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Bob Jeffrey

Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
Javier Arbona
in 2011

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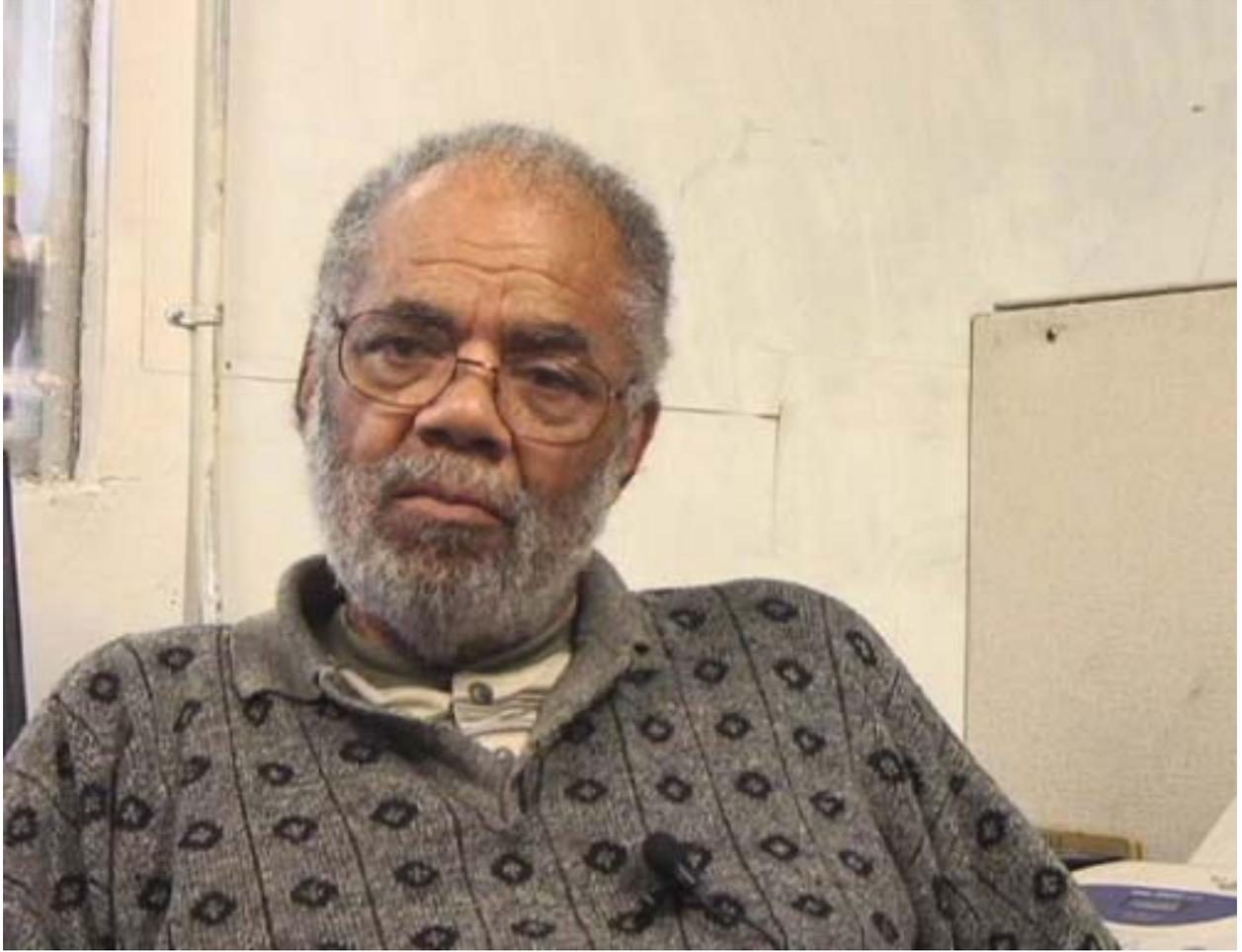
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Bob Jeffrey

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Interview 1: July 26, 2011

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Arbona: Today is July 26, if I'm not mistaken. Yes, July 26. We are in Oakland, California, speaking with Mr. Bob Jeffrey, and this is Javier Arbona. This is tape one. We're going to be doing an oral history today and talking about a lot of things. We'll get to Port Chicago at some point, but I was just going to ask you to start sort of at the beginning, with your childhood, where you were born, where you grew up, and tell me a little bit about your parents.

