

**Interviewee:** Cox, Joe C.  
**Interviewer:** Robin Sellers  
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**Sellers:** Mr. Cox, do we have your permission to tape-record this?

**Cox:** Yes, ma'am.

**Sellers:** Why don't you tell me where you were born and where you grew up.

**Cox:** I was born and raised in Blackshear, Georgia, 1921. I stayed there until I was eighteen years old. We lived on a farm and planted cotton, corn, tobacco, stuff like that. When I got eighteen years old I went in what they called the CC camps. I followed that and went all over Oregon and all that and then I come back to Georgia. Then I went into the Maritime Service, joined the Maritime Service in St. Petersburg, Florida.

**Sellers:** What year was that?

**Cox:** That was 1941.

**Sellers:** '41 - before Pearl Harbor happened, right?

**Cox:** Yes, ma'am. I was there when the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor. We were supposed to take nine months training but I was only there six months. They was needing seamen, so they shipped us all out to New York. We left and went to New York and we all split up. I went work for the Altanate Refining Company. I stayed there and caught a ship and went to Port Arthur, Texas. On my way down, we picked up some survivors off the sister ship of ours - the Blum [??]. It was cut half in two right there off of Norfolk, Virginia.

**Sellers:** By a torpedo?

**Cox:** No, ma'am, it was hit by a mine.

**Sellers:** I didn't know there were mines that close.

**Cox:** Well, they put mines out on account of submarines; there was so many submarines there, so they had mines out, and it hit that mine.

**Sellers:** Was it an American mine or a German mine?

**Cox:** American, American mine.

**Sellers:** Oh, friendly fire already.

**Cox:** [laughs] Well, I mean, that's my understanding of it, that's the way it was. It was an American mine and it was trying to protect the coast up there because (they called it the frying pan) because it's a bad place. More ships sunk there than there were in the whole war, off from Cape Hatteras. So after we'd taken them to Norfolk, we went on Texas. We got a little fuel and on our way back, that's all we could we talk about, was we had high explosives and if it hit above the water line, we'd never see what happened [laughs]. Right out of Charleston, they spotted a submarine and we had to run into Charleston. They kept us overnight and the next day we pulled out, and we were back on the way to Philadelphia. On our way up, that evening about three o'clock, we spotted a submarine and ... we had a gun crew on there (Coast Guard), and I asked them, "Why don't you all shoot them?" They says, "Well, it's too far to shoot to it and we don't want to get no message off because they might not spot us." So they didn't shoot it. But that night at 9:45, me and my buddy was sitting there at my desk and that's when we got it - the torpedo hit right on my side but it was down a good little piece. I went up to the upper deck, I got in the lifeboat and when we hit the water, somebody cut the forward falls loose and it just made a flip; threw all of us out except two of us. So, I was holding on for dear life. He give me a hand, pull me back up, and the water just hit me and everything. We was still kind of underway - the motors ... the ship had done cut speed but it's still moving. Somebody threw a life preserver overboard out to somebody hollering for help, and it kind of set the ocean on fire. Then I could see a life raft hit that side of him and that's when I got hold of it. I got hold of it and I couldn't make it ... I was weak ... it seemed like that was the way it was. So I pulled my shoes off and started to pull my clothes off so I could swim for shore, which way I thought was shore. Then somebody hollered and said, "Throw water on this so we have something to get on when we get out." We did, and when we got out of the fire we went round and round, round and round ... seemed like ... I know I couldn't breathe under water, but it seemed to me I could breath better underwater than I could on top - the fumes and everything. After we got out of the fire, we got on the raft and there was eleven survivors. Eleven of us got on that one raft.

**Sellers:** How many of you had been on the ship?

**Cox:** I think it was fifty-something. But they were a crew of a twenty-two or twenty-something, I don't remember just what the number is now ... that got picked up right after it happened, and they carried them into Charleston. We stayed out there adrift that night and we could see lights, you know ... we done drifted close enough to shore to see lights on the beach. We could see airplanes searching for us. When it got daylight, they found us and the Coast Guard come over there and picked us up and carried us into South Port, North Carolina. I stayed there in South Port in the hospital two weeks and four days being treated for burns. After I got out of the hospital, I got transferred to a Marine hospital, was outpatient here in Savannah so I could be close to home. After I got well and everything, they got me and said I was in good shape and everything, they said, "Well, you about ready to go back to sea?" I said, "No, right now" [laughs]. I said, "If I'm going to do any fighting, I'm going to do it on land." They told

me to go home and take a week off. I went home, but I didn't go back. I just let them put me in the Army. Instead of putting me on land, they put me back on the water in the amphibious.

