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Berkeley, California

Ivan Herbert

Rosie the Riveter  
World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

*This interview series was funded in part by a contract with the  
National Park Service, and with the support of individual donors.*

Interviews conducted by  
Javier Arbona  
in 2011

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Ivan Herbert, "Rosie the Riveter World War II American Home Front Oral History Project" conducted by Javier Arbona in 2011, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2012.



Ivan Herbert

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Interview #1 November 2, 2011

Begin Audio File 1 herbert\_ivan\_01\_11-02-11.mp3

01-00:00:11

Arbona: We are here today in the city of San Pablo, right?

01-00:00:19

Herbert: Right.

01-00:00:33

Arbona: It is November 2, 2011. And the person speaking into the microphone is Javier Arbona, the interviewer. I'm with Mr. Ivan Herbert. We're going to be talking about a lot of things today, Port Chicago—

01-00:00:56

Herbert: All right.

01-00:00:57

Arbona: —and your whole life. So really where I always begin these interviews is just to ask you to tell me where you were born and a little bit about your childhood to start with.

01-00:01:12

Herbert: Ah, well, it's been so long ago I forgot where I was born. [laughs] Ooh, man.

01-00:01:23

Hope Herbert: What state?

01-00:01:24

Herbert: I knew it was Louisiana.

01-00:01:26

Arbona: You were born in Louisiana?

01-00:01:28

Herbert: Some part of—gosh, gosh.

01-00:01:33

Hope Herbert: What town?

01-00:01:38

Herbert: It's not far from {BiPaul?}, Louisiana. BiPaul. Five miles north of Baton Rouge.

01-00:01:46

Arbona: North of Baton Rouge.

01-00:01:47

Herbert: Near BiPaul. It was a town called BiPaul. I think that's what they called it. It's been so many years I've been there. I think I'm pronouncing it right.

01-00:01:58  
Arbona: How long has it been since you've been there?

01-00:02:00  
Herbert: Oh, man, before you was born. [laughs]

01-00:02:04  
Arbona: What year were you born?

01-00:02:08  
Herbert: I was born in 1922.

01-00:02:10  
Arbona: 1922. And you're—

01-00:02:12  
Herbert: I'm eighty-eight today.

01-00:02:14  
Arbona: Today?

01-00:02:15  
Herbert: Yes, I'm eighty-eight.

01-00:02:17  
Arbona: Is today your birthday?

01-00:02:18  
Herbert: No, I'm eighty-eight; six-sixteen-twenty-two is my birthday.

01-00:02:24  
Arbona: Who were your parents?

01-00:02:31  
Herbert: George Herbert and—

01-00:02:39  
Arbona: Oh, take your time.

01-00:02:41  
Herbert: I forget my mama's face right now. Anita. That's right.

01-00:02:48  
Arbona: Anita.

01-00:02:49  
Hope Herbert: No. I'm trying to remember her name, too. Come back to it.

01-00:02:54  
Arbona: This is Hope, by the way, on the audio, H-O-P-E, for the record. Hope, do you also go by Herbert as your last name or—

01-00:03:04

Hope Herbert: Yeah. Hope.

01-00:03:05

Arbona: Hope Herbert? Uh-huh.

01-00:03:06

Herbert: Melissa Hope, yeah.

01-00:03:08

Herbert: Melissa Hope her name.

01-00:03:15

Hope Herbert: Yeah, but they call me Hope.

01-00:03:17

Arbona: So why don't you fill me in a little bit on your childhood? On any recollections about growing up. For example, maybe what your parents did and what you did during the daytime while they were busy, or who took care of you?

01-00:03:36

Herbert: Well, I grew up on a farm that was down north of Baton Rouge. They called Scotlandville. And my dad worked on this boat there on the barge that they brought and load from about twenty miles north of where we stayed at. They brought it here for the saw mill, to take these long logs and make into planks. You know, planks, two by fours, one by six and like that. So that's why they built the planks at this lumber yard there. Want me to tell everything that's happened?

01-00:04:21

Hope Herbert: Yes.

01-00:04:22

Herbert: Everything?

01-00:04:22

Arbona: Sure. Keep—

01-00:04:24

Herbert: Okay, okay. I'm going to give a history.

01-00:04:26

Arbona: Did you work on the farm?

01-00:04:27

Herbert: Well, I grew up on a farm, yes. Now, during that time my dad was working on the—it's a little boat there, a little barge boat that held the—my dad stayed overnight through the week. And I would go down on the weekend to stay Saturday and Sunday night with him for company. So there was two other white guys there. They didn't like the idea, because my dad was honest about

doing a job right. But the other two white guys, they didn't give a damn. They worked when the boss man was looking. I'm trying to say they didn't work when they boss wasn't looking.

01-00:05:24

Arbona: On the barge?

01-00:05:25

Herbert: Yes. So for that reason, they murdered my dad. They killed him, and threw him in the river, those two white guys did. But I was quite a distance from him. Almost about a half or about maybe 200 feet away. But they saw me. When they saw me, then they tried to catch me. But I hid between all these logs because they say, "Let's kill that nigger because he going to go tell somebody." That's what I heard them saying. So I ran like hell and hid between all those logs to stay alive.

01-00:06:12

Arbona: How old were you at the time? Do you recall?

01-00:06:15

Herbert: I was a little child then, of course, Scotlandville, Louisiana, where my dad worked on the river. So he stayed on the little barge at night because his boss wanted him to stay at night because he was more trustworthy than the other white guys were. So they didn't like that, so that's why they killed him and threw him in the river. But I saw them when they was doing it, so they say, "Well, let's catch that nigger before, because he going to tell on us." I'm telling like I heard it. I'll never forget. I don't lie on nobody. I never—because of staying alive. So I stayed hid, boy. When I got out, they still tried to catch me a week later. I was about two miles from home. And it was foggy. And the evening was really foggy, and this train was coming down from the north, like coming from the north going south toward Baton Rouge. So the old truck they had stalled on the trucks because they trying to catch me to kill me. But they didn't notice that the train was coming because it was so foggy. So I got across the railroad cross just in time, and that train hit them and grind them right on straight down the railroad track. When the train stopped—rather, when the train had passed me, I got back on top of the track. I checked to see what happened to them. All I saw was just pieces of their bodies scattered all up and down the railroad track. Boy, that scared me so.

01-00:08:18

Arbona: The two men? Both of them?

01-00:08:20

Herbert: The two white guys—

01-00:08:21

Arbona: Wow.

01-00:08:22

Herbert:

—that were trying to catch me. They were all in pieces. A truck stalling on the railroad track but it was so foggy they didn't notice the train was coming. It was so foggy. They was trying to catch me, but they didn't hear the train was coming. So the train hit them and chewed them up on the railroad track. Never forget it.

01-00:08:44

Arbona:

Do you remember how old you were at the time that this took place?

01-00:08:48

Herbert:

That time I was right at sixteen years old. Between sixteen and eighteen years old because I used to go on the boat at night. When my daddy was working at night I used to go down and help him at night because I used to walk a mile home, from my house, to where he was and that was about, sometimes, three miles to be company with him. Because when I went with him I would catch a lot of shrimps. We loved shrimp. We brought shrimps home for mama to cook and she boiled them and made shrimps like that. Boy, it was good eating, too. Yeah.

01-00:09:33

Arbona:

You have siblings?

01-00:09:36

Herbert:

Oh, boy, where are they now? So long ago. [laughter] Brothers and sisters. You remember how many children I have?

01-00:09:50

Hope Herbert:

No, brothers and sisters.

01-00:09:52

Herbert:

Brothers and sisters.

01-00:09:53

Hope Herbert:

Your brothers and sisters.

01-00:09:54

Herbert:

My brothers. One sister.

01-00:10:00

Hope Herbert:

No.

01-00:10:01

Herbert:

I know. You came on later on through the years.

01-00:10:04

Hope Herbert:

I'm a daughter.

01-00:10:06

Herbert:

I guess. [laughs]

01-00:10:13  
Hope Herbert: How many brothers did you have?

01-00:10:15  
Herbert: Brothers? I had two brothers, Norman and Walter and George. Three brothers.

01-00:10:24  
Arbona: Three?

01-00:10:25  
Herbert: George. George, I told you what was going to happen. You should go to church and take that woman. The purse that she had was the money that they had collected for church, for the preacher, for the church. I told my brother, “Man, you better let that woman and her purse stay with her and quit trying to take her purse and carry it home with you. You know you gambling. You going to lose that woman’s money, and she going to cut the hell out of you.” Sure enough, he didn’t believe me. He had her purse and the money and the money belongs to the church. My brother, my older brother, he loved to do nothing but gamble. Well, he lost his life gambling. I told him that was going to happen to him.

01-00:11:15  
Arbona: Which one of the children were you and which order was everybody?

01-00:11:20  
Herbert: Oh, oh, oh. He was an oldest brother.

01-00:11:22  
Arbona: He was oldest?

01-00:11:23  
Herbert: Yeah.

01-00:11:24  
Arbona: This was Norman or—?

01-00:11:26  
Herbert: No, this was George.

01-00:11:32  
Hope Herbert: And who came after George?

01-00:11:34  
Herbert: George. Norman never was around. He was in towards the southern part of Louisiana. His family’s down there in a little town called—I think called Garyville at that time.

01-00:11:51  
Arbona: Garyville?

01-00:11:52

Herbert: I think it was Garyville. Long time ago. It was a little town called “-ville.” Garyville and Montecito and Dixon. And Dixon, like that. Yeah

01-00:12:06

Hope Herbert: And who came after that?

01-00:12:08

Herbert: After that it was—

01-00:12:11

Hope Herbert: Were you next?

01-00:12:16

Herbert: I was next then because I stayed around dad a lot, because I liked to bring the shrimps home for mama to boil. We had a lot of the extra shrimps, every other day or so. Shrimps and corn bread and sweet potatoes and mustard greens. And we kept that growing all the time.

