yeah, there was a Bethlehem Steel shipyard and they built battleships and destroyer escorts.

Interviewer: Did you know anyone who worked there?

Henry: Oh yes. There were quite a few men that were uh a bit older than me that were married that were not subject to the draft because they had children. They worked at the shipyard. And they were, at that time, making tremendous money because they were working seven days a week and doing time-and-a-half and double time on Sundays and making pay that we had never heard of in the depression years.

Interviewer: Right. So, so tell me about being called up. How did news that—

Henry: Well, yes well everyone was called as a group. You had uh, you had numbers, everyone was called according to... according to as numbers were drawn. So, just about all of our high school class went to the induction center at the same time for a physical. And everyone went, even the three people that were turned down, they had to go, and you go through a long line of medical people and each one specializes in a different uhm, different phase of your medical, and uh, all of us one-by-one passed except for the three that had the serious problems.

Interviewer: And uhm how did you end up in the Air Corps?

Henry: Well, they had a test, they called it Standard Aptitude Test, SAT Test, and apparently, they took the higher one's, the one's they felt that could be taught something ha-ha, into the Air Force. The Air Force was more technical then say the Army. The Army was more ground troop and more part where someone else would be the leader in, whereas the Air Force tended to be, people had to be independent in whatever they were doing. If they were a radio man or if they were a navigator or pilot or bombardier. It was something that individual skill involved so the Air Force felt like they had to have people who could be taught. So, I guess they chose by the score on your SAT who they put in the Air Force.

Interviewer: And... where did you go for Basic Training?

Henry: I came down here to Greensboro, North Carolina. And that's where we took all sorts of tests there to decide whether you could be a pilot, a navigator, bombardier, or flight mechanic or radioman or whatever. That they were in need of at the time. And uhm, I started in the cadet program, but the program folded up, so they switched me into radio. But I was never gonna be a pilot anyway, I was gonna be a bombardier. And I learned math then. It required a lot of math there so I was in the program a while and I picked up a lot of math knowledge.

Interviewer: That was through the Air Force cadet program?

Henry: Yes, mm-hmm, yes.

Interviewer: Okay, so uhm... you completed basic training there in Greensboro—

Henry: Yes.

Interviewer: —And where did you go from there?

Henry: Well, I came down here to Augusta, Georgia. It was a Replacement Depot. Just came there for approximately a month or so till they found an opening at a school when they were vacancies at a school. They send us to whatever we've been assigned to. So, we went from Augusta, Georgia to a college which was, that was

some good living there, at a state college in Springfield, Illinois. And we were at the college and the Army had taken over the college, and we were taught there.

Interviewer: Why was it such good living?

Henry: Oh, we lived in the dormitories there, and other soldiers were usually out here, infantry people were out here in Fort Benning in woods in tents digging foxholes and stuff and we were Class A Uniforms and went to class and ate at the cafeteria which was much better than army cooking and it was, it was like a college student rather than being a rough outdoors or even being out on a ship in the Navy, so it was a choice. In fact, it was easier than what most people on the outside were doing in heavy construction or things. It was a good city. It was nice, friendly little city and there were a lot of, very few soldiers around, so we, there were a lot of women in that town so you know we, course I was only about 19 then so I got to know a lot of girlfriends but nothing serious you know, but it was a very pleasant situation.

Interviewer: And you said you were learning math there?

Henry: Yes, yeah.

Interviewer: Through the Air Force Cadet Program. So, could you sort of tell me about the courses you were in and what they were preparing you for?

Henry: Oh a bombardier has to know something similar to a navigator but he has to know... [pausing to think] ... when you're bombing you have to know your speed, your altitude, the weight of your ammunition, and the wind speed, and you have to calculate all that to know how much drift you have at whatever speed you have cause it doesn't drop straight down it tends to drift like that from your speed so whatever bomb is used. Its more of a, now they use calculators that figure that all out for you immediately now, but in those days, it was all done with a more or less let's call it paper and pencil.