**Sellers:** So that's how you ended up at Gordon Johnston.

**Cox:** That's right. When they drafted me I went to Atlanta, from Atlanta to Fort Devins, and Fort Devins to Camp Edwards out on Martha's Vineyard and all of that. Then we come on down to Carrabelle, Florida, in the fall of the year 1944, I think it was 1944. I stayed there ... I was in the 534th. We were out giving them training ... I think it was the 4th Division or 3rd Division Infantry or something like that ... we was giving them amphibious training for the invasion of France. One night, we run into a little storm and it just pitched around and threw me around and hurt my back and I wound up in the hospital. I didn't stay but just a week in the hospital and I come on out. Then a little later on, they were getting ready to go overseas and they put me in the 594th. When I got in the 594th, it was a replacement to go overseas and they sent us on to California. We got there, we went over to New Guinea. We pulled amphibious operations in New Guinea ... I mean, you know, it wasn't just from shore to shore carrying re-supplies for American troops. We followed that up from Milne Bay, from Milne Bay to Buna, and Finschhaven, New Guinea, and ... there were so many places that I don't remember.

**Sellers:** I imagine you were all over the islands at that time.

**Cox:** Then we were attached to the Australian army for invasion over there on New Britain. We pulled some ships to shore - a little invasion over there, carried the Australian army troops in there. After we did all of that, we went back to the American base and they shipped us on up to the Phillippines. We got to the Phillippines and we just pulled amphibious force ... you know, unloading ships ... I mean, we hauled cargo and stuff from out in the water ... didn't have all the docks, you know, to bring the ships. We'd take it aboard our ship and carry it to shore and they'd take it off.

**Sellers:** What kind of a ship were you on?

**Cox:** I was on a LCM, Landing Craft Mechanized. I took some of my training on a LCV, but most of my duty was a LCM.

**Sellers:** What's the difference between a vehicle and a mechanized?

**Cox:** Well, LCM is a Landing Craft Mechanized, LCV is Landing Craft Vehicle. (I forgot about all of that). Anyway, LCV you can carry troops, you know, for small invasions. Now, LCI is a big ship for a big invasion. So that's what we did there in the Phillippines. We were taking training there. I think it was the 43rd Infantry Division - we were attached to them for the invasion of Japan.

**Sellers:** So you all were pretty sure that an invasion was going to come?

**Cox:** Oh, yeah. We done had our shore crew aboard the ship waiting for orders when Japan surrendered.

**Sellers:** I bet that made you all feel good.

**Cox:** All we could talk ... we said, "We've been lucky but this is it, this is it." But we gave them amphibious training for invasion of Japan. So the shore crew had gone aboard the ship ready for invasion. I was on the boat crew and was waiting orders, and I'll never forget that day. Man, I was .... Then it was late that evening and I was in the shower, taking a bath, and hear boys come hollering, shooting, going on - oh boy, oh boy. I just knowed the Japs had come back. They says, "It's over!" I says, "What?" He says, "The war is over." I says, "Yeah, all over the world." They said, "No - Japan surrendered." That's when they dropped that first atomic bomb. Oh, man, that was the best news I ever heard in my life. Then we got orders to come ahead and go aboard ship. We got on the craft and ... we'd set right on the boat and they'd lift us right up on the ship, and then they took us right on to Japan. We got there ....

**Sellers:** So you actually went into Japan?

**Cox:** Oh, yeah, we went into Tokyo. Well, Yokohama - Tokyo Bay - right there where General Electric Company was. I'll never forget ... you see, we had maps ... we had to study maps, you know, where invasions would take place, and we had to know all about how the beaches is and lights and depth of the water and everything like that. I still got my map.

**Sellers:** Do you?

**Cox:** I sure do - I still kept my map. But you know what? According to what we'd taken, that we was supposed to hit right there at the mouth of Tokyo Bay at Yokohama, but the map does not say that's where it's at. Because the water is too deep there and it was supposed to have been shallow water where we was going. I guess that was a good idea in case it got out, see.