01-00:12:39

Hope Herbert: Did you have any sisters?

01-00:12:42

Herbert: One sister.

01-00:12:43

Arbona: Oh, one sister.

01-00:12:44

Herbert: What happened to sis now? What happened to my sister?

01-00:12:49

Hope Herbert: But she was younger?

01-00:12:51

Herbert: No, she was between me. I forgot what happened to sis. She never did stay around home much. So she went off with some husband of hers somewhere.

01-00:13:07

Hope Herbert: And what about Boo?

01-00:13:09

Herbert: Boo?

01-00:13:14

Hope Herbert: Your brother in Fairfield.

01-00:13:15

Herbert: Yes, he’s still down in Fairfield right now.

01-00:13:17

Hope Herbert: Is he younger than you?

01-00:13:19

Herbert: Yes.

01-00:13:22

Arbona: So there's six in total? Are there six siblings?

01-00:13:28

Herbert: Three boys. Boo, myself and George.

01-00:13:37

Hope Herbert: And the one you said was Norman.

01-00:13:39

Herbert: Yeah, and Norman.

01-00:13:41

Hope Herbert: And then sis. And one girl.

01-00:13:45

Herbert: Walter. Did I say Walter?

01-00:13:49

Hope Herbert: Is Walter Boo?

01-00:13:50

Herbert: Walter, George, Boo. Or Gus. But he went to Chicago. He was kind of partying and he went way up to New York. I don't {inaudible} no New York from Scotlandville. That's about six or seven thousand miles from Baton Rouge.

01-00:14:15

Arbona: One thing really quick. I'm just going to pause this because—

01-00:14:21

Herbert: Oh, boy. History. I wanted to get cleared up. I'll ask you later, Daddy, because I'm not sure about how many brothers and sisters you have now. But anyway—

01-00:14:44

Arbona: That's okay. We can come back to that question later on if that's—

01-00:14:48

Herbert: Well, they all left home. I didn't.

01-00:14:49

Arbona: I was very struck by the story you were telling me about your father, your father being murdered, because then it immediately in my mind went to what did your mother do at the time. What happened?

01-00:15:15

Herbert: Well, she was just a housewife at home all the time and that took—quite painful. That was pretty painful to her but nothing we could do about it. There

was so much prejudice in that town, there was too much prejudice, so we just stayed back and let happen what happened. Let the good Lord take care of everything else. That's the way we looked at it. So we had ten acres there. I farmed on and grow our food on it and that's kept us going through the years. And as time went on, well, I increased my chicken ranch to about 3,000 laying hens or more.

01-00:16:08

Hope Herbert: Well, wait. That's in Fairlawn, correct? That was in Louisiana?

01-00:16:12

Herbert: Um-hmm.

01-00:16:13

Hope Herbert: You had that many chickens?

01-00:16:16

Herbert: Fairlawn was turtles.

01-00:16:17

Hope Herbert: That was turtle, right.

01-00:16:18

Herbert: Turtle.

01-00:16:18

Hope Herbert: Still back in Louisiana.

01-00:16:19

Herbert: Turtle.

01-00:16:20

Hope Herbert: Before you joined the Navy. He's asking about before you joined the Navy.

01-00:16:28

Herbert: Oh, before I joined the Navy. Oh. Oh, my gosh, way back then.

01-00:16:32

Hope Herbert: After your father was killed.

01-00:16:37

Herbert: Well, after dad was killed, I just worked the farm, I remember. We had ten acres, and I cropped another ten acres next door. Maybe I was cropping down twenty acres. Ten and ten is twenty. We were living off just cropping the land, planting grain. And I had animals only that I fed. Small steers, calves, then they grew up to be large steers, and I sold them. And hogs. I raised a lot of hogs like that. So I raised a lot of corn, too, to feed them with. So I was between, oh, sixteen and twenty, twenty-four years old, like that.

01-00:17:34

Arbona: When you were about sixteen years old?

01-00:17:36  
Herbert: Yeah. Between sixteen and twenty-five, like that. Yeah.

01-00:17:47  
Arbona: How old were you when you went to the Navy?

01-00:17:51  
Herbert: I went in there?

01-00:17:53  
Arbona: Yeah.

01-00:17:54  
Herbert: Went in the Navy in 19—was it '16 or was it '60? Fifty-nine.

01-00:18:08  
Hope Herbert: It was during World War II, in the forties.

01-00:18:13  
Herbert: Yeah. Oh, boy.

01-00:18:18  
Arbona: About 1940?

01-00:18:21  
Herbert: About 19—

01-00:18:23  
Arbona: '44 or '42?

01-00:18:28  
Herbert: I married mama—

01-00:18:29  
Hope Herbert: Not 'til the sixties. But let me ask you, did you join the Navy in Louisiana?

01-00:18:36  
Herbert: They sent us to New Orleans. They picked us up in Baton Rouge, and they sent us to New Orleans, and then from New Orleans they sent us to Great Lakes. That's where we stayed, there.

01-00:18:58  
Arbona: Illinois. Do you remember when the war broke out?

01-00:19:06  
Herbert: War broke out. Let's see.

01-00:19:10  
Arbona: Maybe the attack on Pearl Harbor or hearing news of the war starting and the US going into the war?

01-00:19:21  
Herbert: I got to think about that real hard. Pearl Harbor?

01-00:19:29

Hope Herbert: Let me ask you this. Why did you join the Navy?

01-00:19:34

Herbert: They sent a guy around the house. He had came out, and he had his uniform. He said, "Man, where you been?" to me. "I been in the Navy." He said, "You should join." That's what he told me. I said, "You sure now?" About a week before again, I was at an Army base, about from here—almost a mile that way. Well, not quite a mile. But almost. Just about yon a mile. Twenty acres. I used to see a guy, big jughead on the ground, crawling on the ground on their knees. They on the end of my ten acres. I peeked over the fence and say, "Hey, guys, what you all doing?" "Man, we in the Army. What do you think we're doing?" I said, "All right, I just ask." I said, "What you going in the Army when you got to crawl on the ground in the Army on your knees?" He said, "Yeah, so what." Said, "I just wanted to know." So I said, "Hell, I don't want to get in they want to get in the Army."

01-00:20:38

Arbona: They were getting prepared to enlist in the Army or they were in boot camp?

01-00:20:41

Herbert: Yes, they were already in the Army. They was behind my fence line just tracking, doing something back then, breaking them in sort of called. So another guy, a month later, I saw him, I forgot his name. He had a uniform. Said his goodbyes. I said, "Man, where you been?" He said, "Man, I've been in the Navy." I said, "You've been where?" "In the Navy." He said, "Man, you should get in the Navy." I said, "Get in the Navy? What you doing in the Navy man?" "What you think we doing in the Navy?" [laughs] I'd been just on the farm all my life. So he told me what they do in the Navy. So I said, "Hell, I'm going to go get in no Navy." I was scared to death, country boy, and I never been in no town, nowhere. Just born in the country, stay out in the country by my father. So that's life. We grow up today, we don't know what tomorrow hold for us.

01-00:21:51

Arbona: So how did you—

01-00:21:52

Herbert: Eventually I learned.

01-00:21:53

Arbona: So after your friend's story, were you afraid to join the Navy, or how did you end up making the decision to enlist?

01-00:22:02

Herbert: Well, when the time come to enlist, there was about twelve of us together. They talked about sending us back up, going north. I think going north. I said, "Why north?" and the guy said, "Towards Chicago." I said, "Oh, I never known about no Chicago." I said, "Okay." So he keep talking. So he say, "We going to send you all to New Orleans first and then from there, I don't know

where they're going to send you all. That's for them to decide where they'll send you then." I said, "Well, I'm still scared," so I just went along with the group. So they send us to a boot camp called—where is that boot camp?

01-00:22:54

Arbona: To Great Lakes?

01-00:22:55

Herbert: Yeah, Great Lakes, Illinois. Sure was. Great Lakes, Illinois. And I got the boot camp training there. And that was scary, too.

01-00:23:09

Arbona: Were your brothers enlisted also?

01-00:23:12

Herbert: No, no. No.

01-00:23:14

Arbona: Did any of your brothers go to the war?

01-00:23:15

Herbert: No.

01-00:23:17

Arbona: Did they try to enlist or any—

01-00:23:22

Herbert: All of them was older than me, as far as I can remember. And I think they was too old, or they weren't enlisting them at that age at that time. But I never remember them going into any of the service. So the only thing I can remember was when I signed up, and then they shipped me to Great Lakes, Illinois.

01-00:23:49

Arbona: Can you tell me more about Great Lakes, Illinois, what they had you do in training and what the days were like while you were there?

01-00:24:01

Herbert: Let me think a little bit.

01-00:24:16

Arbona: Were the officers—?

01-00:24:17

Herbert: No, the officers there at Great Lakes, I remember, they pretty prejudiced there at the same time. So all the enlisted men there, they were the black race there, so to speak, you know. And so they had them get up early in the mornings and start planning the drill, put them in a line. And they had them start marching in a line, one behind another. What was I doing in there?

What's that building there? Not quite. Anyway—

01-00:25:16

Arbona: Outside?

01-00:25:17

Herbert: —there were some bushes, tall bushes. I was all right but—

01-00:25:25

Arbona: Can I interrupt you for one more moment, Mr. Herbert? I'm still having a little bit of feedback on the mic and I don't want to miss anything here. I'm just going to pause this. Okay, sir. So we're back to rolling tape with Mr. Herbert, Javier on the microphone, Javier Arbona.

01-00:25:43

Herbert: You just talk as you want.

01-00:25:45

Arbona: Okay, Mr. Herbert. We were just talking a moment ago about what your encounter with the officers at Great Lakes were like and what your days were like in training.

01-00:25:58

Herbert: Oh. Oh, yes. Now, at Great Lakes, the officers there, they would—I remember all the time it was three officers. Each morning, it was about almost a hundred or so like sailors that was loading ships. We supplied the whole Pacific coast, Pacific coast. We're on the Pacific right now. We're on the Pacific.

