

Interview with

John Steiger

March 14, 2002

by Dick Nelson

for the

Oceanside Historical Society

P.O. Box 125

Oceanside CA 92049

Transcribed by Kristi Hawthorne

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

Interview with John Steiger by Dick Nelson for the Oceanside Historical Society. March 14, 2002 at the home of John Steiger, Oceanside CA 92054. Transcribed by Kristi Hawthorne

Dick: This is an interview with John Steiger at his home in Oceanside. The date is March 14, 2002. My name is Dick Nelson. Okay, John, why don't you go ahead and tell us something about yourself, where you were born, things like that.

John: What I'll start with is a few comments that I made before the city council about my father, which I think kind of gets it back before I was born, and after. To the Honorable Mayor, Vice Mayor, members of the Oceanside City Council, I'm here before you on behalf of the Steiger family to express our deepest appreciation and sincere thanks for your action memorializing a fine public servant, our father John Paul Steiger, assistant superintendent of the City of Oceanside Water Department, who died many years ago March 8, 1934. He had been foreman in charge of new construction, emergencies and regular maintenance and he was on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He had been involved in making emergency repairs to a broken water line and getting wet and cold, he caught a severe cold which worsened into pneumonia. Those were the days before antibiotics of today. He died serving the people of Oceanside. His fellow workers took up a collection and gave it to my mother. As you know, there were no survivor benefits in those days. My dad died leaving her with five children, the oldest being thirteen and a freshman at Oceanside Carlsbad Union High School. That was me. His widow, Laura Marron Steiger, our wonderful mother, created a team with her five children and we all worked. That's another wonderful story. My father had often stressed the importance of getting an education and I am proud of the fact that all of his five children graduated from Oceanside Carlsbad college and some of us got degrees from Stanford, UCLA and the University of California, Davis. My father parents came to San Luis Rey River Valley in 1888 from Germany by the way of Ohio, where my father was born in the town of Lowelville in 1885. They were a hard working, truck farming family of three boys and five girls. They farmed along the San Luis Rey River from Oceanside to Pala. My father knew where the water was and he often spoke to me of the importance of protecting our water rights--the City of Oceanside's water rights and the greater San Luis Rey River Valley area. He was afraid we took water for granted since it was so easy to go to a water faucet and turn it on. He grew up when they went to a water well and pumped by hand and carried water by the bucket to their house and gardens. In 1919, my dad married a lovely Spanish senorita, Laura Marron, daughter of Don Juan Maria Marron, of the Rancho Agua Hediondia and Dona Lorenza Serrano Marron of the Rancho Pauma. They bought a home in 1920 and they raised their family at 530 South Ditmar Street. My mother and one of my father's sisters, Caroline Steiger, were in the graduating class of 1913 at Oceanside High School. In fact, my Aunt Caroline introduced her brother John, my dad, to my mother.

I thought that would give a quick brush, anyway, on where I came from. I was born at 530 South Ditmar Street. Dr. Robert Reid, you've heard of that name in Oceanside history, he delivered me and my three sisters. Then when my little brother came along, Dr. Reid was out of town, so my mother had Dr. Crandall come to the house. We didn't have any hospitals in those days. So they named my little brother, Robert Reid Steiger. He's still alive. He lives over in Desert Hot Springs presently. This is an introduction, notes, that Col. ? who had been Chief of Staff out at the Marine Corps Base and he retired here and he became first president of the San Luis Rey Rotary Club. He wanted me to talk about the community. I said "I will, if you introduce me." That was a good thing because he made a lot of notes. I'm pleased with what he did here, so I will read you his notes.

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. John Steiger was born in Oceanside on April 5, 1920. He graduated from Oceanside grammar school, Oceanside-Carlsbad Union High School, Oceanside-Carlsbad College, now Miracosta, with an Associate of Arts degree and from Stanford University, Bachelor of Arts in public administration. He later attended the school of law at UCLA. He was elected president of his class, the second class of UCLA Law School. At the end of the first semester he dropped out. It just wasn't what he thought it was going to be. I think he was also in the Air Corps Reserve. In March 1944 John received the silver wings of a pilot in the U.S. Army Air Corps and was assigned as an instructor pilot and later assistant base operations officer at Carlsbad Army Air Base in New Mexico. He went into the Reserve after World War II in November, 1945. He retired from the Reserve as a captain. John has been very active in Oceanside, San Diego County, California affairs. He served as president of the Rotary Club of Oceanside in 1983, President of the Oceanside Chamber of Commerce, Chairman of the Planning Commission for the city of Oceanside, Vice President of the California State Junior Chamber of Commerce, Southern California Chairman of the Committee for Young Men in Government, member of the 1948 California delegation to the National Republican Convention in Philadelphia, Chairman of the Oceanside Community Chest Fund Drives and the Red Cross and the Blood Bank and the March of Dimes, Chairman of the Old Mission San Luis Rey Heritage Ball Committee, Co-founder in 1987 of Leadership 2000. He was charter president of the Oceanside-Carlsbad Junior Chamber of Commerce, a founder of the Oceanside Boys and Girls Club, named in "Who's Who in United States Politics" in 1950 and Outstanding Young Man of the Year in 1951; a founder and the second commodore of the Oceanside Yacht Club. In 1968 John was elected to the Oceanside City Council, winning in every precinct first in all but one. He went on to serve four years as vice-mayor of Oceanside. -- I'm happy to say I was elected by the council every year. Normally, they have an ego problem. -- And vice-president of the Oceanside Small Craft Harbor District and Chairman of the Water and Sewer Committee; served as chairman of SANDAG in 1971.

What I'm pleased about, while I was chairman of that I saved the Guajome Regional Park for Oceanside, a 567 acre park. You know how these things work, the U.S. Government had grants. Any grants went through SANDAG, they still do. Anything that has to do with Government properties and what have you. We had a program with three of them coming to San Diego County. We were happily pleased with the Guajome. I got word from the head of our staff and he says, "they don't have enough money for three parks, there's only going to be two parks. And they are going to be down here in San Diego." I said, "Oh?" So we had a weighted? voting system that we passed, so San Diego couldn't really run rough-shod or we wouldn't have been a part of SANDAG, so I called Orby ? who was the mayor of Vista and also on the board of SANDAG, and this Guajome has a piece of Vista in it. I said, "They're trying to do it to us, Orby, let's get them in the middle." So we did and we got the other communities to support us. We managed to save it. Otherwise, it would have been a park down in San Diego Metropolitan area. That was a nice thing. There's another thing that I did that I remind the marines of once in awhile, when they wonder about whether we care about the marines. Nixon was President and he had the Western White House in San Clemente. The San Clemente people, they were pressuring him that they wanted to annex a part of the base. Well, the Marines just go up the wall when they think anyone wants to annex any part of their base. I don't blame them. It's like a child running amongst the wild animals. That came up and that had to be approved by SANDAG. So I rallied the troops on that, down in San Diego, that's where we met. I said, "Look, they want part of San Diego County. We don't want an Orange County city that's in Orange County and in San Diego County. It wouldn't be good." So we turned it down. I'm sure it didn't bother Nixon that it was turned down. So those are two things that I accomplished when I was Chairman.

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

Dick: Going back to Guajome, if it had not been approved as a park, what would have happened to it?

John: It was a bird farm, Butane bird farm was on a part of it. Then the Richardson family owned a part of what became the park, the bulk of it, and the ranch house, they owned that. The Richardsons were offspring of Coutts. The original Coutts married a Bandini. He had been a West Point-er. Kind of a thug they tell me and a surveyor. You know, the surveyors in the old days, as I understand it, part of their commission was they surveyed it so they ended up with a piece of the guy's land that they surveyed. Everybody was land poor.

Dick: So it would have stayed in private ownership?

John: There would have been residential development around it. Right now, we're getting development around it. Vista comes in there, which of course complicates it for easy development. There's a dirt road, Guajome Ranch Road is paved a distance and then it gets to wiggling and it's not paved there and they just put gravel on it, so it's a dustbowl.

Dick: What was the product of the bird farm, I suspect birds, but for what use?

John: Exotic birds. Like a private park, something of the order of what the fellow up in Anaheim used to do with them. He had stuff where people would come, those type of things. He welcomed them. Maybe he sold birds, too, I don't know. I know my wife took our children out there quite often and they would fix a little picnic. It was a logical thing to make a park out of that portion of it. It was great for water fowl. It's a great thing that they saved it. If they hadn't saved it with that government program, who wants to take care of a lot of water? I was involved very much in the lagoon down here between Oceanside and Carlsbad. There's an advantage of being in public office and being in real estate because you look at maps all the time. You see the maps and you see the ownership lines running out of the middle of nothing out there in those sloughs. Like the Buena Vista Lagoon used to be called after that, Lt. Maxdon Brown, they named it after him, who was the first graduate of the local college and he went in the air corps and he was shot down over Africa, beginning of World War II and so it was named Lt. Maxdon Brown Bird Sanctuary. But somewhere or another a lot of those things get lost. People say "who was Maxdon Brown". I remember when he graduated. He graduated with the high school commencement. This one person. The only graduate, and that was him. Nice fellow.

Dick: This Guajome, what was the time frame of that?

John: When we got the park voted? In 1971. I was on the council, the city council from 1968 to 1972. In fact, I was happy to get an article in the paper here the other day. Phil Diehl, to get one going on. I asked him, "why don't you do something on the Guajome Park?" He said, "where is that?" I said, "I'm very interested in it and I was very active in saving it." They're talking about this El Corazon park and they're not telling people that down the road, less than ten minutes away, we have a 567 acre park that's in the city of Oceanside and it's maintained by the money from the County.

Dick: The best arrangement you can have.

John: Yes. Because the money doesn't show on our budget, they don't advertise it. I've been after the city and they are finally mentioning it now, that it's a park in Oceanside. But it's frustrating. I've

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

been really annoyed with this El Corazon deal because of the half truths and of course the main motivation of the same people that don't want the hotel at the beach, well, historically, that's what we've had. The railroad brought hotels to places and supported them. We had hotels but we didn't have a good fire department and they burned down! My start into business in Oceanside was when I was ten years old, I had a Saturday Evening Post route. My dad used to give me a ride down to the city barn, the city yard, it's no longer there, but it was down at Cleveland and near that old red brick railroad hotel [322 North Cleveland]. That was across the street from it. That would be Fourth Street, they call it Civic Center Drive. But the city sold that off and I think there are houses there now or putting them there.

Dick: Those row houses.

John: Yes, they're getting \$300,000-500,000 for those things. People buy them and are thrilled with them. People come down here, you know, and Oceanside has been whipped and pushed around and slapped around, by a lot of cheap reporters, frankly. I mean cheap that they don't pay them a lot--

Dick:--Thin research.