01-00:00:50

Jeffrey: Okay. I was born in Fort Worth, Texas. I was born to Juanita Jeffrey and {Bert?} Jeffrey, my father. They were both residents of Fort Worth. They're both high school graduates and my father had—I'm not certain how far he went in college, but he had a substantial college background. He was the son of a mortician, a funeral home owner in Fort Worth, and he attended parochial schools and college. My father run his business, and it burned down. He worked on various jobs and that kind of thing until he come to California.

Arbona: Were you an only child?

01-00:02:18

Jeffrey: No, there are six of us siblings, and I'm number two. I had two brothers and three sisters. There were a total of six. My father came to California, and I believe that his first time was the last of 1941, and then [in]'42, we moved here. '42? Yeah, I think it was '42; maybe '43, but I think it's '42. He came here and become a carpenter. He was a carpenter in Texas, and when he came here he was a carpenter. He was a carpenter first in the shipyards. Back then, it was very difficult to be a carpenter outside. As you know, there was a lot of racist employment practice, and that's where he came from, that racist—He built houses, but he wasn't able to get into the white unions. He didn't get into the carpenters union for many years. I'm not sure whether he got in—it was after the shipyards, or whether it was before. But after the shipyard, he worked out of the carpenters union, which he was a carpenter, in various levels. He was really a bright guy, with his education and what have you. It was a little difficult still, because of the way you look.

Arbona: When you say “after the shipyards,” you mean after World War II?

01-00:04:45

Jeffrey: World War II, yes.

Arbona: He finally got into one of the unions, broke through the limitations and segregation that was placed on the membership?

01-00:04:58

Jeffrey: Yes. He became a member of—I won't forget it—Local 6 of the carpenters union, which he worked, for many, many years, for various contractors and

what have you. Then he started building houses, working on houses, remodeling them and such. But he did that many, many years, until about 1948, '49, he went to work at Port Chicago naval base. He was a carpenter there. He wasn't an ammunition carpenter; he was just a regular carpenter on the base there. But he did do some ammunition ship carpentry with ammunition. Prior to that, my mother had a restaurant in Port Chicago. At the time of the explosion in Port Chicago, we lived in Richmond. But they had the restaurant in Port Chicago.

Arbona: So before we get to the restaurant, can you walk me through a little bit how it came to be that your mom had that restaurant? So if I'm following you correctly, the family came from Texas, settled in Richmond?

01-00:07:11

Jeffrey: No, they came to—see, I didn't come when they come in the late forties. I didn't come. I was the last one of the siblings to come. I stayed with an auntie and—or actually, it was a great—no, I guess he—yes, he was. I guess he would be considered a great uncle and aunt, in Fort Worth. Well, my parents, they lived in Berkeley.

Arbona: Oh, okay.

01-00:07:51

Jeffrey: They maintained housing in Berkeley for years. I went to school in Berkeley and Richmond. Then we moved back to Berkeley. My parents, they kept the restaurant going, though. I didn't want to go to school in Port Chicago, and so they arranged for me to stay at the house with other relatives, their place, with other relatives in Berkeley. I went through the school system, grammar, elementary, junior high school and high school. I graduated high school from Berkeley High School. But I would go to Port Chicago daily. I didn't want to stay with the people in Berkeley, so my brother and I traveled to Port Chicago daily. At the age of sixteen he got his driver's license, and my mother bought a car and he brought me backwards and forth.

Arbona: When you came from Texas, that was what year?

01-00:09:38

Jeffrey: '42.

Arbona: '42, okay. So you were already here when the explosion happened.

01-00:09:47

Jeffrey: Yeah. At the time, my father got a job at the shipyard, so from Berkeley they moved to Richmond. We stayed in the project in Richmond, and he worked—I'll never forget—for Hopeman Brothers. I was just a little kid then.

Arbona: When you came from Texas, your mom and dad had already moved to California before?

01-00:10:19

Jeffrey: Oh, yeah.

Arbona: And she had already opened the restaurant?

01-00:10:22

Jeffrey: At that time, Mom cooked for some housing place in Berkeley. That was back in '42, early '43. Then I don't know how she found out about Port Chicago, but she opened a restaurant in Port Chicago. But my dad, at the time, at first, he was still working in Richmond. Of course, he would help Mom, come out and help her and everything. It was called Mama's Chicken Shack.

Arbona: Mama's Chicken Shack.

01-00:11:26

Jeffrey: Yeah.