**Sellers:** Sort of like the Normandy invasion - they were telling people ... letting them think you were going to go somewhere else.

**Cox:** Yeah. That's where it is. I still kept my map and I gave it to my grandson and he got a picture of me in my uniform and he's having it fixed up. So we went on in Japan and I stayed there ... I wasn't there but thirteen days and I had enough points to send me back to the States on point system.

**Sellers:** You had racked them up quickly.

**Cox:** Yeah. So then I come on back to the States and got my discharge, and later on they sent me a book about my outfit, the 594th. It don't have the 534th in it; it's about the 594th - that was the last one that I went through with overseas. It's got all the citations in there and they have everything about what we did ever since this outfit was formed, right on up to when we was discharged.

**Sellers:** Well, that's convenient, because you were probably so busy you didn't know half of what the others were doing.

**Cox:** No, that's right.

**Sellers:** Tell me a little bit ... had you ever been on an ocean-type ship? You had been up and down the east coast as a merchant, but when you started to go over into the Pacific, what kind of ship did they put you on?

**Cox:** A Liberty ship. Just an old cargo ship converted over to a troop carrier.

**Sellers:** What kind of a trip was it? Was it rough?

**Cox:** Well, it was pretty good for it just being converted. I believe it was good because we didn't have no problem.

**Sellers:** What about your food? How did they feed you and was it any good?

**Cox:** Yeah, the food was good. We got breakfast about ten o'clock and supper about four or five. We got two meals a day. That was going over.

**Sellers:** What did you do in between the meals?

**Cox:** We'd just walk around, talk to everybody ....

**Sellers:** You didn't have any duties or battle station practice or anything?

**Cox:** No, well, the only thing ... I had to do that, be on call in case of emergency. Another thing is I pulled guard duty on the ship, you know, we did all that. And just the regular things an old Army boy would do [laughs].

**Sellers:** What about mail? Who were you writing to?

**Cox:** The mail? Well, I wrote to my mother, my wife ....

**Sellers:** You were married?

**Cox:** Yeah.

**Sellers:** When did you get married?

**Cox:** I got married in 1942.

**Sellers:** So it wasn't long after you went into the service?

**Cox:** That's right.

**Sellers:** Was she a school sweetheart?

**Cox:** Well, no, they was building up Fort Stewart and she moved ... they had taken her mother's property and everything there in Fort Stewart, and she moved to my next door in Blackshear. That's how I met her. We were married for fifty-eight years when she passed away. I got a sweet wife now, too.

**Sellers:** Well, she sounds like it when I talk to her.

**Cox:** She is.

**Sellers:** When you got your points and you came back, did you come back into where - San Francisco?

**Cox:** San Francisco.

**Sellers:** What did San Francisco look like to you after all that?

**Cox:** Well, that Golden Gate Bridge was the prettiest thing I ever laid my eyes on [laughs].

**Sellers:** When you docked, did you dock in Oakland?

**Cox:** I believe that's where it was we docked.

**Sellers:** Was there any kind of celebration there welcoming you home?

**Cox:** Oh yeah, oh yeah. Man, they had a big band and welcomed us all home and they took us and rode us all through town on convoy and rode us all through town. And showed us how everything was and they got to telling us what kind of food we was going to have. We hadn't had no fresh meat in so long, boy, that sounded good.

**Sellers:** Did they actually give you fresh you meat, then?

**Cox:** Oh yeah, we had steak and we had ice cream (that's something we hadn't had) and we had real Coca Cola and things like that.

**Sellers:** You mean, you didn't have any Cokes when you were out there?

**Cox:** No, not where we was at. There's one ... we come into one camp that they had a place where they had Cokes. We could go the USO camp.

**Sellers:** Okay, because I thought everybody had Cokes during the war [laughs].

**Cox:** No. We was on the go all the time and we didn't get to ... we'd go from post to post. Sometimes we'd be attached to this outfit, we'd be attached to Army, we'd be attached to Navy, we'd be attached to the Air Force. Whatever they called us to do, we had it to do.

**Sellers:** Once you got back into San Francisco and got all your fun out of you with eating steak and everything, how'd they get you back to Georgia?

