

view Pearl Harbor. I think we came back through the base hospital there for just kind of a checkup. Then they put us on another plane. This time it was a regular four-motor, I think the army called it a C-54, four-motor propeller job, you know.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: We got about an hour out over the ocean, headed toward the States and had motor trouble, had to turn around and go back. They worked on this motor, and we took off again. The next thing we knew, we were in Sacramento. I imagine it's somewhere around where Travis Air Force Base is now, somewhere in that area.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Then how they divided us up, I don't know. But they took me and several more, I think, they took most of us that came in on that particular plane and put us in the Oak Knoll Hospital

MR. PYLE: What hospital?

MR. ABBOTT: Oak Knoll in Oakland. Put us in the hospital there, and then they gave us all of this physical checkup, de-worming, everything. In other words, we went through all of that there, maybe some dental work, and I'm not sure how long we were there, but we were there a week or so.

MR. PYLE: This was the first hospital that you'd gone through the whole thing in?

MR. ABBOTT: Right. We just got minor checkups in the rest of the places.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Then, you had a choice of any hospital that you wanted to go to in the United States.

MR. PYLE: Because they were going to keep you in the hospital for a while?

MR. ABBOTT: That's what they wanted to do. They wanted to send you through the hospital for a checkup to see what--now I took New Orleans. Inasmuch as my home was close to Beaumont, Texas, about 45 miles from Beaumont, Texas, but enough to--I guess it turned out well, but I was in a quandry whether I should have taken Corpus Christi, for Corpus Christi is about the same distance as New Orleans. But anyway, I took New Orleans. And as you said, they put us in the hospitals. They didn't do an awful lot except just check how you feel and passed you over or kind of observe you a little bit and turned around and gave you 90 days rehabilitation leave right there.

MR. PYLE: Oh, that's super!

MR. ABBOTT: Ninety days rehabilitation. So that's when I--everybody was just like--you see this ad on TV now, you know, when they were anxious to get out of the [service]. I wasn't out of the service, but I was anxious to get going home until, like a lot of the VA, when they get out, they show it on TV in an ad now, they were in such a hurry to get out. Then later on, they come back, and they're wanting some of these benefits that they're entitled to. They weren't concerned with them at that time. So I don't know--they gave us some more money. I don't know how much, at New Orleans, and then I went home. I rode the train, I remember that, back to Beaumont. Then I rode the bus from Beaumont to where I lived. This was the first time that I had seen my parents in close to ten years.

MR. PYLE: It must have been an emotional reunion.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, it was. It was an emotional reunion. In fact, you can imagine how much older your parents look. Let's see, last time I had seen them was when I came on boot leave in 1936, in August or September, or somewhere along in there of 1936. This was in October of 1945, so it was almost, we're getting in the neighborhood of nine years and some, or a little over nine years.

MR. PYLE: It must have been a tremendous change in them seeing you too. You left home--

MR. ABBOTT: I could not call anybody by name because all the kids had grown up. They were all grown. I didn't recall anybody. But it was just a small town. I had my uniform on with all my medals, and my campaign bars, and it's still ironic that some of them said when I came back, some of these old-timers asked me, "Won't they let you out of that outfit?" [Laughter]. They said it was an outfit. But anyway, the first one I saw was my father, and my mother was still at home. I had to go on down to see her. They lived a little bit from town, and it was really an experience after being gone that long.

MR. PYLE: Sure.

MR. ABBOTT: Remembering how homesick I was as a 19 year old boy when I first went in the service and had to go off from home, it's just hard to get used to.

MR. PYLE: Now, you're almost a 29 year old man, at the time

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. I was 28. I think I was 28 when I got back.

MR. PYLE: You know, I've said that three months rehabilitation is a pretty long time, but in retrospect, after spending three years as a POW, it kind of diminishes in--

MR. ABBOTT: I was born in 1917. I was 24 years old whenever the war broke out, just passed my twenty-fourth [birthday]. I was 24 in 1941. So when

the war broke out in December, I was just past my twenty-fourth birthday. So I got to Japan, as I said before, on my birthday in 1943, so I was 26 years [old], and I didn't get out until after my twenty-eighth birthday.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. ABBOTT: So therefore, I was, if there is such a thing, in the prime of life. So those are the prime years of your life back then from 24 to 28. Of course, just to regress a little bit if you don't mind, you asked me before what did we do in the prison camp and what did we talk about. As I said before, we lived on rumors. But our main topic of conversation is what we were going to eat once we ever got back to the states. All we did was live in hope. We were hungry the whole [time], hungry all the time that we were in prison. Well, all we talked about was what we were going to eat when we got back to the states. Women, which is what young men would usually talk about in normal conditions, was never brought up, or anything of that nature. Food was on our mind.

MR. PYLE: Oh, yes. What was the first big meal that you got? That you had the choice of?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, the thing that we would crave so much was meat and sweets. Fortunately or unfortunately, I don't know which one to say, we had already filled ourselves up in Japan before we were ever released. As I said, we had all this food dropped to us, and we had access to that, so we immediately gained [weight]. I guess I weighed a little less than a hundred pounds when the war ended. You'd be surprised how quick rich food will put the weight on you, except that it does make you sick along the line. So, you couldn't eat as many sweets and things like that. By the time that we got back, including that two weeks that we spent in the Philippines with all that military food, we already didn't look like prisoners [laughter]. Of course, most of it was put on too fast, and it was more or less bloat. Then later on we suffered from that because a lot of us got stomach trouble because our stomachs had no doubt shrunk when we were in prison, gone down to a smaller size. Then we got all of this rich food too quickly, and we had stomach trouble. I don't say that it was serious, but it was something like gastroenteritis, and things of that nature that we had to overcome. Some of us probably never did overcome it.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. PYLE: Go ahead, Mr. Abbott. You were talking about, and I don't find this surprising at all, that the thing that you thought about the most over there was food. The one thing that you couldn't ever get enough of.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I don't reckon that this would be anything wrong to say this, but because I know that we did say it, and we joked about it a million times, that if we'd had our choice of Betty Grable or a good steak, which one would we take? We would have picked the steak any time [laughter]. That's all

that we ever talked about as far as prisoners are concerned. Because the other things just didn't come across your mind. When we did get back to America, going through all this eating, we just don't remember then what our choice of food was the first time we sat down to a good meal because we were already filled up by the time we got there. That's all we could talk about when we were in prison, when we were hungry, is what we were going to eat and what we were going to do when we got back. But then, I guess it was just kind of a big letdown because we were already filled up when we got here.

MR. PYLE: I'll never forget my own experience when I came back from Vietnam. We stopped at Oakland Overseas Replacement Station and were welcomed with this tremendous steak dinner, and it was the first time we had had that kind of a meal in a long time. So I, no, I remember mine very definitely. That's why I was wondering if you did.

MR. ABBOTT: No, we had just stopped off so many places on the way, like I said before, in the--

MR. PYLE: Okinawa and the Philippines?

MR. ABBOTT: We were greeted in Nagasaki by the Red Cross with some doughnuts, which we hadn't seen in years. Then on the American ships, that they put us on to transport us to Okinawa and also to the Philippines, plenty of food. Then in the two weeks that we were in the Philippines before we got out, plenty of food. Then the troops that were in route back to the States to Honolulu and Oak Knoll Hospital, plenty of food. So by the time we actually got a chance to get out into civilian life and to a restaurant, we were already filled up. But I heard many a military man say, "One thing I'm going to do when I do get back to the states, I'm going to one of the finest restaurants that they've got and order me up a great big bowl of rice. Then I'm going to sit there and dunk cigarette butts in it." [Laughter].

MR. PYLE: No great rice lovers [laughter]!

MR. ABBOTT: But I am not like that. I still like rice. Rice is one of my favorite foods. The only thing wrong with the rice, while I was in prison, was that I just didn't get enough of it. I still love rice. I'd rather have rice than potatoes.

MR. PYLE: Okay. But you still won't drive a Japanese car [laughter].

MR. ABBOTT: I won't say that I wouldn't, but I don't think that it would be very appropriate. I think it's a shame that a great country like this has to take a back seat to Japanese cars and German cars, when those two countries were our enemies. Now they're in the greatest shape that they've ever been in their history.

MR. PYLE: It is ironic, isn't it? That the two losers in World War II have come out the two super industrial powers.

in England that the empire is so spread out over the world that the sun never sets on the British Empire. But now they--

MR. PYLE: Britain, and France too, neither have ever been able to recuperate after the war.

MR. ABBOTT: Never will. Never will. Never will recover. I was over in France in the late forties and early fifties, long before they were completely recovered, you know, before the Marshall Plan had shown that it had taken its effect. But France had never fully recovered either. Although they did recover a whole lot more so than England.

MR. PYLE: Of course, you can still go through the French countryside and see World War II. The marks are still there.

MR. ABBOTT: Same way with Italy. There are a lot of marks of war there in Italy. I was there.

MR. PYLE: We've got you back to the States now. Now you continued to stay in the military.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. I went to New Orleans to the hospital, and this is where my records were kept. I remember and I still have a letter and the medal that was awarded to me when I was at that hospital. Even though I was a navy man, I was awarded an Army Distinguished Unit Badge with an oak leaf cluster. So I joke about this now, although I guess it's no joking matter. Here I was a navy man and wore a marine uniform and fought as a marine during World War II and was awarded an Army Distinguished Unit Badge. So it was a kind of a mixed up deal, wasn't it [laughter]? I got all three militaries in there.

MR. PYLE: That's right and there was no air force at the time, so it was just the air corps.

MR. ABBOTT: No, just the U. S. Army Air Corps at that time. Instead of us being awarded what they call a Presidential Unit Citation, we were awarded an Army Distinguished Unit Badge. I still have that badge. I was awarded that with a citation down at the naval hospital in New Orleans. Of course, that didn't mean much to me back then. I was so anxious to get back. Well, I didn't know what I was going to do after I finished. Went home and saw my people and then came back to New Orleans after my 90 days rehabilitation leave was up.

Somewhere in the process there, between the time that my 90 days rehabilitation leave was up, I'm not going to say that this was a bad thing, I thought it was one of the most wonderful things that ever happened, at that time, but it turned out just to be sour grapes later, when I met my first wife. I was 28 years old, and met this girl that was 19. It was a quick courtship, and we got married.

MR. PYLE: All within this three-month period?

MR. ABBOTT: All within this three-month period.

MR. PYLE: It was a quick courtship, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: It turned out that this girl was almost related to me. We had never met each other's parents when we got married. We weren't related, but we did have the same first cousins.

Well, there was a daughter born of this marriage, and that's the only child that I have even today. My daughter is living in Houston, Texas, now, and I see her often. She calls me often. She has her master's degree. She teaches school in Houston, and I'm very proud of her. That was one thing that came out of the marriage, even though the marriage was dissolved, but I still have a wonderful daughter out of that marriage.

MR. PYLE: And what is you daughter's name?

MR. ABBOTT: Mrs. W. P.--well, her name is Linda Bellenger, B-E-L-L-E-N-G-E-R, Bellenger. There's her--well, I can show it to you later. It's on the television. I'll show her picture to you.

MR. PYLE: Okay, we'll get over and look at that. Oh, that's good, that's good.