John: Yes. In fact, we used to help the San Diego Union reporter. He'd come up here, where can he call his story in? well, we'd let him use our office. We know that they have a problem, but a lot of these reporters, what they do is go to the police station and look at the police blotter. That's the outline for their story then. So the whole story about the community generally, is based on the police blotter. So every day they've got something, go to the police blotter, the Oceanside Police center was the center in North County, particularly with the Marines, so they started putting it in and people would read that and people would think "oh those marines, they're terrible, they're terrible." They were just a bunch of kids that drank too much. The thugs, well we got thugs, after the Marines would kick them out and they didn't send them back to Waterloo or wherever they came from! They dumped them here. So they'd hang around and then they'd get the young marine who just came out of boot camp and they'd say, "I've got a girl down in the alley over here" so they'd go down the alley and they'd mug them and take their money and everything else, and hurt them. So people would read about that. For a long time they used to blame everything on Marines, it was very unfair. But a reputation got out and you can talk to people, and they're afraid to go to downtown Oceanside because of all those marines. Well, at one time the marines had MPs and that was great. Well, then some do-gooder, American Civil Liberties Union or somebody, I don't know who put the pressure on but they had this law, the military cannot be used in place of policemen.

Dick: There went the shore patrol.

John: The shore patrol, they could tell a guy "straighten your tie" and "straighten up and be presentable" and they did. Oceanside in those days, the policy was, we'd pick up the kid and take him to the gate. We didn't want to jail them, unless they beat up somebody. But most of them, they'd haul them to the gate and it was their problem to get along with the Sergeants that didn't care for that conduct. Well anyway, this Saturday Evening Post route, I got to know the people downtown. We sold them for a nickel, five cents. It was a great deal. My dad was still alive.

Dick: With the Saturday Evening Post you earned brownies and greenies.

John: You bet, we got bicycles.

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

Dick: You're talking to another Saturday Evening Post.

John: Is that right! I tell you, it was great. Another thing, when I couldn't do my route--I'm the oldest and then there's three sisters--they would take care of the route. The youngest one never work on the paper route, but the other two did and by that time I had the San Diego Sun, I used to deliver that. It was a heavy load. You've probably done that, too. You've got the big bags and you carry that thing and the streets in Oceanside weren't paved, just the main drag and you get out on that adobe and it's been rainy and you just skid, you know. The fenders weren't very good on a bicycle, so you'd get a strip of mud up your back! But it was a great experience. I got to know a lot of people.

Dick: Taught you business skills.

John: Yes.

Dick: What did you make off that nickel? One or two cents?

John: A penny and a half. I think my distributor, he got the bulk of it, I guess. They increased it, so when they increased it I got a feeling there was an adjustment that could be made. I think I was making over half of the nickel by the time we got rid of the route. I might have even been to three cents. I remember now, it was kind of graduated.

Dick: How many customers did you have?

John: Well, I am guessing, but it was probably 35 people or something like that.

Dick: Would those Saturday Evening Posts come to you by train?

John: No, a local man was the distributor. A nice man. I knew his kids. I guess his son may have also had a route. There were several, Herbie Bachrach had a route. So he had several Saturday Evening Post routes.

Dick: Do you remember his name?

John: Yes, Alf Post. In addition to that, he had Post's Posey Box, which was a florist shop. He also had a little column in the local paper, one of these little things about two inches and he would have something nice about what was going on. They were just the nicest people you could run into. That was the Depression Days, you know. He had sold, as I recollect, he sold Fords for the dealer, the guy's name was Merrill. Anyway, he switched from that into a florist business. I guess, he did better probably, because the car businesses ... I remember he gave us a ride one time. It was a big thing to get a ride in a car in those days. He was going down to Torrey Pines. There was a lodge down at Torrey Pines, it may still be there, I don't know. I haven't been there since maybe that time! One of the things, the road was so steep that they had to back up because the carburetor didn't work! Anyway, we got up there and we waited in the car for a long time while he went in and did business. The town just had a lot of nice, nice people in it.

Dick: You said you were around ten, so that would have been around 1930 or 1931.

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

John: Yes. I got to know the people in Martin's Meat Market. I would trade them a Saturday Evening Post for wieners and I'd give them on the way.

Dick: Where was Martin's located, do you recall?

John: They were down--let's see who would be in there now--Tremont and Mission, but it was Second Street then, they hadn't changed it from Second Street to Mission. It was just off the corner, towards the railroad track, toward the depot, from Tremont on the north side of the street. Martin's Market was in there and in that same half block, Martin's Market later bought that and took the whole corner. Dr. Reid had his office in that area and then Exton & Nichols, the drugstore, it was an outstanding drugstore, old-fashioned. I remember walking in there and I sold Mr. Exton the Saturday Evening Post. Manuel Castorena was a local boy that Mr. Exton had sent to college to get his license to be a pharmacist. He had done that for several boys, Earl Stillman was one, and Joe MacDonald, who later became mayor of Oceanside, he was from British Columbia. The place was so clean and neat and it had a soap smell to it when you walked in. That brings great memories. That was a very important part of the downtown area, that little spot. On from there, across the street from that was Archie Freeman's pool hall or billiard parlor. Across the street and up the street on the other corner was, I recollect, the Safeway Store. The stores that we're talking about, would have been within two blocks of the train depot. Fred Hayes owned the building toward the train depot on the corner of Cleveland and Mission (or Second). On that side of the street would have been Safeway and Archie's Pool Hall. Fred Hayes had an old brick building, I guess J. Chauncey Hayes probably built it. They were the big real estate sellers, they sold all kinds of lots. The Hayes family were offspring of the first Federal Judge of Southern California. A fellow up in Los Angeles [Benjamin Hayes]. His youngster, J. Chauncey Hayes, came down here. His wife was Felipe Marron and Felipe Marron was my grandfather's sister, Juan Maria Marron. My mother's father's sister. Felipe and J. Chauncey Hayes had thirteen children. They didn't have tv in those days! I knew them both. I knew Felipe very well because my mother liked her, she would be my mother's aunt, I guess. That was a lot of fun, keeping an eye on them and watching them get old. I remember poor old J. Chauncey when he was getting old and pretty soon he was beginning to lose it.

Dick: What line of business was he in?

John: Real Estate. He was also a justice of the peace. You know, an interesting thing, his son Fred was the one, I've got pictures of him, he was still active in real estate when I got started in it and he was just a real nice guy, but he rebuilt one of the adobes out here, the one that's on Vista Way. Fred had two sons, Berry Hayes was the oldest, and Roby Hayes, a smart young man. Barry had a daughter and she now lives in this old adobe.

Dick: Off of the freeway?

John: Yes. It's the old road which they made a frontage road out of it to serve that old adobe. At the end of World War II all that was left of it was a wall, probably at the most was twenty feet long, and so Fred went in with his son Roby and Roby was married to a real smart fellow classmate of his at Stanford, Barbara Lang, who was an Orange County girl, Phi Beta Kappa type. They rebuilt the place. In fact, they built a new house is what they did, but they built it with the thick walls. It was very nicely done. It's an asset. They restored it above and beyond. Anyway, it ended up that Roby and Barbara got a divorce. They had three boys. She was a very good attorney, they're both attorneys and attractive. An interesting thing, they had three boys, one of them is named Chauncey, one of them is named Fred, what's the other one's name, it's one of the old names, maybe Ben

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

[Roby]. But anyway, they are two lawyers and a doctor, those three boys.

Dick: Are they still in the area?

John: No, they're up in the L.A. area. Barbara Lang Hayes, then when she divorced Roby, she married the Treasurer of the State of California, a guy by the name of Betz. She did well, she was quite a maneuverer in politics. She liked that kind of stuff. I remember one time we used their law firm when the State was going through condemning for the Vista Way Freeway, we had land, we were neighbors, my grandfather's property. There was about a 190 acres on the south side of Vista Way and 100 acres on the north side of Vista Way. So he left the south side and went down into the bottom to his two sons and they went broke on it. It was dry land farming and it was impossible. They borrowed from the federal land bank and they couldn't pay it back. So Fred picked up their note from the federal land bank and he ended up owning that property. It was a nice place. The farming that goes on there, they must do other things to survive. I'm a little annoyed with them because they've really cost the city money objecting to the current discussion on the interchange with Rancho Del Oro Road and the freeway. The daughter she talks about the history of the area and they go out there and "oh no, you can't put the road there because they found dust of adobe bricks, that's important to save." So then they study it and study it and they've got all kinds of plans. The city has to get new environmental impact reports. They need it badly, it's in the city's master plan to run. When people screw around with the master plans and then they start yelling about how the traffic stops up. The traffic at El Camino, the answer to the El Camino and Vista Way log jam is the one that the state and everybody in the city is between the College interchange and the El Camino interchange. The city's been trying to do it for years. They haven't had the money for a long time. But then when they get up to having the money, they've got people who sit up in the hills there, "you're going to bring all that traffic through here!" Then you'll hear them another time talking about all traffic stopped up and all that. Well, if the traffic runs through you don't have the fumes from a bunch of parked cars. Anyway, it's interesting how this discussion gets off.

Getting back to downtown to my magazine route, they had the First National Bank at that time, that was up on the corner of Hill, or what's now Coast Highway and Mission, or Hill and Second. That went broke during the Depression. In my scrapbook I have a school savings certificate that they gave me. I met a lot of nice people. There was a barber shop that I used to sell the Saturday Evening Post to, a man by the name of Luke Seifker. Luke Seifker was a barber but he had been a boxer. He had the old pictures around. It was a neat, clean place. They had a shoe shine man in there. The first permanent black man in the community. His name was Johnny Mann. He was one of my Saturday Evening Post customers. I used to trade him for shoe shines. The most satisfying trading deal, was there was a malted milk depot, where they had milk shakes. That was run by the Newcombs. I forget Mrs. Newcomb's maiden name. Higley. The Higley family were movers, they had a moving van business. She married a fellow by the name of Newcomb and they had some youngsters. I traded them the Ladies Home Journal, it was good work.

Dick: Then you went beyond the Saturday Evening Post, you sold the companion publications?

John: We had the Ladies Home Journal and the Country Gentlemen. Didn't sell many Country Gentlemen's. They were only a nickel. But we did sell some. Looking back on it, I'm convinced people just gave me the nickel. They were nice magazines, Curtis Publishing Company.

Dick: Well in Oceanside there might not have been as many as "Country Gentlemen" at that time

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

as the city was growing.

John: No, but there were some who probably dreamt of it. The people at the City Hall, Mr. Landes, we used to deliver Mr. Landes' to his home. He was the city clerk and a fine man. Just a fine man. Oceanside was so fortunate to have a city clerk like John Landes. In fact, we named a park after him. I'll tell you one of the things he did that was so valuable, he looked out for the city. He was actually from New Orleans [Atlanta], he was from that part of the country. He was also the city assessor. He really looked out for the city and he would hide money from the council. He told me, "We have the money, but I don't let the councilman know, or they will spend it." It was great knowing him. When people would call at tax time and they couldn't pay their taxes during the Depression--taxes weren't very much but they were an awful lot relative to someone's income--so they would write and tell him, "Well, we just can't afford to keep it anymore" and "what do you suggest?" He would say, "Well, why don't you give it the city? Sign it off and the City. You're losing it to the city, so you're really giving it to us." At the end of World War II, the council, John Landes had retired, and they were looking around and they found out that Oceanside owned 1300 improved residential lots. Some of them were little, tiny 25 foot lots. There were some parts of town that these encyclopedia outfits used to give a lot if you buy this or that.