01-00:26:35

Arbona: But now you're telling me about Port Chicago, right?

01-00:26:37

Herbert: Uh-huh.

01-00:26:38

Arbona: You're telling me about loading the ships.

01-00:26:40

Herbert: Yeah, yeah.

01-00:26:43

Arbona: Sure.

01-00:26:43

Herbert: Well, there was three officers and all the black guys, they were enlisted men that was doing all the loading because it was two ships way in the back on the docks that they were loading and unloading. So as they was unloading the ship, every morning unload the—the three white officer, they had a group of about eight—I remember, between about eight. Let's see, yeah. Four, five, six, seven. Between six and eight or twelve in that group that would be doing nothing but loading the ships. Putting them on a pallet. Picked them up with a great big winch that picks them up and lifts them in the air. And they carry

them way up in the air and put them over and drop them down in the hub. Call that a hub on a ship, where they put them on a ship that was docked there.

Okay. Now, the same time that it was being loaded, they would load another load off the ship, bringing them back up, inspect those on the docks again so they would—every time. And that kind of got on my nerves a bit. I never noticed anyone that went over there and check the pallets and nothing. So when the officers hadn't left already, I went over myself, by myself, and I checked those pallets myself. I said, "Damn, why don't the officers be checking these damn pallets?" You have that little screw not going to last long here, and those pallets there, each time they pick it up, it's a ton. A ton is 2,000 pounds. Pick them up, one little bolt like that and 2,000 pounds on that, and the screw hanging out here, not tight. I was just trying to push that back myself. I said, "Gosh, we going to have an explosion on this damn place," that's what I'm thinking to myself. Hell, I'm not going to go any further on this boat, get closer on this. Get closest to down on the docks to where they loading the ships there. I said, "I'm going to stay here in these bushes by myself." That's what I did every morning. Way over there where they could pass right by me going to the—

01-00:30:22

Arbona:

What was your work at Port Chicago normally?

01-00:30:24

Herbert:

Loading ships. Loading.

01-00:30:26

Arbona:

You were one of the munitions loaders?

01-00:30:28

Herbert:

Yes, but I stayed here. Because they was making work too fast. Shit, I think they were making me work this fast, no gloves on their hand, to pick those heavy bombs up like that, and their hand was black and dirty. I'm a farmer myself but always had gloves, working with my mules on my own farm, and I had to have—because that's metal there. I noticed their hands was just black and dirty every day.

01-00:30:54

Hope Herbert:

Excuse me. Daddy, weren't you cooking? Weren't you a chef or cooking?

01-00:30:58

Herbert:

No, I wasn't a cook then.

01-00:31:00

Hope Herbert:

Oh, later you became—

01-00:31:01

Herbert:

Yeah, yeah. Later, later. Later I became a cook. I learned to watch everything because I was on my own farm and had to be my own boss on my own farm. I had to watch everything that my little farm produced. Like you the boss, you

got to see everything. See, on a breakdown, you know you're going to breakdown, they're going to slow you down. So I watched everything that is supposed to keep everything working smoothly. That's what I did with everything I built.

01-00:31:45

Arbona:

Can you back me up a little bit and tell me how you learned that you were going to end up in Port Chicago? You were at Great Lakes. Did they give you the news? An officer came up to you and gave you the news that you were going to Port Chicago, or what happened?

01-00:32:06

Herbert:

Well, we got shipped from—was that Chicago? From way up there.

01-00:32:09

Arbona:

From Great Lakes.

01-00:32:11

Herbert:

Yeah, from Great Lakes to Port Chicago. That's how I got to Port Chicago. We were shipped there on a train. I don't remember. A train, a bus. But I think it was a train at that time. But anyway, that's where we ended up at. And they just work the guys there unmerciful. The officers would leave, the three officers leave every morning because I would get up before they would get up because they had to get up and call. What'd they call it? I forget the name. They called platoon. Not the platoon but they wanted the company to get up in the morning, and they had to be called for duty. "James! "Here, sir." Herbert!" "Here, sir." I stayed hid in the bushes. I was scared to death.

01-00:33:18

Arbona:

So you would avoid it completely?

01-00:33:21

Herbert:

I was watching them in the bushes. Everything. That's what I remember. All I seen I just kept it to myself. I didn't tell none of the rest of them because they would have court martialed me. Now I'm telling it to you.

01-00:33:41

Arbona:

Tell them the danger that you had seen or tell them what?

01-00:33:46

Herbert:

I'm telling it now but toward then I wouldn't be telling you. I'd just been keeping to myself. So it was a revelation, I'm here to tell you. It was no plaything, let me tell you. It was no plaything. Then one officer came out later on. It was a white officer. He said, "I need three cooks." My hand up went like a streak of lightning. I wanted to get out of the bushes, get out of the bushes, get in the kitchen. I got tired of staying in the bushes, being hungry every day, so I decided to be a cook. That's how I learned how to cook. I ended up being a first-class cook.

01-00:34:47  
Arbona: I see. So for how long were you working in the kitchen?

01-00:34:53  
Herbert: Until I got discharged.

01-00:34:58  
Arbona: Okay.

01-00:34:58  
Herbert: I worked in the kitchen, oh, about until I got discharged three or four years later, something like that. Whenever I got discharged, I got—

01-00:35:09  
Arbona: So before we get to the discharge, what was it like to be in Port Chicago? And I'm referring to like your entertainment, your time off? If you would get license to go off base, what would you do? Would you go to a bar, would you go out with friends? What would happen?

01-00:35:32  
Herbert: Not me.

01-00:35:34  
Arbona: No?

01-00:35:34  
Herbert: I went everywhere by myself, came back by myself because I didn't want to be involved with nobody but me. That's enough to worry, with me. If I had to hide, I'd tell them, "Come on in." He might get scared, say, "I'm scared. No, I'm going to run for myself."

01-00:35:52  
Arbona: So you'd go off by yourself?

01-00:35:54  
Herbert: Always stayed to myself and I still do, to be by myself.

01-00:35:57  
Arbona: And would you go to, I don't know, Oakland or San Francisco?

01-00:36:02  
Herbert: Oh, hell, no, man.

01-00:36:05  
Arbona: No. Port Chicago the town? Where would you go?

01-00:36:07  
Herbert: To Oakland and maybe one time I think I went to San Francisco. I got out and I said, "Dang gone. All these people on the streets out. Where in the hell, where they eating at?" just thinking to myself about—because I got planting done and kill my hog and kill one of my steers and save it for the winter months, that going to carry me through the winter month. "They ain't got

nothing out here. This is a hard concrete walking board,” I’m just thinking to myself. I said, “Damn, I’m going to stay in town?” I don’t like to stay in town. Not much, even now. [laughs] I like the country. Man, I grew me something to eat. I can’t grow nothing to eat in town. You can’t even grow a turnip green on the sidewalk. [laughter]

01-00:36:55

Arbona:

So you basically were concerned that there were no animals and no fruits or vegetables to be grown in the city? It basically was—

01-00:37:03

Herbert:

No, because I didn’t see none. It was also I had left on my farm and around neighbors that are out in the area.

01-00:37:14

Arbona:

Yeah.

01-00:37:14

Herbert:

Yeah, yeah.

01-00:37:17

Arbona:

And then when you went to Oakland or went to San Francisco, did you enter prejudice or encounter any problems with bar owners or people that ran businesses or anything like that?

01-00:37:30

Herbert:

Oh, about peeping, just going in and seeing. If they’re gambling men and cussing, I just keep on walking.

01-00:37:34

Arbona:

Oh, really? So not even bother with them?

01-00:37:39

Herbert:

No. I see them drinking their whiskey bottle on the street, man, I’d cross the street before I see them come out of a bar, some, or walls. I’d cross in front when it get to me.

01-00:37:52

Arbona:

And why was that?

01-00:37:53

Herbert:

I was scared. I didn’t know if someone was going—they might have wanted to beat the hell out of me because I seen it happen. I didn’t make no friends with nobody. Nobody.

01-00:38:06

Arbona:

You had seen that happen?

01-00:38:07

Herbert:

Yes.

01-00:38:08  
Arbona: You had seen it?

01-00:38:09  
Herbert: Two guys walking together, and they would grab another and beat the hell out of you. No, I saw that happen.

01-00:38:14  
Arbona: In San Francisco?

01-00:38:15  
Herbert: Oakland, yes.

01-00:38:16  
Arbona: In Oakland.

01-00:38:18  
Herbert: Yeah. Most of the time, I got scared to go into San Francisco, and I'd have to go across on the ferry. Said, "Ah, hell, that's too much water for me." Can't go on that water like I can on land. See where my legs can carry me the fastest. Yeah, experience is the best teacher.

01-00:38:38  
Hope Herbert: Daddy, did you go to Richmond or Vallejo with anybody around here?

01-00:38:41  
Herbert: No, I didn't know a thing about Richmond and Vallejo then.

01-00:38:44  
Hope Herbert: They didn't have it then?

01-00:38:46  
Herbert: I didn't know about Richmond or Vallejo then.

01-00:38:49  
Hope Herbert: So you spent most of your time on the base?

01-00:38:52  
Herbert: There on the base in Oakland.

01-00:38:54  
Hope Herbert: Oakland.

01-00:38:56  
Herbert: That was about the time I used to get—not often but sometimes I would catch a bus in Oakland and go to San Francisco. That got rough, and I quit that.

01-00:39:11  
Hope Herbert: Did you have any girlfriends?

01-00:39:13  
Herbert: Yeah, I left her, too. [laughs]

01-00:39:16  
Hope Herbert: No, girlfriend here.

01-00:39:18  
Herbert: Yeah. I left one in San Francisco and left her. I go back to her no more.

01-00:39:23  
Hope Herbert: We used to go visit her.

01-00:39:24  
Arbona: Oh, so you'd visit her in San Francisco?

