

Interviewee: Baszkowski, Thomas R.
Interviewer: Robin Sellers
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Sellers: Mr. Baszkowski are you aware that we're recording this conversation?

Baszkowski: Yes, I am.

Sellers: Do we have your permission to do so?

Baszkowski: Absolutely.

Sellers: Great. Start out then, if you will please, by telling me a little bit about where you were born and grew up.

Baszkowski: I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, January 21, 1926. And that's where I grew up, right in Jersey City. I grew up in a Polish parish, I guess you would call it. And that's about it. I grew up and went to Public School 26 and 31. I went to high school and I quit high school in order to go into the Navy.

Sellers: You did? Was that before or after Pearl Harbor?

Baszkowski: That was after Pearl Harbor; it was in 1943.

Sellers: So you were just a youngster when you went in.

Baszkowski: I was seventeen.

Sellers: What do you remember about Pearl Harbor and the kids around you? Did it cause a lot of them to leave school or what?

Baszkowski: Well, in my particular case – I don't remember kids my age really — you know, everybody was excited and everybody used bad language, you know, about what happened. And in my particular family, I was the baby in the family of three of us boys, and we did have a brother-in-law by then. It's funny, my brother who's older than me by about four years, the next day, on Monday, he went across the river into New York City and signed up in the Navy for six years. And within three to three and a half weeks he was on a destroyer in the North Atlantic.

Sellers: Wow, that was fast.

Baszkowski: Wasn't it? He didn't even have a full sea bag.

Sellers: Was he the first one in the family to sign up?

Baszkowski: He was the first one, and then my oldest brother – my oldest brother tried to get in the Marines, he tried to get in the Army, he tried get in the Navy, but he has bad eyesight, and of course they kept turning him down. So he went to the Merchant Marine and he was able to go into the Merchant Marine. He served in the Merchant Marine during the war. And then my brother-in-law, at that time my brother-in-law was working as a guard, a security guard, in the Treasury Department. Now he was already a veteran of the Army; he had been discharged about a couple of years before Pearl Harbor, and as soon as Pearl Harbor came, he went about looking to get into the service. They actually took him in the Coast Guard as a munitions expert.

Sellers: Is that what he had been trained as when his —

Baszkowski: Well, evidently he had good training in munitions when he was in the Army and they made him a chief petty officer right off the bat. That was pretty good. And of course I was only fifteen and I couldn't get in and I couldn't wait to get in, I couldn't wait to get in, and my parents, you know, no way I could get in.

Sellers: I was going to ask you how your mom was dealing with that.

Baszkowski: Oh that poor lady, she was a saint. But they didn't want me — then when I reached my seventeenth birthday, you know —

Sellers: They couldn't stop you.

Baszkowski: I kept begging, I kept begging, and they finally let me go, because they still had to sign. I wasn't eighteen, I was seventeen and a few months when I finally got in.

Sellers: When you got in, where did you have your induction and tell me what happened then. Where did you go?

Baszkowski: Went to Great Lakes, boot camp. And if I remember, it was about – you know, it could have been longer, but it was about six weeks, I think.

Sellers: And this would have been in '43?

Baszkowski: Yes, yes. And they decided that they were going to send me to fire control school — I don't know if you know anything about fire control, but fire control is not putting out fires, it's locating your guns. Controlling the guns, the location, the direction. And they sent me to school for about – I think it was a four-month course of fire control. And of course I didn't — you know, I quit school after two years, but I got through fire control school okay and then they

sent me to Camp Bradford, Virginia, for LST – amphibious training. And we formed the nucleus of an LST crew, amphibious crew.

Sellers: And you did all your training there in Virginia?

Baszkowski: Yeah, for amphibious training. It was nothing but a — it was a physical, brutal camp. It was just running, running, jumping and climbing, and crawling and everything you can imagine. It was terrible. And you know, the leader of our camp was Gene Tunney.

Sellers: Really?

Baszkowski: He was a former heavyweight boxing champ. I think that's the guy that beat Dempsey.

