

Transcript: Henry (Hank) Nance

Transcribed by Kristen Muenz

CARRIER: Well let's start out, let's do the '37 flood. This is Jerry Carrier talking to Hank Nance regarding some of his personal experiences in the '37 flood and World War II. So Hank, we'll just put this right here, it'll record everything we're talking about. So anyway, Hank, during the '37 flood you said you were...?

NANCE: Over there in Greendale.

CARRIER: Over there in Greendale?

NANCE: On Ridge Avenue.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: The corner of Ridge Avenue, and the water was up to the base of the hill at Ridge Avenue.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: And it was covered by the National Guard. And at 11 years old, why, he caught me playing in the water there and told me exactly what to do and when to do it. [LAUGHS]

CARRIER: [LAUGHS] Okay. Now, where were you going to school at that time?

NANCE: Up there in Greendale, grade school.

CARRIER: Greendale? Okay. And was school shut down after the flood, the levy broke? What was...

NANCE: Well, that's a good question. The people were in a place called [PENN CENTRAL?] over by the cemetery.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: After the levy gave way... I can't really, I was a kid.

CARRIER: Okay. Now did you have people come to stay in your home who had to get out of Lawrenceburg?

NANCE: Yeah, we had four or five people that stayed with us.

CARRIER: Okay. All right. Now, did - your father was very active during this time, wasn't he?

NANCE: Yes he was, he was a plant manager at Schenley.

CARRIER: Okay. Now, his background, he was in the military, right?

NANCE: No, he worked for the banks down in Louisville. He - well, I guess it was called... when they would take over businesses that weren't doing well, the banks would, and he would be a manager. And he worked with several of them down in New Orleans. That's where I was born.

CARRIER: Okay. You were born in New Orleans?

NANCE: Yeah, in 1926. And he had a chance to come back up here, and that's how I ended up in Louisville. We moved to Lawrenceburg in 1932.

CARRIER: Okay. So he was working for the distillery at that time?

NANCE: In 1932.

CARRIER: Okay, all right. He was plant manager of...?

NANCE: Schenley.

CARRIER: Schenley, okay. So what did Schenley do to help the victims of the flood? Did they -

NANCE: Well they had a car, a sleeping car out there... what was it, there was a station roughly where the office was now. And of course people were sleeping any place they could.

CARRIER: Right, right. And did your brother - were you the youngest, the oldest of the family?

NANCE: Well I was the youngest. My brother was in Ohio Military School at the time. They put him up in Cincinnati.

CARRIER: Okay, all right.

NANCE: And the daughter, [LAWSON?], I don't know if she was going someplace or not. Let me see... there seemed to be a lot of people there at Ridge Avenue. [LAUGHS]

CARRIER: Right, right. So what happened - did the Schenley plant have to shut down during the '37 flood?

NANCE: I wouldn't know. I couldn't tell. He was always there. I'm sure the people were - if they could get there, they were working.

CARRIER: Okay, all right. So do you remember after the flood subsided, anything that went on down in Lawrenceburg, trying to clean the place up? Any remembrance of that, what went on down at the cleanup process?

NANCE: I wouldn't have - at that age, I wouldn't have any...

CARRIER: Right. Right, okay.

NANCE: I was six and –

CARRIER: Right. The other thing I wanted to talk to you about, you - you continued your education, and you ended up - you went to where, Indiana University?

NANCE: IU.

CARRIER: Okay. And what - when did you graduate from there, Hank?

NANCE: Ah, let's see, now I probably finished off about 1970.

CARRIER: Okay. And when did - now, how did World War II impact you?

NANCE: Well, I joined the Navy in '44.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: And only spent 2 years in the Navy.

CARRIER: 2 years, okay. Where were you assigned?

NANCE : Well, I - the submarine problem on the east coast was taken care of before I got out of the signal school. I went to signal school for the Navy and signal school for the armed guard for merchants.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: And we were in New York, and the war was peeling down, and I was shipped over to... well, Oahu, the island over in Hawaii. And they were massing there for an invasion, in '44. And of course they come off when they drop the bomb.

