



Robert James Crandall

U.S. Navy

Naval Armed Guard and DRE

World War II

Niles Public Library Veterans History Project Interview

18 August 2005 Niles, IL

Now Sailor Son Can Be Proud Of His Sailor Father's Rank

When Leo M. Crandall was inducted into the navy in September, his son Bob, a sailor with nearly two years of sea duty to his credit, gave him advice via V-mail to which he listened gravely—and now he is a credit to his son.

Nineteen-year old Bob was always a rather serious-minded boy and when home he even made certain that his father said his prayers and, in general, kept a careful watch over the family.

But Bob was particularly worried about his father's budding naval career and wrote: "I hope you like it. It will be tough at first but keep a clean record and everything will be o. k. Wish I could see you and give you some advice. Best of luck to you, Dad, and God bless you. Go in and win."

Father Crandall thought his son's advice pretty good and wrote back that he would follow it.

The going was tough for a man who reached his 38th birthday after only two weeks of boot training, but in advance of his coming home on leave next week, he has sent his wife, Beulah, a certificate which



ROBERT
CRANDALL

LEO M.
CRANDALL

... dad's a credit to his son.

gives him the rating of petty officer, first class.

Will Bob be proud of his father? The elder Crandall hasn't heard from him yet although he hastened to send him the glad news.

"He's a great kid," he commented, "and I certainly hope I catch up with him at sea or somewhere."

Father and son have swapped experiences right along and Bob has been urging his father to speak up

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Son Can Be Proud . .

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about all the experience he obtained in years of working as a molder and core maker at the A-B Stoves plant and as an inspector for Wilcox-Rich.

The elder Crandall, again following his son's advice, did disclose all this practical experience and he feels that the rating has resulted from doing as he was told. He expects to be assigned to a ship repair crew.

Bob has made at least three ocean crossings and because he is a signalman, is right up on the ship's bridge where there is plenty of action. Convoy trips to England were tricky, he reported when home on leave in August, and his ship, during one of the trips, was the first to sight a Nazi submarine pack when three days off the North American coast.

He is now stationed in England, which, he writes, has become a second home to him.

Waiting at home, at 224 Hussey, is Mrs. Crandall, Bob's stepmother. She is making preparations for her husband's leave next week and relaying news to Bob.

"Bob'll be happy and proud when he hears of his father's rating. And as for his advice, well, it's always been good and I guess this time was no exception."

Mrs. Crandall, who recently underwent an operation, expects to return to work shortly at the Veterans Administration facility, where she is a nurse.

Navy Signaller, 19, Tells Of Fights with Sub Packs

On continuous sea duty for the last 10 months during which time he made two trips to England and one to North Africa, Robert James Crandall, 19, son of Mr. and Mrs.



Leo Crandall, of 88 Avenue B, is spending part of his 15-day leave with his parents before returning to duty as a signaller in the signal corps of the naval reserve.

This is his first leave he has had since he came home last Decem-

ber on a one-day visit. He is a petty officer, third class.

On these three ocean trips, Robert saw action against enemy submarines and bombers. All of his trips have been made aboard a tanker, carrying gasoline abroad.

On his first trip to England, the convoy was attacked for five consecutive days by a pack of enemy submarines, he related Saturday in telling of his experiences. The tanker was able to avoid oncoming foredooms, only by changing its course frequently when the submarines were detected.

His ship, he said, was the first to sight the enemy submarine pack when it was three days off the North American coast.

"We began firing at it and those on the other ships thought we were crazy, but they thought different that night when the subs launched their attack on the convoy."

Robert said the Germans painted the periscopes while which made them difficult to see at night, even if the moon was shining. They could only be detected by the wake they made in traveling through the water. On one occasion, a submarine surfaced near the tanker, too close for the gunners to fire on it, so an attempt was made to ram it, but the ship missed.

He described his first trip to England as the worst one of the three. Upon reaching port, the tanker underwent three nightly attacks from enemy planes.

his post was on the ship's bridge. His duties consisted of handling all incoming and outgoing messages with visual signals, such as semaphore, blinkers and flags. Reading blinkers is like reading a newspaper, after you get used to it, he said.