Sellers: I think so, yes. Long before I was born, of course [chuckles]

Baszkowski: Yes, of course.

Sellers: What were you hearing about what was going on. We're maybe getting close to spring of '44 now, and your going to be going the other way to the Pacific?

Baszkowski: Yes. First we went to Jeffersonville, Indiana, and that's where the LST was built, the LST 700 which I served on. I think there was about fifty of us. And the ship was commissioned there from there it came down the Ohio River into the Mississippi.

Sellers: With you all on it?

Baszkowski: Yeah, oh yeah. That was quite an adventure for a seventeen year old.

Sellers: I'll bet it was. With an LST, do you become a plank owner?

Baszkowski: Oh yeah, I was a plank owner, sure. And then we went from the Mississippi down into New Orleans, naturally, and if I remember, the little place we went to was Cairo. They put the high stuff on the ship that we didn't have coming down the Mississippi, obviously, because of the bridges and everything. And we took on ammunition and a lot of stores and we took in more people on the ship. And then from there we went to Guantanamo Bay on a shakedown cruise. I don't remember too much of our shakedown cruise other than I lost a cigarette lighter.

Sellers: It's the important things you remember.

Baszkowski: Yeah, it was funny. Of course, I shouldn't have been smoking, I was too young, really.

Sellers: You're old enough to be in a war, though.

Baszkowski: Yeah, yeah. I had this beautiful Ronson cigarette lighter my brother-in-law gave me – the one that was in the Coast Guard. It was a beautiful thing and I had it in my breast pocket, you know, and I was on anchor detail and we're pulling up the anchor and I'm reading off the markings on the chain. And all of a sudden, I see this silver thing slip out of my pocket. I could have died; I could have died.

Sellers: I'll bet, wow.

Baszkowski: Yeah, well you know, big deal.

Sellers: Well, it was.

Baszkowski: Anyhow, yeah, it was, yeah. From our shakedown, we went — and this I can't remember this but they tell me that's what happened – we were going to go up the Atlantic, we were headed north in the Atlantic, and we got this order – I understand we were outside of Carolinas – to turn around and head for the Canal, we were going to the Pacific. Yeah, I don't know why they changed orders or what, but this was prior to D-Day in Normandy. So I guess we might of been slated to go to Normandy or who knows, you know, you don't know. And we wound up, we went through the Canal and then we took a long, long trip — and we were unescorted. I never saw another ship around that I can remember, and we went all the way to Manus in the Admiralty Islands.

Sellers: Alone?

Baszkowski: Alone.

Sellers: On an LST?

Baszkowski: On an LST. It took us – the trip from the Canal to where we wound up, if I remember correctly, was about thirty days. But it was a beautiful trip. You know, a kid from the city, seeing the Pacific Ocean, and we had beautiful weather. There was never any storms, no rough weather at all, and the ocean was just calm. And of course, you know, we're going real fast, I guess about ten, eleven knots. [Laughs]

Sellers: You'd get whiplash if you looked around too fast.

Baszkowski: But of course we kept – at night we were blacked out and we had good watches and everything. But you know, I think by that time the Japs in the navy part of it, they were pretty well beaten. They were pretty well — Halsey had did a good job on them, yeah.

Sellers: Did you ever feel like you were at war?

Baszkowski: Oh yeah, yeah. We made invasions. From the Admiralty Islands we went to New Guinea, Hollandia. And there were other little islands we stopped at and I don't remember their names — .

Sellers: When you say you stopped at them, you mean you got off the LST and went to fight people?

Baszkowski: No. No, no. We were carrying stuff; we were carrying equipment, we were carrying Jeeps and trucks and stuff. Then when we went into Hollandia, New Guinea, that's when I realized that there was a war going on, because there were Jap bodies still in the water. And you know, we're coming into the beach, we've got to lower our tank deck because we had troops aboard —. It was secured, there was a perimeter around the Hollandia area that was set up. I think that either the Army or the Marines kept the perimeter pretty secure. You know, this is when MacArthur started the island hopping. In other words, they went from island to island, and they wouldn't necessarily try and get all the Japs and kill them, but if we drove them into the jungle, you know, where they couldn't come out, that was okay because we could have our air bases there and fly from there.