MR. ABBOTT: I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. I had almost ten years in [the service], and I went to Galveston for my first duty, up to the U. S. Supply Depot in Galveston, Texas. I went back to duty and never once had they ever told me, "You got to do something, re-enlist." So I just kept hanging on, and finally a message came through from the headquarters over there in Galveston, "Here you are about four years or something overdue for a discharge. You're going to have to do something." [Laughter]. So, I didn't know, at that time, exactly what to do. Jobs were kind of plentiful. I even was ridiculed when I did make up my mind later, "What are you doing still staying in that outfit? Why don't you get out? There are plenty of jobs available." But I didn't listen to that. I went on and re-enlisted and stayed in.

I had a good job there in Galveston, I mean as far as the navy was concerned. Good pay back in those days. So, I re-enlisted. So therefore, my first enlistment was almost ten years before I got my first discharge out of the service. Then I went on and completed 22 years in the navy.

MR. PYLE: Twenty-two years. After Galveston, how many different places? You mentioned--

MR. ABBOTT: I was in Galveston, then I stayed there until they closed the supply depot in 1946. Then I went to New Orleans and Algiers. Then from Algiers to the naval air station in New Orleans. Then from the air station in New Orleans back to the naval air station in Hitchcock, Texas, which is almost right back where I came from in Galveston. It's only 17 miles from Galveston.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. ABBOTT: This was a blimp base. The navy had blimps back in those days, dirigibles. I went back there for duty, and I reported into the naval air station in Hitchcock, Texas, on the day that Texas City blew up. Do you remember that?

EDITOR'S NOTE: A ship exploded in the Texas City, Texas, harbor 16 April 1947, which resulted in 500 deaths and over 3000 injuries.

MR. PYLE: Oh yes! That was that big gas--

MR. ABBOTT: The nitrate laden ships were there.

MR. PYLE: That's what it was, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: They caught fire, and then e in prison in February 1981.

MR. ABBOTT: I think it was an all officer jury. So, it's interesting to see what's going to happen. But we don't know the details behind it, but it's kind of like maybe the one, well, pick o

MR. ABBOTT: Nineteen forty-seven.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: I remember that there was another guy, even though it was seventeen miles away, was close to a window looking out when this explosion hit, and the glass came everywhere. The concussion, seventeen miles away, and some of the glass went in his eyes. Some people had enough forethought, or something, to catch ahold of the guys hands. Wouldn't let him rub his eyes with his hands.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Until they got that glass out of his eyes. That probably saved his life--I mean his eyesight rather. But anyway, that was a horrible thing, almost like a war, to see what happened down there. Because then right across the road from our base, there at the naval air station in Hitchcock, was a separation center that had been used after World War II to separate soldiers from the services.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Big separation center. I don't know what kind of a base it was. Well, that's where they took all the dismembered bodies, and so forth, over there, and put them in cold storage to try to piece them together. It took months to ever get all that out of there. American sailors that were there, and I was in on part of it, and we went down to help the town to get back to normal, picking up bodies. To show you what concussion will do, secretaries,

women were sitting at desks close to that dock area with their hands still on the typewriter and dead.

MR. PYLE: Oh, is that right?

MR. ABBOTT: The concussion had killed them. Most of the people who were killed were people who had gone down ^{as} curiosity seekers.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: A lot of them were curiosity seekers. They had gone down into the area to see this ship burn, and it exploded with that nitrate, which is a fertilizer. When it exploded, well, the sharpnel and everything just went everywhere. It just dismembered people. It cut them all to pieces. So, it makes me mad today, or it disturbs me, when I see a fire truck going to a fire and then I see curiosity seekers around it or following it or going around and getting in the way. If they could just have seen what happened in Texas City, they wouldn't want to take any chance.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, then I stayed at Hitchcock, oh, I guess until 1949, or I'm sorry, 1948. Then I had to go to sea again. So they transferred me to San Francisco, and I stayed there at the receiving station waiting on a ship in 1948. I caught an oil tanker in 1948. Then I remember that my wife came out on a train with my one year old daughter at that time. She was born in 1947.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. PYLE: Okay. You had caught an oil tanker, you say.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, went on an oil tanker. Well, let's back up just slightly there. I was waiting at the receiving station in San Francisco for a ship. The ship that I was supposed to go to was a hydrographic, oceanographic survey ship that was going to the North Pole. And one of the last places in the world that I wanted to go was to the North Pole.

MR. PYLE: Understandable, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: So I don't know that I--I'm not going to say that I one hundred percent faked an illness, but thinking about it made me ill [laughter]. So I went to the hospital and--I mean I went to the doctor and told him that I had stomach trouble, and I did. I guess that's what it turned out to be was gastroenteritis. I thought I had ulcers, and they sent me to the hospital in Oak Knoll, California, back to the hospital that I had been in before.

MR. PYLE: When you first returned stateside?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. Then I didn't have much of an appetite. I guess it was because it had only been two years, three years, after I got out of prison. I

saw a lot of people later who had stomach disorders, and I didn't have much of an appetite. I went through a lot of testing and got all my dental work up to date and went through a therapy to improve my appetite. By the way, the therapy treatment for my appetite was insulin.

MR. PYLE: Insulin?

MR. ABBOTT: They gave me insulin shots like they give people for diabetes.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: The doctor who gave me the shot, gave me the insulin therapy, whatever it was that they gave me, didn't tell me at one time what they do to you. One of the shots that I got broke me out into a cold sweat and a nervous [tremor] and I was so hungry until I could, I think I could have eaten weeds, if I had got to it. I headed for the galley and just luckily it was about mealtime. I think I just piled everything that I could on my plate, and I started eating. But now I told the doctor about it later and he kind of laughed and said, "I'm sorry. I should have told you that insulin takes the sugar out of your system. I should have told you to go into the diet kitchen there and get you some pineapple juice, or tell you to carry some sweets on you, or candy, or something on you, so you could replace that."

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: He said, "That's my fault." That was too late for that.

MR. PYLE: You really did have stomach problems now [laughter]!

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, that really did do it. Anyway, I stayed there for two or three weeks. I don't remember the exact date, but until I got dental work done. By that time, they had already outfitted this oceanographic survey ship and got somebody to replace me, and it sailed to the North Pole, which I had no regrets.

MR. PYLE: That's enough to make you feel better right there [laughter].

MR. ABBOTT: I felt better. So instead, I went back to the receiving station and waited, had got another ship, an oil tanker. Then this ship was due to go back to the Far East. We got as far as Honolulu in 1948 and our plans were changed. We stayed there about 30 days in Pearl Harbor. The next thing I knew, we were headed toward Balboa Canal Zone, and we had to tow a dry dock, a floating dry dock. It took us 54 days to go from Pearl Harbor to Balboa. We didn't see any land in that 54 days going. Of course, you could only tow it at a certain speed.

MR. PYLE: To the Balboa Straits? That's right at the foot of South America?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, right there before you go into the canal. Balboa, that's the western port of the canal. You go into the Atlantic part of the canal in Colon, and then you go into the western [which] is Balboa. They're both at different sea levels, see. That's the reason why you got that canal.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I misunderstood, right.

MR. ABBOTT: That was an interesting trip through that canal.

MR. PYLE: You said about the--you were talking about the Panama Canal. I thought you meant the Balboa Straits.

MR. ABBOTT: [Inaudible].

MR. PYLE: Yes, okay.

MR. ABBOTT: When we dumped the dry dock at Balboa, not dumped it, but turned it over to where we were supposed to deliver it to, they changed coasts for us. Instead of us going to the Far East, we went on through the canal and changed our home port from the West Coast to Newport, Rhode Island. So we went to Newport, Rhode Island, and that was my first duty in the Atlantic. In 1950, we sailed to Europe and the Mediterranean and North Africa. Then, of course, in 1950 when I got off the oil tanker, I was an instructor at the navy storekeepers school in Bayonne, New Jersey, and they later moved the school from Bayonne to Newport, Rhode Island. In 1951, see, they used to have all the schools for officers and enlisted men all at Bayonne, right at the same place. I went through the instructor's school in Norfolk, Virginia. That, by the way, was one of the hardest schools I've ever been through. It was a 30 day instruction school that I went through in Norfolk, Virginia, under college professors. And I'm telling you, you had to learn not only what you teach, but how to teach it.

MR. PYLE: Oh yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Most of us were nervous when we got up, and you could see all the mannerisms in the world when people would get up. One guy was so nervous one time, and he got up--you're supposed to write your name on the blackboard, tell who you are--and he said, "Well, good morning, my name is blackboard." [Laughter]. All the mannerisms! But it gets you out of some of those. You could hear people practicing their speeches all during the night--even in their bunk lying there [laughter]. So you start out with a ten minute speech, then a 20 minute speech and go on up to a 30 minute speech to deliver. So I think that was one of the best schools that I've ever been through, and it certainly helped me in later years when I was an instructor at a junior college.

You know yourself, and I have seen this right out here at the University of

Southern Mississippi, when I went to school out there, we had, I'm sure, some of the most learned professors in the country but they didn't know how to put it over. I know I can say this now without hurting anybody, but I took a course in money and banking under a professor out there in 1961 who was a graduate of Harvard and Dartmouth, anyway two New England colleges. No doubt [he] was a learned man, but he just came in and read the stuff and would never look up where you could ask a question. So I think that maybe it might be good for everybody that is going to teach school to go through something like that, not only knowing what to teach but how to do it.

MR. PYLE: Exactly, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Because I know that Southern right out here, and I think about it, no matter where you go, you'll find some of the world's best and the world's worst teachers. Just because somebody has a Ph.D. doesn't mean that he can teach school. He's got a head full of knowledge, but he doesn't know how to impart it to somebody.

MR. PYLE: Which is just as important.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, it's just as important.

MR. PYLE: Exactly.

MR. ABBOTT: One of the best, I'm not going to say the best, but one of the best teachers that I've ever had at Southern was a part-time instructor, a West Point graduate, and his name is Sullivan--he may still teach out there but his daddy was with Standard Oil Company, distributorship of Standard Oil.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see.

MR. ABBOTT: He could teach. He taught economics and could make a course that can be just as dry as a desert interesting. You've taken some economics, haven't you, I'm sure?

MR. PYLE: Oh, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Because I know I took some later under a Ph.D., and I didn't understand what he was doing, and nobody else did, because he just couldn't impart it. Well, anyway, not criticizing any professors, let's go on with it.

MR. PYLE: Okay [laughter].

MR. ABBOTT: I was in instructor's school, and then I taught school in the navy schools in Bayonne, New Jersey, and Newport, Rhode Island. If I may say so, I've had a lot of college graduates who came into this school, you know, when they go in and get their military service and come to me and tell me, "You know in that nine weeks, I have learned more than I did in maybe a whole year of college work. I can [say that] because it was put over where we could

understand it." We'd take them through a certain area at a time and another area at a time. Then go right on through the ship's store, the clothing and small store, knowing how to be a storekeeper all the way through the supply area. Then a nine-week course, and one time there in Bayonne, I had a group of 54. I think it was 54 businessmen that came from all over the country, and my job was to teach them in that one week the ship's store operation. Some of them were lawyers.