CARRIER: Right.

NANCE: I believe September, the atom bomb. That was really something, to see that many people floating out there. I read somewhere there was about 60,000 people killed when we dropped that bomb.

CARRIER: Right.

NANCE: And they were floating out the harbor.

CARRIER: Oh boy.

NANCE: There wasn't a dull thing that ever happened. I was just a kid when I was one of' em, on one of the little gun tugs there, and everybody in there was so awestricken, awestricken with the sight of these people floating by, that we didn't call the bridge.

CARRIER: Oh boy. Okay.

NANCE: Of course, the signalman... [LAUGHS] If you called him... I better not pray he's there. They really let you know that was kinda stupid.

CARRIER: Now, these were the Japanese who were killed in the attack?

NANCE: When they dropped the bomb at Hira - at Nagasaki.

CARRIER: Okay. Now where were - you were on a ship at this time?

NANCE: Yes.

CARRIER: Near coming in there, or outside the harbor, or...?

NANCE: No, I think we - we probably left Pearl Harbor or Oahu there at Hawaii... probably just when the bomb was dropped.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: So there was a lot of ships there.

CARRIER: So, but how - these bodies had floated quite a distance, then.

NANCE: Oh yeah, I don't know what happened, because we were coming on into the bay there at Nagasaki.

CARRIER: Okay. And there were still Japanese dead floating in the...?

NANCE: Oh yeah. Thousands of them.

CARRIER: Oh my God. That must've been...

NANCE: Oh yeah. I can still remember that.

CARRIER: And the horrendous smell.

NANCE: Yeah. And you know, they'd go with the tide - they'd go out and then...

CARRIER: Oh boy. And was anybody trying to cover them or do anything?

NANCE: Well... anything I would say now would be just assuming things.

CARRIER: Right.

NANCE: But I don't know.

CARRIER: Okay. Now did your ship go into Nagasaki?

NANCE: We went into the harbor and -

CARRIER: Docked?

NANCE: - we docked there and, oh, no one knew anything about the atomic bomb. We were walking around.

CARRIER: The radiation wasn't an issue, or...?

NANCE: Nobody knew anything.

CARRIER: Nobody knew it.

NANCE: [LAUGHS]

CARRIER: So you were - you were in a hot zone then, probably.

NANCE: Didn't know it, yeah, 'cause nobody paid any attention to that. They were worried about getting somebody to dig the latrine. [LAUGHS]

CARRIER: Right. [LAUGHS] So how long were you in Nagasaki after that, the bomb?

NANCE: Well, we got there around 30 days after they dropped it, and it was still hot.

CARRIER: Uh-huh. And what did they have you doing there at that time?

NANCE: Well, we were always standing guard.

CARRIER: Standing guard. Okay. Now, did you take over a navy - or, a Japanese naval installation? Is that what -

NANCE: We were in a... it's sort of like a... well, it'd be more sort of a docking, a bay docking area.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: And I remember standing guard in one of those big enclosures. And oh, they were big. The enclosure was pretty well knocked down, too.

CARRIER: Now, you weren't there for the surrender of the Japanese, were you? Was that in Nagasaki?

NANCE: I didn't see it.

CARRIER: You didn't see any of that.

NANCE: Nah.

CARRIER: Okay. Did you - did the military try to help the Japanese people at all, or... I mean, the civilians that were left, that weren't killed?

NANCE: Well, I didn't see anybody... there weren't a lot of people around there to help.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: Other than the military, I mean, I don't think they knew whether the Japanese were gone.

CARRIER: Right. Did you ever get any rec time to go into the city or anything like that?

NANCE: No, just on the bank there.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: Yeah, we got off the ship.

CARRIER: Right, okay.

NANCE: But, uh... I remember digging the latrines 'cause the... I don't wanna say that, but, because the Japanese'd do that, and you know, they're - [LAUGHS] -

CARRIER: Yeah.