Dick: Incentives to buy, a lot near the beach in California.

John: Yes. They were on paper. The street was named and what have you, but there was no street there, you know, and all that. So they had some of those down in the flat, the low areas. They did this all over the country, the little flat areas. Anyway, 1300 of them. I bought one that was improved.

Dick: Improved meaning?

John: The one I'm telling you about had concrete paving, on Alberta Street in Plumosa Heights. Plumosa Heights was over near Wisconsin Street, Alberta Street, Leonard Street and West Street. This was after the War, after World War II. I paid \$75 for a fifty foot lot, 106 foot deep, an easement across the back. They backed up and the utility easement went across the back of the lots, not out on the front, so you didn't have poles out on the front in that particular area.

Dick: It was not an alley, just an easement.

John: Yes. It worked out. I got it cheap and I sold it cheap to somebody who needed a good lot. I was going to use it.

Dick: Where did Mr. Landes live?

John: He lived at Clementine. He lived on a 100 by 100 foot corner. Clementine and Missouri, I think it was. I'm quite sure. It would be the northwest corner, a 20 foot alley. It was recessed, the house sat. The main lot was down below Clementine street a little bit. His cottage was there. It was all planted. It was a lovely garden as you walked by.

Dick: The assessor also, did he not make personal visits to home to assess what your personal property was worth?

John: I don't remember exactly how he did it. But the county eventually took over and the city

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

signed up with the county assessor's office. I guess they did it all over the county. He was always walking. Early in the morning you would find him down on Pacific Street. It was invigorating. He was looking at the real estate! He'd keep track of sales. He had his own system. I just never paid too much attention to it. He knew about the building permits. They'd keep track of whatever they paid so he'd know when there was an increase. He had one daughter. She was ahead of me in school. I don't know what happened to her.

Dick: Now, what grammar school did you attend?

John: Oceanside Grammar School. It was the only grammar school in Oceanside and it was up on top of the hill at Horne Street, where the [high] school is now. Before I went to Oceanside Grammar School, there was a two story building up at the head of Topeka Street. They had a cobblestone wall on the school yard that went from Topeka Street both north and south and the school was up on the hill there. There was steps to get up. They had two statues, bronzes of Lincoln and Washington. I don't know whatever happened to those. You went up the steps and the High School ended up being on the north side of those steps. They had a science building that they had built there, that was relatively new. The Grammar school was on the south side of the steps. There were different school boards. The Oceanside Grammar School, the first grade--Kindergarten was farmed out. That was in a building behind the little Grace Episcopal Church downtown. You know where the post office is downtown? Just go down the alley from that Post Office about a half a block north. There was a little building at the back end of the lot that fronted out on Hill Street or Coast Highway, between that there was the little Episcopal Church, which was moved. The old church is still but they added to it. They moved it down to West Street. That little Episcopal Church, it was a cute little church, it sat out on the highway there in the middle of that block between First street and Second Street.

Dick: That was the Kindergarten there?

John: Yes, that was the kindergarten. My Kindergarten teacher's name was Miss Helena. My first grade teacher's name was Miss Eschwege. She had a son who was in my class, Jimmy Eschwege. I think he just passed away.

Dick: What nationality was that?

John: Gosh, could it be English? I don't know. Mr. Eschwege, he was kind of like a gentleman farmer. As I recollect, they lived out in North Carlsbad. We called it North Carlsbad, actually it was over here in back of Laurel, Avocado and over in that area. By the way, Al Post, he moved out there and built a little house and I guess he was going to grow plants. But he used to live down on the 500 block of South Freeman. We were in the 500 block of South Ditmar and there was a vacant lot so we just cut through there. Another neighbor we had down there across from 530 South Ditmar was Ronald Johnson. Ronald Johnson was married to one of Ranson's Bakery's daughters. They had two daughters. He had a bread route. Things were real tough and he ended up with a bread route. They made a delivery truck look like a loaf of bread and they had a bell in it like the ice cream trucks and he'd have the windows in the sides of it. Think of the work those guys used to go through.

Dick: He would travel the neighborhoods and sell?

John: Yes, through the town. Ranson's Bakery was one of the old bakeries of Oceanside, the most

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

popular one because of Lottie Ranson, that was the Ranson's youngest daughter, I think. Very pretty lady, very pretty and a personality.

Dick: She attracted customers.

John: You bet. She just had a beauty about her. She could have been a movie star. She was older than I but I got to know her, well, everybody knew Lottie.

Dick: Did she stay in town or did she leave?

John: No, she died just recently, if I'm not mistaken. She had a misfortune. She married a young fellow who couldn't get a job locally. He got a job working on the aqueduct over in Imperial Valley. I guess the construction crews were pretty tough and he got killed in a bar fight, or something. I may be off on whether it was a bar fight, but anyway in the construction crowd. So she was left as a widow with two little boys. One of them became quite a musician, Dillard was their name. We were just simpatico, because maybe we didn't have a dad in the house either. But Lottie, she conducted herself beautifully. I don't think she ever remarried. That's when drugs began to show up around musicians, she had to put up with that worry. One of the boys in particular had a real drug problem. You know, in a little town you knew everybody and you knew the problems.

Dick: There were no secrets.

John: No, no. That's right.

Dick: You were how old when your dad died?

John: Thirteen.

Dick: Was that quite an impact upon you?

John: Yes, it was.

Dick: Who managed the family?

John: Well, I would say my mother kept the respect of all five of us. She was very, very good in running and organizing and supporting and encouraging. If we'd get into something, she'd support us. We were very fortunate in that respect. I remember one time one of these social workers came by, they had a few in those days. I don't know where she was from, but this lady came and told my mother that she ought to get married again. I think my mother just about ran her out of the place. It didn't go over at all. She enjoyed the problems of her kids. My mother was an excellent seamstress, so she developed a clientele of people who wanted sewing done. She always had somebody at the house. She was a dressmaker, which was a big help. As time went on, I made more money. I was always working different jobs through school. One of my fun jobs, my kids gave me a little model of a Model A convertible with a rumble seat. Well, one of my jobs was throwing the L.A. Times from the rumble seat. The man who owned the route was a Mr. Nichols who lived about a block away from us. He was an elderly man and he got me to work with him. I remember, it was nice except that you got up in the middle of the night and we'd go down and wait for the L.A. Times truck to come around the bend, looking north. Hill Street was the 101, you know, and the L.A. Times truck had three lights up on top of the cab. There weren't too many

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

trucks going by we would wait at the corner. There was a drugstore that was not opened, but we'd wait in there and wrap our papers and get them ready and then put them in the car and go deliver them. We delivered in Oceanside and Carlsbad. I remember poor Mr. Nichols, he'd be driving along, and it was very quiet. You can imagine, it's a small village, you know and at that time of night you didn't hear anything. There was anything, and if there was something, you heard it. I remember, this must have been 1936, because there was a time when the city bought a police car, a 1936 patrol car and they let the night watchman in town, a man by the name of Fred Sickler--they said Fred was like a hound dog, he could smell out where any vagrants shouldn't have been and in the middle of the night he was covering the town--well, they let him drive in this patrol car at night, so he'd know how to drive it. You could hear him switching gears two miles away. You know how in the old days when they didn't work the clutch right. We knew where Fred was!

Dick: You say night watchman, he was basically a patrolman.

John: Yes. He was on foot patrol downtown, up the alleys, he'd go in the dark places.

Dick: When he got the car then he expanded his range.

John: Yes. I remember poor Mr. Nichols, though, the man owned the route, well he'd be driving along and I'd be throwing the paper and if it didn't land on the porch, I'd tell him. I got very good at it, I didn't like to stop and get out. But he could hear the paper plop. We'd go along and he'd hear the "plop" and then he'd go along and he didn't hear the "plop" and then he'd turn around and look and he'd wake me up! I'd fall asleep. I used to fall asleep in class in school. It was a real experience. My grades went down. Like I got A's in geometry but in Trigonometry I got D's. It was tough. So then I got out of the job. He paid me nicely, I forget what it was, but in those days I wasn't complaining. We had another neighbor who had a milk route with Connelly's dairy and they delivered to the door bottles of milk. That you had to run off the truck and run up to put the milk down and pick up the empty bottles that they had and bring them back. That was more work. I remember, I never will forget it, because I was delivering milk through the dawn, this one particular day, I guess it was about 7 o'clock and there was the school bus and it was my senior class going on the senior class trip to Catalina. I couldn't afford it. I still remember that. Fortunately, I was in the Elk's drum and bugle corps. We were state champions and because we were state champions, we were given a trip to Catalina on the Catalina Steamer, the white steamer. So I had been to Catalina, it was a nice place to go to and the boat was nice. I already had the experience.

Dick: Do you know where the Great White Steamer is today?

John: No.

Dick: It's gradually settling into the muck in Ensenada harbor. It was built by P.K. Wrigley to bring the people over in the 30's and 40's. I think it went on until about the 60's and then it was taken out of service. It's amazing that it's a California state landmark, it's a city of Los Angeles historic--and it's in Ensenada harbor. There's talk of renovating it, but you're talking about millions of dollars and I don't think that's going to happen.

John: In those days, the big thing was the 1935 Exposition in San Diego. In Balboa Park they built all those buildings, the towers. That was all part of it. Ford had a fantastic display. It was a big deal.

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

Dick: Well some of Balboa Park was already there for the Panama Exposition.

John: Yes, but they added the Exposition Part, the Ford building.

Dick: Let's talk about the drum and bugle corps. By the time you're throwing L.A. Times, that's around your drum and bugle days. How did you pick up the bugle?

John: Brownies and Greenies.

Dick: Oh really? That was a premium?

John: Yes. I had that bugle and I guess the word got out. The poor Elks didn't have a lot of money either. They did those uniforms for us, which were pretty classy white uniform with a purple trim around it.

Dick: As I recall, the Elks Club started around 1928 or 1929. They were pretty knew and just coming through the Depression.

John: Yes. Here locally the Elks were started by Hurley. Uncle Tom Hurley. Uncle Tom Hurley was on the Board of Supervisors and so he had a lot of county jobs that he could get the supervisors and the superintendents and they joined the Elks Lodge, I wonder why! He was a nice man. He lived at the corner of Ditmar and Fifth or Sixth Street, I can't remember. I didn't sell him a Saturday Evening Post, that was somebody else's area. I knew of him, I was a little kid. He had been in the theater, in vaudeville or something at one time. He used that as kind of a P.R. deal. The Elks put on a Christmas show and then they had a show for the kids. He would sing "Rock Candy Mountain". He just was a personality. He was the first exalted ruler of the Oceanside Elks Lodge.