01-00:39:26  
Herbert: Yeah, a couple of times or two. Not over three times.

01-00:39:36  
Hope Herbert: Was there very much prejudice here in California?

01-00:39:37  
Herbert: Yeah, oh, at that time? Nothing but. It was all over. By myself I never make friends, but I stayed away.

01-00:39:47  
Arbona: And what about on the base? Seems like you spent a lot of time on the base but did you encounter problems with the officers or—

01-00:39:56  
Herbert: No, not on the base because they wanted some cooks. That was the first time I learned how to cook. Start to learn how to cook. Mama had taught me how to cook, but all I cooked for at home was Mama. So they wanted three cooks. My hand up, the first one. "Okay, come on, you first." That's how I started cooking. So I did all the cooking for the guys on the base, yeah, around that time. At home I used to have it, and we kill them. On my farm, I killed a whole animal, cleaned him up good. I had a guy in town, he would send a truck out to my place after you kill him and then take them back to his place in town, about two miles when I lived out in the country. He would dress him up, cut him up and chop steaks, round steaks like that, wrap them up just like you go to the store and grind them. So I kept my deep freeze. I never went to the store to buy any meat. I grew my own meat and my own food and the only time I bought—what I did buy was sugar and that's all. That's it.

01-00:41:14  
Arbona: You bought sugar for the base?

01-00:41:17  
Herbert: No, for my own house.

01-00:41:18  
Arbona: Oh, I see. Sorry.

01-00:41:20

Herbert: Yeah, yeah. Own home. Yeah.

01-00:41:23

Arbona: Now, you mentioned earlier that you had loaded munitions and you didn't have gloves. You said that you didn't have gloves to handle the cargo.

01-00:41:33

Herbert: No, we didn't.

01-00:41:35

Arbona: I've read about this before, about the lack of equipment and gear to do the work. Do you remember asking an officer or telling a superior that you needed this equipment or anything like that?

01-00:41:53

Herbert: You'd be talking to your shoes. Trying to talk to an officer was just about impossible because they wouldn't hardly listen to a black guy at all by himself and hardly—like five or six, we had a group of black people that was appointed. They would be appointed by a white officer and that group—one black guy would be over the other six or eight and they had to do what he said to do, like that, to get everything done, accomplished. That's why I always stayed to myself. Some got put in jail, and some of them got mad and fighting with one another and went up and they killed one another. Now they're throwing them on the floor there. Gambling with them bones, you know, they flipping bones on the floor, gambling.

01-00:42:50

Arbona: Playing bones amongst yourselves, amongst—

01-00:42:53

Herbert: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

01-00:42:54

Arbona: Yeah, gambl—

01-00:42:55

Herbert: This would be on the floor there, on the base out there. I say that's not for me, so I stay away from them, too. One of them got killed, you know. Yeah, a little town there.

01-00:43:10

Arbona: In the town of Port Chicago or—

01-00:43:11

Herbert: Yeah. That's right, in Port Chicago. It's a little old—

01-00:43:17

Hope Herbert: That's not Vallejo?

01-00:43:18  
Herbert: No, no, no, no.

01-00:43:18  
Hope Herbert: That's not Port Chicago, right?

01-00:43:20  
Herbert: Well, that's still Port Chicago, little bit of town. It's still got the same name, right?

01-00:43:27  
Arbona: Yeah. The name, just like the base did, right? So the little town of Port Chicago.

01-00:43:29  
Herbert: Yeah, the same. It's still there. It's still there.

01-00:43:35  
Arbona: You said that this sailor got killed there? You—

01-00:43:39  
Herbert: Um-hmm. They was gambling. They was gambling with one another. Yeah.

01-00:43:42  
Arbona: So there was a confrontation of sorts, or what happened?

01-00:43:49  
Herbert: Well, gambling, someone's going to be crooked. One say you didn't see it, the other say you did see it. Well, did or didn't do it. Saw someone wasn't happy when they wanted to be gambling, stop looking at them. So I just say to myself. When I got a little bit—went on to my father, and I cropped my farm.

01-00:44:11  
Arbona: Yeah.

01-00:44:12  
Herbert: —some greens and raise my own chicken and hogs and put them on the truck and carry them to town and sell them at the big market.

01-00:44:22  
Arbona: Oh, and did you ever go into the town of Port Chicago itself for—

01-00:44:25  
Herbert: That's a small town anyway, yeah. Went in to pick up some things like at the drugstore or something. Yeah, like that. Small drugstore.

01-00:44:35  
Arbona: Now, can you tell me about the explosion? What happened? Do you remember the moment itself when the explosion happened?

01-00:44:48

Herbert:

That was due to carelessness. It was plum carelessness. They're loading the ship, the big ship. It comes in to the dock. They start unloading, taking some off, pull them off the ship, then bring them into the dock to be stored there. So when it's coming down, right here they got it on like this, that guy was pulling on the lever. That's a ton on there, on the one pallet. When he pulled that ton, that ton's coming down, it's three or four, five times heavier, coming down. I forget what you call it that way. Anything that's coming down, it's going down faster, I mean, a lot faster than it would be going up. But when you got to do this, they pull this, lever up there, it would make that whole ship rock. I watched that three or four. I said, "That damn son of a bitch, he ought to have sense to know that that cable up there going to get hot and going to break." So I was trying to tell him. He cussed at me. So okay, I just stayed hid in the bushes. Sure enough, that what caused it. Carelessness. That's what caused the explosion, carelessness. {inaudible} guys do that like this, the guy, they said, "Pull that lever down, stop, you make that whole ship {inaudible} they come down with a ton on the one pallet, pallet is wider than this. That's 2,000 pounds."

01-00:46:46

Arbona:

So the operation of the winch was too fast, you think, or was too—

01-00:46:52

Herbert:

Yeah. When you coming way down, you're way up there. Was about sixty feet or so, eighty feet, yeah. Eighty feet was right up there. Was about forty feet. That isn't forty feet; that's about twenty feet. Anyways, way up there.

01-00:47:09

Arbona:

But were people trying to work fast? That's what one always reads in the—

01-00:47:16

Herbert:

Yes.

01-00:47:17

Arbona:

—history books, is that—

01-00:47:19

Herbert:

It was working too fast, yes. Working too fast because those that worked fast on this—often those that worked the fast put out more tonnage, and if his group got more tonnage, they were getting longer liberties. Get long liberties. Maybe twelve hours or twenty-four hours, maybe the thirty-six hour. I said not for me. I still stay in my little {inaudible}.

01-00:47:53

Arbona:

So the officers would—

01-00:47:55

Herbert:

Soon as the officers leave in the morning, about 8:30—between 8:30 and 9:00, no more officer is on base at all until the next morning. They'd be coming in and then be leaving. Between 8:30 and 9:00, no more officers. You'd be told,

your group of men, black men, what to load. That what they'd be doing all day.

01-00:48:22

Arbona: But they would offer them extra liberty time—

01-00:48:26

Herbert: That's what they got.

01-00:48:26

Arbona: —if they got more tonnage done.

01-00:48:29

Herbert: That's all they got, was more liberty time. He sees but a mighty few knows.

01-00:48:38

Arbona: I'm sorry?

01-00:48:40

Herbert: He can see but a mighty few knows. "He sees," my daddy said. Momma says, "Yeah, he sees but a mighty few knows."

01-00:48:51

Arbona: Mighty few knows.

01-00:48:53

Herbert: Yeah, he sees but a mighty few knows.

01-00:48:57

Hope Herbert: That's like an old saying.

01-00:48:58

Arbona: Yeah.

01-00:48:59

Hope Herbert: A lot see but—

01-00:49:00

Herbert: Okay, I'll make it different to you. I know how to build a home. A lot of people pass by see me building a home. A lot see but a mighty few know how a home is being built or building, knows to build.

01-00:49:15

Arbona: Yeah. So you're saying that carelessness and the drive of loading these ships so quickly caused the explosion.

01-00:49:31

Herbert: Carelessness. Carelessness, carelessness. Carelessness.

01-00:49:33

Arbona: But tell me about the moment that that happened. You were in bed? It was late at night from what we read, about ten o'clock, 10:20 pm.

01-00:49:50

Herbert:

Well, things had quieted down a little bit then. At that time the sun had gone down. It had gotten real dark that night. And I just had got out of the shower, happened to look towards the window, like this, towards the docks where a ship was being loaded. And there a big blast went off. Man, it scared me so. Ran out the door so fast. Soon as I got to the door, I made a short turn to my right, and I fell down. And I was shaking like a—a water bucket.

01-00:49:52

Arbona:

A water bucket?

01-00:50:54

Herbert:

I was shaking faster than a water bucket of crab or something. But anyway, I was scared half to death. But that time I try to look up again. I was trying to straighten up. There's a bomb right back—had landed right by me, I fell right by and I looked at it. [Makes a sound of being horrified]. It had blown off. It scared me so bad. I didn't know what was going to go off next. I was laying by just a bomb, you know, laying by it. The bomb's around here. Like I fell. Golly! The bomb was across here. I just knew I was going then, but it didn't go.

01-00:51:36

Arbona:

Wow.

01-00:51:37

Hope Herbert:

Wait, Daddy. Now, that was after you were thrown out of the barracks, though, right?

01-00:51:41

Herbert:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

01-00:51:42

Arbona:

Yeah, outside.

01-00:51:43

Hope Herbert:

You had gone out.

01-00:51:46

Herbert:

When it blew up on the base, I mean on the dock, I ran out of my barracks. As soon as I got out of the door, I made a left flank, so to speak, and I fell down, and I didn't know. When I fell down, I fell right side of a bomb coming alongside by that side. That scared me and managed to, "A bomb, a bomb." I'll never forget. [laughter] I said, "I don't know why they got to be that far off the dock," but anyway, there was one there, and that frightened me so bad I can't ever forget it.

01-00:52:27

Arbona:

Wow.