While in England and North Africa, he was permitted to go ashore and saw considerable evidence of the damages caused by the war. The British people, he said, had to "take a lot" from enemy bombings. In some North African cities, it is still dangerous to be out after dark because of snipers, he said.

Robert was attending his senior year in high school at Montague when he quit at the end of the first semester to join the navy. However, he had sufficient credits to receive his diploma. He attended school through the ninth grade at Springfield school and was a 10th grade student at Lakeview high school.

Upon enlisting in the navy, he received his "boot training" at the Great Lakes Naval Training station, was at the University of Chicago for four months for training in a signal course and was sent to Los Angeles for advanced training. He was sent to New York City in October, 1942, for assignment to sea duty.

He said he found it strange to return home to find most of his friends now serving in the armed services in all parts of the world. Problems of the home front, including food and shoe rationing, also were interesting to him because he was out of contact with home while at sea.

fireworks display because of the anti-aircraft barrage, the falling bombs and flares," he stated.

On the second trip to England, the convoy also was attacked by enemy submarines. While returning to this country, the tanker was struck by another ship and for a time there was considerable excitement aboard, as the tanker was hit just behind its magazine, until it was discovered there were no serious damages.

Because of the route taken by the convoys, they experienced some extremely cold weather. Robert said that when on duty he wore clothing, including a face mask, in which no part of the body was exposed to the weather. Storms were common, one squall lasting for three days with waves breaking over the bow of the ship. The water froze, leaving the tanker coated with ice. Icebergs were seen frequently.

"You could always tell when you were within five miles of an iceberg by the change in temperature," he said.

Robert returned from his trip to North Africa about a week ago. In comparison to the other trips, this one was "like a pleasure cruise because of the good weather, except when we were attacked by submarines." This attack occurred about three days off the coast of Africa. He said he was not permitted to say if the convoys had suffered any losses on any of these three trips.

As a signaller aboard the tanker, he was part of the action for

Robert J Crandall
Veterans History Project Interview Transcript
Niles Public Library, August 18, 2005
Interviewer Kate Wolicki

003: INTRODUCTION

I always start out by saying a little piece

Okay

for the Library of Congress so they know. So, we start with the introduction. This interview is being conducted on August 18, 2005, at the Niles Public Library in Niles, Illinois. My name is Kate Wolicki. I am speaking with Robert James Crandall. Mr. Crandall was born on June 8th, 1924, in Battle Creek, Michigan, and now lives in Niles, Illinois. Mr. Crandall learned of the Veterans History Project when speaking to a librarian here at the Library. He has kindly consented to be interviewed for the Project. Here is his story.

So, you have a lovely, lovely, written out thing that you have, but I'll ask you questions

Fine

and if you don't like anything, you know, we won't put them in the transcript.

Okay. I'll give you-- do you want my serial number and all that stuff? I remember it like yesterday.

You remember it like, well, tell me it, if you remember it like yesterday!

6225228

How come you had to remember it?

Just drilled into me.

011: PAY: THE NAVY vs. THE MERCHANT MARINE

Did people ask?

Well, they used to ask because in the arrangement that I was in in NAG, we used to have to go, when we were paid, we went into various ports. We had a card, a pay card, and you had to give your service number. And then they would process that. They didn't have computers, but they'd hand you a check. That way, you would get your monthly pay, whatever amount.

So, did they only pay you when you were in port, then?

Yeah, yeah, there was a lot of times I'd be out-- when I was out in the Pacific for several months, I didn't get any pay at all because, well, there was no place to go, you know.

There was nothing to spend your money on, anyway.

Which brought up an interesting point because the difference between which-- I really honored the Merchant Marine-- they were good people, and we worked together although we were separate in the Navy unit. They were Merchant Marine. But, in that period of time, I remember I came back, I forget how long they were there, but I got like a couple of hundred dollars because I was gone for several months. And I got them all in singles because I wanted to have a big-- I remember the radioman who turned out to be a good friend of mine, was at my wedding when we came to Chicago, but he was a civilian, and they considered as an officer in the Merchant Marine. He collected eight thousand dollars.

Oh, my gosh. Just like today then, huh?