MR. PYLE: You had to cram a nine week's course--

MR. ABBOTT: I taught them that week. Most of them, I think, were just coming for a good time in New York and to get away from it. But anyway, it was an experience for me and every one of them. They wanted to shower me with gifts, which was illegal to take money or otherwise, "You did a good job. We learned a lot." Anyway, that was a great experience, and we'll leave that now. That's in my later years, which I had no intentions of ever being a teacher. But it turned out to be very beneficial by going through a 30 day program where you learn nothing except to learn how to teach.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: In other words, to get it over to somebody, and that is important. You can have a head full of knowledge but unless you know how to get it over to somebody else, it's not doing anybody any good except the person who knows it.

MR. PYLE: I'm going to, before we move on in your naval career and you're still, oh, I guess seven or eight more years in your naval career, go back and discuss something that you, I think, had some contact with. The war crimes trials are normally thought of in the European theater but this came up in the Japanese and the Pacific theater too.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we should have taken that up, I'm sure, right after I got back to the states and when I went back to duty. Then when we were interrogated, when we got back then, after we got off of our rehabilitation leave, the naval intelligence, which was, I guess, a military arm that correlates with the FBI or anything else there, naval intelligence would ask me to make statements. Of course, I made as much as I knew at that time, even gave names of which I can do now, in Japan, who treated us bad, including the camp commander and the ones that were really tough on us, and also the Americans. That's the time that I turned in the [man] who was at that time a navy lieutenant when he was captured. He was made the mess officer in this camp that I was in in Japan.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: He's the one that turned in somebody that did minor infractions. Of course, I realize that he had a duty to do but he could have corrected some of those things himself by not turning you in to the Japs. In other words, he collaborated, I would say, with the enemy. I turned him in

many, many times, and they had a general court-martial for him in Washington. They tried to keep it on the hush-hush because he was a naval academy graduate.

MR. PYLE: Oh yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: They didn't want any bad names against the naval academy. Drew Pearson, who was an old blabbermouth, but he did some good things too, like Jack Anderson, his protege, exposed it, exposed this trial. But luckily, not luckily but unfortunately, they never did call me to the trial in Washington because I was against him. Many more of them were against him, and most of the people they called up there were the people who were his cronies, or his buddies, and he beat it. They restored him to duty. So finally, I got to the point where intelligence would come around and ask me and I said, "I'm not saying any more. Don't bother me anymore. I'm through." I just wouldn't say any more about it. I had already said all I knew anyway, and so I just refused to talk anymore.

Of course, if I may just regress just a second, when I was on this oil tanker that I caught in San Francisco in 1948, and I went to Pearl Harbor just before we towed this dry dock. When we got to Pearl Harbor, or when we were there, we had another ship in the harbor that was going to inspect us, going to come over and give us inspection. We didn't know who it was, and we didn't know who the commanding officer was, or anybody else, but just coincidental that I had the quarter-deck watch on this tanker that day in 1948. Then, I had a .45 caliber pistol on for security, and it was loaded too. This captain's gig came alongside and who stepped out but this former lieutenant that was mess officer in my prison camp. He was a full commander and was the captain of this ship. Well, our executive officer and our captain were down there to see him aboard. And I don't know, it just hit me, and I don't--I'm not saying this now to say that I, maybe I was wrong but something just hit me, and I said, "I wouldn't let that traitor S. O. B. aboard this ship."

MR. PYLE: You told that to your captain?

MR. ABBOTT: I told that to my captain. I said, "I wouldn't let that traitor S. O. B. aboard this ship." Well, they relieved me from my duty. They saw that I was getting pretty well shook up. They took the gun away from me and sent me to my room, to my quarters. I guess that if I hadn't of had an understanding with the captain, my commanding officer now and the executive officer, they could have probably court-martialed me for making those remarks. But it just got the best of me when I saw that guy back--things that he had done back when we were in prison--back restored to duty and then commanding officer of a ship. Then when I went to Fontana this year in 1980 and saw one of the--I'm going to show you that I wasn't by myself, and some of these people I hadn't seen in 35 years--the subject was brought up without me asking. So, we don't have to worry, we don't have to talk about this particular person anymore, he's dead.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see. I see.

MR. ABBOTT: So, he was a subject of a lot of conversation, in other words, a traitor. So he died, and the guy that was with him, that was the same, his number was 18 and mine was 17, and we were both first class storekeepers. I was one number above him but he had somehow or another talked himself into being the right arm of this guy that was--and he turned out to be just about as big a traitor as the other one. I found out about him when I was out here in the mall one day. I happened to run across a guy with a POW tag. I don't believe I have his name on that list there but I got it on the other one, and I'll point it out to you. His name was Forsyth and I'll point it out to you later on that other list that I've got over there. And he told me that this guy--I asked him about Gascoigne, this particular guy that was number 18--and he said he and his wife were going someplace, I think just last year, and were killed in a car wreck. So, we didn't have anybody to talk about too much when I was in prison.

MR. PYLE: Frank Forsyth?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. He lived over here at Foxworth, Mississippi.

MR. PYLE: Okay, good.

MR. ABBOTT: This fellow, for some reason, he will not come to our meetings. He doesn't want anything to do with prisoners of war. We've invited him to come over here, you know. He said, "I don't want to go to a bunch of meetings and hear a bunch of people gripe about their problems." I said, "We don't sit around and gripe about our [problems]. We just have a good time. We don't complain about all the VA stuff." If I depended on what the VA did for me, I guess I'd gripe a little bit too. They sure have treated the veteran pretty shoddy in this last administration [Carter's], taking veterans' beds away from them down in Florida and for these Cuban refugees. The veterans can't even get a bed in the hospital. And when people spill and shed their blood for their country and they get treated like this.

MR. PYLE: It all boils down to politics.

MR. ABBOTT: You can pretty well take it down to the fact that you know who I'm against.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: The administration. I don't, and, of course, this has all been brought on right from the very beginning when all these people who are draft dodgers were pardoned when they got back, when Carter took office. It has not been, not a very, I don't think you'll find many, many veterans who'll--

MR. PYLE: Well, the VFW, of course, is campaigning for the--

MR. ABBOTT: I just got their magazine a few days ago, and I read it last night. The national commander of a two million man organization has endorsed Ronald Reagan for president. If you haven't read it--I gave it to my

sister-in-law this morning to read, because she's interested in that too. She's going to bring it back, so if I see you again, I'll give it to you and let you read it.

MR. PYLE: Oh, that would be interesting. Yes, they have endorsed Reagan.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, it's a pretty shoddy thing when a man goes and fights for this country, I don't care if it was an unpopular war or whatever it is, Vietnam, or whatever it is. Then he comes back and can't get any treatment from his own government. They cut the veterans and still keep increasing the give-away programs, but let the veteran go by the wayside. Well, I reckon that's enough on that right now [laughter].

MR. PYLE: Okay. I appreciate you coming back and mentioning this part that you played in the war crimes trials, and I'm sorry that it was as ineffectual as it turned out.

MR. ABBOTT: I never was called, so I just never did--maybe it's as well that I didn't. Because I might have gotten up there and might not have been completely a hundred percent objective, or a little emotional, or something about it. But still in all, I was hoping that they did have some that were against him, instead of not all the ones that were for him, as far as the court-martial was concerned. Now, I was noticing the other day, and I'm not going to say I'm pro or con on any of the things, but every one of this jury sitting in on this Garwood trial was officers. I'm not going to, but I've heard Lieutenant General John Flynn speak to us, who was the one that I brought up before that spoke, that was in prison in Vietnam for five and a half years. If you could have heard him say, "I'm not going to say what was right. Now this one guy is just a scapegoat. A lot of people were, and some of those high ranking officers, should be right in there." So that's going to be kind of like the pot calling the kettle black. So anyway there's a whole--they're supposed to come out with a ruling on that now in the next few days.

MR. PYLE: Ought to be coming up pretty soon.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Captured in 1965 by the North Vietnamese, Gary Garwood returned to the United States in March 1979 and faced charges of collaboration with the enemy. He was found guilty by a Marine court-martial and sentenced to life in prison in February 1981.

MR. ABBOTT: I think it was an all officer jury. So, it's interesting to see what's going to happen. But we don't know the details behind it, but it's kind of like maybe the one, well, pick out one person like that and they convict him. All of the other shoddy things that have gone on, as far as pardoning draft dodgers and those that evaded. You know, even in World War II we had people that didn't want to fight but at least they went into some other kind of an alternative program. I think Lew Ayres was one of the popular movie stars back in those days. He was a conscientious objector but at least he went into some

other program. But I think there's a difference in a conscientious objector and a draft dodger.

MR. PYLE: Yes. Yes, there certainly is a distinction there. We've got you teaching in Newport, Connecticut, now.

MR. ABBOTT: Newport, Rhode Island.

MR. PYLE: Rhode Island, yes. Go over, hit some of the highlights of the rest of your military career and some of the [inaudible].

MR. ABBOTT: All right. The highlights, after I left the school in 1954, I left to put the U.S.S. Intrepid CVA II back in commission in 1954 in Norfolk, Virginia. They remodeled it, took it out of mothball because it was terribly hit during World War II. It was like the Yorktown and other carriers that were severely bombed and burned. I was on it when it was recommissioned in 1954. I served on it for 30 months. We went to Guantanamo, Cuba, for shakedown and then we made two trips to Europe and the Mediterranean. We went all the way around from Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, all the north African ports.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: I made two cruises over there on it, and then got off of it in 1956. At that time, I had 20 years in the service but I still didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't know whether I wanted to get out or not, so I shipped over again for California. I hadn't been to California since, well, back right after--before the war days or right after the war. I mean for duty just before the war. I went back to San Diego, caught my first destroyer.

MR. PYLE: Twenty years in the service and getting your first destroyer?

MR. ABBOTT: Got my first destroyer.

MR. PYLE: Excuse me.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. PYLE: Okay, go ahead.

MR. ABBOTT: When, after serving three months on that destroyer [it] didn't take but one day to find out anybody that served on a destroyer ought to get hazardous duty pay. I wouldn't begrudge it if sailors got hazardous duty pay because our quarters were right up in the bow. When you go to bed at night, you've almost got to rope yourself and tie yourself in your bunk.

MR. PYLE: It's that rough, huh?

MR. ABBOTT: That rough. I had made a trip to Washington D.C. to find out about my shore duty. I went to the Pentagon to find out about my shore

duty, not the Pentagon but the Naval Bureau of Personnel. They told me that they had just issued my shore duty orders but it was to someplace around the fifth naval district in Norfolk, I guess. And I said, "Well, cancel them. I don't want to go there. I don't want to go to Norfolk." But anyway, they paid my way all across the country.

I went to San Diego. I got the port that I wanted. I got the coast that I wanted, but you were supposed to have been able to get the ship that you wanted, so I asked for a tender, and they gave me a destroyer.

MR. PYLE: Oh, my goodness!

MR. ABBOTT: So, I was on this destroyer only three months. I hadn't been aboard long before my orders that I had told them to cancel caught up with me. Well, then I didn't want them cancelled. So, I took these orders and went all the way back. Instead of Norfolk, it was revised, but was still in the fifth navy district and it was in Bainbridge, Maryland. They trained Waves and young sailors and all there, but I wasn't in on the training part. I was just in the supply. I never was a recruit pusher or anything like that. So this was in fifty-seven, early part of fifty-seven when I reported in to Bainbridge, and there I stayed until 1958, October of fifty-eight, when I went into what they call the fleet reserve. Then I had 22 years, a full 22 years then when I got out.