Arbona: Do you remember where that was in the town?

01-00:11:37

Jeffrey: I know where it was; I've forgotten the name of the street. It was right off Main Street, I know that. I'm not certain; that's been so many years ago.

Arbona: Now, this is interesting. In the 1940s, a woman opens a restaurant in a town. A lot of times, in interviews that I do, I don't often hear that a woman has that kind of opportunity, so this must've been something pretty—

01-00:12:13

Jeffrey: Well, with that, my father was involved, too. But my mother is the one who run the place. She hired the people, did this, did that, and my father was carpentering and helping my mother. So it was kind of like a nightclub-bar, where she opened first. She opened there with these people, and she did the restaurant; they sold beer and wine.

Arbona: So when she opens the restaurant, before, it had been this nightclub; but did they continue to run it as a sort of day-and-night place?

01-00:13:02

Jeffrey: Yeah. They run it. They kept the beer-wine thing, and they run it full-time. They would run it every day to—I think it was one o'clock at night.

Arbona: Wow.

01-00:13:18

Jeffrey: Then they would be off, and Mom would close the [restaurant], kept the food. She would sell food up to late. I'd say 99 percent of the business was all sailors. And I'd say they were black sailors. There were a few whites come in, but mostly all black. That's what Port Chicago was about, mostly. Those who worked on the base loading ammunition, they were black. Their supervisors,

most of those were white. But basically, well, it was part of the racist American system. White folks was telling black folks what to do.

Arbona: So how would that work on a day-to-day level? Did the family, your mom or your dad or yourself, encounter residents of Port Chicago that didn't want that restaurant there, for example? Or were there incidents that were confrontational?

01-00:14:27

Jeffrey: Well, it was where the whites didn't care, as long as you stay away from them. The schools were integrated. My younger siblings, they went to school in Port Chicago. They went to school in Port Chicago, and they stayed in Port Chicago until after the war. After the war, my mother bought a place in Oakland, and we all moved there. I think she sold the place in Berkeley, and we ended up in—I don't know. They were involved in all of that; I was not. I was too young.

Arbona: Do you have recollections of any of the sailors?

01-00:15:25

Jeffrey: Any of the sailors? Oh, yeah.

Arbona: Yeah, did you know some of them? Were they friends of your parents? Who were they?

01-00:15:38

Jeffrey: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes. Spencer Sikes, Willie Jacobs, Charles Bostick and—I can't think—Paxton.

Arbona: Paxton. Bostick, is that as in B-O-S-T-I-C-H, or—?

01-00:16:04

Jeffrey: B-O-S-T-I-C-K.

Arbona: C-K, okay.

01-00:16:07

Jeffrey: Yes. He was from Brooklyn, New York.

Arbona: Now, these that you're mentioning, I know that Sikes, maybe a few of the others that you mentioned, certainly were survivors of the explosion; but did some of those perish in the blast?

01-00:16:24

Jeffrey: No. No. No.

Arbona: Did they have friends that died in the explosion?

01-00:16:28

Jeffrey:

Oh, yes. Yeah, Sikes and all of them had friends who were killed on the base, the explosion. The blacks were very close to each other. They had very little other than themselves because, again, things were segregated. Then Sikes would be at my mama's place just about every day. *Every* day. Sikes was an SP, Shore Patrol. That was—

Arbona:

Right. Yeah, I remember reading that in his oral history. Sorry to interrupt you.

01-00:17:22

Jeffrey:

I should say he was a Shore Patrol for the black sailors. So was Paxton. Paxton was in the Shore Patrol. Paxton was probably the older one. Then {Willie Jacobs?}, he was just a little older than me. He went in the Navy at a very, very young age. Charles Bostick was, too. We kept up with him for many years. Sikes got out of the Navy. He was discharged from Port Chicago. Willie Jacobs went into the Coast Guard, and he retired from the Coast Guard as a {E-8?} Chief. And Bostick was the same. He stayed in the Navy and he was a chief boat's mate, yeah. Yeah, and we stayed in touch with them all. Matter of fact, I tried to locate Jake last week.

Arbona:

Paxton? Which one is Jake? Sorry.

01-00:19:08

Jeffrey:

Willie Jacobs.

Arbona:

Willie Jacobs, okay.

01-00:19:10

Jeffrey:

Yeah. He was a chief, also. He got out of the Navy in Jacksonville, Florida.

Arbona:

You think he's still alive?