Interviewer: Well, did somebody tell you you were gonna be a bombardier or did you chose to be a bombardier?

Henry: No, they assigned me to it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Henry: Yeah, because I would have been too tall to be a fighter pilot. They didn't want anyone over six feet tall, and uhm the program, they already had enough people who were, who had been advanced far enough in the pilot program, that they didn't want any more uhm pilots trained. They felt that they had enough in what they called the pipeline to take care of, they anticipated, they planned ahead, and they felt like they had enough until the end of the war.

Interviewer: I see. So, I want to backtrack just for a second to Augusta. Do you remember the name of that Replacement Depot?

Henry: Daniel Field!

Interviewer: Okay, and this was your first time in Georgia?

Henry: No, I had come down here to visit my uncle soon after he retired. He took me down here. And it was in Jesup, Georgia, this little town about 40 miles West of Brunswick in that pine tree country down there. And uh, he had bought a house down there, and he liked it down there. He had lived in New York, but they wanted to come down South and found the cost of living was much cheaper than anywhere up in the New England area or New York. So uh, I came to visit him and then when I was in the military, I came down there, I got a three-day pass, and went to visit him from Augusta. I hitchhiked on highway... interstate... highway 1. They didn't have interstates then. And I came down to the small town of Baxley. From Baxley I caught a ride into Jesup.

Interviewer: So, Daniel Field?

Henry: Daniel Field, mm-hmm.

Interviewer: What did it look like? How big was it?

Henry: Oh, we was in the city airport, and it had a single runway, and uh probably five or six airplanes a day, except for some private planes that were there, which were varied. Of course, very few of them flew during the war time, but later. My daughter, when she went to work for the [inaudible at 31:29] administration lived about one mile from Daniel Field, so I went to see the place and the barracks where we had been, where we all were, had been torn down, but the airport was a little bigger now, and they were having more commercial traffic.

Interviewer: You mentioned the barracks. What were the accommodations like there?

Henry: Oh, they were two-story barracks, and they'd have about 20 men on the bottom floor and about 20 men on the second floor, and they were just typical army barracks.

Interviewer: And there was also an Army fort in Augusta.

Henry: Oh yes, Fort Stewart was its name. No, Fort Gordon. Fort Gordon was nearby. Fort Stewart is closer down towards Savannah's way.

Interviewer: So, was there any movement back and forth between this airfield and this army base?

Henry: No, they had no contact, no. This uh, the army base was for infantry type people. They were not Air Force at all, and we weren't assigned to anything we were just there waiting to be reassigned so we didn't do anything there. A little exercising, and they'd have us sweep the barracks out, just anything to keep us doing something, but it was just a matter of us making time until we were reassigned to a school.

Interviewer: Did you come in there by plane or by train?

Henry: Oh, it was completely train, yeah. No GIs. Everything was on trains.

Interviewer: Okay, so you had gone to bombardier school and you were in Springfield, Illinois.

Henry: Yes.

Interviewer: But then you went to communications school?

Henry: Yes.

Interviewer: And describe that change.

Henry: Okay.

Interviewer: And the reason for that change.

Henry: They felt that they no longer needed to expand that program. They cut out the bottom 50% and I stayed. And they had another cut and that's when they got me. Well, they just kept about 10 or 20% of the class, and I was sent to Scott Field, Illinois, which was an Army-Air Force training center for radio. And we went to school there. And from there we finished school. We went to Tinker Field, Oklahoma and then went overseas from Tinker Field, Oklahoma. Went to Seattle. And took a boat from Seattle to Hawaii. I thought "Oh this would be a good deal" but then they didn't drop me off there. Then we went to Midway and dropped off some people, and then we went to Guam.

Interviewer: What time period is this?

Henry: This was right after Christmas of 1944.

Interviewer: Okay, so you were going over as a sort of communications specialist.

Henry: Yes.

Interviewer: What was your title or rank?