Dick: How did you get in? You got your bugle through your brownies and greenies and those were certificates, brown and green, and they were given to you for the number of sales you made. The number of magazines you sold, you got your pay plus these premiums when you did good.

John: That's right.

Dick: You accumulated them and they had a catalog that you could redeem these coupons for these valuable gifts.

John: That's right. We even got a bicycle one time.

Dick: Did you get some instructions with the bugle?

John: Yes, they put a guy in back of me that could read music and we went marching! They gave me some rudimentary instructions on how to try to follow the music. They had a guy that I kept up with that was behind me.

Dick: He was a bugle guy?

John: Yes.

Dick: So he hit the note and then you hit the note?

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

John: Yes. If I didn't do it right, I got the word. He was right there. We played "Over There." We were in all the local parades. In Ramona, Turkey Day. Did you know they had a Ramona Turkey Day? They had an Escondido Grape Day. They had the Oceanside Fourth of July, that was a great parade, of course. We had a silk banner that hung from the bugle that said Oceanside Elks #1561.

Dick: How many kids were in there?

John: Oh it must have been 24 or 25. All boys. Our leader was a man by the name of Titmas. Mr. Titmas, he worked for the postoffice. He had his own family and it seems to me that one of his kids was in the drum and bugle corps.

Dick: How did you travel around?

John: It seems to me that they were on a bus at different times, so they must have chartered a bus.

Dick: Were there other Elks or other units? Did they have a color guard?

John: No. We were the Elks champions. We went to the state convention in Long Beach and we competed with other drum and bugle corps. We ended up Number One, so that's how we got the Catalina trip.

Dick: What year do you think that was when you were state champions and the Catalina trip.

John: It would have been 1933 or 1934. I think my father had already passed away, so it would have been 1934.

Dick: Was there a friend who encouraged you to join?

John: I think neighbors of ours, some of the guys that were pall bearers at my dad's funeral, were Elks. I think they were looking out for me. Because one time I was told, "Go on down to a service station on Coast Highway and talk to the man there at the service station". I think his name was Fikstad. "They want to talk to you." So I went down and he gave me a bicycle. It was an old racing bicycle with tiny tires. Apparently somebody's wife had it and they didn't need it anymore and the reason it was at the service station is that they had unloaded it there to make sure that it would run. The guy at the service station had volunteered to make sure it worked. It helped me on paper routes. I remember there was a bicycle shop in town that Mr. Henman operated. I used to go into the shop every once in awhile with it because the tires were going out in the adobe. It got me into the paper route business. The bicycle, that helped. I remember I gave a talk to the Elks many years ago, I guess it had tears in their eyes, I didn't know, but I thanked them for looking out for me and the bicycle that they arranged and gave to me. Over in Catalina, remember the glass bottom boats? We went on the glass bottom boats when we went over on our prize trip.

Dick: As you went into high school, when were you starting to drive? What other jobs did you have?

John: That's a good story, too. We had a neighbor by the name of Mickleson. Mr. Mickleson and his family were garbage route contractors. He was an older man and he had a couple of sons. As I recollect, they had a contract in National City, one of the sons. The other one had one in maybe El Cajon, I can't remember, but they were down there. But the old man, he came up and he got it in

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

Oceanside and Escondido. The garbage trucks in those days, what they would do is get a big Peerless limousine or Cadillac limousine or Pearce Arrow, you know, the big cars. And they'd cut the back seat off and they'd have a truck bed constructed and put on the frame and they had their own garbage truck. He had this beautiful cab with the beautiful headlamps on it, cushioned front seat. It had a problem, though. He invited me, I was about 11 or 12 years old, and he wanted to know if I would like to go over to Escondido and help him with his route. All I had to do was drive and he'd be the swamper and load the garbage and trash up into the truck. Well, what an opportunity. Me, drive? We did it several times. We'd get the truck all filled up and he'd go into restaurants and get the garbage and all that and then we'd go out to a hog ranch and if there was a good apple or something that looked exciting for the people at the hog ranch, or the pigs, he would set aside some stuff so they could toss it to them. Mr. Mickleson was quite a nice guy. In Escondido they have hills and St. Catherine's Hotel was up on one hill and we'd go up there and take care of that and then we'd leave there and we'd head down across town and the brakes were for a car, not for a truck loaded with a heavy load. They were hydraulic brakes and fortunately there wasn't a lot of traffic and he'd just go like a bat out of hell. He'd go down the hill and then up the other side. It was a great experience. I did get to learn how to drive. I guess I was some help to him. He had someone to move the truck. That was one of my jobs that didn't hurt me any. I worked in grocery stores. Downtown Oceanside I worked at Humpty Dumpty, lifting cases. In good old Oceanside, I worked for Huckabays. The Ben Franklin store, I'd sweep out their store. Worked at the J.C. Penney company, washed their windows. See downtown Oceanside had J.C. Penneys and a lot of markets. It was the center, there was a lot of activity down there. I guess probably when things really changed it was when the freeway came through. Then the gas stations that were just about on every corner, it seems, they're all gone. They left vacant spots. The people that worked there didn't go to the coffee shops, and then the market people started getting modern and going to the bigger boxes. Downtown just faded away. We started having a rather intimate knowledge of the downtown and a concern for it. I was aware when I came back from World War II that something had to be done. The fish didn't buy anything. We were on the edge of the ocean, but there were no customers out there in the water. The Junior Chamber of Commerce is what we started then. To save the economy of the area we said, "they've got to change things and turn this into a real visitor center." Well, that's awful hard to do, change when something is dying. Who in the hell did we think we were? What did we know about it? We had been away from here and we had seen other places and we had a lot of eagerness in the group. Our Oceanside Carlsbad Junior Chamber of Commerce had a 150 members, 3 from Carlsbad. The reason we called it the Oceanside Carlsbad was because they had a very nice hotel. It was like the Santa Barbara Biltmore. It ran from the Coast Highway down to the ocean. It was nice and they had a lot of hoity-toity people there.

Dick: Let's go back to your high school days. You graduated from Oceanside Carlsbad Union High School, what were you doing and what were your aspirations?

John: I was busy with these different jobs that I mentioned. When I graduated from high school, my grades were lower than they probably should have been because of the different jobs I had, I'd fall asleep in class. I did manage to graduate. In those days the commencement was very nice. They really went to the trouble of building a structure out on the campus with lathe, like a greenhouse. Then they would go around and get asparagus, the fern, and stick that in the holes in the structure, the big stage that they built. Our colors were green and white, so they got white gladiolus and they spotted them all over. It was a gorgeous thing. They had the girls wear formals and the boys wore dark suits, black suits. Well, I didn't have a black suit. I remembered I borrowed a pair of shoes from Mr. Thill and I borrowed a pair of pants from around the neighborhood and a

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

black jacket from somebody. I didn't have anything like that. I guess the other guys were doing the same thing, and a shirt and tie. We went to the commencement and they played "Pomp and Circumstance" and it was beautiful. You couldn't help but to remember. They made a point of working at it and it came out well, I still remember it. This was early afternoon. We were out of there by three o'clock and so the big deal was to walk downtown. It's just a few blocks from the top of the hill. I had my diploma wrapped up. I was a little afraid to open it, to make it wasn't blank! I carried that with me. We got down to the corner of Mission and Hill about 3:30 or thereabouts. The reason I know that and remember that is the fellows from the bank, who a lot of them were my customers from either the newspapers or the magazines--the manager of the bank was Mr. Roy Hoover, and he had been a Saturday Evening Post customer and an L.A. Times--So here, all these bankers are in the drugstore, catty-corner from the bank at that time. I didn't think too much about it then. So Mr. Hoover walked up to me and all the students were coming down the hill and he said, "Are congratulations in order? Did you graduate from high school?" I said, "Yes, sir, I did." He said, "Well, that's nice. What are you going to do? Are you going to go on to college?" I said, "Mr. Hoover, I can't afford to go onto college." "Are you going to get a job then?" "Well, I hope so. I've got to get one some place. Do you have anything in mind?" He said, "Would you like to work in the bank?" Now, this is the Depression, 1937. There weren't a lot of jobs around. I said, "I'd like that very much." He said, "When can you come to work?" I said, "Well, whenever, tomorrow." He said, "Fine." I said, "Well, at 10 o'clock?" And he laughed and said, "No, we open the bank at 10:00 for the public, but we come to work at 8:00." "Oh, fine, I'll be there at 8:00." Well, I got this job with the Bank of America. I felt very fortunate, of course, and I worked there for five years. I worked there until World War II. But while I was working there, I'd take courses up at the local college. The bank encouraged you to take whatever courses might be helpful, basic stuff. Later on, after the war, then it was important that I had my foot in the door in their records. I was there five years and then the war came along and the bank was good to me. My pay, when I started with the Bank of America, I got \$720 a year. That came out at \$60 a month. But that was very good. I worked in the bank and the war came and we were the only bank in the area.

Dick: Now where was that?

John: It was at the corner of Coast Highway and Mission Avenue. The gal in our bank who was the escrow officer and the secretary to the manager, was a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley in architecture. Her name was Margaret Zelear. But she couldn't get a job as an architect. But she became the escrow officer and the secretary. A great bridge player and a great gal.

Dick: Two questions before we get too far along--Did you get yourself a car at that time? And what about girls?

John: I didn't get a car. Fortunately I could walk from home to the bank and back. I didn't get a car actually until after the war. In the bank, I got to know the controller from the constructors that were building Camp Pendleton, a Mr. Lewis. He was in one day. I didn't realize it at the time, but they were looking for personnel, too. Everybody was looking for personnel. And the bank, my lord, they were bringing in guys from little crossroads banks from Iowa. Our bank here was a modern whiz, compared to what they had. They hired them and they paid them more than they paid us, and we had been there a long time. So anyway, Mr. Lewis happened to hit me up and he leaned over one day. I was at the teller window and I was telling him, "I'm going into the Air Corps, but they're not going to call me for about five months." He looked around and he said, "Why don't you come to work for us? We'll pay you more in a week than you get here in a month." I was in shock. I said,

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

"Really?" and he said, "Yeah. Think about it." I said, "Well, how long do I have to think? I'll have to give them notice here." So I gave them notice and geez, stuff hit the fan. There was a poor guy, that the assistant manager, his name was Earle Walwick. Earle was one of these fellows, I'd go by and go to the movies to a Sunday matinee and it would be dark when I walked home and I'd look in the bank and there was a light and there was a guy wearing a visor. Here's Earle working. He was down there sometimes seven days a week. He ran the bank.

Dick: He wasn't related to Rob?