01-00:52:26

Hope Herbert:

So at what point were you blown out the building?

01-00:52:29  
Herbert: I ran out fast, and I stumbled. And I was so scared and I was running fast and I slipped and I fell right side this one because it had come. One that didn't—

01-00:52:41  
Hope Herbert: Right. But you were blown—

01-00:52:42  
Herbert: Didn't blow up. That one didn't blow up. Follow me?

01-00:52:44  
Hope Herbert: Right. But weren't you blown out of a building?

01-00:52:47  
Herbert: I ran out of the building, and I fell.

01-00:52:50  
Hope Herbert: So you weren't blown?

01-00:52:51  
Herbert: No.

01-00:52:52  
Hope Herbert: It didn't blow you out of the building?

01-00:52:53  
Herbert: No, no, no. But it was just like blowing out of the building I got there so fast, and I was scared to death, too, and I thought I was blown out anyway. So I wish I was blown out I was going so fast. But I did wake up with some sense I said that's where he went.

01-00:53:11  
Arbona: Can you also show us the photograph of your—your service photo that you have? Your framed photo of yourself in your uniform?

01-00:53:19  
Herbert: This one here?

01-00:53:20  
Arbona: Yeah. If you'd hold that up, I can get that. Maybe a little bit higher. Hold it up there. Yeah. Maybe I can—

01-00:53:28  
Herbert: Hold it higher?

01-00:53:29  
Arbona: That's great. How old are you in that photograph?

01-00:53:34  
Herbert: How old am I now?

01-00:53:35  
Arbona: No, in that photo. When that—

01-00:53:38  
Herbert: This one here, I was about, oh, maybe eighteen years old or so. Eighteen.

01-00:53:42  
Arbona: About eighteen.

01-00:53:43  
Herbert: Between eighteen or twenty-four, something like that.

01-00:53:49  
Arbona: Was that taken at Port Chicago or Great Lakes or—?

01-00:53:52  
Herbert: Where was this taken? Let's see. Port Chicago, Port Chicago, Port Chicago.

01-00:54:02  
Arbona: Did they take that right when you enlisted, or—?

01-00:54:06  
Herbert: No, I think it was afterwards, after I was enlisted. It was taken at Port Chicago.

01-00:54:16  
Arbona: Great. So the explosion happened, caused this massive destruction on the base. Where did you end up right afterwards?

01-00:54:29  
Herbert: Oh, a young guy got killed, and it was terrible.

01-00:54:33  
Arbona: Your friends?

01-00:54:35  
Herbert: On the docks where the boat went off. It was two ships. One went off, and then they both blew up just about together. They was loading and unloading. All those ships was right there together. You know how far Oakland is from Port Chicago?

01-00:55:01  
Arbona: It's about twenty-five miles or so.

01-00:55:03  
Herbert: Yeah. It blew all the windows in Oakland. Windows in Oakland.

01-00:55:12  
Arbona: Did you also witness the piers? Were you able to see some of the destruction on the base?

01-00:55:23  
Herbert: That was terrible. It was pitiful. They was picking up dead bodies there, three or four or five at a time. All of the bushes, tall bushes, tall weeds, way over past those buildings, way over there, weeds way over there. Because the dock

was almost a mile from the building there, from the back anyway. And it was no picnic, I'm going to tell you.

01-00:56:09

Arbona: Were you given another job after all that happened? Were you given another job, or you were given any orders to fix, repair or do anything else after the explosion?

01-00:56:20

Herbert: Well, they needed more cooks. So that's how I became a first-class cook.

01-00:56:30

Arbona: Where did they need the cooks?

01-00:56:32

Herbert: At Port Chicago.

01-00:56:33

Arbona: At Port Chicago itself?

01-00:56:34

Herbert: Yeah, yeah. Out there back {inaudible} cook.

01-00:56:37

Arbona: But do you remember if you were then taken off the base while they rebuilt everything and then came back or did you—

01-00:56:44

Herbert: No, we all stayed there on the base.

01-00:56:46

Arbona: You stayed right there on the base?

01-00:56:47

Herbert: Yeah, yeah. We had our own barrack there. So our barrack got kind of shook up quite a bit but we about a good mile and a half or two from the dock anyway. So our barrack was shook up quite a bit. We had a double-decker, double-beds.

01-00:57:09

Arbona: Yeah.

01-00:57:09

Herbert: Double-decker beds. Some of them still went out on the beds like that at night.

01-00:57:15

Arbona: Yeah. I've read that several ended up thrown out of their beds and oftentimes injured by broken glass.

01-00:57:22

Herbert: Sure was, sure was.

01-00:57:23

Hope Herbert: That's what I thought happened to you, is that you were thrown out of the building about twenty feet or so. You don't remember that?

01-00:57:34

Herbert: I looked through the window, saw a big explosion. And I tried to run fast as I can get out. And I'm trying to make a left turn when I get out of the door. That's when I fell right side this bomb. How it got there I don't know. But that just scared me so to death I couldn't think about nothing else since.

01-00:57:54

Hope Herbert: But right now you don't recall being blown out of the building?

01-00:57:56

Herbert: No, I wasn't blown out.

01-00:57:58

Hope Herbert: Okay. Because that's what you always said.

01-00:57:59

Herbert: Yeah, I went out fast enough, man.

01-00:58:04

Arbona: So before we run out of time on this tape, because it's running low, I wanted to also you if you remembered a memorial ceremony or if you attended a memorial ceremony a couple of weeks after the explosion.

01-00:58:16

Herbert: Oh boy, never remembered any of those.

01-00:58:20

Arbona: No?

01-00:58:19

Herbert: No, never been to any memorial. They could have had one, I don't remember I attended any. I could have. Oh, if they did, I know where they had them at because any liberty I got I caught a bus right there outside of the gate. I caught a bus, and I went to Oakland and had liberty right at Oakland. Like yeah, have a little canteen, what you call a little place kind of like a cafeteria like that, in Oakland and San Francisco where we would go sit down there.

01-00:58:58

Arbona: And then did you find—oh, sorry, go ahead.

01-00:59:02

Herbert: I was just saying that when we have a lot—like cafeteria where—while waiting in there I would check things off, whether I'm going to have a sandwich. I'm {inaudible} in the cafeteria. That was all. Always went by myself and came back by myself. I stayed out of trouble that way.

01-00:59:24  
Arbona: When did you find out about the Port Chicago mutiny? Did you learn right away of what happened over at Mare Island?

01-00:59:36  
Herbert: Well, they put it in the papers, and they send lots of guys to—they called it—

01-00:59:41  
Arbona: To Mare?

01-00:59:43  
Herbert: To a penitentiary somewhere.

01-00:59:45  
Arbona: Oh.

01-00:59:45  
Herbert: Because they didn't want to go back to work. I would call that mutiny.

01-00:59:50  
Arbona: Well, they were put on trial over on Treasure Island, but I think—

01-00:59:54  
Herbert: Yes, right. Right. Were put on trial there. They was too afraid to go back to work. And that was dishonest. The guys were putting them on trial was all there to witness it. And seeing it in person is different from just—from hearsay. I mean seeing it from hearsay. You got to see it with your eye going into your brain. I haven't forgotten it, and that wasn't yesterday either.

01-01:00:33  
Arbona: So that you're—

01-01:00:37  
Herbert: That's what you call post-traumatic stress. That's what I've been suffering all through the years since then. Post-traumatic stress.

01-01:00:44  
Arbona: When you say the word dishonest, do you mean the men that held the work strike or the men who put them on trial? Who are you referring to in terms of the dishonesty?

01-01:00:01  
Herbert: One that put them on trial. Yes. Because these were just outside lawyers that were just assigned for that purpose. That's all they were. Yes.

01-01:01:18  
Arbona: Well, let me just pause right there because we're going to be running out of tape if we keep going. I don't want to cut you off in the middle of an answer.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 herbert\_ivan\_\_02\_11-02-11.mp3

02-00:00:02  
Herbert: See my picture there?

02-00:00:04  
Arbona: Yeah, I see it pretty well. Let's just check the microphones really quick.

02-00:00:08  
Herbert: Okay.

02-00:00:10  
Arbona: Seems like everything's doing okay. I can hear myself.

02-00:00:14  
Herbert: Very good.

02-00:00:15  
Arbona: You're good there. This is tape number two on November 2, 2011, an interview with Ivan Herbert. The interviewer is Javier Arbona, and we were just talking a moment ago about Port Chicago.

02-00:00:36  
Herbert: Pardon me for interrupting. Do you have a card I could have? Or you have no card?

02-00:00:40  
Arbona: I do usually have cards but in fact I might have forgotten to pack them in this camera.

02-00:00:48  
Hope Herbert: Daddy?

02-00:00:49  
Arbona: But all my information's in the letter.

02-00:00:50  
Herbert: Oh, all the information there. Okay.

02-00:00:53  
Arbona: And if you need anything else, I'll leave more of my contact information certainly.

02-00:00:58  
Herbert: Okay. I'll see if she has a—

02-00:00:59  
Arbona: Yeah.

02-00:01:00  
Herbert: Okay, let's do it then.

02-00:01:02  
Arbona: Well, a moment ago you were giving me a few of your reflections on the trial and the Port Chicago Fifty. Was there anything else that we missed before the

tape ended about the mutiny trial and how you heard of it or your response to that?

02-00:01:24

Herbert: Let's see, it was about sixty years ago?

02-00:01:30

Arbona: Yeah, 1944. Did you remember hearing about it on the radio or read about it? Followed it in the newspapers?

02-00:01:39

Herbert: Oh, I was there just about when all was happened. Was there just about all that had happened.

02-00:01:43

Arbona: I'm sorry? So that you—

02-00:01:46

Herbert: I was just about there when all that was happening.

02-00:01:50

Arbona: So when all of that was happening, you were actually working at the base in Port Chicago, right?

02-00:01:57

Herbert: Yes, I was a sailor there at the time, yes. Later on I worked up to be a first-class cook. Yeah.