Henry: Oh, I was radioman, second class. There were different people. First class were the ones who had security clearance for all kinds of messages coming in and I didn't have that. I just worked in a telephone office and the communications center, so I worked more in the telephone than I did radio.

Interviewer: What were your skills? What did you train to do in communications school?

Henry: Oh, well I was gonna be on radio but they had me working on these strong telephone wires from the base headquarters to all the small companies that were scattered around on Guam or wherever they were gonna send us so that we could maintain telephone system.

Interviewer: Can you sort of describe that? As if I'm completely ignorant.

Henry: Oh, yes. Well, the base headquarters would be where the colonel or the general would issue the orders of the day to the companies and the call would go to the company headquarters, to the company office I mean, where a captain, or it might be a lieutenant, might be in charge of a company. And they would be let known in regard to what the orders of the day were and just general information and just keep the lines open between the base headquarters and the companies outside of the base, base headquarters, to keep the lower ranking officers informed what decisions were made on higher levels.

Interviewer: What did Guam look like at that point?

Henry: Oh, Guam is an island 25 miles long. It's about 5 miles wide at its widest point. It's slightly mountainous, but not high mountains. Probably, probably as high as Kennesaw Mountain. Like that, scattered all around the country. But the shore, the shoreline was like our beaches here in Georgia. And there were natives there of Oriental descent. I'm sure they were originally Japanese, but when the Spanish had the country, they had everybody learn Spanish and they brought Christian religion to them. They were Roman-Catholics. So those people did a lot of farming. They grew rice, but their big crop was coconuts. All the trees on the

island were owned by the Colgate-Palmolive Company and any trees that were damaged during the war the US government paid for when the war was over. Paid them 25 dollars for each tree that was damaged in the war in any way. A coconut, I don't know if you've seen it, is quite big when its on the tree. It has a shell on it and when you get the shell off the coconut is about the size of a softball, a little smaller than that but bigger than a baseball. The Colgate-Palmolive people would want the oil from that, and palm oil is used a lot in different kinds of soaps and different kinds of lotions. And the white meat from that is used for just coconut products so it was a money-making thing for the company.

Interviewer: Were there signs of destruction from the fighting that had taken place there on Guam?

Henry: Oh yes, yeah. They brought in a small canon and they tore up any kind of concrete type building because they would have been used for any kind of defense. But there was a native force there, but it was so small that they didn't put up much of a fight. But when we went back in 1944 to take the island back the Japanese had scattered barbwire all along the beaches and even in the water at low tide so when it came higher all the Marines came in and oh, did they get cut up with that barbwire. You can get very serious problems, especially in hot climates like that, when you get scratched by rusty barbwire fences, and they were tough little soldiers that Japanese. They were small little people, but they were tough. They got by and they didn't give up easily. It was—

Interviewer: S, what sort of places did you sleep there? On Guam.

Henry: Oh, when we first when we went there, we had no housing at all. We just had little pup tents, a small tent that you only lie on the ground and its only about six-and-a-half to seven-feet long. And we used those for about two weeks and then by then the corps of engineers had put up some six-man tents, they were a little bigger, and we used them for about five or six months. And then they had to come up and build some plywood barracks which would hold 40 men. They were one-level buildings. They used them until we left the war.

Interviewer: Where was the mess hall? [Timestamp 41:33]

Henry: It was uhm it was a joint, the barracks, it was close by. It would be six... let's see six... it was either six or eight barracks would make up a company of men. A

company would have a lieutenant or a captain in charge, and a first sergeant and a duty sergeant, and then there was this, every barracks just had a scattering of men. Everybody had these different types of classification, more than were flight line mechanics than anything else and there were others that were... couple people in my barracks that worked in the medical center there in the first aid. And then we had one fellow that was a mailman for the company. Another one was a chaplain's assistant, so it was just a wide variety. Then there were about three or four of us in the communications, either the radio or the telephone. And some were truck drivers. Some were... uhm... just general laborers.