John: Yeah, he was the dad. What happened was, all of sudden, here comes a man by the name of John Minahan. John Minahan was one of the top vice presidents in the Bank of America in personnel. And they got my notice that I was going to leave. I was told he wanted to meet with me. They had a little meeting room upstairs in the bank at the back end there. He said, "I hear you're going to leave?" I said, "I'm going into the Army Air Corps, they're going to call me in about five months." "Well, why don't you stay here until then? You have a great career here in the bank." He went on and kind of got a little high pressure in a way .. 'How well the bank will treat you' and all that, you know. I'm sure that he felt that way, but I said, "Well, you know, I'd like to tell you something. You've got a man out here, Earle Walwick, who's been with the bank 27 years and the way you people treat him." Well, they thought he put me up to it and they made the mistake of chewing his ass. This big John Minahan. They made a big mistake because they guy came into Earle a few days later. It was a guy by the name of Frank Telford, who had the Merchants Credit Association. He said, "Earle, they're calling me into the service. Do you know anyone who would like to buy a Credit Association?" Earle said, "Tell me about it." Earle ended up buying it and they lost him, too. One of the nice things about it, was I did go out there, I did go out there for five months. There were lots of guys who lived in town or at the hotels and it was easy to get a ride. I got a ride with a guy by the name of Wendell Hays. He had a station wagon and he worked in materials. He was real handy, hell, he picked me up every morning! They issued me a station wagon when I'd go out there and then I'd drive all over that huge base, physically checking. When the Navy was billed by the contractors for 28 pieces of drainage pipe that you could walk in, that they had down at the bottom of those big canyons, before they filled them. I'd walk through those and you could see the joints and count them. The contractors, and that's who I worked for, liked to be able to show the Navy 'well, you go and check' and there would be 28 or 29 and we had checked it ourselves. As a kid in the summertime, I worked on the rancho. They had dry land farming on the coast. I worked for Lima Bean Carter, they called him. Mr. Carter had acres and acres that he leased from the Rancho Santa Margarita. They were concerned about morning glory getting into the lima beans. So they had a truck load, Carter picked us up at the bank corner, and haul us out there. There was no side boards on this flat bed truck and he drove like a bat out of hell! He'd go up the highway and he had a little workman's shack that was kind of his headquarters, where the beans were planted. He had two sons. They drove tractors. They were more expert. Fred Carter, who became a B-24 pilot and Jack Carter, who went into the Merchant Marines and a captain of the president line ships. Fred's dead but Jack's still alive. He now does deep sea tugging. Anyway, that was a good job. I got twenty cents an hour back in those days.

Dick: Were lima beans the only crop that was planted there?

John: That was the main one and that was the only one that Carter did. They had big warehouses here and they'd thresh the stuff and get the beans out.

Dick: So right on the other side of the San Luis Rey river outfall here basically started the lima

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

beans?

John: I would say the second, not the San Luis Rey one, but the Santa Margarita, where the Navy had an auxiliary field, a safety field, which is the other side of Camp Del Mar. There was a flat area there and they'd land these little planes. The beans were up the coast for miles. I graduated from that though to the bulb fields in South Oceanside where they dug a harrow down the fields and loosened the dirt and we got down on our knees and clawed into the dirt. My back, I can still feel it. Had hang nails hanging down from my fingers. We'd get these bulbs out and the bulb people had an international market for their bulbs, gladioli bulbs.

Dick: Were the Frazees involved in that?

John: The Frazees, yeah. We were working for Frank Frazee.

Dick: This is in your high school days, you went back a little.

John: Yes. The ranch reminded me of it. But we got 25 cents an hour for that. But getting back up to speed.

Dick: When did you go work out at the base?

John: It was 1942. I was called up in 1943.

Dick: How did you get the five months? I thought we were in a big war and everybody was needed?

John: All the military outfits were grabbing onto every possible flier and they were saving them.

Dick: How did you come to their notice?

John: Bob Shaffer, long time friend of mine, he graduated from UCLA and he was down here and he managed a Shell service station. He was married to Lorraine Fulton. She was pregnant. I had dependents, I had my little sisters and little brother and mother. We didn't have to go, I forget what they called it. Anyway, we got to thinking about it. We had a lot of reverses militarily at the beginning of World War II. We decided that "you know, they're going to get us, so why don't we beat them to it. Why don't we go up and let's go in the Air Corps. We don't know a damn thing about aviation but at least when we get out, we'll know something that we didn't know anything about." So we went up to Santa Ana, the two of us, to the Santa Ana Army Air Base, which was a bean field with buildings on it. We decided we'd inquire about it and signed up. We signed up on October 5, 1942. And they said, "You won't be called until about five months." Well, let's see, October, November, December, January, February. They were right. We were called in February.

Dick: Was that because there were training classes to go through?

John: They didn't have any place to put us. They had what they called a college training detachment that they created to standardize and give us some basics so that they'd have an idea, because we weren't college graduates. He might not have graduated but he was close to graduation at that time. They created what they called a college training detachment. We went in the same day, we reported to the train depot at Los Angeles. We were eager. I was in a top coat and a business suit and he was all dressed. In fact, he stayed overnight with this wife in downtown L.A. and I slept on a desk in the depot. That's how eager we were. So they put us on a train, we didn't

Interview with John Steiger, March 14, 2002

know where we were going. They wouldn't tell us, they just told us what train we were going on! They lined us up and so we go up to Fresno. They moved the Japanese out of an interment camp and they moved us in, the fairgrounds at Fresno. They had built some shacks, tar paper shacks, to keep the rain off of you. The deck was the parking lot and they had cots in there. I remember talking to one of my buddies--they became buddies right away, you know--we were sitting there this first night and we were shocked. We were shocked. "Boy, things are really a hell of a lot worse than we thought they were, aren't they?" We told the guys, "Don't tell your folks, the morale will go down the tubes." "It's all great!" "The food's great, and everything else." Well, it was a miserable deal, I'll tell you. I lost 33 pounds in 17 days. They had a drunk sergeant. They didn't have uniforms for us. They'd call you out there and you'd stand out there. We got uniforms the fourth day, I think. I remember this poor drunk sergeant, he was a pain in the ass. He probably could have been a hell of a lot worse. I talked to guys in other training detachments throughout the country, they had people dying in the barracks. Jefferson barracks Missouri was, you just couldn't believe it. We went to L.A., Fresno, then to Santa Ana. They did some tests in Fresno. We didn't know what they were, but we took them. Santa Ana, they called it the classification center. Prior to going in, Bob and I were, we had been in business, we were working, we were serious. We weren't going to be failures, so we'd study. Bob felt that he wasn't too sharp on his math and would I help him, so I did. He got so good at his math that on the classification he was really adept and had a great shine. They put him down then that he'd make a good lead navigator or bombardier. When I went through, I was put down for pilot training. From Santa Ana they shipped us out. Well, they shipped Bob out to New Mexico to bombardier school. They shipped me out to a college training detachment at Arizona State at Tempe. I was there about three months. They took us over to Sky Harbor to see if we'd get airsick. If we didn't get airsick then they just ran us through courses of geography, economics. They were holding on to us. The Navy had some kind of programs going but they had their own little touch to them. We finished at college training detachment. I was made a cadet officer there because I had been a scout master.

Dick: Your bugle didn't help.

John: No, thank god. If I had told them that, I might have been a bugler! How lucky I was that I didn't mention the bugle! But I did mention the scout master bit, jokingly, and I ended up "okay, you're in charge of that flight." There were three flights. A golden gloves boxer, a guy who had been a manager of a drug store in Culver City, was in our group. When they were out of the ROTC college boys, they were into this next group of guys to people who had been making a living. So anyway, Jim Stevens, and then we had one ROTC boy from Oregon State, Dick Mellhoff. He was made Cadet Commander. There wasn't anybody in charge of us. There was once a week, like a circuit rider. Captain Hamilton or Hathaway, once a week he came through Tempe. They had an office and they had some NCO's there. They didn't have any plans, they didn't know what to do with us. They didn't have any technical manuals or any of that stuff.

Dick: This is the second session with John Steiger. It's the 21st of March, 2002. My name is Dick Nelson. John, we had talked last week going up to World War II and your growing up years. I'd like to go back, if you could, and fill in a little bit of your knowledge of your mom's family, the Marrons, when they came and what they did. I know they are still in Oceanside and Carlsbad. So, could you fill us in a little bit about that?

John: Well, I'll try. My mother was the daughter of Juan Maria Marron and Lorenza Serrano. Juan Maria Marron, her father, was the grandson of Juan Maria Marron, the grantee of the Agua Hedionda Rancho, which was a 13,000 acre land grant that took in most of Carlsbad and the edge of Oceanside and some of Vista, and probably some of San Marcos. Agua Hedionda was Spanish for "stinking waters". They named it when Portola and his trek came through here in 1769. They couldn't go along the ocean because of all these sloughs. The sloughs had a little bit of water and when they got stagnant, they stunk. They referred to it as the "stinking waters" Agua Hedionda. Anyway, taking my grandfather, Juan Maria Marron and his wife, Lorenza Serrano. Lorenza Serrano was from the Pauma land grant, which was up by Pala. And it, too, was a large 13,000 acre grant, which apparently in those days, the governing people who oversaw the grants did give consideration "well, if we put a colonizing family on there, we've got to give them enough to survive" so that they could run some cattle, that was the main thing that you could do, really. Maybe a little dry land farming. So taking the grandfather Marron on the Agua Hedionda, he was raised in an adobe residence which was across the street over here from the Automobile Club building [Vista Way]. Where the Automobile Club building is now there was another adobe residence that my grandfather built when he got married, I guess it was around that time. Then he and Lorenza Serrano moved in and raised their family there. At the time my mother was born they were working on the house so she was born in a frame farmhouse, a little west, actually where the El Camino Country Club, clubhouse is, on that knoll. There was a house there and they were living there at the time. I used to take my mother to dinner once in a while. She was getting older and I'd take her out to the El Camino Country Club and then I would introduce her to people and I would say "you know, my mother was born under the bar here." And of course, she'd go "Oh!" But of course, she expected sons to do things like that, I guess, and wasn't surprised. My grandfather Marron had two sons and four daughters. They did the best they could. They had dry land farming and some cows, and chickens and they survived. They had about 100 acres on this side of Vista Way and about 180 acres on the other side. Vista Way split their property, went through the middle, or along the high side. Later on when the freeway was put in, it went along the same area. One swatch was 13 acres of land for the roadway and it went up where it was high, that's the better land. My grandfather's grandfather was a Spanish sea captain and when he got to San Diego, he liked San Diego so he stayed there. He became a part of the *politicos* that ran the city, the trustees of the city. At one time he was the *alcalde*, which is the mayor. Juan Maria Osuna was, I believe, the first *alcalde*, the first mayor. Juan Maria Marron, my grandfather's grandfather, married an Osuna. I don't know if it was a sister of the mayor or a daughter. I never have figured that out. But the Osunas got into the Marron family way back when. Later on down the line, there were inter-marriages. The ranchos were like little settlements, really, which gradually grew into towns and cities. Jumping over to my grandmother's deal up in the Pauma land grant--Serrano was a soldier with Governor Portola, who was the first Spanish governor of California.