01-00:19:25

Jeffrey:

I don't know. With many of them—

Arbona:

We'll look into it.

01-00:19:34

Jeffrey:

Asbestos was a big killer of many of the sailors. I remember right across the tracks, was one of the gates that the guys went in. They were all together. I was such a youngster, though.

Arbona:

How old were you at the time?

01-00:20:12

Jeffrey:

I was probably about thirteen, fourteen. Well, I'm eighty now.

Arbona:

So you were born in—

01-00:20:24

Jeffrey: '31, 1931, yeah.

Arbona:

And the explosion happened '44, so then you were thirteen at the time?

01-00:20:32

Jeffrey: Yeah, I was pretty young.

Arbona:

Or twelve?

01-00:20:35

Jeffrey: Something like that.

Arbona:

Twelve or thirteen.

01-00:20:38

Jeffrey: The explosion was in '44, wasn't it?

Arbona:

July 17, 1944.

01-00:20:44

Jeffrey: Yeah.

Arbona:

So what do you remember of the explosion?

01-00:20:52

Jeffrey: Well, upon the explosion the kids, we were in Richmond. We weren't allowed in Port Chicago.

Arbona:

After the explosion?

01-00:21:10

Jeffrey: No, until they—It was parts, people parts and other things and they didn't know whether they were—There was explosives found all over the place. And they cleaned it up. There must've been, oh, three, four, five months. But I think my older brother Bert—I'm not sure about that. And I have an adopted brother, Henry James. He was a community kid in Fort Worth that my mother took care of, and he grew up with us. Then finally moved back to Texas, where he passed. He was an elderly gentleman when he passed.

Arbona:

I see.

01-00:22:19

Jeffrey: It's hard to separate my time in that I was busy doing my homework. I was using Sikes and Paxton and a few others; they would come to the restaurant, and they would help me with my homework. Matter of fact, I was about fourteen years old, fifteen maybe; I'm not sure. Sikes was taking a correspondence radio course. He would come every day and teach me. I don't have my hat on, I had.

Arbona: It's over there.

01-00:23:17

Jeffrey: Yeah, see? They taught me and—

Arbona: [reads aloud:] “Bob-W-sixty-XK”

01-00:23:25

Jeffrey: OXK. This is an amateur [ham] radio call.

Arbona: Oh, okay.

01-00:23:30

Jeffrey: A ham radio operator. He started me off in radio, and he taught me the theory. He gave me a briefing in the Morse code, which I learned. I learned it very fast and quick. But I didn't bother [with] it anymore, until I got to high school. Well, I graduated from high school; I just turned seventeen, so you can imagine. So that means I was fourteen when I got to high school.

Arbona: Wow.

01-00:24:17

Jeffrey: I was fourteen or a little younger. That's when I started studying radio in high school; Berkeley High School taught radio. I learned the rest of it there, and with the help of a few other folks, I got a ham radio operator's license and learned to repair radios and all of that. It all really came from Sikes. But Sikes, he just learned, and he went to work at Naval Air Station, Alameda. Now, I think he worked primarily in the accounting division, something like that. He was a very sharp guy. But things weren't open to us. After the war, when he got out of the Navy, he went to Oakland. Back then, it was Oakland City College. That's where he went, anyhow. Good person, but things were limited. It was very limited back [in those] days. We had different societies. In Port Chicago, all the blacks lived in—it was kind of like a project. It was called Columbia Park. [chuckles] Boy, I haven't thought of that name in years.

Arbona: This was in the town itself?

01-00:25:56

Jeffrey: Yeah. Yeah. They had the white Columbia Park and the black Columbia Park. They didn't mix. I'll never forget the civilian constable. Bill Ludricks Sure was. Never thought of nothing like that.

Arbona: So when you mention housing and where people lived, it sounds like you're talking after the war.

01-00:26:36

Jeffrey: No, no.

Arbona: During.

01-00:26:37

Jeffrey: During the war.

Arbona: It was during the war, too.

01-00:26:39

Jeffrey: Yeah. They had some sailor families who lived there, too.

Arbona: Okay. So this was military housing, or this was provided as a rental?

01-00:26:52

Jeffrey: No, it was like the housing authority. They called it the projects. They still do.

Arbona: There's a lot of questions that come to mind from everything that you're telling me. One thing I immediately sort of am curious about is, you being friends with Sikes and with Bostick, Jacobs, after the—

01-00:27:29

Jeffrey: Those are the people that I recall. There were many, many other sailors there. We were all together. But those are the ones I recall the best and had years of follow-up with them because, again, I was pretty young.