02-00:02:14

Arbona: Did the base become more integrated after the explosion? Did the Navy change some of its policies?

02-00:02:24

Herbert: Not too much it didn't. No, not too much it didn't. Not too much it didn't. No, at most it was a black base as far as I can remember. As far as I can remember.

02-00:02:40

Arbona: You don't remember any other white munitions loaders that start to work there after the explosion or anything?

02-00:02:46

Herbert: No, never seen any white sailors loading the boats at all or unloading. It could have been after I left. I think there were some began to apply for jobs, the job of being—{inaudible} during that time way after the explosion. That job was pretty good down there. They got big oil companies now, some big oil company. Was an old company—

02-00:03:21

Arbona: There's an Avon refinery.

02-00:03:22

Herbert: Avon refinery right there. That's right. Avon. Sure was. Right. I used to go there and work part-time.

02-00:03:28

Arbona: You would work part-time at Avon?

02-00:03:31

Herbert: They were short of men. They came to the base and the lieutenant asked any of the enlisted men that wanted to work part-time, they could. So I got hired. That's why I saved my money. And I saved it all up and sent it on to mama.

02-00:03:58

Arbona: So how would you get to the Avon refinery to work? Were you going on—?

02-00:04:04

Herbert: Lot of time we got to the place, they would send someone up in a truck to pick us up. That's what they started to do.

02-00:04:11

Arbona: So they would send like a vehicle to pick you up?

02-00:04:13

Herbert: Yeah. And bring us back.

02-00:04:16

Arbona: So with the full knowledge of the Navy that this was happening?

02-00:04:20

Herbert: Yes, yes. Because there were hardly any civilians, men, around in that area at all. So the only thing that was there was the sailors around that area, the men. So for them to work. So there was a lot of those that volunteered to work, take the job that was open.

02-00:04:48

Arbona: What would be your job there?

02-00:04:50

Herbert: Any kind of labor. Any kind of labor they wanted to do there. Cleaning up. All kinds of different—oh, my god, not all kind of work there. Had Avon clean up. They used to have those big old tanks. A bunch of us would get in those little tanks, the Avon tank, and we'd have to go up in that and clean them out. They would get kind of balled up from smoking or something. I remember getting up in those tanks and chiseling off around inside the chimney of the—around those chimneys at the head.

02-00:05:40

Arbona: It would be your job to clean those? Like the chiseling was for maintenance purposes, or—?

02-00:05:46  
Herbert: That's right. That was at Avon. That was some kind of refinery there. I forget what kind of refinery. An oil refinery of some sort.

02-00:05:55  
Arbona: Yeah.

02-00:05:56  
Herbert: Yeah, so they brought us in. We could do it, go out there and wait for them because they came to the base at once said "when you coming to work?" because there was no men around there.

02-00:06:08  
Arbona: So you would have an eight-hour shift at Port Chicago, and then you'd do more work at the refinery? Or would you—?

02-00:06:16  
Herbert: On my liberty.

02-00:06:16  
Arbona: On liberty time. I see.

02-00:06:17  
Herbert: Liberty times.

02-00:06:18  
Arbona: I see.

02-00:06:19  
Herbert: Yeah, they would pick us up and bring us back. I just took advantage of it.

02-00:06:25  
Arbona: Take advantage of you?

02-00:06:27  
Herbert: I took advantage of the job.

02-00:06:28  
Arbona: Oh, you took advantage of the job. I see.

02-00:06:30  
Herbert: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

02-00:06:31  
Arbona: You were sending money back home?

02-00:06:34  
Herbert: Sure did. Back to my mom.

02-00:06:47  
Arbona: Were some of the other people working with you at the refinery munitions loaders, as well?

02-00:06:54

Herbert: Those other sailors there with me, too, working. Not just me. Oh I can see about ten or twelve, sometimes more than that. Those that wanted to work. Those that wanted to work. And I wanted to work because I know when I left home I had no job like that because I just came up. I grew it all on my own farm, so a job, I saved it. I threw no bones on no floor. That was my hard working money. [laughs] Uh-uh. No, never gambled. At no age. Forty, fifty, sixty. Never gambled my money. I seen too many guys got killed for nothing, just gambling. Guy losing his money, you stand over his hand, he down on his knees there. He going to blame somebody that was behind his hand. Got a friend down there and they messed up the conversation. Didn't understand was another one, got killed for it. So I cut that out.

02-00:08:17

Arbona: During the whole time that you were sending money back to your mom, what were your siblings doing at the time? Were all your siblings back in Louisiana?

02-00:08:27

Herbert: I send to mom and my brother. One of my brothers, one of my other brothers, he was somewhere working. But he had a family going, and most of the time—he always come by the house and check mom anyway. But we had a big old house there. Pretty big old house.

02-00:08:56

Arbona: And your sister?

02-00:08:58

Herbert: No, one sister. No, she stayed up in Chicago. My sister never did come home.

02-00:09:03

Arbona: Oh, she was in Chicago at that time?

02-00:09:04

Herbert: Yeah, in Chicago somewhere.

02-00:09:23

Arbona: Well, I was going to ask you how much longer you were working at Port Chicago after the explosion.

02-00:09:28

Herbert: After the explosion? After the explosion, after the explosion there. I just worked whenever I could get liberty. If I could two days liberty or something like that, I would work those two days and that would be maybe six hours or eight hours. About six hours overtime and eight hours or eight and a half. Ten hours then they would skip, come back next day or day after. Next day. Well, they always told you when to come back. Another time they would send a bus, a real small gypsy bus, someplace to come down pick us up and drop us off like that. It was late in the evening.

02-00:10:30  
Arbona: Until late in the evening?

02-00:10:32  
Herbert: It was late in the evening depending on how long they want us to stay or not stay. So they told us in advance.

Yeah. They say, "He sees but a mighty few knows."

02-00:10:48  
Arbona: I'm sorry?

02-00:10:49  
Herbert: An old saying. He sees but a mighty few knows.

02-00:10:53  
Arbona: Oh, yeah. And do you remember when the war came to an end?

02-00:11:06  
Herbert: I think I do. Where was I when the war came to an end? Somewhere in Oakland or somewhere. And they was owing us \$1,500.

02-00:11:21  
Arbona: \$1,500 was how much you had?

02-00:11:25  
Herbert: \$1,500 to reenlist.

02-00:11:30  
Arbona: Oh, to reenlist?

02-00:11:32  
Herbert: Yeah. A lot of guys taking \$1,500 dollars. I never did. I said, "No, hell." So give me my \$1,500 right now; I'm quitting." Took my \$1,500, came on home.

02-00:11:45  
Arbona: So that's what they gave you?

02-00:11:47  
Herbert: Yeah, \$1,500. I came home with my \$1,500. First time I see so much money in one time. \$1,500 is a lot of money then. Yeah.

02-00:12:00  
Arbona: Yeah. This took place when the war was over?

02-00:12:03  
Herbert: Yes, yes. Everybody being discharged. Those were the good old days.

02-00:12:11  
Arbona: Yeah. Now, what did you do with the money? What did you do after your discharge?

02-00:12:20

Herbert:

Well, I had that little farm yet, and I needed me a mule or two. And {inaudible} after that, {inaudible} next big building was the auction yard. I went over there. First time I been in an auction yard. Didn't know anything about what an auction was but learned quick. Got into the auction. "Do I hear \$65, do I hear \$65? \$65. Do I hear \$67, \$65? Do I hear seventy? \$75?" I was like, "Ah, hell, what in the hell are you trying to say?" I—first time went to an auction yard. He's going so fast. [laughter] So I did kind of get the hang of that. I thought it did. So a little mule made it through there on the way {inaudible} kind of fat. I went and got it home but then, oh, hell, this old mule is a bow-legged son of a bitch I said to myself. He was kind of crippled. He sold me a bow-legged the son of a bitch.

02-00:13:41

Arbona:

The mule was?

02-00:13:42

Herbert:

Yeah, in auction yard. That was my first time in an auction yard. When I got him home, he was there away from the most of the rest of them. Got him home, looked at him good. I said, "You sold me a bow-legged son of a gun. Ain't nothing—this old mule ain't no good anyway."

02-00:14:04

Arbona:

Now, where was this?

02-00:14:06

Herbert:

By a little ranch I had in Scotlandville north of Baton Rouge.

02-00:14:11

Arbona:

North of Baton Rouge.

02-00:14:12

Herbert:

I said, "Look what you done sold me. I put him in the plow and I tell him to get up." Man, he just kicked like a son of a—pat, pat pat! I was like what I done bought? This kicking son-of-a was so—

02-00:14:22

Hope Herbert:

Wait, I'm confused. Is this after the war?

02-00:14:23

Arbona:

After the war.

02-00:14:25

Herbert:

Yeah, it was after the war.

02-00:14:26

Hope Herbert:

You went back to Louisiana after the war?

02-00:14:28

Herbert:

Yeah.

02-00:14:30  
Hope Herbert: Oh.

02-00:14:30  
Arbona: So this is—

02-00:14:33  
Hope Herbert: I bet this was in California.

02-00:14:34  
Herbert: I don't know where I was, but I was back home where my farm was.

02-00:14:38  
Arbona: Did you get to Louisiana somehow? Did you take the train or was this back in California?

02-00:14:46  
Herbert: No, I was where the ranch was. North of Baton Rouge.

02-00:14:50  
Hope Herbert: Daddy, do you want me to just clarify. Are you talking about Turlock?

02-00:14:55  
Herbert: No, before that.

02-00:14:57  
Hope Herbert: This is before Turlock?

02-00:14:58  
Herbert: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

02-00:14:59  
Hope Herbert: You went back to Louisiana?

02-00:15:01  
Herbert: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

02-00:15:02  
Hope Herbert: Okay, all right. Is that where your mom was?

02-00:15:05  
Herbert: Uh-huh. Yeah, mama lived here.