Dick: Who came in with Father Serra.

John: Yes. They were the same team, the Spanish colonials. They dropped off a priest where they were going to get a mission going and dropped off some soldiers to protect them and then they had

some colonials who they encouraged to look around and settle there. That was kind of the program as they went up the coast by land. Part of the Portola trek went by sea, they sailed up the coast to Monterey and established their capital up in Monterey. A lot of people don't realize this, because there's so much bologna, a lot of Mexican propaganda--

Dick: By revisionists, you mean? Or just bologna!

John: Bologna! They're trying to influence somebody. Tragically, today, they're trying to influence a lot these poor uneducated Mexican workers and they tell them "this is your land, this was taken away from you" well it was taken away from the Spanish by the Mexicans. The Spanish flag was here over 300 years. For less than 30 years the Mexican flag flew here. They have really rewritten history.

Dick: They don't realize the land was taken as a result of the Mexican war, plus the United States paid \$15 million at that time. So it was paid for, which is unusual, under war time conditions, in which a victor takes the land and then pays for it. The \$15 million was five times what the U.S. paid for the Louisiana purchase.

John: A lot of the Mexicans were really Spanish at heart and not loyal to the Mexican government. The colonial ranchers and farmers that got hit when the San Luis Rey Mission got hit, the Mexicans came in and kicked the padres out of the Mission and it began to deteriorate. It was in ruins for years. The farmers began to worry, 'we better start kissing the fanny of this new government or we're they're going to get us.' I remember my grandmother telling me one time that they were going to church out at the Mission and they were accosted by some of the Mexican loyalists. They threatened them and my grandfather outlasted them in the threat. He and his family were going to church and he said, "well, we're going to church, we'll talk to you later." But they were in a threatening mood and stopped them and the poor people didn't have much anyway. They'd have a cow or some chickens and if they could steal it, they'd do it. Just like the stole the tile off the old Mission and built themselves a little hovel some place and put the tile on it.

Dick: But what I have read of the Californios, at the time of the war, there was a little resistance put up but basically they were pretty unhappy with the Mexican government and were fairly happy with the dealings they had with the Americans and weren't unhappy that the Americans had won the war.

John: As I understood, they were secretly looking forward to Americans being strong enough to stay here, so that they wouldn't leave them hanging out to dry.

Dick: These activists were talking to a friend of mine recently and telling them about why there should be problems at the border because under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago they were given free access across the border. So I went back and looked at the border, there's no free access. You had a year to make your determination as to whether you wanted to be a citizen of Mexico or a citizen of the U.S. and if you wanted to be a citizen of the U.S. and you're on the Mexican side, then you moved. If you wanted to be a citizen of Mexico and you're on the U.S. side, you move, but the Americans paid you. Probably not as much as any owner of any property thinks he or she should get, but ...

John: That's very interesting. My father's family, when they came to Germany to Pennsylvania and then to California, they came and they were in the Pala area. My dad went to school in Pala and his

Interview with John Steiger, 2nd Session, March 21, 2002

sisters and brothers. They were up at the end of the San Luis Rey Valley. They never mentioned the Serrano's, they're all gone by now. One of my sisters was a wheel with the telephone company and she used to give talks and she gave a talk one time up in Pala. She was sitting with some of the Pala leaders and they got to "Steiger." "Well, we had some Steigers, there was a family here." They got the connection. But the Serrano's, we never bumped into them very much.

Dick: I was going to ask, are there any Serrano descendants around?

John: Yes, there are, but I don't know. Most of the Serrano's ended up in Orange County. They seemed to take the road from Pala, the Ortega Highway loops around and hits in by Capistrano. At one time, the big King of the Missions, you know where it was going to be? They had selected Pala. But the poor guys who had to traverse from San Diego to Capistrano, they said, "no." They'd go from San Diego to Capistrano and they needed a mission half way. If they used the one from Pala, that's a hell of a long way out of the way to go to Pala to rest, so why do it? That's why the located San Luis Rey.

Dick: One part of the Marron family that's doing the sand operation. They're still active, I guess.

John: No, they're no longer active in that. In fact, their mother just passed away, Caroline Marron. Four Romo sisters married four Marron brothers. You can imagine the offspring, they all looked like and it was really very confusing. The four Marron brothers were cousins of my mother. I remember as a little kid going over to one of the Marron residences. This used to be called Marron canyon, where Vista Way runs up. That was on this edge of land grant up the lagoon, that was Marron canyon and there were several Marron families that lived in the canyon. It was little valley, really. The El Salto, the falls, that the people refer to once in awhile, up Vista Way in Marron Canyon, they used to refer to that. There was a family, a Romo family, lived near the falls and a Marron family lived there. When they got married, it was really interlocking with the two families. I remember one of the Romo's lived down here at the corner of El Camino Real and the railroad track, kind of catty-corner from the fire station, but not at Oceanside Boulevard, but the railroad tracks. There's an olive tree that's still there. In fact, the city just bought some land near there for open space and they should have acquired that old Romo home site because the pad is still there. I remember as a kid we used to stop by there. My grandfather used to come into town, Oceanside, and we lived at Ditmar and Minnesota. He'd come in on his horse and buggy and I'd get to ride back, you know, take the little grandson out to his house, where the Auto Club is. I remember it was a little one horse buggy, like a pick up truck, it had a little truck bed in the back of the seats, and I'd sit there. It was small and it would cramp my legs and my legs would fall asleep and I'd have to be careful when I'd get up. From Ditmar, he'd head south and down into this Loma Alta, which was white sand. It wasn't salt, although at one time they used to think it was salt, but it was silica sand that had washed down there. He'd run his buggy up the middle of the draw and then he'd stop by there and say hello and then he'd go over this hill, where we live now, and into the Buenavista area, where their home was. He'd go over and we'd go up the draw again. El Camino Real crawled all over. They'd find the easiest way to get over the hill. It wasn't a freeway or anything like that, it was a trail.

Dick: Are there any Romo's still around?

John: Yes. I went to Caroline Marron's funeral out at the old San Luis Rey Mission and there was a lady there. I was curious, I didn't recognize anybody. You know how funerals are like a reunion, so I was inquiring of some of the people I knew. I said, "Now, who's that?" They said, "Well, she

Interview with John Steiger, 2nd Session, March 21, 2002

was a Romo girl [Edna] who married a fellow by the name of Handley and then they moved to Ramona." I said, "Is that right?" Well, when I was an altar boy at St. Mary's in Oceanside, there was this big wedding and I remember I was an altar boy at their wedding. So I told her, I introduced myself. We're distant relatives, the cousin, cousin, cousin thing.

Dick: Why don't you fill in about your scout mastering, apparently you became a boy scout at some point.

John: No, I never could afford to be a boy scout.

Dick: Well then how did you get into scouting?

John: They needed a boy scout leader. St. Mary's church sponsored a new troop, troop 38. We were co-scout masters. The Army Engineers had moved into Oceanside before Pearl Harbor and they had taken over the building which was later converted to the USO. It had been the magnificent Borden's Department Store. Borden built a department store that was at least 100 x 100 in size with a full basement, a main deck, a mezzanine and a top floor. He went broke during the big Depression. He had moved from Second Street, which is now Mission Avenue. He was a hard worker, Charlie Borden, had a big family. He moved over and he built that new store. I think Cave Coutts had loaned him money on it and I think maybe Cave Coutts ended up owning the building. The city then rented the building, part of it. They rented the upstairs and they had their city hall meetings there and the library. There was no elevator in the building. I remember. I delivered the Saturday Evening Post to the City Hall to the third floor and there was Mr. Landes, the city clerk. During the Depression they got money from the WPA or the Public Works Administration and built the building which is now the Oceanside Museum of Art. Before they put the city hall there, it was a park and a planned civic center. They had a big ball field there and they had lights on it for night ball. It was a neat, handy ball field. Not baseball, but softball. So anyway, the church needed scout masters. Well, the Army Corps of Engineers, 29th Engineers, took over the building. There was a 2nd Lieutenant by the name of John Minahan and John Minahan was a West Pointer. In fact, they had a lot of West Pointers in that engineering outfit. In fact, several of them became three star generals as time went on. I lost track of John Minahan. The combat engineers, that was a tough life and I often wonder. I worked in the bank when he came to town. I remember on vacations we'd go together to Yosemite. He was an aggressive guy, I admired him. We were about the same age.

Dick: So you were in your early twenties?

John: In 1940 I was twenty. Well, anyway, so Father Ryan at St. Mary's, we'd go over to the parish house in the evening. In those days, when Father Ryan came to Oceanside, there was no house, and so they had made a little apartment out of the back end of the church. So we would visit there and have a drink. He was a good buddy. All of a sudden one time, he said, "I need you two fellows to be scout master." He figured one of us wouldn't do it by ourselves. We did it and we had a very good troop. We were the new troop on the block. The other troop was a very fine troop. I don't think they had too many of the Catholic boys and I think that's why Father Ryan wanted to get a troop going because he wanted to keep these kids busy. So we became very competitive. Father Ryan really recruited for us. We had these bright kids. Of course, Minahan, they were fascinated with a lieutenant, a West Pointer. But he wasn't with us long. He soon transferred. It was getting that time and they transferred him to Fort Belwar. So there I was. So then I got a good scout master. I got one of the fathers of the Williams boy, Carl Williams. Carl Williams had a floor covering deal. So he volunteered to be assistant. So when I went into the service, he inherited the troop.

Dick: Do you remember how many kids there were?

John: I can give you a pretty good count. Some of these boys, well one of them was Bob Frazee, who later became an Assemblyman in Sacramento.

Dick: What were the ages of the boys?

John: They had to be twelve. I think the oldest might have been 15. Harold Carpenter, who became a very fine citizen, he's gone now. He was one of these thinkers and doers. Then we had a kid who was built like a rhinoceros, a Mexican boy. He was really an example of what Society can provide an environment that's a sad environment for some of the people in it. He was a Mexican boy and he lived in a house, this was before the freeway was put in, there was a canyon called "Lawrence Canyon" a big canyon that went through the town. The freeway follows it up as it goes out from San Luis Rey Bridge and swings around back in back of the school. Down and across the street from Lawrence Canyon was the Mexican section, Posole Town. They didn't have any sewer, they just had hovels.

Dick: Where was that located?

John: You'd go out Mission Avenue to get to it and as you crossed the canyon, you're going by the school, the high school. The high school had filled in some of the canyon as it went through. They were kind of at the head of the canyon, you might say, and they reclaimed I would say, from Mission Avenue, in about a block. Where they're building that new building on the high school now, that three story science building, that would have been on the edge of the canyon, on the west edge. Posole Town, well's that where we had a scout named Pete Losa. Pete Losa, as I say, he was built like a rhinoceros, he was a nice kid, but he hadn't had any pressure to get an education or anything. His parents were thrilled that he was in the scout troop, I mean thrilled. They lived on the other side of the canyon in a little hut with no electricity, no running water. This little kid was raised there. He was really treated royally. Father Ryan got a hold of him and started trying to educate him. It was a little too late. He was a big handsome kid. He was the biggest boy in our troop. I had these other fellows in our troop that were smarter. Harold Carpenter was a smart guy. This other fellow, Johnson, who got some National Safety Award for something, I forgot, and Tommy Weese, who's dad was in the water department. Harold Carpenter's brothers like Ernie, all these guys were smart kids.