Sellers: Yeah, you basically wanted possession of the island.

Baszkowski: Exactly.

Sellers: Yes, because you needed it for a stepping stone to Japan.

Baszkowski: Yes, that was it. And you know, it was when in a very interesting thing – I knew my god-mother's son was in 122nd Seabee Battalion. And when we docked into Hollandia, there was a big, like a home made sign up there, "122nd Seabees," and a big arrow on this road, you know. And I said, "Oh my God, that's where my buddy Eddie Dikey is." And I got permission and I went up there on that road – it wasn't far up, and in fact I got a lift, some jeep picked me up – and my god-mother's son was a mechanic and he was working in a mechanic shop of the 122nd Seabee Battalion. And when I walked in there, you couldn't imagine the look on his face – because we grew up together. You know, he was a Polish kid like me and like I say – in fact his mother delivered me. Yeah, I was born in a, you know, not in a hospital – at home, and his mother —. But it was funny, you know. And then, of course we started operating out of Hollandia; we made two or three more trips out of Hollandia, went to a few islands and delivered some troops and supplies, and then the last time we left — and each time, of course, I would get to see Eddie, you know, he'd come on the ship and the guys got to know him, because our ship was very small, you know, our crew was 125 guys, I guess. He got to know the gunnery department which I was in. And then we went to make the invasion of Leyte, and I don't know – that was in October of '44, I think —

Sellers: Because the war was over by the following year.

Baszkowski: Yeah, the war was over in September of '45. And then we came back from Leyte and went to Hollandia again, and I saw Eddie again. And we operated in a three ship flotilla; you know, we worked together. And believe it or not, I can't remember the numbers of the other ships, but they were LSTs — . And then we went to Sansapor, New Guinea, and did some more training of certain type of beaching and amphibious work. Then I remember we were there for that Christmas. And then we went up to Linguyen —

Sellers: Linguyen Gulf?

Baszkowski: Yeah, and made the Luzon invasion. By the way, at Leyte we saw Mr. MacArthur when he came aboard, when he, you know, went into the water and said, "I have returned," you know.

Sellers: Were you impressed?

Baszkowski: Well, we didn't like MacArthur.

Sellers: Why not?

Baszkowski: Well, I don't know if this was true or not, but they say that he set up sort of a little mansion of up in the hills in New Guinea —

Sellers: I've heard that before.

Baszkowski: You've heard that?

Sellers: Yeah. So I don't know if it's true or not, but a lot of people have told me that.

Baszkowski: Yeah. And to get the special equipment in to build this place — you know, obviously New Guinea is, you know, there's nothing there, it's jungle. And he used planes that could have been used to take wounded out (because we had wounded in the area). And you know, this is what we heard. And he was so arrogant anyhow, we just didn't like him. And you know, he made two trips. When he went ashore, he went into the water; he didn't realize he was going to get wet, but he did. And then I understand, reading books, that the next day — we were already off the beach by the next day, we were anchored out; we didn't see it, but they say that he made another trip just for photographic reasons.

Sellers: That is true, it's documented.

Baszkowski: That is true, see. I always thought that because we'd heard it. It's amazing how news gets around. Well, then after the Luzon invasion we dropped our troops and equipment off

in Luzon. And they didn't seem to have too much resistance, and we anchored out and they formed a little convoy. I think it was three LSTs and I don't know – I can't remember if it was a destroyer or a destroyer escort – and we were going to leave and we were going to go back to, I guess, New Guinea. But the Japs were at the end of their rope at this time, and on the twelfth of January we were really attacked very fiercely. A lot anti-aircraft, I mean a lot of strafing, and I think our ship suffered nine guys got shrapnel wounds, you know, but no casualties.

Sellers: Is that the first time that you'd actually been under that kind of attack?