NANCE: They're - [INAUDIBLE MUFFLED REMARK, LAUGHING]

CARRIER: Yeah, right. So how long were you there in Nagasaki?

NANCE: Oh, about, I don't know...

CARRIER: A year?

NANCE: Oh no, oh no. When I was there... oh heck, about 60 days.

CARRIER: Okay. So you rotated out back to the United States?

NANCE: Back to Hawaii.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: Everything's working out of there, Pearl Harbor.

CARRIER: Okay, all right. So what'd you do when you got back to Hawaii?

NANCE: Oh, we did a few... [INAUBIBLE] level time, you know, with the [INAUBIBLE - SAILS?]?... but you know, that thing's so big, and there's so many of them there...

CARRIER: Right.

NANCE: I can't even remember the call sign.

CARRIER: Now when did you get - when were you finally separated from out of the Navy?

NANCE: I was in just about two years. It was...

CARRIER: '46, or...?

NANCE: '46, yeah.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: And I got out of school in '47. Yeah, 'cause I - they cut the... we cut the time at IU down, they gave me time for some of those Navy schools over there.

CARRIER: So you went back to IU after the service? Was that it?

NANCE: After the service.

CARRIER: After the service. Okay. Now was Beth - was she at IU? Or, she was at Purdue, wasn't she?

NANCE: Purdue.

CARRIER: Now did - the part about Beth, now, your wife. Were you and Beth dating each other when you went off to the service, or did you...?

NANCE: Oh yeah.

CARRIER: Okay. All right. So how was Indiana University for the people coming back? Were there a lot of veterans coming to school when you were there?

NANCE: Yeah, yeah. Quite a few.

CARRIER: Was Tom Brooks going back about the same time?

NANCE: I'd imagine, yeah. I can't... wasn't in the same vicinity as Tom, but, you know...

CARRIER: Yeah. When the veterans came back, did the social life change, or was it like you'd been there?

NANCE: [LAUGHS] Oh yeah.

CARRIER: Oh yeah, right. So when did you graduate from IU, then?

NANCE: I was down seeing there the other day... I think '79.

CARRIER: Okay, all right.

NANCE: So three years in the service...

CARRIER: Did you get any credit for being in the service, towards being at IU, for your graduation requirements or anything, or...?

NANCE: Well, I think I got... a couple things [INAUDIBLE- OUTSIDE NOISE INTERFERES], but I didn't realize it. Wasn't that important, or... no, they, I'm trying to think, I got something. I think I got an English credit.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: For those schools in the Navy... I don't know. I can't remember that.

CARRIER: What was your major in college?

NANCE: I had a business.

CARRIER: Business? Okay. All right. So when you completed school, where'd you go to work, or what -

NANCE: Well, I worked at Seagram and Schenley, both of them.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: But then, you know, I was - [INAUDIBLE]

CARRIER: Right, right. Okay. All right. So how did you end up getting in the Navy? Were you drafted, or enlisted?

NANCE: No. Bill Jackson and the quiet boys, we were going to be drafted. It was that summer that we went up and went to the Great Lakes.

CARRIER: So you enlisted in the Navy.

NANCE: Enlisted in the Navy.

CARRIER: And if you didn't enlist in the Navy, you'd get drafted into the army.

NANCE: Right, right. That's what'd happen to you.

CARRIER: Right. So your basic training was at Great Lakes?

NANCE: Great Lakes.

CARRIER: Okay. And where did Bill Jackson go? You went in at the same time?

NANCE: Yeah. He... he went to a different school than I did.

CARRIER: Okay. All right.

NANCE: I mean, the Navy, they kind of made a thing with a Navy school, and the merchant school was a bit different.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: In the signaling of it. And of course when we shipped out and went over to Hawaii, Oahu, then the war ended.

CARRIER: Right, right. Did anything ever - did the military ever contact you after you'd been exposed to the atom bomb over there, the radiation, or was it ever brought up to you, or nothing was ever...?