Arbona: How was Port Chicago remembered among that group of people? Was it ever talked about, the explosion and whatnot?

01-00:27:57

Jeffrey: Yeah, yeah. They talked about it. I've heard them talking about the blacks who refused to load ammunition until they were trained about safety and all that kind of thing, who were put in prison.

Arbona: The court-martial.

01-00:28:15

Jeffrey: They were court-martialed. Again, it was sick again, because all of it were by white folks. They run everything. When I say they run everything, I mean from the cradle to the grave. They were in charge. It's very sad, looking at it today, that I went to high school, and I never had a black teacher. I never even knew any. There was one at Longfellow in Berkeley. I wasn't really thinking, but it would've been extraordinary for me to see something like that, to understand what would really happen if I—I never saw a black driving a bus. Hey, I was pretty big when I seen the first black salesperson. We lived in another country. [chuckles] That's the way it felt to me. Many of the sailors were the same thing. They resented the fact that they were there for their labors, not to defend the country, in the terms of the military. They were in the military to work, to support the others. Also, I remember in Port Chicago the railroad. I think it's Southern Pacific—it might've been one of the others—who had gangs. They called them—I've forgotten—railroad gangs. They

fixed the railroad, tires and the rails, and did all that kind of work. I remember that because I remember—I can't think of the guy. I got to know him pretty good, too. I can't think of his name now, but he worked on the railroad. He would come over, and he was among the sailors, he got to know them, because he was unmarried, and he would come over the restaurant and eat and drink beer. It's hard to imagine the way it was. Like they would walk in the restaurant, and Mama sold beer; she didn't sell wine. When she moved, she moved the restaurant around the corner. I can draw it out for you.

Arbona: Okay. We could do that. We can find a paper.

01-00:31:42

Jeffrey: Yeah, I'll have to get that from the other room.

Arbona: Here you go. Go ahead.

01-00:31:49

Jeffrey: Yeah, like this is Main Street, right down like this.

Arbona: Bane Street?

01-00:32:00

Jeffrey: Main.

Arbona: Oh, Main, right. In Port Chicago.

01-00:32:03

Jeffrey: Yeah. Up here, I've forgotten the name of that.

Arbona: Like a diagonal.

01-00:32:13

Jeffrey: Huh?

Arbona: Like a diagonal, coming like this.

01-00:32:14

Jeffrey: Yeah. Down here—Mama's first place was over like that. There's a house over here. This is our house. Then we started out right here. There's another building right here. I don't know what happened, but for some reason, something happened here, and my mama moved to here.

Arbona: Closer to Main.

01-00:33:10

Jeffrey: *On* Main, right on the corner. We stayed there for a while. I don't know how long, but it was a while. Then there was a place right here. It was kind of long. This is the Shack. So Mama had got this place, finally. We rented this place here, and we kept this for many years. This. Then they built a building; apartment building was built here.

Arbona: Which way would be the loading dock?

01-00:34:03

Jeffrey: This is north.

Arbona: Okay.

01-00:34:13

Jeffrey: Up here, this—oh, let's see. I'm trying to remember now. I think up here, this is Pittsburg. This was Concord over here.

Arbona: Oh, okay, I see.

01-00:34:32

Jeffrey: This. The Burlington Northern used to run through there, and I was trying to figure out where those railroad tracks were.

Arbona: Well, we can figure that out. That's a good start. We can do a little bit more searching.

01-00:34:52

Jeffrey: Over here was projects. The housing. The blacks lived here. We didn't have blacks living anywhere else. The blacks lived in projects, or they lived in Pittsburg or Bella Vista back then. Concord didn't have any blacks. I think our family was one of the first blacks to move to Concord. Mom got a housing authority house. I've forgotten it now.

Arbona: So the family moved around quite a bit.

01-00:35:39

Jeffrey: Oh, yeah!

Arbona: There were several moves.

01-00:35:41

Jeffrey: Yeah, it's several moves. But we still had the place in Richmond. But all those places, we maintained the place in Richmond and Berkeley.

Arbona: And those would just get rented out to other folks?

01-00:35:56

Jeffrey: Well, the place in Richmond, no, we didn't rent that out; we just moved out of that. That was a housing authority; that was run by, I believe, most of the—in the cities and counties, there was the housing authority. I think that was ultimately owned by HUD.