Baszkowski: No, no we were under air attack before that, in Leyte. There was some strafing and stuff, so we were kind of used to it.

Sellers: Had you had casualties before?

Baszkowski: No, this was the first time they really got to us. And that was January 12th, because the next day, on January 13th, we were hit with a kamikaze.

Sellers: Oh, that's an attack!

Baszkowski: Yeah. That plane came off our port bow and swept one of the gun tubs with the gunners, you know, everybody in it, and the bomb that it carried penetrated the main deck and the next deck and exploded in the auxiliary engine room. So we had casualties down there and on the deck. That put the engines out, of course, and we started listing and we thought we were going to sink, but of course we didn't. You know, it was pretty nasty there for a while, but another LST – I'm trying to remember the number – was it 625 or – I'm not sure, I'd have to look into some paperwork I have. But it was another LST. And as a practice we do is we'd tow each other, and it's something that we did in training and everything. So off their stern winch line we got it hooked up to our ship, dragged it across the water, and it was a terrible job doing it. I mean, every body on the ship had to, you know, help pull this heavy line over. And we got it hooked up and then the line parted right away. Just the first strain on it, the line came apart. So of course we're not too far from Clark Field in the Philippines at this time, and the Japs, of course, had planes there and everybody's nervous about the whole —. The rest of the ships went on their own, the two other LSTs kept going, the destroyer escort stayed with us along with the other LST and they threw another line over and we tugged and pulled and we finally got it hooked up, and it parted again. So this time the destroyer or destroyer escort signaled over to our group, and said "Look, why don't you just abandon ship, we'll finish sinking her and we'll take all the survivors." And our Old Man said, "No, we want to do it again, we'll try to save the ship." So we did, and we finally got it hooked up. By this time it's dark. And this all started at daybreak, because the plane that hit us come right out of the sun, you know, you never even saw it. We were at battle stations, but you didn't see it until it was on you. But anyhow, it's now dark and this line is holding. This is the third time, and this line is holding and we're being towed slowly down toward Mindinao, I think. And this is a little story that I'll never forget as long as I live. You couldn't sleep below decks because, you know, it was a mess. And guys were sleeping topside on the gun tubs, anywhere. And I was sleeping under a gun tub, you

know, scared to death of everything, and all of a sudden I see this guy walking up with an axe in his hands and he's walking up toward the bow of the ship. And you know, it didn't dawn on me what he was doing, but I kept watching and I woke another guy up and I said, "Look at" – this guy's name was "-ski;" I won't give you his full name because, you know — but it was a "-ski" like I was. "Look at what Ski's doing." "You know what he's doing?" he told me, "He's going to cut the line." Because we wanted survivor leave.

Sellers: If you go in the water, you get survivor leave?

Baszkowski: If the ship is sunk, which the destroyer already told us that if, you know, that this is your last time; if it don't hold, we're going to sink it – we're going to take the survivors, you know, on our ship and we're going to sink the rest of it. So with it holding, of course, our survivor leave was over — we were out there almost two years, believe it or not. And we really wanted to go home. And here this guy was going up with the axe and he was going to cut that line if he could. And it's a big steel line, I don't know if you could ever cut it with an axe.

Sellers: But he was going to try! [Laughter]

Baszkowski: But the Officer of the Deck, he was on duty and he caught him. And he was probably the only officer that I really ever liked, because he was a mustang and he was a good guy, very competent. And he grabbed the axe and he grabbed this guy and he told him to get the hell out of there. He said, "I don't want to see you, and don't you ever say anything about anything." And he didn't turn him into the Old Man, because I'll tell you, our Old Man was tough! If he'd of heard about it, that guy would still be in jail, I think. Anyhow, it took us finally – it must have been thirty days to get to the Admiralty Islands. We were towed by different sea going tugs and different LSTs and we finally got to this big drydock in the Admiralty Islands. And they put us in drydock; it was what you call a battleship drydock because it could take like two LSTs and a destroyer all at the same time. It was a big, big drydock. And there was nothing going on over here; they hadn't had any air attacks or anything for two years. And we're up one night on the deck watching a movie, and all of a sudden here comes, you know, air raid alarm going. And you know, we can man our stations, but we couldn't – because we're so deep in a – you know, the only way we could shoot would be straight up. You know what I mean? We're down kind of like in a — and believe it or not, one Jap plane somehow got through and actually hit the drydock with a – had to be a pretty small bomb because it didn't make any impression on it – made a hole in the side but not very big – and nobody got hurt. When that poor Jap – by that time – because we didn't know it, but by that time there was nothing left of the Jap air force at all. I mean they were literally wiped out, they were gone. That was after the Battle of the Philippine Sea and the big naval battle after that.