NANCE: No, we didn't - we were in school. We were all in the dark! [LAUGHS]

CARRIER: I'm sure you were exposed, but who knows.

NANCE: Oh, I had cancer.

CARRIER: Oh, you did?

NANCE: Oh yeah, I don't know if the radiation...

CARRIER: Could that have had any connection, you think?

NANCE: Nobody said anything.

CARRIER: No one'd tell you anything.

NANCE: [LAUGHS]

CARRIER: And what kind of cancer was that?

NANCE: It was, um, I would say it was on the intestines or the bowels.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: I had one too... they were very successful...

CARRIER: Right. Well you know, I -

NANCE: Dr. McLaren, what was it... I might've got that wrong.

CARRIER: But you were - you certainly were exposed to radiation.

NANCE: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

CARRIER: Okay, well. That's interesting. Of course, back -

NANCE: And a lot of that was my own fault because they were going to Chicago, to get checked out.

CARRIER: Uh huh.

NANCE: And I had the choice of going to Lawrenceburg or Chicago and I went... [LAUGHS]

CARRIER: You came home.

NANCE: I came home!

CARRIER: You weren't -

NANCE: I can't even spell [INAUDIBLE]

CARRIER: Right, right.

NANCE: They didn't even know what they were looking for, either.

CARRIER: No, no. Yeah.

NANCE: [LAUGHS] It wasn't too smart.

CARRIER: No, no. Well, thank goodness you're here with us, so you made it. You made it.

NANCE: [LAUGHS] I made it. That's all.

CARRIER: Right, right. Well, there were a lot of people exposed to radiation. I mean, when they were dropping the experimental bombs, there was a lot of radiation floating around. People just didn't think about it or they weren't in tune to what they should've done, so.

NANCE: Well it's pretty hard to tell if somebody has a "souvenir." [LAUGHS] It might not be given up.

CARRIER: Right, right.

NANCE: I don't think so.

CARRIER: Oh, no. Well things would be a lot different now, that's for sure.

NANCE: Oh yeah.

CARRIER: So anyway, you came back. And how soon after you're back did you and Beth marry and start your family life?

NANCE: Oh Lord. Let's see... got married in... I'll tell you...

CARRIER: Cause you got out of the service in, what, '44?

NANCE: I don't know.

CARRIER: '46?

NANCE: Well, I went in at '44 and got out in '46. Probably got out and finished school in '47. I guess '49 is when we got married.

CARRIER: Okay, all right. And did your brothers have military experience? Did they get drafted, or...?

NANCE: Oh my Lord, oh... 'course Ken did. Ken was, he was in the service for quite a while.

CARRIER: Right.

[ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND NOISE INTERFERES]

NANCE: ...for quite a while. Bud had bad eyes, Bud did.

CARRIER: So he wasn't drafted? He wasn't...

NANCE: No. He would've been drafted, but he couldn't pass the physical.

CARRIER: Okay.

NANCE: And 'course Ken had a long military...

CARRIER: Right, right. Yeah, he did, he did. Where is Ken?

NANCE: [INAUDIBLE] He was shot up pretty bad.

CARRIER: Right, right. Yeah. I know he was. He had quite a distinguished military career.

NANCE: Yeah, he did.

CARRIER: Yeah. And your sister, is she...?

NANCE: She passed away.

CARRIER: Okay, yeah. And where's Bud now, is he...?

NANCE: Bud, he passed away too, yeah.

CARRIER: Okay. All right. Where are all their children?

NANCE: Well, they're both - they're all in Houston. They're in Houston.

CARRIER: Okay. All right. Well, I remember meeting them a long time ago, and... so anyway. Well, Hank, thanks for the talk.

NANCE: Yeah, I'm sorry. I don't think that'll be very interesting. [LAUGHS]

CARRIER: Yeah, we'll, you'd be surprised about what - how things work out with these different interviews and so forth. Little things pop up you don't even imagine will be worth information, but it is. So, anyway.

NANCE: You're not gonna mark me.

CARRIER: No!

[RECORDING ENDS]