**Cox:** Let me see ... I stayed there I think it was two or three days, and they put me on a troop train and brought me back to Atlanta. I stayed there two days in Atlanta getting my discharge. And buddy, I saw many things, but that was the prettiest ceremony I ever saw in my life, getting a discharge. They had a band and Kate Smith singing "God Bless America." We were lined up in four ranks and there was a long line. This one here, on the outside, you know, he'd step forward and he'd salute the general and as he'd come down with his right arm after he'd given the salute, he'd take his left arm and go down and shake his hand and take your right arm and get your discharge. That's the way it did. Some of them about passed out. It had me shaking, too. Of all things, when it got to me, that general had to stop me and talk to me a while because he saw my insignia that said Amphibious Engineers, it had the seahorse on the arm. He had to ask me all about my outfit. I was the only Georgia boy in that outfit. I guess he saw my insignia and everything and he was a general. So I guess he saw my insignia and knowed what I'd done, and he said, "Well, that's one thing I can say," he says, "You boys done a good job over there." He praised me for it and everything. Of course, I didn't do it - I had help [laughs].

**Sellers:** When you got back home, what's the first thing you did?

**Cox:** Well, the first think I did, I took two weeks off. Then I got a chance ... I said, well ... you know they're paying me the 52/20 - you get \$20 a week for fifty-two weeks. I said well, I'll take two weeks off, and I says I'm going to get me a job. So I went to the Union Camp there in Savannah and got me a job there, and I would work six days a week and after I got through with it I was drawing \$18 and something cents a week [laughs].

**Sellers:** That's not good.

**Cox:** No. The thing about it ... somebody said, "You're crazy for doing that!" I said,

“Well, I’m looking out for later.” That’s what I did. If I hadn’t, I wouldn’t have had that job. So that’s where I retired from that.

**Sellers:** And eventually you were paid more than eighteen dollars a week [laughs].

**Cox:** Later on, yeah. I think I was making ... I can’t say for sure, I don’t remember how much it was. But anyways, I’d pull overtime - I was making \$18 and something a week. If I worked any more time, I’d get a little more. But I was glad to have that job.

**Sellers:** Did you ever think of using the GI Bill to go to school or anything?

**Cox:** Yeah, I did. I went to school and I went for about ... I don’t remember now ... about two years or a year and a half or something like that but I give it up because ....

**Sellers:** Just decided it wasn’t what you wanted to do?

**Cox:** That’s right. I said I’m going to stay right here at Union Camp and learn what I can about that, about the machines and bag papers, things like that. I just stayed right there.

**Sellers:** Sounds like it worked out as a career of you.

**Cox:** Yeah, yeah. It did. My wife worked there too. We worked right there together. See, I went there when a man and his wife could work together. Later on, they passed it that they couldn’t work together. But she could move over to the next machine. She couldn’t run my machine but she could work right there. I talked to her and I joked with her for a long time and some didn’t know that we were married. I’d cut the fool with them and tell them, “I’m going to take that girl home.”

**Sellers:** How do you think your experiences in the war changed your life? Do you think they did at all?

**Cox:** Well [laughs], I really couldn’t say because ... well, I’ll tell you - yeah, it has in one way. I have lots of things that I never would have saw and things like that.

**Sellers:** Did you ever go back to the Pacific?

**Cox:** No, I never did.

**Sellers:** Did you ever want to?

**Cox:** No [laughs]. The thing about it ... see, I was stationed there at Carrabelle and I kept saying I wanted to go back to Carrabelle and what it was like. So, this past year ...

**Sellers:** In March, when they had the reunion?

**Cox:** No, they done had it; they already had it when I went down there. I didn't know all about that - I didn't know nothing about it. I just wanted to go there and see what it was. All it was was a little crossroads or something [laughs].

**Sellers:** Right, that's all it is now.

**Cox:** So I wanted to go by there and see what it was like, and I got there and I found out that man, that place was built up and everything. So we're planning a trip going back there next March.

**Sellers:** Are you? Yes, the reunion is in March.

**Cox:** Yeah, yeah. This book I have about my outfit, it's got some letters from the General Hutchinson and all of them, you know ... citations from the Australian army and ... everything about us - it's got all that in there. So what I did, I went and had a copy made of it and I'm planning on sending you all a copy, and I'm going to take Carrabelle a copy. I got one copy made and I'm going tomorrow ... planning on having the other copy.

**Sellers:** Is there anything else you want to put on the tape recording?

**Cox:** No, I don't believe so.

End