Interviewer: How much free time did you have?

Henry: Oh, we had some of... we went every day to the field. It was seven days a week. There was no... early in the morning we woke up around... they woke us up at 7:00 am, we had breakfast. We were through breakfast by 8:30 am. Had to be down by the airport by 9:00 am. Big quonset hut where the planes were kept. Checked out by 8:30 am. We had lunch around 11:30 am and had to be back by 1:00 o'clock and we stayed until 5:00 o'clock and came back to the barracks.

Interviewer: Did you have any entertainment of any kind?

Henry: The USO would come about every two months and put on a show. Bob Hope came one time. He came to see us with Dorothy Lamour. And one time a fella by the name of Eddie Bracken, he was quite a famous entertainer those days, and let's see who else... Gene Autry came. He was on active duty but he came. He was part of the USO, I guess that's the United Service Organizations, and he put on a show. He had some cowboy singers with him, but I don't remember any of them. And a couple fellas showed us rope tricks and things like that. And then they put in a small radio station on the island, and they played different music and told baseball and football scores and just general information of what things were in the states. Nothing ever about the fights or anything; it was just pleasant news. And they never told of any casualties in Europe or anything like that. It was, I guess you'd call it controlled news.

Interviewer: About how long were you there in Guam?

Henry: Let's see... ten... fourteen... about fourteen months. A year and two months.

Interviewer: And uh, did you expect to stay there? Did you have any idea how long your assignment would be?

Henry: No, it was... we were there until the war ended.

Interviewer: Okay so, I want to talk about a few big events. Uhm, do you have any memories of President Roosevelt's death?

Henry: Oh yes, I remember someone come in one morning and said, "We heard someone said Roosevelt had died". We says "Oh I don't think that's happened. Someone just made a rumor", but we heard just a little later they said President Roosevelt had, was living in Georgia and died.

Interviewer: And how did how was how were you affected? How were the members of you know—

Henry: Oh, we thought "Who takes his place". Someone said "Oh, a man by the name of Truman". That he's somebody from the middle-west somewhere. That he'll take over as the President. And said, "Well maybe, maybe then this war will end". By that time, it was May of '45 and the war ended in Europe just about that same time as he passed away, and uhm, and then two months later the atomic bomb was brought to Hiroshima and they dropped the bomb, and it was over then by the middle of August. And they signed a peace agreement in September.

Interviewer: So, you were still on Guam when the atomic bombs were dropped?

Henry: Oh yes, mm-hmm, yeah.

Interviewer: And how did you and the other guys react to the dropping of the bombs?

Henry: Oh, they just told us that it wiped the city clean. That it killed everybody. We said "Oh, this ought to end it.", and sure enough it did. In about, in about three days

the Japanese did not surrender so they dropped a second bomb on Nagasaki. And that's when the Emperor decided "Well, better hang it up". So uh, they decided to give it up. But he was never prosecuted. America decided that since uh, he was more of a political religious man, the Emperor, so he was not held really responsible for the war like Tojo and others, the head military men of the country.

Interviewer: Right. So, how long before you got word that you would be moved? That you'd be going somewhere else other than Guam?

Henry: Oh, they uh... the oldest men, the married men, who had been in the longer, were the first ones to start coming back to the states to be... they started coming back in October.

Interviewer: And that was through the Point System.

Henry: The Point System, that's right. And a married man had extra points by being married, and uh anyone who'd been in the service longer had one extra point for each month and being in combat area gave you one extra point. But I was single and uh, had been let's see fourteen, at that time I had been eleven months there, so I was kinda bottom of the, the younger of us were kind of bottom of the barrel in terms of leaving. So uh, but they got smaller and smaller, and we were doing less and less. We'd go to the, I worked in the telephone office, but we were shutting down base and companies so they would just leave, so we just did less and less. We were just taking the telephones out and just phasing things down.

Interviewer: How eager were you to get out of there?