Dick: I recently interviewed Ernie.

John: Is that right? Well, Ernie was raised by his grandmother, I think. His mother had too much to do, so he lived over with grandma. I forget, they had a nickname for her. They lived over on Tremont Street and Fifth, I think.

Dick: What happened to the Mexican boy? Did he stay in town?

John: Well, he was a good boy while we had him in the troop. I think we had about two dozen boys when they were all there. We'd have competitions with other troops, tug-of-wars and field events.

Dick: Other troops within Oceanside and Carlsbad?

John: Yes. They had a troop in Carlsbad, if I'm not mistaken. Our guys, the smart kids would make a team and the guy who was pulling that rope on the tug-of-war was Pete. They learned an awful lot. Unfortunately, when the war came along, I lost track of them. Father Ryan went in the service. He was a chaplain in the Air Corps. We found out later on that poor Pete, there was nothing for him to do. Hell, he was as big as these young marines, and so he'd go downtown and he'd buy booze for them and he got into a lot of bad habits, fights, and became an alcoholic. When I came back from the service, I'd get phone calls at night and he was in jail. He wanted out so I'd talk to the sergeant on duty and say, "Tell me what's going on?" He said, "You don't know this, you've been gone, but he's an alcoholic now and he gets in fights. It's sad." I said, "Tell him I just can't get down there tonight, but I'll be down there in the morning." The guy said, "Well, we'll let him out in the morning." Then he'd come by and he wanted money. I'd give me a buck or two until I found out what he was doing with it, he'd go buy wine with it. So I finally said, "I can't do it. Not only will you get in trouble, but I can get in trouble." "Oh, no," he pleaded. "No, no, I wouldn't get you in trouble." Anyway, he got into a fight one night and was stabbed to death. It was just a waste.

Dick: He never went into the service?

John: No, I don't think he could have passed the test.

Dick: Were associated with the scouts until you went into the service?

John: Yes.

Dick: And what about the 20/30 club, you mentioned that in passing?

John: Well, we were the 20/30 club. Somebody decided that Oceanside needed one. The guy was Al Lang, from Coronado, if I'm not mistaken. I've got a program here of a our presentation on the charter night. That was on July 26, 1941.

Dick: You were a charter member.

John: Yes.

Dick: So you were ringing up your accomplishments in those days, you were a scoutmaster, you were a charter member of the 20/30 club.

John: Oh, yes. I was chairman of the Charter Night Committee, I just noticed that on here. The vice-president was Dean Green, who was one of the coaches at the high school. Carl Maier was secretary and he worked, if I'm not mistaken, for the city recreation. A guy by the name of James Sharp, if I'm not mistaken, he was involved with the Master's Automotive Supply, Bob Sharp, who's passed away. Sergeant in Arms was Johnnie Domene. Johnnie Domene was head of the vegetable department at Van's Market. That was a big market downtown that they put in next to the Palomar Theater.

Dick: Where was that located?

John: That would have been the corner of Third and the 101. There was a vacant lot. He had on

Interview with John Steiger, 2nd Session, March 21, 2002

the corner, but people parked there to go to the market. As I recollect, it wasn't a paved parking lot. It was called Van's Market and Johnnie Domene had the vegetables. Johnnie Domene was a boxer, nice guy. Ken Brown was the director, I'm trying to remember what Ken Brown did. Clingon Smith and Hal Hyta, seems to me he sold cars. Jack Holbrook, lost track of him. Herb Linman, he went into the service and after the service he went to work for Elmer Glaser at Elm's. He was there until Elm's closed down. It was a career for him. Max Glaser was Elm Glaser's little brother. Eddie Hubbard was half brother to Johnnie Domene, if I'm not mistaken, a handsome guy. He went into education and I guess he was a teacher here at the time. I remember after the war he was up near Monterey. Roger Hoffman worked with me in the bank. I remember he was the first fellow I ever bumped into who had graduated from Boys' Town, Father Flanigan. He was a member of the 20/30. Don Wedeking, the Wedeking family had a bakery. We had the Southern California Governor, a guy by the name of Joe Zarubika and the presentation of the charter was Al Lang, Deputy Lt. Governor of the 20/30 Club and he was from Coronado. He just recently passed away, I read. But he was quite a leader in Coronado for years.

Dick: Was he the one who came down and got a hold of the core group?

John: Yes.

Dick: And you were in the bank at the time?

John: Yes. Catty-corner from us was the Mission Drug, and they had a restaurant counter, lunches and what have you. Lee Vick was our first president. Lee Vick was probably who Al Lang contacted when he came to town, wanting to get it started. We had roast potato, prime rib of beef, new spring peas, butterscotch sundae with toasted almonds. We had mix garden salad, chilled fruit cocktail with melon balls.

Dick: How long did you stay with 20/30?

John: I was with them until I went into the service.

Dick: Just a couple of years, roughly.

John: It wasn't very long. We were beginning to have military fellows coming into it. San Diego people, the Coronado guys, they had some fliers. I remember they were talking about one of their members who was a flier and he didn't come out of a dive. They guys were discussing it that they maybe he didn't want to. He had a romance problem, but he was just a young kid who was a Marine flier. I remember that. We were at the Carlsbad Hotel. The Carlsbad Hotel was like the Santa Barbara.

Dick: It used to be the Biltmore?

John: That's right. That's still there. It's now a Marriott, I think. We stopped there on our honeymoon, as a matter of fact on our way to San Francisco. Through the years, it's been kind of a watering hole, you know how you traditionally pull and take a look.

Dick: Where was the hotel located in Carlsbad?

John: They tried to duplicate it with that retirement home. It was across from the well. It ran from

the Highway to the ocean. They had a beautiful yard and a type of eucalyptus tree that had drooping leaves, kind of a willowy type. They used to call it, they created a romance about that tree and they'd tell people about it, the tree was called the weeping eucalyptus. "You've got to see the weeping eucalyptus at the gardens of the Carlsbad Hotel." So people would go and then they'd have a little deal about a romance and the young man had to go to sea, and he went off in a sailing ship, and she waited and all of sudden, not only was she weeping, but the tree was weeping. But that was the story. Remember these first shows on TV where they had a wedding? They honeymooned at the Carlsbad Hotel with the weeping eucalyptus tree.

Dick: What do you remember about December 7, 1941?

John: Well, December 7, 1941, in the meantime, they were talking about getting ready for things so we had what they called the air warning service. Our people were anticipating something, but we were training, we didn't have any idea of anything. But that particular day, I had a girlfriend up in Los Angeles, Mary Kerns. Her parents were related to the Royalty of Norway or Sweden and they had a place on the bluff by the Carlsbad Hotel in Carlsbad. She was a cute, little red-headed gal. So she had invited me up L.A. to some event, so I was there. I had gone to mass at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Beverley Hills and I remember coming out of Mass about 11 o'clock in the morning, and "Extra, Extra". In those days they had paperboys, "Pearl Harbor Bombed by Japs!" "Japs Bomb Pearl Harbor!" Pearl Harbor? Where in the hell is Pearl Harbor? We went to a ball game. Pearl Harbor is bombed, so what, you know, in a sense. But then we started getting the radio reports. Most of it was disorganized. Then they started saying about the reservists were going back to duty and heading back to their ships. A lot of the active duty people were on holiday. I finish the day up there visiting and caught the Streamliner back to Oceanside. And on the Streamliner I bumped into a vice-president of the Bank of America, one of the big shots. His name was Purdy. He was nice enough to chat with a young kid, really, who worked for the Bank of America, although I had been with them several years. Got to talking to him and he said, "Well, you know, we're not surprised at this. You are aware that Convair is in San Diego and they've been expanding and expanding and we've been financing their expansion. We've been involved in it." At least, I felt that there was some planning going on. So then we got home then for sure we were on duty on top of the school building every night.

Dick: What was the purpose? Were you aircraft spotters?

John: Yes, air warning service. We had a pattern of answering a number, you did that first, the number of aircraft, then the other comment had to do with the type and then the direction. You phoned it in immediately so there was somebody plotting someplace. We couldn't see them very well, because we had the night duty. The day duty was probably just as hard.

Dick: Did you call in everything that came over?

John: Oh, yes. Boats off shore. I remember we called in before dawn, we were making out something. We were standing on top of the high school building and you could see a hell of a ways and looking out at the ocean, pretty soon, you'd think you were imagining something. We were paired, so you'd ask your buddy, "can you see anything out there?" So we reported a shadow going up the coast. It was just before light. Fifteen minutes later well there was a P-38 from March Field, come looking. We often wondered. Later on we found out that the Japanese submarines were all over here. So anyway, I did that. That was terrible. You'd go to work and be sleepy.

Dick: What were your shifts?

John: My guess is probably six hours, or something like that.

Dick: How many outposts were there?

John: I don't know. The only one we were on is the one on top of the high school. So my guess is we were the only one here and there was probably another one on some other high spot. But I think we were the only one in Oceanside.

Dick: How did you get recruited for that?

John: Maybe from being a scout master, I don't know.

Dick: You weren't uniformed or anything.

John: No uniform, no.

Dick: So your report went into some center somewhere.

John: Yes. Our line was a direct line, you just picked it up and identified our code number, whatever it was.

Dick: How long did you do that?

John: I had to quit when I started working ... when the war came along and I was working at the Bank of America, we were the only bank in the area. I knew the bank balances of everyone in town, and Carlsbad and Vista. We had most of the customers. The constructors had started building Camp Pendleton. Their controller for Haddock Engineers Limited was a man by the name of Lewis. I think it was Bill Lewis. He lived down on South Pacific Street. I got to know him. He'd stop by and have a drink with Father Ryan. So did the contractors. In fact, they gave Father Ryan an organ for his church. He was thrilled to death, living through the Depression. It was dramatic. Bill Lewis would stop by there after work and I'd stop by after the bank, it was right handy. In fact, I used to deposit their money for them, the church's money, count it and deposit. I got to know him pretty well. He knew that I worked for the bank and had been there since 1937. One day he came to my teller's window on bank business. When he came in, he had all kinds of accounts, so it was a good half hour visit processing his stuff. I told him, "My buddy and I have decided were going into the Army Air Corps. They've accepted us, but they're not going to call us for five months." He looked at me and leaned over quietly and says, "Why don't you come to work for us. We'll pay you more in a week than the bank will pay in a month." So that was my introduction into going to work for the base. When I went to work for the base, I had to be early in the morning and I couldn't get away with being sleepy out there as I could with the bank.