There was a big disparity and difference between the Merchant Marine, well, the thing of it is that the Navy went in to serve, not necessarily to earn money, but just goes to show you the difference. That's why we used to have all them-- pay cards. Wherever you went, if you needed any money, you had to go in to present that card to a specific location wherever you were at.

031: ENTERTAINMENT IN PORT AND AT SEA

So, did you have things to spend money on when you were ashore? Did you find stuff to spend money on?

Oh, yeah, sure, we'd go to bars, you know, went to bullfights out in Peru, and, you know, go to movies, see plays in New York. Where ever we were in port, yeah, we'd want to do things.

But when you were at sea was there anything to?

We gambled.

Yeah.

Shoot dice and play cards.

All nice wholesome activities.

But, well, I didn't lose a lot, because I didn't have a lot to bet with, but, I mean, we'd keep ourselves busy. Otherwise, in between your watches or when things were slow, we'd go crazy. You remember the film *Mister Roberts*?

It was quite a show. You ought to see that. That was during the War where the Navy was like the Armed Guard except that was the Navy guarding ships, doing such long hauls between the

islands and stuff. You'd go nuts. There was nothing else to do. Unless there was any action, I mean, you'd go crazy. So, guys would play cards. We did the same thing. We used to play pinochle, and bridge, and cribbage, and everything else you could think of. In fact, I used to spend hours up on the bridge with the Navy radioman then when we were going into Africa and those places. And, sure, we had the lookouts watching things, and I'd be up on the bridge, which was my post, and we'd pay cribbage, play chess.... We did a lot of things. Otherwise, you'd go nuts.

Also, I found on one ship I was on, they had another book on mathematics. So, I learned my own mathematics and so forth. I have since forgotten since I got out of the Navy and into the telephone company. But a lot of it helped me out even when I got in the telephone company. But I taught myself. Fortunately, that time on that trip, we had a good lieutenant junior grade who was interested in teaching and he would help me through the mathematics and stuff.

That's wonderful. Do you remember his name?

Yes, I do.

I always ask because I think, you know, if you remember somebody's name then they end up in the Library of Congress. How nice is that!

He was Polish, I remember that.

Well, there you go! Close enough. You know, those Polacks, they're everywhere!

The first captain I had on ship was Polish. Nice guy.

055: BEFORE ENLISTMENT

Did you see—now, you were from Battle Creek, so you were from a pretty big place in Michigan. Did you

I actually lived in Battle Creek and then my -- I was raised in Marshall, which was about ten miles outside of Battle Creek -- with my grandmother. My mother and father were divorced. My mother got remarried. That's how I happened to end up going up to Montague, because my mother had been remarried. And, so, I left Battle Creek to go up there.

So, then you were -- that's where you enlisted, right?

Right. I was a senior at high school at the time. And I wasn't setting the world on fire either, I don't think. But my stepfather was the superintendent of the Montague Casting Company which was a gray iron foundry up there. At that time, it was rather small, but, yet, for foundries, it was a pretty good size. He employed probably 150 to 200 people. But he was being transferred down to Tecumseh, Michigan, which was down near Adrian, from another bigger place. So, that was during just about the beginning of the year around December or January. But Montague was just a small burg of about 2000 people. Across the lake, on White Lake, was Whitehall. It was all

resort areas and stuff except for the foundry. That town was about 3200 at the time. But I didn't know a soul up there, because I had just moved--my folks had only been up there about a year and a half and I knew that if he was transferred, if I had to go down to Tecumseh and start school all over again, it was going to be a little difficult, because it was during midyear. So, as I said in my notes, we went to Muskegon, which was about twenty miles away, every once in a while on Sundays. You know, we'd save up our money working on the foundry and stuff. And two of my friends and I-- they had the car, we would drive down to Muskegon and go bowling. And there wasn't any bowling alleys in Montague. Nothing. Two gas stations, about fifteen saloons.

And you.

And me.