02-00:15:09  
Arbona: Did you take the train back, or how did all that come about?

02-00:15:14  
Herbert: Train. Railroad track. That big old building over there, that willow tree, that's the railroad track. A mile. I would walk there going south or going north. Yeah, I never did want to go north. That's going toward Chicago, and I thought I'd stay home, shucks. I decided one day, before daddy passed, we had all these potatoes to pick up in the field. He told me to pick all those potatoes. I say to myself, "I'm not going to pick all those potatoes up." Then

I—shucks, Pap left. I decided to help pick up all the potatoes by myself. When I have an acre of potatoes, that's a lot of potatoes to pick up and it started getting dark. It was getting dark, too. By that time a train coming by, again, it just pick up. Going—just left a small town, Scotlandville going—like going to go up to Chicago. Of course, Chicago was quite a distance that way. I said, "I'm going to hop this cotton picking train." Ain't never hopped on no train anyhow. I threw myself on this train, man. I said, "God damn, I'm going to cut my leg, I hurt it so bad." Get down. I says, "Damn, I'm going to hop on the train again. I ain't hopping on no train stands either." No more. I never hopped on no more kinds of trains. Almost lost my leg. So they going to get killed a little faster. I heard of guys say, "We could go," say, "Man, if you go way up there about ten more miles, up to twenty more miles, man, they started beating you at night up there." Getting dark. No, not on the train. I looked out of the box. side door's open on the carbox. Said, "Damn, it getting dark out here." By that time I was feeling sick. [growling sound] "Hell, everyone got hungry, too?" I said, "Well, man, I'm leaving." Oh. I'm getting up, talking to myself and I'm getting hungry, my stomach's still growling. I'm getting hungry. Where am I going to sleep tonight? I said, "I sure was a fool, leaving home at night and no food in my belly." [laughs] I was thinking to myself and I'm on the train and one car back, no chance, picking up speed. [train sound] I think, "Ten minutes, hell, I'm going to be a way away from home." Train getting a little faster and a little faster. I say, "Damn. I got to get off this so and so here" I decided I'm going to jump off. I ain't never jumped off a train before. I just thought I would jump right on off and that was it. Just jumped off. Man, don't ever do that again. Don't ever do it. Just jumped right out of a door {inaudible} train. [laughs]

02-00:18:34

Arbona: Not a great idea.

02-00:18:35

Herbert: I jumped off, man. I jumped off, my feet hit the ground side of the ground and I rolled down, just kept rolling. You know what happened later?

02-00:18:48

Arbona: What happened?

02-00:18:48

Herbert: Got briar patches all the way down. I was just trying to get out. Said, "Damn." I got rolled up in the briar patch." Briar patch all wrapped up all around, the briar patch all around me. Now, you try and get out when the son of a gun's wrapped around you, briar bushes all wrapped around you. And they're dry.

02-00:19:09

Arbona: Wow.

02-00:19:11

Herbert: And they're sticking in your hair, bleeding, you're in your hair bleeding there. That's experience. Said, "Why in the hell didn't they teach me this in school?"

02-00:19:23

Arbona: I wanted to just back up a little bit and ask you, did you always plan to go back to Louisiana after the war?

02-00:19:35

Herbert: Well, after the war I had my farm there, and I had picked me up a little route. I'm like everybody who go there knew all three of the small towns, villages—got mustard greens, turnips and Foster Farms. You ever heard of Foster Farms? They still in business today?

02-00:19:58

Arbona: Yeah.

02-00:19:59

Herbert: Right down there and not too far from where my farm were. And they sold fryers. They're known for fryers.

02-00:20:09

Arbona: Fryers?

02-00:20:09

Herbert: Fryers. Small chickens they would grow for frying. And they sold little boxes, a box of fifteen to sixteen. Sixteen in a box. About fifteen. Yeah. About that thick; that wide. Flat box between twelve and sixteen. So we got flat of those; two boxes. They would charge for two or three boxes. Not get these {inaudible} houses. I got, I think it was seventy-five cents and I sold them for a dollar and a half. They were a dollar and a half. Anyway, seventy-five for a dollar and a half. Anyway, I made my profit on those. So I done good that way. {inaudible} profit that I made {inaudible} people {inaudible}. I would rather make my own independent living. Don't ask nobody for a job. Getting my life. Never ask nobody for a job.

02-00:21:04

Arbona: So you could make an independent living back there on the farm?

02-00:21:08

Herbert: By myself.

02-00:21:10

Arbona: And you were helping your mother at the same time or—

02-00:21:13

Herbert: Yes, yes.

02-00:21:14

Arbona: She didn't remarry?

02-00:21:15

Herbert: No, no. No.

02-00:21:21  
Arbona: So how did you end up back in California? At what point did you come back?

02-00:21:30  
Herbert: When did I get back here, California? Gosh. I started an egg farm. I started an egg farm on my own.

02-00:21:45  
Arbona: A farm?

02-00:21:46  
Herbert: Yes.

02-00:21:46  
Arbona: Here?

02-00:21:47  
Herbert: No, in California, yeah.

02-00:21:49  
Arbona: In California?

02-00:21:50  
Herbert: Yes, yes, yes. And I built two buildings about fifty feet wide. Two buildings, a hundred feet long, and I put fryers all in there, eggs. Fryers and eggs, later on eggs.

02-00:22:06  
Hope Herbert: But Daddy? When did you come back to California? Before you got the farm in Turlock? Do you remember when you came back to California? Is that when you brought your mom with you?

02-00:22:23  
Herbert: Yeah, mom had came; I brought along with me.

02-00:22:26  
Hope Herbert: And then you bought the house on Grove Street? Was that before you bought the Turlock—

02-00:22:30  
Herbert: On Grove Street? On Grove?

02-00:22:33  
Hope Herbert: —Farm?

02-00:22:34  
Arbona: Grove Street in Berkeley?

02-00:22:34  
Herbert: Grove Street, on Grove Street.

02-00:22:35  
Hope Herbert: Berkeley.

02-00:22:40

Herbert: Boy, oh, boy.

02-00:22:42

Hope Herbert: So you got the farm and then you got the house. Which one did you get first?

02-00:22:48

Herbert: Always had the farm first. Always did have the farm first. Then we got to town some kind of way. Anyway, we ended up here in Oakland or Berkeley, somewhere in there. Then I bought this piece of Berkeley property, Oakland property. Berkeley property.

02-00:23:07

Hope Herbert: Let me ask you one more thing that might help you remember. You got married. When you got married the first time, why don't you talk about when did—did you meet your wife here?

02-00:23:19

Herbert: Ooh. Now, where did I meet her at now?

02-00:23:24

Hope Herbert: Or in Louisiana?

02-00:23:28

Herbert: That's many moons back. You know that? Lot of moons to remember.

02-00:23:35

Hope Herbert: Just if that helped a lot. Maybe.

02-00:23:38

Herbert: Yeah, many moons and many suns to remember. Anyway, I ended up back here in California.

02-00:23:48

Arbona: How did it compare, California to Louisiana? Did you have a preference being in one or the other? You wanted to go back to the farm or were you happier farming, or did you look forward more to being here?

02-00:24:08

Herbert: Oh, I go in Southern University, and I watch this guy while he was farming.

02-00:24:20

Arbona: You said Southern University?

02-00:24:19

Herbert: Yes, Southern University north of Baton Rouge. You know where Scotlandville, Louisiana?

02-00:24:27

Arbona: No, not really. Scarlettville?

02-00:24:32

Hope Herbert: Scotland.

02-00:24:33

Arbona: Scotland.

02-00:24:34

Herbert: Scotlandville of Baton Rouge.

02-00:24:35

Arbona: Yeah, Baton Rouge.

02-00:24:36

Herbert: Well, Scotlandville is five miles north of Baton Rouge, yeah. And it's a big colored university there. So I was in school there before I got into the fields. Boy, that ground sure looked good. {inaudible} About an hour.

02-00:25:01

Arbona: So you enrolled in the university after? Afterwards?

02-00:25:04

Herbert: Yeah. After I wait for a while. When I saw this farm, I'd been in school there a while. I watched this guy cropping, plowing his field. While I was watching him, at the same time I was playing football. I was one of the best at playing football. And I got a tackleman, and he tackled me. I fell down, and as I was getting up, he's kicked me in my kidney. Man, that hurted me so bad. I wanted to get up and whip his so-and-so so bad. I was in so much pain I quit. I quit. So I let that be a lesson. And I said to my wife, "Just quit hurting, Lord, stop the pain. I'll never do it again." I never went back to school. I saw that guy plowing that field. I thought, "Hell, I got ten acres." I said, "How much the school paying you to crop for them?" He had mustard greens and turnips out there. I said, "Where all these go?" He said, "I have to plant these to feed the people that was living on the college campus, the teachers and all and the principal and all. They pay me \$50 a month." "Fifty dollars a month?" God damn. Sure enough, I said, "Heck, I'm going to quit." I'm going on my own ten acres, planting my own field. That's what I did and I quit when we got a loan.

02-00:26:46

Arbona: And then you left the school?

02-00:26:46

Herbert: I left the school, and I have been farming ever since. Still is today.

02-00:26:51

Arbona: Still today?

02-00:26:54

Herbert: I learned how to build homes now. Build homes like that.

02-00:26:58  
Arbona: You went into construction later on you mean? You built homes?

02-00:27:03  
Herbert: My own.

02-00:27:04  
Arbona: Oh, your own. Here in Berkeley? Just—

02-00:27:08  
Herbert: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

02-00:27:09  
Arbona: Your daughter said that it's on Grove Street? Do you remember the cross street or where it's located?

02-00:27:17  
Herbert: In Berkeley?

02-00:27:18  
Arbona: Yeah.

02-00:27:19  
Herbert: Yes.

02-00:27:20  
Arbona: Grove and what? Is it a—

02-00:27:26  
Herbert: 1464 Sixth Street, is it?