Sellers: How long did you stay there, at the drydock?

Baszkowski: I think we were there probably a month and a half, maybe two months. Again, I'd have to go into records to give you dates, you know.

Sellers: What were your duties while you were in dry dock? Surely they didn't let you just kick back and relax.

Baszkowski: No. First of all, believe it or not, they sent us to gunnery school on the beach. And the gunnery school was like set up where you lived there for a couple days. And why went to gunnery school – by this time we were pretty good, and you know, we thought it was a big joke, except for the fact that we could drink beer and stuff like that. And that was about it, and see movies. And target practice was all right, because we really didn't know if the war was going to be over that soon or what. And then, of course, while we were on the ship, the rest of the ship, you know, we cleaned up and like all my fire control equipment, I did all the work on the gun sites and the director that I could. The gunners took care of – all the gunners, you know, and all the guns and everything were brought up to date. The deck gang, they did their chipping and their painting and their work like that. And of course, the machiners, the motor machs, they worked right along with the dock people who were repairing our engines. But we finally got put together and went back to sea and wound up in Manila Bay and that's when they dropped the big bomb.

Sellers: So you got to stay in Manila?

Baszkowski: Yeah, we went to Manila afterwards, and boy, the Japs really tore that place up before they left. I tell you, they devastated that place; it was terrible. And then after Manila, we loaded up again with troops and trucks and we went to Okinawa, Buckner Bay in Okinawa, and we got to Okinawa and didn't even get in the bay – well, we were just getting into bay when this message came out to all ships to go back out to sea because this big typhoon was on its way.

Sellers: Oh, you got in that one.

Baszkowski: And we got in that terrible typhoon and that was terrible. We had 150 troops on the ship and they lived on the port side and — you know, because of the kamikaze hit on our ship, there were a lot of places where we didn't have watertight integrity. And watertight integrity on the port side was not good. On the main deck water, would come in and leak into living quarters and that's where the troops were. And they were, you know, sick as a dog, all of 'em, just laying in the bunks and throwing up. And we had to go through there all the time because we had an ammunition magazine up at the bow of the ship on the port side. And we had to go through there because you couldn't walk on the main deck, that was out of bounds. And these poor guys, I'll never forget – it was a terrible sight. They were just dying, really, literally dying. And even half our crew was sick. It was the worst — and that went on for five or six days and nights. You'd look up and you'd see this mountain of water coming down on you. I mean, it was unbelievable. I saw that movie *The Perfect Storm*, you ever see that movie?

Sellers: Yes, and I got seasick.

Baszkowski: Yeah, well. That was calm compared to what we went through, I think, to tell

you the truth. It was horrible. In fact they wrote a book about it. Up to that time, up to when they wrote that book – and that was about ten or twelve years ago – they said it was the worst typhoon in that area, of all time that's recorded. And they lost two big minesweepers and a seagoing tug, and they just lost them.

Sellers: They just went away?

Baszkowski: Just went away, yeah. And there was a big cruiser, I think it was the *Pittsburgh*, where it tore the bow right off of it.

Sellers: Were you able to see any of this going on?

Baszkowski: No.

Sellers: No, you were hunkered down?

Baszkowski: Well, you just couldn't see. Every once in a while you'd see another ship, but we actually navigated by a pretty basic radar. You know radar just came out, and we had one in the wheelhouse and that's what we steered by. One thing you never did was stop all engines, you know, in a situation like this. And you made sure that you were as far from any ship as possible, because you didn't know, you know, what could happen.