Arbona: Okay. I wanted to go back to this question of the sailors and your acquaintances and friends that were sailors at Port Chicago. You mentioned that they talked about the court-martial. Did you know any of the court-martialed sailors or that were charged with mutiny, personally?

01-00:36:41

Jeffrey:

No, I didn't know much of those. I'm certain I knew some. Those people who was jailed and what have you, there was some that was released or what have you that I got acquainted with; but I've forgotten them now. There is one person here in Oakland that I'm told I know; and there's one lives in—today is when I got—that quick, I intended to write his name down, but I was busy doing something. But I want to talk to him. I want to reach him. That's a ninety-three-year-old person from Port Chicago that I'm going to get for you.

Arbona:

Well, that would be wonderful. But you think that that was one of the men that was court-martialed?

01-00:37:45

Jeffrey:

I'm not sure—

Arbona:

You're not sure. Okay.

01-00:37:47

Jeffrey:

—whether he was one of those or not. I also talked to my sister Sunday, and she's going to look up—she still lives up there. She lives in Pittsburg. See, our family all have kept some presence up there for many, many, many, many years. And they're still there. That's where they are instead of Oakland or Berkeley. So when the Navy base closed down—and the Korean thing. My mother opened another.

Arbona:

Another restaurant?

01-00:38:38

Jeffrey:

She opened a cafeteria this time *on* the navy base.

Arbona:

Oh, really?

01-00:38:43

Jeffrey:

Matter of fact, she started, she had two on the base. But at that time—that was during the Korean thing—it was a different thing. The white sailors were right there with *all* the sailors. It was mostly more white sailors than anything. They used civilians to load the ships, back in that time. So it changed. Many of the old sailors, they worked on the base, too.

Arbona:

They went back and worked on the base, right? Yeah, I've read some of the oral histories where they say so. It seems like sort of the feeling's changed, some of the environment changed.

01-00:39:40

Jeffrey:

Well, the environment changed quite a bit. There was less racial divide, with the exception of Columbia Park, there was black and white. But eventually, that got taken out anyway because as the base, and particularly the sailors, were gone, then Columbia Park couldn't stand. There was one guy owned

damn near everything there. He owned the light company and the water company.

Arbona: Oh, yeah, Van Winkle.

01-00:40:35

Jeffrey: Van Winkle, yeah. Yeah, I remember. We used to go to his store, Van Winkle {and West?}. We'd pay him for our lights and all that stuff. Matter of fact, we used to pay our phone bill, I think, at Van Winkle. I believe. Every now and then you would see some black sailors and white sailors fighting. It wouldn't be any riots, but there'd be some fighting. That's when, well, Bill Ludricks would call the Shore Patrol and the Shore Patrol would—that's when you'd see the white Shore Patrol out there. Otherwise, you seen the black ones.

Arbona: Now, supposing there was some progress in the military and its procedures, what would you attribute that to? When you think back, what's the turning point there?

01-00:41:52

Jeffrey: To me it wasn't a turning point then. That was up until partially now, a few years back. Because I have a law enforcement background, being a sheriff and being a city policeman, federal investigator, see? That's my past. So it was much better in my time than their time, because they were basically laborers. That's what they did for a living. The hard work. Oh, they had auto mechanics and auto-body people, and I remember some of them. I remember one guy, we used to call Fats. Bob {Catell?}, that's it.

Arbona: Bob Catell.

01-00:43:03

Jeffrey: Yeah. He had been in the military, and got out of the military and started working on cars.

Arbona: So I guess I'm also wondering, when people would talk about— especially if you had conversations with Sikes and some of the other guys. You remembered the mutiny, the work strike. How did they see its impact? Did that make any difference? Did it change things?

01-00:43:35

Jeffrey: Oh, yeah. Well, dealing with Jake and Bostick, they didn't join in the strike. They worked. They loaded ammunition. Jake cooked; he was a cook. Then my uncle, he was aboard ship over there. He was the chief petty officer. Back then, that was a—but he was a steward. That was making beds and taking care of the others. It was different. The military changed. They brought in the change. Then when Harry Truman—I've forgotten the year.

Arbona: Yeah, '48. You mean when the Executive Order came through that desegregated the armed forces?

01-00:45:14

Jeffrey: Yes. But prior to the Executive Order, it was separated. Yeah. When I say separated, it was separate. Even in the mess halls. They didn't eat together. With Sikes being in the shore patrol, [chuckles] you know what they did.