02-00:27:27  
Hope Herbert: Oh, that's where you live now. He's talking about—

02-00:27:31  
Arbona: That's a different house than the one that he—

02-00:27:33  
Hope Herbert: The one I was talk—Grove, on the Martin Luther King?

02-00:27:34  
Arbona: Oh, Grove.

02-00:27:35  
Hope Herbert: It used to be called Grove.

02-00:27:37  
Arbona: Grove. Yes, the same. Sixth Street.

02-00:27:40  
Hope Herbert: No, Grove Street.

02-00:27:41  
Arbona: Grove.

02-00:27:41  
Herbert: Oh, Grove, Grove.

02-00:27:43  
Arbona: What today is MLK.

02-00:27:45  
Hope Herbert: Martin Luther King.

02-00:27:45  
Arbona: I see.

02-00:27:46  
Herbert: It's Sixth Street. It's really Sixth Street.

02-00:27:50  
Hope Herbert: No, it's Martin Luther King, Dad.

02-00:27:51  
Herbert: I knew it. But it's—yeah. Sixth Street. Still Sixth Street but it's Martin Luther King. They called it that.

02-00:28:02  
Arbona: I see. Well, I have a slightly different question, to go back a little bit to the war. But at the end of the war, of course, the Americans bombed Japan and the atomic explosion—

02-00:28:22  
Herbert: Sure did.

02-00:28:22  
Arbona: —happened. Do you remember how you felt at the time or how that impacted people?

02-00:28:30  
Herbert: Well, that scared me. Scared me but I never did—nothing I could do about it. I just was conscious that I couldn't do anything about it. You see this thing, hear about it. I just hear that, just like news, daily news. That comes out of the news people. Things like that. Way back then I didn't have no TV. Yeah. Way back then had no TV. But things have increased. Oh, just went along with the flow.

02-00:29:22  
Arbona: And did you ever feel like going back to Port Chicago? Did you go back there at all or go recently to the memorial ceremonies that have been held? No. I see.

02-00:29:35

Herbert:

Hell, I see enough of it. I had lived on the base. I seen how those two ships down here on the dock, how they blew up. I was sure it was going to blow up before it blew up, but I just stayed my distance. All the men on both those ships, all those young men who got just—just got bombed up. They blew up those two ships. They was making them work too fast. It all come to gotta do this—make that whole ship rock and go back. Pretty soon that little nut up there. A little bolt no bigger than that. I checked it four or five times. That boat going to break, and that's what happened to it. Bombed on the pallet, fall right down.

02-00:30:26

Arbona:

So the bolt that held up the whole—

02-00:30:28

Herbert:

Pallet.

02-00:30:29

Arbona:

So the whole pallet of bombs, you suspected that that was going to snap at some point?

02-00:30:34

Herbert:

I knew it was. Because I always see my mule, when I work them in the fields, I would watch their mouth because when the plow would break I would—half the bit would go through their mouth, and they'd be chewing it over time. So they would wear that out and then the tie because a mule's mouth is hard in a way and that old little piece of metal in there, it would just keep them mashing on and biting on it, keep bending it before it breaks, too. That's what happened. That's why I figured what would happen. Same thing happened. Put two and two together, make four.

02-00:31:12

Arbona:

Yeah. Did you warn some other guys about it?

02-00:31:16

Herbert:

I warned them before it happened.

02-00:31:19

Arbona:

You told them that this would happen?

02-00:31:22

Herbert:

I told the lieutenant that passed by me. I said, "Okay. I'm not in charge." So I see him come in the morning, I go back in the bushes. First time I saw, he stop, I stopped him. He told me to go on back to duty. Surely my duty was to stay hid from everybody.

02-00:31:42

Arbona:

So you would do that day after day? You'd go and hide away for basically the duration of your shift that you were supposed to be on the dock?

02-00:31:50  
Herbert: I would be with a group. I was supposed to be inside cooking somewhere.

02-00:31:58  
Arbona: Oh, I see.

02-00:32:00  
Herbert: Like that. So I either can play sick or something like that. But I would tell them—I would go around and watch everything, finding out for myself what caused this and what caused this to happen and what caused that to happen. How you prevent. In my life, I've always tried to learn how to prevent something so I won't have to cure it. More easy to prevent than it is to try and cure it.

02-00:32:35  
Arbona: Yeah.

02-00:32:34  
Herbert: I think I was pronouncing it right.

02-00:32:38  
Arbona: Yeah.

02-00:32:41  
Herbert: So that's how I made my own living. Working for myself; never worked for nobody else.

02-00:32:47  
Arbona: What did you work in when you lived in Berkeley, and when you came back to Berkeley?

02-00:32:53  
Herbert: I worked at?

02-00:32:55  
Arbona: Did you work also in agriculture, or what were you working in at the time?

02-00:33:02  
Herbert: I still had my own farm so I grew vegetables. Vegetables. Mustard greens, turnips, beans, pulled beans, and then I went down to Foster Farms. They still in business, Foster Farms about five or six miles from my home, from where I lived at. So I'd go down there and bought a basket of six fryers. I would put them on my wagon, along with my vegetables, and I'd get to the door and sell them these chickens, the fryers, vegetables same time. I never had to go five or six miles into town to try to buy some food to cook. Far enough. Yeah.

02-00:33:55  
Arbona: And your daughter said that you were married once before? Did you remarry? Did I understand correctly?

02-00:34:04  
Herbert: Who did I marry first before?

02-00:34:07  
Arbona: Or am I confusing things? Sorry, I don't mean to throw you off. I was just trying to ask if he—

02-00:34:23  
Herbert: {Anita?} is my first wife.

02-00:34:25  
Hope Herbert: Mildred.

02-00:34:28  
Herbert: Mildred?

02-00:34:28  
Hope Herbert: Was that her name? Mildred?

02-00:34:31  
Herbert: Mildred?

02-00:34:32  
Hope Herbert: Your first wife.

02-00:34:33  
Herbert: Mildred. I'm trying to picture her, Mildred.

02-00:34:36  
Hope Herbert: Ivan and Stan's mom, and Darlene.

02-00:34:42  
Herbert: Mildred, Mildred, Mildred.

02-00:34:44  
Hope Herbert: Is that her name?

02-00:34:45  
Arbona: Ivan and Stan and Darlene are your siblings?

02-00:34:48  
Herbert: My stepbrothers and sisters.

02-00:34:50  
Arbona: Stepbrothers.

02-00:34:51  
Herbert: I'm trying to place them now.

02-00:34:58  
Hope Herbert: She passed away.

02-00:34:58  
Herbert: Yes.

02-00:35:01  
Arbona: And then you remarried?

02-00:35:02  
Herbert: Oh, yes. Right, right, right. Right. Because at that time we're all living on 32<sup>nd</sup> Street in Oakland. 32<sup>nd</sup> Street in Oakland.

02-00:35:16  
Arbona: Oh, you were living in Oakland at the time.

02-00:35:18  
Herbert: Yeah. In Oakland, in Oakland.

02-00:35:24  
Hope Herbert: And was that before you bought the farm?

02-00:35:25  
Herbert: Yes.

02-00:35:26  
Hope Herbert: Yes.

02-00:35:28  
Arbona: I see.

02-00:35:29  
Hope Herbert: You got married before you got the farm?

02-00:35:32  
Herbert: Yes. Right.

02-00:35:33  
Hope Herbert: Good, it's coming back.

02-00:35:36  
Herbert: Yeah, I like the country, oh, we can grow me some food.

02-00:35:38  
Hope Herbert: Did you buy the farm under the GI bill?

02-00:35:48  
Herbert: [laugh] Most of—

02-00:35:49  
Hope Herbert: No, did you get your loan from the GI—

02-00:35:51  
Herbert: No, I didn't.

02-00:35:52  
Arbona: So you worked and saved and then bought the farm back in Louisiana?

02-00:35:59  
Herbert: The lady that I had the farm, when I looking for a farm—

02-00:36:03  
Hope Herbert: This is California, right?

02-00:36:05  
Herbert: Yes. Well, we had this ten acres. We had this ten acres. They were very up in age, too, and I was looking around, just bumped up on the little farm accidentally and they said, “Yeah, they would like to sell it.” I said, “I can offer—I say, “\$2,000.” They say, “\$2,000?” “\$2,000, we’ll do it.” Well, well. “I’ll give you a thousand down and so much a month until I get through.” “Well, okay, then.” That’s the way it went. Took the thousand dollars I had and I paid the \$2,000, twenty-five a month, something like. But when I got through paying for it it was mine. Nothing around it. No fence or nothing so I put new fences. Cyclone fence all around it. Posted and it had little hills in it. I had a guy to come in and level. I would irrigate it at the back. I had three really big, over thirty inch pipes in the back that I improved it with. Four thirty inch pipes. I kept taking it out one vent at a time. It would be one second from here to here and they’d put the lid up here and put the lid up here and keep on going until I got the whole ten acres.

02-00:37:44  
Arbona: That was in California, or that was in Louisiana?

02-00:37:46  
Herbert: Yeah.

02-00:37:47  
Arbona: No, that’s here. Where in California was this located?

02-00:37:52  
Herbert: Oh, was that in California now? Oh. That was north of Baton Rouge. Scotlandville.

02-00:38:05  
Arbona: So back in Louisiana, the farm?

02-00:38:07  
Herbert: Yeah.

02-00:38:08  
Hope Herbert: Wait. The farm, when you bought the ten acres, that was here in California in Turlock.

02-00:38:11  
Arbona: Turlock. Okay.

02-00:38:14

Hope Herbert: We're talking about Turlock now.

02-00:38:16

Herbert: Oh, yeah. Okay, okay. Yeah. Yeah. Okay, right. Now I can remember. They were very up in age too.

02-00:38:26

Arbona: Turlock, okay.

02-00:38:27

Herbert: Leave the home they had there and go into town. Everything in life is timing.

[End of Interview]