This is where I met my present wife. She was in the Waves. By the way, my wife is retired from the navy too, but hers were--most of it was in the reserve. She served four years during World War II in the Waves.

Then she kept her reserve time up at the naval reserve units at Laurel and then Hattiesburg, out here, this unit out here behind the Pontiac place, you know.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: She went out there. They used to drill once a week, but then they changed it to have a weekend drill, go out there the whole weekend. She was the only Wave that was out there, and the first person to retire from that unit, and the first Wave to retire.

MR. PYLE: Oh, is that right! Your wife is the first Wave to retire?

MR. ABBOTT: Here, and also the first person to retire at this unit.

MR. PYLE: Oh, that's something.

MR. ABBOTT: She had 33 years service.

MR. PYLE: Perhaps we ought to get your wife's name in here now at this time.

MR. ABBOTT: D-E-E.

MR. PYLE: . . . Dee?

MR. ABBOTT: . . . That's her first name, and E. or Elizabeth.

MR. PYLE: . . . Okay. That's fine. And her maiden name was Thornton, is that correct?

MR. ABBOTT: . . . Thornton.

MR. PYLE: . . . Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: . . . And, let me cut this off.

EDITOR'S NOTE: . . . At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. ABBOTT: . . . Also, I'm drawing state retirement, 20 years teaching. I taught 16 years, but the state gave me credit for four years military service, so they're paying me for 20.

MR. PYLE: . . . Oh, that's super. That's super! I'd say you're doing all right then [laughing].

MR. ABBOTT: . . . Then I get social security, which I started last year when I was 62.

MR. PYLE: . . . What prompted you to go into your teaching career? Was it from this earlier experience?

MR. ABBOTT: . . . No, when I got here after my wife and I married in fifty-seven, then I went back to Maryland. I stayed until fifty-eight when she came up during the summer up there with me, and when she came back she was still teaching. She was teaching down at Beaumont, a little town in Perry County, Mississippi. So then, she got her job here at the high school in fifty-eight, and so I came here not knowing what I was going to do. And then I decided, "Well, I'm still eligible for the GI Bill."

MR. PYLE: . . . And still a young man.

MR. ABBOTT: . . . So I felt a little odd. Here I am 41 years old going out there to school [laughter] with all those young people, but you soon get over that.

MR. PYLE: . . . Oh yes.

MR. ABBOTT: . . . So I went to school out at Southern on the GI Bill. Then I got my degree in sixty-one. I started in fifty-nine, got my degree in sixty-one.

MR. PYLE: . . . That's a pretty quick degree.

MR. ABBOTT: . . . Yes, about two and a half years. Then I had made good

enough grades, I got the opportunity for a teaching fellowship. I had the opportunity to go to Mississippi State, Oklahoma State, or the University of Denver. I went to Denver. It sounded a little better, although Oklahoma State is a fine accounting school. Mississippi State is now, but it wasn't at that time. It didn't have the business school as it does today. Anyway, I went to Denver, and I'm not sorry. My wife wanted me to go there. She said, "I think it sounds better." Of course, she got both of her degrees out here at Southern. She says, "I think it's good, if I had it to do over again, I'd get one degree here and then go to another college to get another."

MR. PYLE: That's always a good idea to have a varied academic experience.

MR. ABBOTT: I'm not sorry that I did, and I'm not saying anything about Southern, because Southern was a good school. I thought I knew it all, but then that's where I guess I made a mistake, because when I went out there, I found out there's a lot of things I didn't know. I would rate Denver right up there with--their business school--I'd rate it up near the one that gets such publicity such as Harvard. They really poured it on you out there. That's where I got my master's. I almost had enough money, GI Bill left, to go out there and get my master's. I was out there about, well, four quarters. I had a class that I taught every quarter, and they'd pay me a hundred dollars plus tuition there. That was big money back in sixty-one, sixty-two.

We lived in an apartment. It was right downtown Denver. I roomed with another guy that was a graduate student from Kansas. We rented an apartment together. We paid a hundred and twenty dollars a month [for an apartment] within walking distance from the school of business administration which was right in downtown Denver, right near the Denver Hilton. But now, the main college, the main university, goes out about five miles. It's right on the edge of town. It's all been moved since that day. Everything is consolidated into the main university. But anyway, I'm glad that we got an apartment right downtown because sometimes my car was covered with snow for two weeks. I didn't see it one time for two weeks. It was covered in snow.

MR. PYLE: Which is a little change from Mississippi.

MR. ABBOTT: We could walk down to our school. So anyway, when I got through with my degree at Denver, I came back home still not knowing what I wanted to do, even though I had a master's degree in accounting. Still knowing that I was too old to get out here and fight the outside. I was too young not to do anything. So I applied for, if you had a master's degree in accounting you didn't have to take a Civil Service Exam, so I applied for a job with the Internal Revenue and got on the list. Of course, in the meantime, I had applied for different jobs around different colleges like Carey and junior colleges. I went down for an interview at Perkinston, and they told me, "We don't have a job for you right now, but we know we're going to have a job pretty soon because we're going to open up two new colleges on the coast, one at Mississippi City and one at Gautier." Anyway, I applied at Pearl River, and I applied at different places.

The job came through at Pearl River and also, just before that time, I got a notice from the Internal Revenue to stand by. I was up near the top of the list for a job with the Internal Revenue Service. The job also came through at Pearl River in sixty-three. I interviewed for it and took the job. A big sum of forty-one hundred dollars a year, nine months [laughter].

MR. PYLE: They're paying a little more now.

MR. ABBOTT: Forty-one hundred dollars!

MR. PYLE: I guess you could triple that, plus.

MR. ABBOTT: Knowing very well that I could have made probably three times that much and probably four or five times that much working for the Internal Revenue Service but I would have been a junior man on the totem pole, would have been transferred no telling where, and go anywhere they wanted me to go. I just had enough of traveling. So, I said, well, now a nine month job at less money was what I wanted with my navy retirement.

MR. PYLE: Sure.

MR. ABBOTT: A lot of money, going off and be gone all the time, so I just took the school job. And besides, I had already worked for the government 22 years, and I thought that was enough. I had no intentions of ever teaching school, that just came about. I used to commute by myself between here and Poplarville way back when the gas was twenty-nine cents [a gallon].

MR. PYLE: You could afford to do it then.

MR. ABBOTT: I could afford to do it then.

MR. PYLE: So, you put in 16 years and just retired last year in 1979.

MR. ABBOTT: A full 16 years and [retired in] seventy-nine.

MR. PYLE: That's outstanding!

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, seventy-nine, I had a lot of good students that are CPAs today, that started their accounting instruction under me.

MR. PYLE: That's a good feeling.

MR. ABBOTT: I know that I didn't make them CPAs, but I like to feel that I gave them a start in life. Started them on that road to CPA.

MR. PYLE: That's nice to be able to look back over your teaching career and know that you stimulated that kind of influence.

MR. ABBOTT: We had a much better relationship back several years ago

when we had a better grade of student. I'm not saying that criticizing the students, but we used to have people that came to school to learn.

MR. PYLE: I think that's a very fair criticism that you made.

MR. ABBOTT: Not just to come to fill a void. The reason that I say that is, I went down to a football game in Pearl River last Saturday for their homecoming, I talked to the dean, one of the deans. He said that even though they had a record enrollment this time, a good portion of them have already dropped by the wayside. They just couldn't cut it because, see, there is no ACT cutoff like you've got at Southern, 15. I think it's 15.

MR. PYLE: Which is probably too low there.

MR. ABBOTT: Which is probably too low. There is no ACT at all. If you come in down there with a 15 minus, if they got the money, or have a government grant, and they're hopefully or woefully inadequate for college work, yet you're supposed to, or they want you to bring them up to the same level, stay on the same level or same area, that they do at Southern. How are you going to do that [laughter]?

I never could get that through that I've got to take the students of all learning capacities and bring them up to a certain level within--and I've almost begged them, I said, "Let me take one group that's got some background and see how far I can go, with that group." Then I'd have a group that I can do more work with, but they wouldn't do it. See, you have to put them all together, so that holds up the fast learner. It's boring to that fast learner, and you're still ahead of that slow learner back there.

So you have a problem in junior colleges. You may have it in your senior colleges too. But it's a big problem. We try to get them into--and they're finally coming around to it--that they got to put in remedial courses. They can't read. They can't spell. Their spelling was atrocious. When I gave them a business law test, just try to grade it. I'd tell them, "You spell atrociously." [They'd ask], "Now what does that mean?" They never heard of the word. It's terrible. It got to the point where, I'm certainly not glad I'm getting old, but I'm glad I'm not in the teaching profession anymore [laughing]. They're just going to have to do something about that.

MR. PYLE: What are some of your general observations about the problems with education today? You've just made a general observation that they've guttered down the level so low that it's hard to teach in many respects.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I don't want to start back in there criticizing any particular area. I do know that we've got to go back in the lower grades and the high schools and bear down a little harder, maybe do away with some of the frills. It's going to have to go back there to the good old three R's and teach them how to work with simple arithmetic and how to read. Because if you can't read, you can't comprehend. For example, when we were working in interest in accounting, or any part of accounting, I'd have to stop and teach them

arithmetic before I could teach them their accounting.

MR. PYLE: That's not your job.

MR. ABBOTT: That's not good, because I remember out here at Southern when I was taking the accounting course, we had a University of Alabama professor that came over here, changed places with the accounting head, so our accounting head could go to work on his doctorate in Illinois. He came over here to work, and he taught me a course of accounting. What he said was, when he taught us how to figure interest, he said, "I'll show this one time but my job's not to teach you interest. My job is to teach you accounting." But you can't do that in a junior college. You've got to stop and teach them the arithmetic. So when I told this one particular person, "Multiply that times forty percent." And she asked, "How do you do that?" Trying to teach them the little basics, you can't multiply with a percent sign on, you've got to drop your percent sign and move your decimal place. That was almost like teaching them Greek. Those are some of the things they should have learned back there before they ever got to college.

MR. PYLE: Just no foundation.

MR. ABBOTT: So, there's no foundation. They're going to have to learn that, and I hope somebody doesn't come up here and get on me about this because it applies not only to junior colleges, it applies to senior colleges too. The junior colleges compete with each other. The junior colleges compete with the senior colleges. The senior colleges compete with each other. There's duplications of programs. It looks like they're looking for volume, the money rather than quality. So we're putting out numbers, but are we putting out quality?

Now I know when I went to Southern out here, you had to be able to sit down and write a six-hundred word theme, or two three-hundred word themes, without any major grammatical errors. You could use your dictionary if you had to learn how to spell a word but you could not use anything else. They did away with that. You don't do that anymore. So a guy showed me how pitiful [the situation is] one time. He wrote a theme out there and wanted me to check it over for him before he turned it in, and he had all simple sentences. "I bought me a car. It was a Ford. It runs good." Things that if I said, "Make a complex sentence, or a compound sentence," he couldn't have done it.

MR. PYLE: He'd have to ask you how to spell it.