Sellers: You didn't want to bounce into it.

Baszkowski: Right, right.

Sellers: Well, once that was over with, what did they do with you all? How did they get you all back together again and things?

Baszkowski: Well, we were still together. We went back to Okinawa when the storm was over and unloaded these poor guys, just dumped them, you know, and off we went. And by this time the agreement had been signed and we went to China and picked up a thousand Japanese troops and took them to Japan. The peace treaty had been signed and it was called repatriation duty or repatriation duty, whatever way you want to pronounce it. When we're in Japan, we'd pick up about 1,000 Korean laborers that were more or less slaves in the Japanese factories, and we took them back to Korea.

Sellers: Did you have any contact at all with the Japanese that you were repatriating?

Baszkowski: With the Japanese troops?

Sellers: Yeah.

Baszkowski: Oh, a lot of contact.

Sellers: What was their attitude?

Baszkowski: Well, they were bowing to us all the time.

Sellers: So they were submissive?

Baszkowski: Yes.

Sellers: Do you think it was sincere?

Baszkowski: No. No, we didn't think it was – we didn't trust them. I was in the gunnery department and we were responsible for them, and they were on our tank deck, 1,000 at a time. And we would actually patrol right through the ranks. We were never bothered, but I don't know, I never felt —

Sellers: Comfortable?

Baszkowski: No. No, I never felt — of course they wouldn't let us – and we had to go down there with empty guns.

Sellers: Sure, too much of an opportunity, for you guys.

Baszkowski: And of course when we were in the Phillippines, we saw some of the people who were in concentration camps that the Japs ran in the Phillippines. So you know, we hated the Japs. Took me a long, long time, myself, to get over my hatred. Very, very long time.

Sellers: When did you come back to the States?

Baszkowski: Well, I got back to the States in early '46; my points were up. You know, I was twenty years old now, I'm an old man. Well, I wound up in a hospital, I had a collapsed lung and I was in terrible shape.

Sellers: Were you injured in —?

Baszkowski: No, I wasn't injured. I suffered from malnutrition.

Sellers: The Navy wasn't feeding you?

Baszkowski: They were trying to feed us, but I lost my appetite because of the smell from the Japanese and the Koreans that we transported. We made several trips and they were very, very rugged trips because it was cold, winter time, the seas were very rough. I just couldn't eat; I lost

my appetite and all I could do was drink, and when we were in China, you could get a lot of booze and smuggle it on the ship and that's what we did. And of course I was smoking like a fiend. And I just didn't eat. And whenever we had liberty in China, it was just like for a five-hour liberty thing – it was in Tsingtao [??] or Shenzen [??]; they were the two ports that we operated out of. And they would only allow you to go on liberty during the day, and you had to be back to the ship at like five o'clock, 1700 – I forget the military numbers already.

Sellers: Yeah, because midnight is 2400.

Baszkowski: And of course we visited the houses of pleasure and that was about it. Just drink and that and smoke. And my weight kept falling, falling.

Sellers: They just decided they'd better get a hand on you.

Baszkowski: Well [laughs], my points were up and they put me on a troop ship in Yokuska, Japan, and on this troop ship is when my lung collapsed. And of course, all we did on a troop ship was sleep and just lay in the bunks; there's nothing you could do.

Sellers: So did you know you had something wrong?

Baszkowski: Oh, I had terrible, terrible pain in my whole left side, but you know, don't forget, you're dealing with a kid. You know, the mentality is pretty bad, and I wanted to get home so bad. And I knew that if I turned myself into sickbay, they going to dump me off in Oakland, because that's where we're going, Oakland, California. And then we're going to get on a troop train to the East Coast. And I knew that if I turned myself in, I'd wind up in a hospital somewhere on the West Coast. And my buddies on the ship, they did anything heavy I had to do, like pick up a seabag even; they did it for me. And they just all the way across country on this cattle car – it must have been a cattle car, that was converted into sleeping quarters, you know. We got across country and I wound up at Lido Beach, Long Island, and then I turned myself in. And of course, x-ray's showed this collapsed lung. I weighted 116 pounds and my height at that time was six foot. So you can imagine what I looked like. I probably looked as bad as some of those Philippine prisoners we had. But I was in the hospital for a month and they built my lung up and I gained about fifteen pounds and they discharged me, honorable discharge. And that was the end of my World War II career. And then like a jerk I signed up in the Reserve a couple years later.