Arbona: What's that?

01-00:45:54

Jeffrey: They were Shore Patrol for the blacks. But having the power? A white third-class with one stripe, and with Sikes with two stripes, that one striper was in charge. I believe Sikes was a boat's mate, also.

Arbona: Boatswain?

01-00:46:31

Jeffrey: Boat's mate. That's the classification.

Arbona: Boat's mate.

01-00:46:38

Jeffrey: I know Bostick was, and Jake was a cook. I knew Jake; he was a youngster. He married my sister. So did Bostick, married a sister.

Arbona: Married one of your sisters, also? Okay.

01-00:46:56

Jeffrey: No. Well, Jake and my sister got a divorce, and Bostick—but they were all youngsters in the Navy together.

Arbona: I see.

01-00:47:10

Jeffrey: Bostick may have been four or five years older than my sister. My sister just had a birthday, day before yesterday.

Arbona: Well, we might want to talk to her, too.

01-00:47:28

Jeffrey: Number 79.

Arbona: Seventy-nine. So she's a year younger than you.

01-00:47:33

Jeffrey: Yeah. Yeah. But all the rest of them are up there. My other sister's up there. I think she's about seventy-five. But they were very young. My brother, he was much younger. Hey, they married people from Port Chicago, though. My sister Margie, her husband lived there in the village, in the housing projects there. Yeah, I remember he and his brother. I remember the switchman, railroad switchman, because back then, they used civilians to run the railroad. The Navy had its own railroad, too, see? Then you had a railroad from—like

Southern Pacific. But on the base and switching the ammunition and moving those boxcars that carried the stuff, those were civilians driving it.

Arbona: Now, what about the danger of the base? Before the explosion, what kind of consciousness was there for the potential of—?

01-00:49:04

Jeffrey: In talking to the sailors—and I don't remember their names—it got safer after the explosion; they got training in safety. But prior to the explosion, that information I got, they got very little training at all. But it was manpower to—have you ever seen? I loaded ammunition.

Arbona: Tell me a little bit about that.

01-00:49:37

Jeffrey: I must've been about eighteen or nineteen. I don't know how old I was; I wasn't very old, though. But the sailors trained me. Because they gave me a test, ammunition test at Port Chicago. Well, my brother-in-laws and some other guys from Port Chicago told me about the ammunition—the five-inch 38s and rockets and bombs. They trained me. When I went and took the test, hey, I wrote a test that they couldn't believe that I had all this information about this, at my age. But they didn't question where I got it from. I went to work on the base as an ordinance man. I didn't like that because it was too hard. They was heavy work, and you worked work. I talked to my dad, and I went down to the carpenters union and took their test, and I become an apprentice carpenter. I took those papers back to the Navy base and they hired me as a carpenter's assistant, I guess.

Arbona: This is what year?

01-00:51:18

Jeffrey: That was back during the Korean thing.

Arbona: Oh, Korean conflict, okay.

01-00:51:22

Jeffrey: Yes. I worked there until I got laid off. I got laid off there, and then I took the test for electronics and went right from Port Chicago to Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, as a radio mechanic helper. Then became an apprentice.

Arbona: Whoa. So there's actually—

01-00:51:55

Jeffrey: So I finished a carpenter apprentice and electronic apprentice. But I couldn't find work. There wasn't any work for blacks. Unless you worked for the government. So I followed the government. I worked at the naval air station until they laid me off there. I wasn't a veteran, so I couldn't stay working. Then I left there, and within a few days, went to work at Naval Air Station, Alameda.

Arbona: Did you have experiences where you went looking for a job and you felt you were discriminated against and you couldn't get the job?

01-00:52:37

Jeffrey: Oh, yes!

Arbona: What was that like?.

01-00:52:39

Jeffrey: I don't recall having any, including the police department.

Arbona: What was that like? What happened there?

01-00:52:50

Jeffrey: Well, I took the exam, got on the list, and got removed from the list. Well, after they hired the number they wanted, they weren't going to pull any other blacks in. You didn't have the same opportunities. In the sheriff's office? The sheriff's office was probably the better place to get a job for a black man. The police department, I had to be coached by those black officers, how to pass the oral interview, how to say what they want me to say. Because I've never seen a black person on the interview board or anything. Well, San Francisco got their first sergeant in probably '65. Can you imagine that?

Arbona: Which police department were you applying to?