MR. ABBOTT: They give them degrees, and I'm not going to criticize anybody, but it's horrible when somebody gets their degree--I don't care if he's going to be a mathematician or a geographer or a historian or whatever he's going to be--he's got to learn how to communicate. He's got to be able to write a report. Even if you're going to be an accountant, you're going to have to write a report. So I think they ought to bear down more on this English. I still think that this new math, that they taught them back there several years ago, ruined a lot of students.

MR. PYLE: I was fortunate. I never had to take that stuff.

MR. ABBOTT: I was teaching with the director of the junior colleges who was an instructor at Pearl River Junior College before he became director.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: You know him?

MR. PYLE: I know the name.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, he and I were teaching together down at Pearl River. We were both going down to teach night classes in Picayune. He started a new night class down there of new math. He was a mathematics teacher, nice fellow.

I was teaching a night class of accounting down there, mainly adults, which was more or less publicity than it was anything else because it's pretty hard to teach accounting one day a week. You had to be a good public relations man. I had a bunch of married women, well, it was mostly married women. They would come in there and just be eager beavers. They were just [ready] to tear this thing up. So, I'd assign them a lesson and the next, about two weeks after we'd get started in, about the third week, I'd have half of my class absent. The other week the other half would be absent, and it was more of a public relations job than it was teaching.

But anyway, this Mr. Moody taught these adults, mostly teachers. Some of them were way up there in age. He was trying to teach them this new math so they could teach it to their students. Several of them had heart attacks because they had to learn this thing. Back there in those days, they were trying to learn so they could teach their students. That was in the early sixties or middle sixties.

Well, I don't want to sound like I'm an educator, but I don't think you have to be an educator to find out what's wrong with some of the education today. I don't say that we ought to do away with all the frills in school because it would be awful boring then. But they certainly need to bear down more on the basics. You know, even when I was out in Denver, the high schools there gave two kinds of high school diplomas. They give one a satisfactory and one a regular. One that's got a satisfactory completion need not apply for college. He's not qualified for college. So here we're lumping it all into one. We've got merit scholarship students that get the same high school diploma as somebody back here that [barely got through high school].

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: I think that something should be changed but I don't know if it will ever get through. You couldn't get it through to some of these so-called educators and superintendents and so forth of education. You can't

discriminate. That's one of the things that probably I have found that was the hard thing to get through. Now if you start some new program, it's supposed to be nondiscriminatory. My whole purpose, and I don't want to get into this integration business, was to bring the lower learner or the underprivileged up to a level with the rest. But instead it broke the top down.

MR. PYLE: It's exactly what I was saying. They've gone to the lowest common denominator.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, right.

MR. PYLE: It's a shame. As you think about it, it all eventually does come around to politics.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, oh, yes.

MR. PYLE: But it's a shame that it does. You have been the past commander, let me see if I can get this right, for the South Mississippi Chapter of American Ex-Prisoners of War?

MR. ABBOTT: We started a chapter here in 1976. I'm sorry, wait a minute--seventy-eight. We started a chapter here in seventy-eight. My wife and I went to Orlando to the national convention in 1978. Shortly thereafter, we formed our chapter. The national commander came here and instituted our chapter in seventy-eight, and Dr. Jack Cleere was the first commander. I'll show you the--he's a chiropractor over here on West Pine Street.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: He was the first commander.

MR. PYLE: Right.

MR. ABBOTT: Huh?

MR. PYLE: Yes, you've got his name on this list.

MR. ABBOTT: He was the first commander, and then I was the second commander.

MR. PYLE: In 1979?

MR. ABBOTT: I turned it over last August to a person in Collins, Mississippi. We meet here at the American Legion. I don't know whether I've got him down there or not but he's listed up there. We meet every third Tuesday of every odd month at the American Legion Hall. The American Legion has graciously let us use their facilities to meet.

MR. PYLE: I was going to ask, are you in any way associated with either the American Legion or the VFW?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, I belong to the American Legion. I pay my dues to the American Legion. I pay my dues to the VFW, although I don't actively attend.

MR. PYLE: I think what I meant by that question was, is the American Ex-Prisoners of War association directly related to either of those two organizations?

MR. ABBOTT: No.

MR. PYLE: Kindred spirit?

MR. ABBOTT: No. This has been a going on. The American Ex-Prisoners of War is not a national incorporated organization as the VFW and the American Legion are. I don't guess we ever will be because they won't let us. They just won't incorporate any more. We're incorporated in a state, in Washington, but we're un-incorporated as far as a national level. But we're gaining strength, and it's been in existence for about twenty years or more. It's been more or less a social outfit. Now, it's gaining strength as far as getting something done. Because you see a lot of the people who were prisoners back in World War II and the Korean War, the diseases that affects a person, who had been incarcerated like us, are just now beginning to show up on a lot of them. They can't get recognition. They don't say that it's not service connected. In other words, because they don't know what, some of these young doctors that are in VA hospitals or places, don't know what you're talking about when they talk about, "I had beriberi," or "I had some of the malnutrition diseases back there." So that's what it is now.

There's a study before the United States Congress, and it's supposed to come up before, in other words, I got a copy of it here, a copy of the POW study. When we get through here or sometime, are we going to come back again for another meeting?

MR. PYLE: At this point the second sitting of the interview with Sam Abbott is being closed, and the interview will resume tomorrow.

Part III

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of the University of Southern Mississippi. This is Part III in a series of interviews with Mr. Samuel Abbott. The interview is taking place in Mr. Abbott's home located on 21st Avenue in Hattiesburg on October 31, 1980. The interviewer is Mr. R. Wayne Pyle.

MR. PYLE: Mr. Abbott, on behalf of the university, I'd like to thank you one more time for a third sitting with us. We should be able to wrap up pretty fast today.

MR. ABBOTT: My pleasure.

MR. PYLE: Over the first two meetings, we discussed your military career, your incarceration in Japan and the Philippines, and the rest of your military career after leaving the Japanese prison camp. We had gotten to your teaching career and discussed a little bit about teaching philosophy, and we were talking about the Mississippi Chapter of the American Ex-Prisoners of War organization. There were several questions that I wanted to ask you about that, one of them was your organization, your makeup. What is the configuration of the American Ex-POWs?

MR. ABBOTT: What do you mean?

MR. PYLE: National makeup and state makeup, do you have a national commander, for instance?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, we have a national commander.

MR. PYLE: He's a local man?

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. PYLE: Okay, yes, I had just asked about the national organization, and I had asked if there was a national commander.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, there is a national commander and from--

MR. PYLE: And he would be the chief executive officer, is that correct?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: We pay dues to the national chapter. The dues are, well, you might say, both husband and wife can become active members in the national organization; whereas, in the American Legion and VFW, the wives are

auxiliary members.

MR. PYLE: Yes, that's correct.

MR. ABBOTT: Our spouses have voting privileges; whereas, they do not in the VFW or the American Legion.

MR. PYLE: While we're speaking of membership, it brings to my attention that I remember seeing a newspaper article not long ago in which your picture was in it. It seems as though the gist of it was that you were trying to get someone into the American Ex-POWs organization whose father had been a POW but who hadn't personally been prisoners of wars themselves. Is that correct? Am I recalling that right?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. Well, no, we had two members of our local chapter who were friends of Dr. Cleere, at that time, who was the state commander.

MR. PYLE: This is Jack Cleere, from--

MR. ABBOTT: Jack Cleere, Jack Cleere the chiropractor. They were members with no voting privileges. We took them in as honorary members until they researched their background and found that their grandparents were both ex-prisoners of war, and therefore they are now active members.

MR. PYLE: Okay, okay.

MR. ABBOTT: They became active members of the chapters.

MR. PYLE: Did they know at that time that their grandparents were ex-prisoners of war?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, but they didn't know whether they were eligible or not. They researched it, and they let them be regular members. She is Mrs. Polly Scott, who teaches in Brooklyn, Mississippi, and her husband teaches at Brooklyn too in the high school, Bobby Scott. She is our adjutant treasurer.

MR. PYLE: For the local chapter?

MR. ABBOTT: The local chapter.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see. Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: He is our chaplain.

MR. PYLE: Then actually, the organization is a rather loose makeup. You don't have to have been a POW to be a member, wives, etc.

MR. ABBOTT: Not exactly. You have to have somebody--you have to be either a prisoner of war, or your spouse, or some of your relatives that were members.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: That's right. It's not as strict as far as the membership as maybe the VFW or the American Legion.

MR. PYLE: Concerning the organizational makeup, you have a national commander, and then I assume you have state chapters?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, we have a state commander.

MR. PYLE: Who is almost a local man, is that correct?

MR. ABBOTT: No, not now. He was. See, we only organized in Mississippi about, oh, about four or five years ago.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: We were very inactive. Since we've organized, we now have five chapters in the state of Mississippi. We have one on the coast. We have one here, the local meets in Hattiesburg, one in Jackson, one in Tupelo and one in Greenville. Five chapters, that are all active. Then we have a state commander who is, what they call a department commander, who is actually the particular head of all of the five--

MR. PYLE: Who is the state commander right now?

MR. ABBOTT: That's what I was trying to think of--his name.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I'm sorry. I just put you on the spot.

MR. ABBOTT: I was just trying to think of his name. His name is in this bulletin here but I just can't think of it.

MR. PYLE: Okay, that wasn't Earl Derrington that you mentioned too?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, he was our first. He was the first state commander and was for one year when it was organized, which I guess was in 1977.

MR. PYLE: Then you mentioned that he was followed by Jack Cleere?

MR. ABBOTT: Then Jack Cleere relieved him in 1978, seventy-eight, seventy-nine, I think it was when he was around. Then we have one now that's located in the northern part of the state, who relieved Jack Cleere. I guess we've had three commanders, and I just cannot think of that boy's name, but probably I've got it written down someplace.

MR. PYLE: We can put his name in later in the manuscript. What is the stated purpose of the organization? You mentioned that it was originally largely a social organization.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, now the original order is to help those who cannot help themselves. Help by doing all we can while we're still able to help those that are not able to help themselves obtain Veterans Administration care.

MR. PYLE: Okay. How is the organization looked upon by the Veterans Administration?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, it's just now coming in to its own. We have strived for national incorporation. But it looks like that under the present administration, that it's out of the picture, no more national, like the American Legion or the VFW or the Disabled American Veterans. So we're just incorporated in the state of Washington, I believe it is. They call it an incorporation but it's not a national incorporation.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: They have been trying to get--now, the head of the, Veterans Administration is Max Cleland, who is the triple amputee, you know, you've seen his picture.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes. Oh, you're talking about the national head of the--

MR. ABBOTT: The national head of the Veterans Administration. He's a Vietnam veteran who lost both of his legs and one arm. But he hasn't been too responsive to World War II, Korean ex-prisoners of war until just of late. Now he's put a little lip service in that he is, but he has not been. So actually, he wasn't a prisoner himself. He was just a casualty of the Vietnam war and a political appointee of Carter, President Carter from Georgia. He's [also] from Georgia.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see, okay.

MR. ABBOTT: I'm sure you've seen a picture of him.