Dick: So you had to give up your air warning service.

John: Yes, right.

Dick: Do you remember who was working with you in air warning?

Interview with John Steiger, 2nd Session, March 21, 2002

John: One fellow had Hagar's nursery. Hagar was up there.

Dick: Where was Hagar's Nursery at?

John: Down on South Hill Street, down below Wisconsin street a couple of blocks. He also was a teacher at the High School. I am trying to remember, I don't remember the other fellows. But I do remember him. He was always "chatty Kathy" and that was nice at night to have someone talking.

Dick: You were pretty much, along with your mom, the sole support of your brother and sisters.

John: Primarily I was.

Dick: What was her thoughts about you going into the service?

John: She just accepted and said, "be careful." I'm sure she did her worrying but she was a quiet person. The oldest of my sisters got a job with Pacific Telephone. She was with them until she retired. She was an operator and eventually chief operator.

Dick: I don't recall that we got the names of your siblings. Can we go over those?

John: I had three younger sisters and a younger brother, a baby brother, we called him. The oldest girl is Doris and Doris graduated from the Oceanside Carlsbad College and she was the Pacific Telephone for years. The middle sister, we called her our "smart sister", she was the first one to get a college degree. She graduated from the local Oceanside Carlsbad College.

Dick: What was her name?

John: Helen. Helen went into education. She graduated from UCLA and later on she got her Master's at Stanford. She got into teaching. After Stanford, the schools encouraged their teachers to go after more degrees. So every summer she'd study for her doctorate, with her tongue in cheek, because she was short in stature and she figured she had the chance of a snowball in ---- as to get a doctorate and use a doctorate in education. She had an experience when she first started teaching. She taught in the Vista High School District and the principal didn't back her up. She was small, anyway, and so she couldn't use "you better straighten up or you're going down the hall." They didn't care about going down the hall. But she studied for her doctorate in Spain, in Mexico and South America. Every summer she was off studying for her doctorate. Which I thought that was pretty clever. She had her Master's and that was pretty darn good.

Dick: Did those two sisters marry?

John: The oldest one did, Doris. Doris married Bob Clarke. They live here in Oceanside, but their marriage hit the fan, it didn't last. The third sister we called her "Toddy". Alice Lorraine Steiger. She was the personality girl of the sisters. She graduated from Oceanside Carlsbad college. She was so darn attractive that she unfortunately got married too soon, as far as I was concerned. But then that's the brother's attitude. She had a couple of little boys. She was married to Max Tinch. Max Tinch, I don't think he had finished high school. He went to work. He worked at an auto body shop, a macho type guy. At the end of the war, when I got back from the service, I went back to school when I got the chance. When I went back to school, he decided that he would, too. He graduated from Cal-Poly in Pomona. He became a teacher and a principal. He's retired. I think

Interview with John Steiger, 2nd Session, March 21, 2002

they were married ten or fifteen years. He got to be the rooster on campus and some of the hens kept chasing him and he was weak.

Dick: What about your baby brother?

John: He graduated from the local Oceanside Carlsbad College and then he graduated from the University of California, Davis. He went in the service. He was in the Navy, aboard a carrier on the weather deck, up in the crow's nest area. He was in the Korean war on several ships. He's always been the little brother. He's retired. After he graduated from the University of California-Davis, he went into agriculture and ran a packing house for pears up in Lake County. He did that for a long time. He was married a gal from Davis. They had four children. I guess about the time the oldest one was a senior in high school, we got a phone call that his wife had just come back home from a horse show with another daughter and handed him the stirrups and fell over dead. They had unloaded the horse from the wagon and she had an aneurism and died. It was just one of those things. He remarried a little sister of a good friend. I think he thought the little sister was going to be like his good friend. She was a widow and apparently she hit him all the time. He couldn't hit her and you could just see the thing deteriorating.

Dick: Is he still around?

John: Yes, he's over in Desert Hot Springs.

Dick: What was his name?

John: He was named Robert Reid Steiger. Robert Reid was the name of Doctor Reid who delivered about every kid in Oceanside in those days. But he didn't deliver Bobby. Dr. Reid was out of town, I guess, so my mother had Dr. Crandall deliver Bob.

Dick: So the one kid he doesn't deliver, he gets named for!

John: Yes.

Dick: Well, what about your love life. Did you get married?

John: I couldn't afford it. I waited until I was 33 years of age.

Dick: So you got back from the service, where were you discharged?

John: I was assistant base operations officer at Carlsbad Army Air Base when the war ended.

Dick: Where was that?

John: At Carlsbad, New Mexico.

Dick: The other Carlsbad!

John: I'm glad you mentioned that. It's important in this area! This was out, the Carlsbad Caverns were a tourist spot at one time. The operations building for the landing strip at Carlsbad was a stucco building and that's where they chartered flights for people going to the Caverns. The reason

I mention that, our base was a bunch of tar paper buildings. They were all built off the ground on piers and they had tar paper. In the middle of all this, at the air strip was this nice, stucco, attractive building. That was the operations office. When the war ended, I was the assistant base operations officer and I did that for about a year. Before that I used to fly training missions and really enjoyed the night flying.

Dick: What did you fly in?

John: Beechcraft twin engine, AT-11. We flew some that didn't have the bomb nose. They were classier, weren't as rugged. Bob Shafer was in combat while I was still in basic flight training. Trying to make sure I didn't wash out. To have that hanging over your head, "they're going to wash you out." It was a great experience. I actually feel that they should have sent us a bill for the experience! The G.I. Bill afterwards. My lord, I couldn't have gone to a University without the G.I. Bill. I couldn't have afforded it.

Dick: I did the same thing out of Korea. I had three brothers in World War II.

John: You were in my brother's class. He missed World War II but he was in the Korean.

Dick: I turned 18, got out of high school. That was in 1950 and in 1951 I was in the Army. I was going to be drafted. My brothers were in World War II and I still was of the generation like you, that thought we needed to pay dues to Club America. Fewer people think that all the time, I think.

John: I agree with you.

Dick: Were you discharged early?

John: Being Assistant Base Operations Officer, I put myself on a flight. We had one B-25 on our field. That was our biggest aircraft. We were flying a lot of the heavy brass on our field. They were taking flights, so I watched what they did so I just scheduled myself a flight to San Bernardino, which wasn't very far, but that's where I got out. But these fellows, they were flying guys back East in that B-25. My buddy, Jim Stevens, who's gone now, he was a great guy.

Dick: When did you get discharged then?

John: I went on terminal leave. That meant you were out but you still had leave coming, that was your last leave. So at the end of that your pay stopped. I signed up October 5, 1942 and I signed out in November of 1945. I still had dependents and the Air Corps, I guess it was costing them more because we were fliers, cut the budget and get us out.

Dick: Then you came back to Oceanside, to the family home?

John: Yes, I was going to make money. I figured out that the people hadn't been able to buy a car. So I thought I'd check my connections and sell cars. So I went down to Dave Rorick of Rorick Buick. It was called Rorick and Larsen, then. Dave Rorick and Arne Larsen. I knew both of them. The only problem was there was going to be a strike and right shortly thereafter General Motors was on strike for I don't know how long. I sold 54 Buicks and only one came in. So I kept that one as my car, and I had that for quite a while. A man by the name of Leo Mies had a real fine real estate operation going in Oceanside and he was shorthanded. Everybody was still short handed. I guess there was conversation about how I sold a lot of cars and hadn't delivered any, Leo asked

Dave "is it okay if I talked to Johnny about real estate?" "Oh, fine." Dave was always gallant, anyway. I talked to Leo and went to work selling real estate. I guess it was in 1946. A press clipping says, "Joins Firm of Leo Miess. Leo Miess a prominent realtor of Oceanside and Northern San Diego County for the last two years announced today the association of John Steiger with his firm. Steiger will work as a real estate salesman in Oceanside and the Northern San Diego County area. John is the son of Mrs. John P. Steiger and the late John P. Steiger and was born and raised in Oceanside, attending local schools and graduating in the local high school in 1937. He attended the Oceanside Carlsbad Junior College and Arizona State." The college training detachment, I was there for a few months. "He had been employed by the Bank of America until the war when he enlisted in the Army as a buck private. He was later accepted for aviation cadet training, receiving his pilot wings and commission as a lieutenant in March of 1944. He later served as a pilot instructor of Chinese and American aviation cadets and as a base operations officer in the Army Air Forces training command. Steiger is now the aggressive young president of the Oceanside Carlsbad Junior Chamber of Commerce, a member of the board of directors of the American Red Cross and was chairman of the highly successfully 1946 Red Cross Fund Campaign."

Dick: Now you have to tell us about those things. How did you get in the chamber?

John: Well, I had been in the Chamber before the war. I was with the Bank and they assigned me to the Chamber of Commerce, which was a great experience. I was put on their board of directors, right quickly, I guess. I was on the board when the Marines landed at Pendleton. The commanding general of the base, General Fegan, he came into the board meeting and told us that "we're concerned and we want you all to know that we are concerned overcrowding the facilities and we intend to feed our people before they leave the base at night so they don't come in overcrowd your restaurants." I got to know General Fegan and I knew him until he died. He retired here in the area. In fact, he came to the charter night for our Junior Chamber of Commerce. In the crowd there's a picture of the General sitting there. He had a son who was a lieutenant when I was, who later became a three star Marine Corps General, Joe Fegan, Jr.

Dick: What about the Red Cross drive?

John: We did very well. We had a lady, Mrs. Dana Blayney. She just loved the Red Cross and she carried her rank very well. They wore uniforms. When I was on the board of the Red Cross and General Fegan was on the board.

Dick: This is after you came back?

John: Yes. We would go to the meetings and they a limousines. They were hauling boys to the airport and L.A. and San Diego and volunteers would drive them. The expense of maintaining these cars, that wasn't donated. The General and I looked at each other and said, "this is far enough." It just broke her heart, but we eliminated the fleet of limos.

Dick: Who did they belong to?

John: The Red Cross.

Dick: They had purchased them?

John: Yes. One was a big Buick and one was a Cadillac. I was a member of Rotary International.

Interview with John Steiger, 2nd Session, March 21, 2002

They asked me, "how long have you been in Rotary?" Gee, I don't know. I think I went in right after I got out of the service so that would have been 1946. Then I got to thinking, you shouldn't say things without double checking because they recognized me for having fifty years service in Rotary. I was the member of the American Legion Post 146. I was vice commander in the Reserve Officers Association. I got involved in all this stuff. I was a Tiler at the Elks Lodge.

Dick: You joined the Elks after the war?

John: No, before. I had been in the Elks Drum and Bugle Corps. I was a member of Toastmasters and a director of Oceanside Chamber. I had plenty to do. At the Legion, all of sudden I'm the Vice Commander, well, I didn't have time to be the Commander. There were plenty of guys who wanted to be the commander. So if someone else could do it, I'd get out of the way.