Henry: Oh, I was waiting. It was the most ordeal waiting thing I'd ever been in; cause one by one everyone I knew was leaving. The older fellas. And uh, it was just kind of a waiting game, and uh, we knew that uh, our time was coming but just didn't know when.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of those guys? Did you keep in touch with any of them?

Henry: Well, I did for the first two or three years, and then, when I came South, I just kept up with one fella in Pennsylvania. He's passed away so... Father Time has pretty well taken everyone I knew. Out of my high school class there's only two boys left anymore there. Gone via George Washington or whatever way you go when you leave here [begins to tear up as he laughs].

Interviewer: And did you also spend time in Taipan?

Henry: Oh yes, we went there. We were sent from Guam there and we were sent from a military fleet there before being sent back home. So, people were coming there from Okinawa, Tinian, and the one's already there and the one's from Guam. And uh, they would get these big troop ships, they could carry 2,000 men at a time, so uh we uh, I think we were there about three weeks. And there were new people coming in and others leaving so it was completely in and out all the time. But there was always more people to leave than there was room on the troop ship to leave. And it was about a twelve-to-thirteen-day trip from Taipan to San Francisco.

Interviewer: Describe the return there.

Henry: Oh, it's... when you get about 30 miles out from San Francisco you can see the Golden Gate Bridge, and that is really something. That was a sight to see. You go... once you get into uh... once you're close to the Golden Gate Bridge there's a big sign still there saying something about thanking the veterans for the war service. I don't remember exactly the wording. And we went on a, the first thing they had for us was a big steak dinner. Really first class real big steak. Cause we didn't have that kind of meal at all for a year, for the whole fourteen months. So then uh, we were there just two, three days. We took a tram, Pullman Tram, from there all across the country back to Massachusetts and that's when we got discharged.

[Five second pause in the interview]

Interviewer: So, tell me what you did after the war.

Henry: Okay. I went to an electronics school. It was an associates school. Associates Degree. It was supposed to be two years, but it took about 18 months. Electronics school. The telephone companies were switching from manual switch boards to dial telephoning where you dial the number like this [motions with his hand and finger like he is using a rotary phone]. Which they wanted, so I went, and they hired me for four hours a day installing those telephone equipment. And then when I got through school, they had work down South down here. I says, "I think I'll come South". And then I got a full-time job with them. Worked in a number of small towns and then the Korean War came on and I said, "Good grief, I'm still single! They're gonna draft me back in!", so I go to work with the Army Signal Corps, which is a civilian job. It paid quite well, but I only stayed there until Lockheed came in. After awhile it looked like Lockheed was gonna be permanent. At the beginning they would, Lockheed, they would come in just to modify the B-29's and make them acceptable for combat in the Korean War. But then uh, when it looked like uh, they were gonna be permanent they started getting contracts for other work like they designed the C-130 plane and then became a permanent operation. And then they shifted more and more of their work from California to Georgia, so I decided "Well it's a little more permanent and better than working for the government".

Interviewer: So, you had worked sort of installing these new telephones.

Henry: Yes, mm-hmm.

Interviewer: And that's what brought you South.

Henry: Yes. That's right.

Interviewer: Okay. So, how did you... you then went to work with the Army Signal Corps.

Henry: Yes.

Interviewer: And where were you working for the signal corps?

Henry: It was Atlanta General Depot. It was an Army maintenance base where they had brought in equipment that had been damaged in training and we repaired it.

Interviewer: So, so there was continuous government work?

Henry: Yes. That's right.

Interviewer: After coming out of service.

Henry: That's right, yes.

Interviewer: Installing telephones. Moving South.

Henry: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Army Signal Corps.

Henry: Yes.

Interviewer: And Korea.

Henry: Yes.

Interviewer: And then you went to work for Lockheed.

Henry: Yes.

Interviewer: So you made the choice to work for Lockheed?

Henry: Yes. That's right.

Interviewer: And that was no longer government affiliated work?