MR. PYLE: I'm sure I have too. That brings about an interesting situation that you mentioned. The group that's not incorporated, and the national corporation doesn't seem to be likely under the present administration, the Carter administration, that brings us into a realm of politics.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, it's all politics. They're trying to cut through the red tape. As I believe I said in the last meeting, a lot of the illnesses are just now coming to show on a lot of the people who were incarcerated, the effects of the malnutrition, the incarceration, and the mental attitudes and things. The mental things that came about with these people back in World War II are just now showing. It's been a hard proposition to convince the Veterans Administration and the medical officers in the Veterans Administration that it was caused, or anything that is wrong with you now, was service connected. Therefore, it would not be in a service-connected disease or debilitation, or

what you want to call it. Then, a lot of them were turned away from the Veterans Administration.

MR. PYLE: Is there any legal recourse that the organization goes to on behalf of veterans? Do you have a staff of lawyers, for instance, to represent veterans before the VA?

MR. ABBOTT: No. The only thing we can do right now is just--we've got a legislative officer, who is one of the hardest workers in the organization, who is the national commander. That's right now our present national commander who is Stanley Sommers who was an ex-navy medical corpsman. He has done a lot of work in what they call med-search, researching the diseases that are prevalent in American prisoners of war.

MR. PYLE: He's from Wisconsin, I see. That's what I was looking at. I just wondered where Mr. Sommers was from.

MR. ABBOTT: There is, see, now we elect, in the national organization, a national commander who serves one year, and then each year a senior national commander moves up. See, this is the national commander now. Then this one right here will be our national commander in nineteen, well, next year when we meet in Fort Worth.

MR. PYLE: That's Mr. Charles Morgan?

MR. ABBOTT: He is from San Antonio, Texas, and he's, I think, army. This woman here who actually runs the business--

MR. PYLE: Pauline Brown?

MR. ABBOTT: She is located in Tampa, Florida, and she is not a former prisoner herself but her husband was. Her husband died. She took this job of taking care of all the dues. She has already submitted her resignation. This will be her last year, so somebody is going to have to take her job. She has done an awful lot for the organization.

MR. PYLE: Let me, for the sake of the cassette, read in this. The woman we're talking about here is Pauline Brown, and her position is national adjutant treasurer. The literature that we're looking at is the Ex-POW Bulletin.

MR. ABBOTT: Which is published monthly.

MR. PYLE: It's a monthly? Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: It's published in some place in Kansas. I think it's right there on the cover. It's published there on the inside of the front cover.

MR. PYLE: Yes, it sure is. O-L-A-T-H-E, Olathe, Kansas. Okay. We were just mentioning about medical research that they're doing on behalf of ex-POWs. That sounds like a fascinating thing. Who is doing the research for

you, and what sort of results have come up so far?

MR. ABBOTT: There's a national organization of POW med-search who, the chairman is Harold Page, the co-chairman of this, and then, also the national commander has been on that, but now he can't serve while being commander.

MR. PYLE: That must be his wife, Peggy Sommers.

MR. ABBOTT: That's his wife, yes.

MR. PYLE: Who is a co-chairman.

MR. ABBOTT: They go through and publish these bulletins and packets that affect the diseases and rundowns on the American prisoners, alcoholism and the mental attitude of a lot of them. You can order these bulletins. I don't have any of them myself. You can order them by the particular camps that were in Japan. For example, here is one on the camp that I was in, and I think I'm going to order that one, number of pages, three, Camp Fukuoka number seventeen, and that was the camp that I was in.

MR. PYLE: Oh, that's fascinating!

MR. ABBOTT: Then the camps in Germany and Japanese camps that were in Burma and all over the place. You can order a med-search package to tell what--how these people suffered, what kind of diseases they suffered.

MR. PYLE: Can I see that just a second, please? I think this is very fascinating, so I'm going to read part of this in here. The Med-Search Medical Research Packets--I'll take a, packet number three is entitled "After-Effects of Imprisonment," and then it lists, must be around ten different diseases that can be contracted from imprisonment. And then they break that down by the different POW camps during the war. That's very interesting. It looks like a very thorough job.

MR. ABBOTT: It seems to be, much work has been done on it.

MR. PYLE: As far as Mississippi is concerned, has the ex-POW organization been relatively successful in helping ex-prisoners of war get VA funds, VA disabilities?

MR. ABBOTT: Being, you mean the Mississippi part?

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Being a relatively new [organization], hasn't been an organization except since 1978 on our local level. We don't actually have a good service officer, somebody that knows and will spend the time to actually know what's going on in the Veterans Administration, and how they could help the veteran that was a prisoner of war. Now we do have a service officer that's located down there in the courthouse building, Mrs. Van Horn, who is our local

representative for all the veterans' affairs but not just for POWs. She handles it all. Now not too long ago, the Veterans Administration did pass a law, or somebody passed a law, that all POWs regardless of how long they were, well, they had to be incarcerated over six months--six months or more--that they were entitled to free dental care, even on the outside. That any dentist that was paid on the outside, like my dentist said he handles it--Dr. Halliwell. He handles VA cases, and if you're an ex-prisoner of war, the VA will pay it in full, if they were actually in prison over six months--six months or more. I don't know why the six months because, as I said before, it should be for everybody. You could have--some people just don't have the constitutions--we all are different. Some people can crack up in three or four months, and, well, I guess they feel like that. But six months without dental work is not any catastrophe. But people like me were in prison over 40 months with no dental work.

MR. PYLE: Oh yes. I think it's rather fascinating myself. The fact that some of these diseases, some of the problems that an ex-prisoner of war will come up with, manifests itself some 30 years later sometimes. In your own personal case, have you had long-term effects from your prisoner of war experience?

MR. ABBOTT: Effects?

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Nothing except probably the beriberi that I have had developed into kind of an arthritis.

MR. PYLE: Did you have dry beriberi?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. ABBOTT: But not in any crippling effect, not crippling yet, just the painful type. And as far as I know, of course, I lost all my teeth. But that was all done, I didn't get it done by the Veterans Administration, and I guess that's why I'm fortunate that I have not had to deal with the Veterans Administration because I'm retired from the navy, and I could go to Keesler or Gulfport and get my dental work. All my dental work was done down there.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. ABBOTT: Not all of it, but most of it was done in Keesler Air Force Base and some of it was done in the Seabee center at Gulfport, Mississippi.

MR. PYLE: As a retired veteran, you get that free anyway.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Okay, okay.

MR. ABBOTT: This is for retired people, not for veterans. Veterans who have just served can't go down there.

MR. PYLE: Yes, veterans who have put in 20 years. I see.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, 20 or more years and retired. Now I, as far as my hospitalization or going to the doctor, if you live over 80 miles from a military hospital, you do not have to utilize the facilities of a military hospital because it's usually on a space available basis. So therefore, the government will pay 75 percent of my hospital bill or doctor bill by civilian sources. I can take insurance to pay the other 20, 25% and keep from having to travel long distances going to a military hospital. That's what they call CHAMPUS, C-H-A-M-P-U-S, Civilian Health for Military Retired People, and the same deal is done for active duty personnel whose dependents are more than 80 miles from the nearest [military hospital]. They can go to a civilian hospital and that, of course, theirs is 80% instead of 75. When you have to, the only thing you have to pay is 20%. So if you take out a little insurance, it's kind of like the Medicare people who have to pay a portion of their Medicare by taking out insurance. Now when I reach 65, I no longer will come under that, even though I am a retired military person. I come under the same thing that everybody else does who reaches 65. Which I can't say that's good or bad, but it looks like, well, anyway it never was a written law but it was an unwritten law that when I went into the service that I understood that as long as you lived, if you retired, you were entitled to military medical care. The government would take care of you.

MR. PYLE: It's no longer true.

MR. ABBOTT: They've twisted it and turned it a little bit, since those days. They said that you can go to a military hospital anytime as a retired person, anytime that you wanted to. Of course, I have never known of anybody being turned away, but they have added the clause "for military retired on a space available basis."

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: That gives them a little loophole that they won't have, say, they don't have beds for you, or room for you, and turn you away.

MR. PYLE: You've mentioned that there are legal stipulations to an awful lot of this. In light of that, does the American Ex-POW organization do any lobbying on Congress, on the different--

MR. ABBOTT: Yes.

MR. PYLE: You do have a lobbying organization?

MR. ABBOTT: Right now we have a committee that goes up there and are lobbying. There are lobbyists in Congress, and our local chapters can do it individually too. We contribute. There's no fund, but you know how expensive it

is for anybody going to Washington to lobby.

MR. PYLE: Oh yes.

MR. ABBOTT: But we contribute to the national fund, [that] in turn will dispense of whatever they've got to people who go up there to lobby. All of our national officers, there is no pay. You have to have--

MR. PYLE: I was going to ask that.

MR. ABBOTT: There is no--

MR. PYLE: Is it just a voluntary thing?

MR. ABBOTT: There may be as far as the national commander, a little expense account, because he has to go all over the country. But they didn't use to have that. So it kind of use to be like the way a person running for president, saying anybody can become president. But we knew better than that. You had to have money to do it. So, you had to have money to be the president. But now I think, they get a little expense account, some of the national officers, but legislative is just something new that they have started to help pay the expenses of people who go up there and lobby for POW legislation.

MR. PYLE: Yes. So far as Mississippi is concerned, has the Mississippi chapter been successful in getting the cooperation of any of our state congressmen or senators?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. We had a good meeting in Jackson about, oh, four or five months ago, we met in the Veterans Administration building on Woodrow Wilson Drive in Jackson, and Sonny Montgomery met with us. If I may so, the way he talked, he was very impressed with us because he kind of acted as if he expected a bunch of bums to come up there. We were all immaculately dressed in our POW coats and hats, and he made a comment. He said, "I'm really impressed with you people, and you're not here haranguing but telling us your troubles. I have to know what your troubles are." So he was very responsive to the needs of the ex-prisoner of war. Of course, we have some others that are, I can't name them offhand but, I mean not the national parts, the senators and representatives that are very responsive to the ex-prisoner of war.

MR. PYLE: So far as Mississippi is concerned?

MR. ABBOTT: Especially the ones from South Carolina, what's the old fellow's name that--

MR. PYLE: Strom Thurmond?

MR. ABBOTT: Strom Thurmond. He's very responsive too, and I believe even that guy, that Nunn from Georgia, Senator Nunn?

MR. PYLE: Sam Nunn, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Is a friend of the veteran.

MR. PYLE: I was going to ask you, as far as Mississippi is concerned, and here in south Mississippi, which would touch your chapter, Trent Lott, has he been contacted?

MR. ABBOTT: As far as I know, but we never have had him in one of our meetings to speak to us, and we're going to have to get, if he gets elected, we're going to have to get him in here and let him give us some information on what he's up to.

MR. PYLE: Seems pretty sure of them.

MR. ABBOTT: I'm sure that he would be responsive to--

MR. PYLE: Mississippi has been blessed in the past with having two long-time senators. I'm thinking now of Eastland and Stennis, of course. That's not taking anything away from Thad Cochran. Has the organization been able to utilize these two men--two stalwarts in Congress?

MR. ABBOTT: I really can't tell you. I'm sure that it did not with Eastland.

MR. PYLE: Okay. Of course, the chapter wouldn't have been organized until Eastland was already out.

MR. ABBOTT: Of course, I'm not, as I said, I'm not a native Mississippian, but Mississippi is my home now and has been for 20 years. I'll take up for Mississippi. Mississippi now is my home. I don't mind who knows it, Eastland wasn't one of my favorites.

MR. PYLE: I see, okay.