Sellers: You didn't. Did you go to Korea?

Baszkowski: Yes. I didn't have enough, I guess.

Sellers: You actually went to Korea?

Baszkowski: Yep, I actually went to Korea. Now this time I went on a battle ship, *New Jersey*.

Sellers: Well, at least it's bigger.

Baszkowski: Oh yeah, yeah, it was bigger. And I had to go back in for two more years. And we're in Korea [phone cuts out; resulting conversation regarding cause not transcribed]

Sellers: Repeat what you said about you were on the ship and then Korea, and then I think you said something about the *Missouri*.

Baszkowski: Yeah, we relieved the *Missouri*. When the Korean war broke out, the *Missouri* was on station out there.

Sellers: Okay, that's what I missed when you cut out.

Baszkowski: Yeah. She was on station, and you know the *New Jersey* was the sister ship of the *Missouri*. Same class, looked exactly alike, and of course *Missouri* had the history of the peace signing and all of that stuff, and of course the *New Jersey* had the history of carrying Bull Halsey in the Philippine Wars; that was his headquarters, on the *New Jersey* in World War II. And we were out there, we were back and forth between Korea and Japan. I don't know how many trips we made because all we did was bombard, bombard, and then we'd go back for more ammunition and more supplies. We'd go to Yokuska and load up, and we'd have some liberty —. But you know, I got to tell you an interesting thing, which I thought was very interesting. When we would go to Japan, like if we would go sightseeing — by the way, I saw Japan right after World War II, you know, when they surrendered, and it was a junkyard. And when I went back there in 1951, it was all rebuilt; it was amazing.

Sellers: Did we do that?

Baszkowski: Well, under MacArthur, yes, we did it. I mean the Japs did it but with the American help; it was like the Marshall Plan in Europe. And MacArthur was a great administrator. I mean even though I disliked him, he was a brilliant man. And the Japs loved him, they just loved him to death. Anyhow, they rebuilt their country and it was beautiful. And we would go on liberty and we'd go into the railroad station and they always had like areas roped off for the Occupation Forces to walk in, so you never got in the crowd of the subway jams, you know, or anything like that. It was really nice. And we went on liberty to Tokyo on one trip and we're coming back, and you know, we're feeling pretty good, and we get into the railroad station and all we see is people, we don't see any lanes —

End side A

Sellers: Okay go ahead. So your lines are gone, your aisles are gone, what's happening?

Baszkowski: I don't know. I mean at the time we don't know. And then we got in the trains and they used to have a special cab for us, one of the trains special for Occupation Forces, and

the Navy, and the Army, and the Marines, they all used it, you know. And all of a sudden it's no longer there. Well, we found out when we got back, the peace treaty was signed in San Francisco, the permanent peace treaty. Truman had signed it, I guess, and the real permanent peace was signed right in San Francisco and it happened that day we happened to be on liberty and that's what happened; that's what happened.

Sellers: So they didn't have to be nice to you guys any more.

Baszkowski: Right. And they weren't nice to us, believe me.

Sellers: What a switch.

Baszkowski: Yeah, it was kind of a surprise.

Sellers: You're gone. You went away again. Something's happening.

Baszkowski: Oh, I'm sorry. I think we're at the end anyway.

Sellers: I think so, too. I was going to say, why don't we wrap it up?

Baszkowski: Mm-hmm.

Sellers: Let me ask you once again if we've tape recorded it with your permission?

Baszkowski: Oh, sure. Absolutely.

End