01-00:53:58

Jeffrey: I applied in Oakland. I was taken off—I made the list. What I was doing is being trained to be a fireman. I was trained at the fire station, and only blacks at the fire station. They only had one. What used to bother me is the fact that I couldn't work at any other firehouse in the area because they only had one for blacks. So you've got to wait till one of those blacks retire, before you can get a job. With that kind of job blacks were quitting and weren't just retiring. When they were retired, they were *old*. I'll never forget, that guy's name was Royal Towns, who trained me. He trained me to take the exam for the police department, he trained me to take the exam for the fire department. He was a lieutenant in the fire department. They didn't have any lieutenants—fuck that—in the police department, not back then. But they had the one fire house. They had a black chief. Not a black chief, but a black captain, lieutenant, engineers, and the fire station. That's all they had is blacks. It was quite amazing, in the history of those guys because many of those guys came up to very ranking after they removed the barriers. After they removed the barriers you see those guys become captains. I'm trying to think of the one guy. I think he become assistant fire chief, the whole works. Was it {Glasgow?}? I've forgotten his name, damn. But Eugene. What was Eugene's name? Yeah, but we live in a quite different world. There weren't many Hispanics, either. They were left out. They were left out.

Arbona: You're saying from jobs, like in the police and in—

01-00:56:39

Jeffrey: Like fire department, police department. The sheriff's department, there might've been a couple. One, two. Might've been two.

Arbona:

So I think I might just have time for one more question on this tape, before we run out of film, and then we can switch over to another one. But I wanted to just go back to the trial, the mutiny trial, to see if you had other memories about that. Do you remember coverage it, reading about it in the newspapers?

01-00:57:12

Jeffrey:

I remember. The black sailors, including Sikes, thought it was injustice to try them and to force them—because they wanted training, see? And they wanted fair treatment. They wanted to be supervisors, too. They believed that they weren't being treated fairly. My brother-in-law, who got to be a chief, he thought it was racism that convicted them, not their refusal. They wouldn't allow any of them—once they run out, they wanted to try them, and they wanted to execute them. The attempts were to execute them. They treated them like they did the Tuskegee Airmen. There's been a lot of books written about that racist-ness. They sent some of the guys, they moved them to Mare Island, and they put them over to Herlong. No, what is this other place?

Arbona:

In Vallejo?

01-00:59:08

Jeffrey:

Yeah, in Vallejo, right. It's a little east, but the ammunition.

Arbona:

Oh, Benicia?

01-00:59:20

Jeffrey:

Benicia.

Arbona:

The arsenal there?

01-00:59:21

Jeffrey:

Yeah. They used some of the sailors there, in Benicia, after the explosion till they got it situated there. Because they never did stop trying to get some ammunition and stuff out of here. They just brought some other ships in, rebuilt the docks. That really eastern dock, they never did put that back in.

Arbona:

No, I know. I've seen the ruins.

01-00:59:50

Jeffrey:

Yeah. They never put that in.

Arbona:

Quick question. Do you know if any of the sailors worked any other moonlighting jobs? Did they have to do other—?

01-01:00:01

Jeffrey: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they worked. Yeah, I believe Paxton and those guys, they worked in Avon.

Arbona: Avon, okay.

01-01:00:09

Jeffrey: Avon. They worked there for the oil company.

Arbona: Because I've heard that in other interviews.

01-01:00:15

Jeffrey: Yeah, they worked in Avon, and they worked a few other places to make extra money.

Arbona: That in itself, in a way, seems contrary to having a safe shipyard. If people are having to go make ends meet in other ways—

01-01:00:37

Jeffrey: Well, none of those sailors made a lot of money. It wasn't that way. Most of them had lower ranking than was anything. So they'd come out and come to Mama's and eat, and they got a chance to eat the home-cooked foods, Southern-cooked food, fried chicken and fries and the beer and all of that, and listen to music. Back then, we had the Nat King Cole and all of that. They would play the Duke. It never stopped.

Arbona: That's what your mom played in the restaurant?

01-01:01:32

Jeffrey: Yeah. Never stopped.

Arbona: Like Duke Ellington. What else would she play? You mentioned Nat King Cole.

01-01:01:38

Jeffrey: They would play a lot of, oh, blues, whatever. They played Count Basie and—let's see. I can't think of the trio.

Arbona: Well, think about that and let me just stop this tape, because I'm about out of time.

[End of interview]