MR. ABBOTT: I don't think he was very much a favorite of the veteran. Now I will say differently about Senator Stennis. I have been with him personally, and we went through Masonic organizations together. I helped initiate him into the Masonic bodies in Water Valley, Mississippi, and then we went through one degree together in Water Valley in the middle seventies, about seventy-four, I believe it was. I know he is responsive, but since his illness at the time he was shot and his advance in age, I don't want to say senility because he's not senile yet, but his advance in age, he hasn't, that I know of, given much help to the ex-POW. If he has it's not something that I know about.

MR. PYLE: Okay. Many of the--just for a label I'm going to say, right-wing organizations, and I think of the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, get political insofar as endorsing candidates. Does the American Ex-Prisoner of War group?

MR. ABBOTT: No, we haven't yet. We haven't done that. Of course, I think that this was the first time, this was a kind of a precedent was set this

time that, when the VFW endorsed--

MR. PYLE: Ronald Reagan, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: I just got through reading the report of the national commander.

MR. PYLE: Of the American Ex-Prisoners of War?

MR. ABBOTT: I'm going to give you that copy. I want you to read it.

MR. PYLE: Stanley Sommers?

MR. ABBOTT: No, of the national commander of the VFW.

MR. PYLE: Oh, the VFW, okay.

MR. ABBOTT: He put it on the line, the shabby treatment that has been given all of our veterans, not just ex-POWs, and that's about all I can tell you right now. You see, this is a two million strong organization. But I will--I've got the copy. I told you yesterday I gave it to my sister-in-law to read, and she brought it back to me this morning so I want you to read it.

MR. PYLE: It's obviously a part of some political argument favoring Ronald Reagan and anti-Jimmy Carter. Okay, I see. I see. Does the American Ex-POW organization, in the future, have any plans along these lines of endorsements?

MR. ABBOTT: I really don't know. We, as I said, are kind of a fledgling organization here in south Mississippi. We've got to get more active and get more involved with the national organization. We've kind of drifted off, and we only meet every two months. We've kind of drifted into more of a social meeting than we have a get down and help people who actually need help.

MR. PYLE: Service organization type.

MR. ABBOTT: We've got a very good bunch of men that have been coming. We have quite a few that belong to our organization. They don't have to pay any dues to our local organization. The only thing that's required is to pay their national dues. Their national dues is \$13.00 now. It's for husband and wife and a person can become a life member. Like in my case, I paid, when I reached the age of 61, I paid \$36.00 for myself, and I believe it was \$10.00 or \$12.00 for my wife. Now we're life members, so we don't have to pay any more dues at all. In other words, like on this back here [indicating the back of the bulletin], see, they raised it since my time.

MR. PYLE: Oh yes, it's prorated by your age, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: This money, all this money that's gone into the life membership, is now into an endowment or into a savings of money. In other words, it's been invested for work, I guess, by the national organization, in

times to come. Like I have said, and I don't say that that's the reason I belong to the organization, I guess that, like I have told many of them before, I said not a thing in the world, I guess, that the Veterans Administration can do for me because I'm a retired person. I haven't had any dealings with them other than using the GI Bill. But that's not the reason I belong. I feel like as long as I'm still able and if I can do anything at all, in fact, I've had people to call me asking who to contact when I was the local commander. Who they could contact, I didn't even know how to start. So if you feel like that you can, regardless of what, doesn't affect me, you want to try to help your fellowman. If you can get some help someway, well--I brought this out before, that twenty years from now there won't be many World War II prisoners at all.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: There won't be many World War II veterans left, that were prisoners of war, probably very, very few. So, we've got to get something done now, not twenty years from now, because it will be too late.

MR. PYLE: Concerning the Mississippi chapters, well, the Mississippi, the state chapter and your local chapters, what is the designation of your local chapter here?

MR. ABBOTT: Ours is the South Mississippi Chapter.

MR. PYLE: Okay. I assume that the Gulf Coast is the Gulf Coast Chapter, then? Since it too is necessarily south Mississippi?

MR. ABBOTT: Now I'm glad you brought that up. Now I can tell you who our, no I can't either [laughter]. I was going to say I could tell you who our, they haven't changed it in a year because it's still got--our state department has still got Jack Cleere as the [commander], but he has been relieved. In our state, my name has been removed. Now, I was in the south Mississippi--now, I can give you his name. That's our local commander, understand? Commander Henry Quick.

MR. PYLE: Henry Quick--now he's the state commander?

MR. ABBOTT: No.

MR. PYLE: Oh, he's the local commander.

MR. ABBOTT: He's the local. He lives in Collins, works for the post office department.

MR. PYLE: Okay. I see.

MR. ABBOTT: He relieved me in the last meeting and, so this lady, Scott, who is our adjutant had already, he was on the ball there. She put that on in so they had to tell them. I can't remember now who they, who took who. I could call Jack Cleere if it's important and find out who the new state commander is.

MR. PYLE: I'm sure it will come out in different things.

MR. ABBOTT: Now here you can tell about when the--this is how, when the whole organization started, so this is the past national commanders. But it must have started in forty-eight. But I didn't know anything about it. It was more or less, as I said, a social club. I didn't even join myself until 19 and, well, didn't even know anything about it until I happened to get in contact with a friend of mine who lives in Macon, Georgia, and he reminded me of it in 1975. I believe it was 1976 that I went to the national convention in Albuquerque and met him. He was one of the national directors. See, they have directors by the regions.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: North, southwest, southeast, and he was from Macon, Georgia, which would have been in the southeastern region at that time. This fellow right here, Joe Upton, he instituted our chapter right here down at the community center in 1978. When he came back from Orlando at the national meeting, he came here and instituted us. Now they have one going in Jackson. They only had one at that time. I think we were the second instituted. Since that time then, there's been one in, I said the northeast region of the state at Tupelo, Mississippi.

MR. PYLE: Tupelo?

MR. ABBOTT: Let's see, northeast chapter. I believe they list them all. Mississippi Chapter is Jackson, central, well, that is what it was to begin with. The Northeast Chapter is in Tupelo and the North Mississippi Chapter is at--

MR. PYLE: Greenville, you said I believe.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I believe it is. They list it here now in Grenada.

MR. PYLE: Okay, they may have switched locations with the new president.

MR. ABBOTT: Switched locations because the commander is from Grenada. The South Mississippi Chapter is in here, and you've got five chapters.

MR. PYLE: So far as the state organization is concerned as a fledgling organization, roughly how many members are there?

MR. ABBOTT: From what, state?

MR. PYLE: As a state, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, there was roughly somewhere between 750 and 800 that came out of the woods. In other words, that came forward for their free license plates when they were granted in 1979.

MR. PYLE: Okay. By the way, speaking of free license plates, did the organization lobby the state government in order to get that?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Then they had been successful along those lines.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, they have been successful there. Then, and if I may say so, this guy Earl Derrington, who lives right there in Jackson, he's a real estate man and his wife works at the VA, he was instrumental in lobbying for this free license plate.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see.

MR. ABBOTT: Of course, my nephew was one of the sponsors who introduced the bill too, Senator David Smith. They also had one that was introduced in the House of Representatives so, both of them, they were both instrumental, when the bill was signed into law being the sponsors of the bill.

MR. PYLE: By the way, your nephew, State Senator David Smith, where is he from? What city?

MR. ABBOTT: Right here.

MR. PYLE: Oh, he's local. I see, okay.

MR. ABBOTT: He lives out here at, what's that north part of, out toward Eatonville? What's that place out that way?

MR. PYLE: Glendale?

MR. ABBOTT: Glendale.

MR. PYLE: Yes, I see.

MR. ABBOTT: He lives at Glendale.

MR. PYLE: And do you know, by any chance, who the congress member was, the house member in the state that put the bill into action in the Congress?

MR. ABBOTT: I can find out who it was.

MR. PYLE: We can add his name in later too.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Representative Lonnie C. Johnson, Rankin County.

MR. ABBOTT: I can pick out magazines back there about what time it happened but, of course, it's got a picture of him in there.

MR. PYLE: On the state level, what other things have the

organization been successful in achieving? The free license plates being one. Are there things that come readily to mind?

MR. ABBOTT: I don't know of anything else other than that. When I went to the meeting in Fontana Dam, North Carolina, in August of 1980, this year--

MR. PYLE: I assume that was the national meeting.

MR. ABBOTT: That was the national meeting of the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor who were from all over the United States, and we had about, oh, we had about three or four hundred people, I guess, there. When we got up to introduce ourselves, a few of them had said we were working on our free license tag in Missouri or our free license tag in some other state, and when I got up, I said, I told them who I was. I said, "I'm originally a Texan, born and raised in Texas, but I learned years ago to quit bragging about Texas. Now I'm a Mississippian and Mississippi is my home, and I'm going to take up for Mississippi. I'm going to tell you something else. We're not last in everything. We're up near the top of the list when it comes to our legislature granting the prisoners of war free license tags." So I got a little plug in for Mississippi.

MR. PYLE: Good job! Good job!

MR. ABBOTT: I got some response too, you know.

MR. PYLE: Our state can use as many plugs as it can get. That's good. That's good.

MR. ABBOTT: I'm not one to run the state down. I know we're quick to criticize, especially when you're in the teaching profession. Looks like we're always going to remain last, but we've got some firsts too.

MR. PYLE: Sure we do. Mr. Abbott, in the state organization out of roughly 750 to 800 members, what percentage of members would be Vietnam veterans or Korean veterans as opposed to World War II.

MR. ABBOTT: I don't know what the exact percentage is, but it's small, very small. We've had very little response from Vietnam veterans. They just don't want to be recognized. They just want to forget it. I guess because of the bad publicity that they have, that the whole Vietnam war, or Vietnam conflict, they just don't want to come forward.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: I don't know whether I mentioned it in my article there in the newspaper, the only reason I brought that out that time is somebody knew, found out that I was a prisoner, my minister. And they had, the Methodist minister who is down at New Augusta, between here and Beaumont, was on the U. S. S. Pueblo.

MR. PYLE: Yes, Rodney Dukes. We've interviewed Rodney Dukes.

MR. ABBOTT: You've interviewed him?

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: And he came up and was going to speak to us and my minister asked me would I mind to say a few words about mine? I said, "Could I talk first?" Then Rodney got up and talked about the Pueblo, and then I had to do a lot of fast researching before he came because I didn't want to act ignorant. Most of us have heard about different things, you know, but the time goes by so quick. So we just could not figure out what year it was, and I couldn't believe it when we went down to the library and researched, my wife and I, one afternoon, and researched the U. S. S. Pueblo and it happened in 1968.

MR. PYLE: Okay. I was about to guess 1967. But I had forgotten too.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. PYLE: Go right ahead.

MR. ABBOTT: He was incarcerated almost a year. He made a very interesting speech and apparently went through some very rough times in that one year. I don't know whether, one question I never did get around to asking him and I don't believe that he mentioned it either, did the North Koreans return this vessel to the American government or did they keep it? It was a spy ship, in other words.

MR. PYLE: That's a good question. I really don't know. I really don't know.