Henry: No, it was government contracts, but it was totally civilian only company.

Interviewer: And what did you do for Lockheed?

Henry: I was in electronic engineering. We kept up the public assist... uhm public address system, kept up the time clocks, all the electronic testing equipment, and then the numerical machines came in where they used tape and items like that to uhm... it was the first of automation in machine-shop work where you could repeat the same thing over and over by using a milling machine with the tape control. So, they sent us to factory schools in, oh, Chicago, Cincinnati Ohio, and some other place, a little town in Wisconsin. I can't remember the name now. So, they sent us to school in the factory where they made these milling, these numerical control machines. So uh, we maintained those machines.

Interviewer: Did you work at the facility in Marietta?

Henry: Oh yes. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Interviewer: You had your office there?

Henry: Oh yes, mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay. And this was the period when you said they transitioned from the B-29 to the C-130?

Henry: Oh yes. Mm-hmm. Yes. And then they came up with a plane they called... plane that was... oh let's see was it 141? It was the 141. A big cargo transport. And then they later made the C-5A, which was the largest transport plane of that type.

Interviewer: And how long did you work at Lockheed?

Henry: 31 years.

Interviewer: Okay. Until retirement?

Henry: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So, can you tell me about meeting your wife and then your family?

Henry: Well, when I came to Atlanta to work at the Atlanta General Depot I lived in Atlanta and I started going to First Methodist Church. It was right in downtown Atlanta and my wife was a member there. And she was working with a railroad office where they kept track of the boxcars and all the freight stuff. And we got going together. I thought she owned the railroad and she thought I owned the big government job and we got married even though neither one of us were an owner [joyful laughing]. I'm just kidding about that, but we got along good. We lived in Atlanta till '55 when we moved to Smyrna. We've been in Cobb County since '55.

Interviewer: Well Mr. Ahola I want to finish up with a question about sort of remembering World War Two and your service. Can you tell me why you think, or you feel its significant to sort of share these memories with younger generations?

Henry: Well, I think people really need to know that war is not a pleasant thing. It's a mean, cruel thing that... I saw things that... and heard about things that... its not good for eighteen-year-old's to see. When you see a flamethrower going into a cave that's not pleasant. If anyone's in there they burn up like toast. All the oxygen is used up they just choke to death. And the next thing someone has a bulldozer, and they close the cave and you're in there. And uh, there's other cruel... young men who were captured on Guam... the Navy men were taken as prisoners of war. They were almost starved to death. That stays with you for the rest of your life. you never really recover from those things. The war is a cruel thing. I think people don't need to glorify war because I've seen too many of them in my life. You know we think that we're a peaceful country, and I think we are,

but through some circumstance we've sort of been the police of the world, and we were when I was only 17 years old one war had ended the next thing we have the depression and then World War Two started and then a little while later we were in the Korean War. That got over in a little while and then we're in Vietnam. We got through Vietnam we had a little island down here in the Caribbean we're in. Conflict. Next thing we're over there in Iraq and Afghanistan. We're still there. We declare the end to these wars, but we still have men in combat today. In a silent war in Iraq. So, wars are not pleasant things. I know if you just visit over here at the veteran's cemetery, veteran's hospitals. The fighting might stop but the pain of the war does not end when men have mental and physical problems caused by the war. I don't know... maybe war is just a part of life. I don't know. Been to Europe and I've seen there's just endless numbers of wars from Napoleon's time and before his time so there's something in nature that man decided to have wars and I've never really understood why, but for some reason it must be in our genes or something that causes us to get involved. But I think we have never had wars of aggression as far as the United States is concerned. I think every one of our wars has been defensive wars, with the exception of our Civil War, which was certainly a cruel war. Absolutely. Should not have ever come about where human beings were used as slaves. But these other wars have all been defensive as far as we've been concerned.

Interviewer: Well, thank you. Very much. And we'll conclude there.

Henry: Thank you very much.