MR. ABBOTT: I was going to ask him again but I never did get a chance and now he's not at New Augusta anymore. At the last Methodist conference he was reassigned to, oh, somewhere, Leakesville or somewhere down in that area there, further on down into the southern part of the state.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In January 1968 the U.S.S. Pueblo and her crew, accused of spying, were seized in the Sea of Japan by the North Koreans. The crew was released in December 1968 but the Pueblo was confiscated by the North Koreans.

MR. PYLE: You mentioned the problem of getting Vietnam veterans to come forward and to join that organization. Can you think of any specific reasons why they might not?

MR. ABBOTT: Not a thing in the world. I haven't been able to contact any of them personally myself, so I don't know.

MR. PYLE: Okay. That's the next question I was going to ask. In the South Mississippi Chapter during your year, which is just ending as the chapter commander, were there any Vietnam veterans in the South Mississippi Chapter?

MR. ABBOTT: No, none.

MR. PYLE: How about Korean veterans?

MR. ABBOTT: Not that I know of now. I don't believe we've even got any of those.

MR. PYLE: Okay. How large of a membership does this particular chapter have?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, as I said before, it's kind of a loose organization, and you don't have to--there's no boundary to be drawn as far as everybody north of so-and-so has to belong to another chapter, everybody south. But kind of a loose organization that you assign yourself for voting privileges when you go to the national organization to belong to one chapter. We don't have any concrete list of people that belong to our chapter. We've got a tentative list, most of the ones have come or we have seen or we have contacted, but there may be some that live right here in Hattiesburg, for example, that never have even come forward and said, "I would like to belong to your chapter." It's been something when we went to organize, we just tried to make people, not make people, but get people to come forward and be recognized. A lot of people just don't want to even talk about it.

MR. PYLE: Oh sure, sure.

MR. ABBOTT: They just want to forget it. Now, I mentioned this fellow from Foxworth the other day. He just does not want to. He said, "I don't want to come to a meeting." I asked him to please come to our meeting. He said, "I just don't want to go to a meeting and hear a bunch of people griping." I said, "We don't do that. We're just having us a good meeting." Now, of course, occasionally somebody might get up and gripe a little bit about the VA.

MR. PYLE: I was wondering if perhaps that wouldn't be one of the reasons the Vietnam veterans have been reticent, that by and large they're an impatient group who have been treated badly, both by the public and by the VA, if that's one of the reasons they stay away.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, that's more or less my opinion, you know? It wasn't very popular to tell people that you are in Vietnam even though they were only doing what their country told them to do. Now, there's been much political hay made of it when, for example, when--

MR. PYLE: Ronald Reagan?

MR. ABBOTT: Ronald Reagan said that we got ourself into it, we should get out, done something to get out in a manner other than the way that they did.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: It was an unpopular war. He didn't come out. Of course, they twisted it and turned it around and tried to say that it was a popular war, but it was an unpopular war. What we should have done, our purpose of the whole thing, otherwise our president or anybody else, like I guess it was Lyndon Johnson and Kennedy is the one who got us in, wasn't it? John Kennedy?

MR. PYLE: We had advisors in under Eisenhower, even back then.

MR. ABBOTT: And so when we got into it, there must have been a reason of what we were trying to do is stop communism from being--domino theory they call it. One falling and the next falling, and yet, there was a no win policy. Just like in the Korean war there was a no win policy. It caused even the disgrace of one of our top generals.

MR. PYLE: Speaking of MacArthur? Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, MacArthur.

MR. PYLE: I guess you mentioned in the very loose organization in the state and the individual chapters, I guess as long as no dues are required, then there's no real reason to have a very rigid organization.

MR. ABBOTT: No. But we do have a meeting, a state meeting periodically. They'll have a Christmas party in December in Jackson. Everybody will congregate up there in some particular place. I say everybody, everybody that will go. I went last year. I don't know whether I will this time or not. Then they have a state meeting. We had a state meeting up there in the middle part of the summer that all chapters come and have the state department, that's a departmental meeting, not the chapter meeting, but the departmental.

MR. PYLE: It's more than just an annual meeting then?

MR. ABBOTT: More than just an annual. They'll, of course, they do elect officers and go through the--at one time during the year too.

MR. PYLE: In your own case, would you prefer to see the organization move away from--I was about to ask, would you prefer this organization to move away from its by and large social standing and start collecting dues and start becoming more of that service organization that you--

MR. ABBOTT: Well, yes. I don't want us to do away with our social too. We enjoy each other, but I want us to get a little more active.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: In helping, see, that person who cannot help himself because we have had some big cases come up who don't know, like wives and their husbands die or their husbands are sick, that they don't know what move to make. So we need some people that they can fall back on and somebody that will take them, more or less, by the hand and help them through the crisis and bring them out, help them to get through it, see what the Veterans

Administration can do for them or who can do for them. There are a lot of benefits that they can get if they'll apply, but nothing comes without--

MR. PYLE: It takes a little effort, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: It takes a little effort.

MR. PYLE: And it takes an awful lot of know-how.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, it does. We've got some good service officers in this state. But, we've got some that know it but they just seem like they can't get it out and tell somebody how to go about it. It's a complicated bureaucracy. Just like I guess any other thing in the government. It's a bureaucracy to try to cut that, all that red tape. Of course, we've got some of them that--some of our people that like to bluster. They know how to do it.

MR. PYLE: You wonder sometimes.

MR. ABBOTT: And they do it to help somebody.

MR. PYLE: Vietnam came up just last week in the news when the wife of a MIA, a Missing In Action, was awarded so much money from one branch of the service--marines, army, I forget--when they officially declared her husband dead. Just in the case of Vietnam POWs and MIAs that are as of yet unsubstantiated cases, does the American POW group have anything to do with this? That was a very nebulous question.

MR. ABBOTT: I don't think we do anymore than just lip service, because we have what we call a national POW-MIA day recognized. We haven't done much on the local level. Every year the president, or the Congress, will designate what day it is, usually it's in July. Some of the organizations do get a little response. They have a parade up in Jackson and try to get a little more active in that and keep it to the forefront, in other words. We don't believe that the North Koreans have told the whole story.

MR. PYLE: North Vietnamese, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: That have not told the whole story. They believe that there's more--

MR. PYLE: Do you feel as though there are still POWs over there, then?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, a good point is people who are still coming out this late in the game like this Garwood. Could be. Now we don't know whether he stayed over there of his own free will and accord or whether he was held captive. This will all have to be brought out in time. But I'm sure that they must know more about some of these pilots and so forth that were shot down. They just didn't let them lay there. These people had identification on them when they were--these bodies. Because that was one of the requirements, to wear a dog tag.

MR. PYLE: Certainly, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: There's nothing we can do about it except that we just try to keep it before the public and before the government that there is a possibility that all men are not out yet, and I don't know what they can do about it. I think Representative Montgomery has been over there several times.

MR. PYLE: Yes, he has.

MR. ABBOTT: And I don't know just what he's found out because they're not going to show you anymore than what they want you to see.

MR. PYLE: Exactly.

MR. ABBOTT: You can't demand, because we don't have any diplomatic relations with them. So, the only thing we can do is, maybe if we gave them several billion dollars [laughter]--

MR. PYLE: Might want to persuade something, yes. The American Ex-Prisoners of War Organization is a fascinating organization. I've enjoyed talking about it with you. Is there any final comment you'd like to make about the organization before we move on?

MR. ABBOTT: No. As I said before, it's how the organization has been in existence so long and how it was so little publicized until the last four or five years. We didn't have not one organization in the whole state. Very few people knew about it until four years ago, four or five years ago. I did not know about it until I happened to contact a friend of mine that I was in prison with. We came back together in 1945, and I hadn't seen him since 1946. And when I contacted him in Macon, Georgia, after I found out where he was living, and he at that time said, "I took the liberty to turn your name in as a prospective member."

MR. PYLE: Oh, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: So, how it could have been so little publicized and he knew about it, yet in the whole state of Georgia, they don't even have one organized chapter. Or they didn't have the last time I had talked to him. Now he was up in, I saw him in August--

MR. PYLE: At Fontana Dam?

MR. ABBOTT: Fontana Dam. He's a retired chief machinist, chief warrant officer, now.

MR. PYLE: Since we've mentioned this man, would you like to mention his name?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, Carl L. Allen.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: Carl Lee Allen. Carl L. Allen. He lives in Macon, Georgia.

MR. PYLE: What efforts, now that you've been a local commander, what efforts have you made in getting more publicity? Getting the word out in south Mississippi?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we've had the public notices, the little pieces in the paper stating where we meet. We send out a letter to everybody that we know, and people who know anybody else, to contact somebody else so we can put them on the list. We have a mall day when we go out there in the mall and set up a booth and set up with our paraphernalia and sell goods like the other people do. We try to get a little television Midday presentation at certain times.

MR. PYLE: Oh, the television show Midday, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: But we don't get very much response out of [the] local newspaper; although, they're not the only ones that don't get too much response [laughter].

MR. PYLE: I was just about to say, in relation to the newspapers, that is, of course, where we got your name for the interview, through Mary Ann Wells.

MR. ABBOTT: If it had not been that I knew Mary Ann Wells I don't know that I'd have ever been on there. She's a member of our church, she and her husband, and I believe he's a retired military man.

MR. PYLE: Retired navy, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: And so when she was at the meeting on a Wednesday night that we had--

MR. PYLE: With Rodney Dukes?

MR. ABBOTT: With Rodney Dukes there, well, she was there and asked me later on could she have an interview with me.

MR. PYLE: And slowly but surely the word is spreading about the organization?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. We're getting out. As I said before, we're kind of a fledgling organization but more and more we're going to, I believe, get a little more active and try to help at least get somebody that is willing to put a little extra effort in being a service officer, so that they can at least tell people where to start in case of an emergency and not just leave somebody in the cold, especially the relatives of a deceased prisoner of war who is, may be benefits that the widows, spouses could get. Our service officer is supposed to be

responsive but I haven't had much contact with her down at the courthouse. Mrs. Van Horn, who is the service officer for the whole county, Forrest County--

MR. PYLE: That's the VA service officer you're speaking of?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, the service officer for the county. She could at least give people forms and tell them where to go, but I haven't had much contact with her.

MR. PYLE: Mr. Abbott, out of the list of questions that I have, that's all I have to know to ask. However, there may be other things that I just don't know to ask you. Are there other things that you'd like to bring into the history?

MR. ABBOTT: Not that I can think of at the present. I appreciate the privilege of doing this. The only regret that I have is, I just wish that there could have been something like this 30 years ago while my memory was still good because so much of it has eluded me in the last 35 years that, what could have happened. Of course, I had a lot of people, including my wife, that want to know why in the world I haven't written a book. If I had taken notes diligently all the way from the time that I was in prison and shortly thereafter, I probably would have enough to make a volume but--

MR. PYLE: To write that book.

MR. ABBOTT: But there have been many books written on it, and I just assumed myself that there must have been a lot of people that got tired of reading this stuff. If it had been written, like one that I had read not too long ago which turned out to be more fiction than fact, then I don't believe I'd have gotten very far with it.

MR. PYLE: Mr. Abbott, on behalf of the university, I'd like to thank you very much for kindly spending three days with us. It's been fascinating and I've enjoyed it. I thank you very much for the information that you've given us.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I thank you. And I thank you for the privilege of making these statements. I hope somebody, in a few years, can benefit from it.

MR. PYLE: Thank you.

MR. ABBOTT: Thank you.