078: PEARL HARBOR DAY: "We were all young and hot-blooded"

We'd turned on the car radio coming home. That was December 7th and we heard that--we thought, oh, my God, can't believe it! But whoever the broadcaster was at that time was very, very specific and, of course, it was all over the radio at that time. Well, naturally, you know, we were all young and hot-blooded and all of that--so really upset about the whole thing. And that was shortly after Germany had sunk the battleship Hood and there was a lot of hard feelings. There was a lot of German people there, too. On both sides, nobody was really fighting, but there was just a lot of emotion. And, so, I knew I was going to be transferred and I had nobody to stay with and I thought, I don't want to leave at this point in time because--frankly, I was about a C student, which I could have been A, but I mean, I wasn't--so, in the meantime, I'm going to sign up. But, of course, my mother had a fit. You know, no way you are going to do it! Because I was seventeen, but I don't know why things were just not too good in the family for me. But the superintendent of the school and the principal, two men, very nice-- very nice people, and I was very active up there in social activities--

Oh, you were too busy to be studying, that was what it was.

Yeah. I was in plays and all that. Well, you had to make up your own, so I did all those things. And Mr. Early was the superintendent, nice guy, and his daughter was a friend of mine. We weren't boyfriend and girlfriend, but he realized my situation. And some of them were not too favorable to my lifestyle, what was going on there in the family, so they waited about three or four weeks and everybody was -- but, anyway, they realized that I was having some difficulty, so they said to me that if you'll take some examinations, we'll give you your diploma ahead of time. Well, fine. So, I don't remember taking the test, but I guess I did, because they said, well, if your mother will sign, you can go.

101: "Well, if your mother will sign, you can go." FEBRUARY, 1942

Well, as it happened -- unfortunately, as I said, I don't want to say too much about my stepfather who was kind of tough at that time -- and, so, my mother said, well, yes, you can go, because I talked her into it. I said, you know, what the heck, I can't-- this was going to disrupt my whole life, you know, where am I going to go, but of course, I had a little -- my sister, who was eleven

years younger than me and my brother -- it was my half-brother, yes. There was no problem there. But there was a problem with me. So, that was the place to go. So, I did. I signed up.

Now in the records, they got me down for sometime in March. I forget the exact dates on my discharge papers, but, actually, I had signed up sometime in February. I went to Muskegon, took the examinations, and all that, and interviewed. And then they put us, several of us, on a bus from Muskegon down to Detroit, which is kitty-corner all the way across the state. And when we got to Detroit was where we took the oath and signed up. But, somehow or other, that never got translated until I went to Great Lakes, which was three or four weeks later. That was important because it has to do with the length of time that I was actually in the Service because, actually, I wanted to get that stripe, you know.

Mmm hmm.

118: DETROIT

But, anyway, we got to Detroit. They put us up in like a class B hotel. There was about 25 or 30 of us finally gathering together from all over the state. And they had a little honky-tonk type of restaurant, and so forth, that we could go to. And they'd give us, a little chit, they'd call it, a little slip. And that way we could go -- we were half starved to death because they didn't really go overboard in trying to feed us. And we had absolutely no money, no nothing. I had this shirt that I had on all that time. We did have -- there was two to a room -- we did have a bathroom. So, I'd have to wash out my clothes

Oh, my goodness

myself and try to hang them up. It was rough. But, fortunately, the people in the community, because the people had all turned out in patriotism to help us, they brought a lot of food. The USO was just starting to really get involved. And they'd give us tickets to movies and stuff to occupy ourselves. But we kept thinking, God, we're starving to death! Wait until we get to Great Lakes. We heard that that's just like Taj Mahal. That's the place to be! Boy, what a false illusion that was! When we get to Great Lakes, and it was about in March, and it was mud and rain, they were building the barracks at that time. And, oh God, there was nothing but bulldozers and steamrollers and everything else running all over the place! And the mud was fierce because, you know, we had to keep spotless. But how could you keep spotless? Half the place wasn't even in sidewalks. And we had to walk through that mud and -- but that was an interesting thing. When we got there, as I pointed out in my notes, when we first arrived, we got there in the morning. They shipped us by train from Detroit to Great Lakes. I don't remember all the transfers that took place. That's a long time ago.

Yeah.

135: GREAT LAKES, MARCH 1942: "The first thing they did..."

But when we got to Great Lakes, the first thing they did was take us in a big gymnasium. And they had squares marked off with sticky tape, you know, like three, about three feet thirty-six by

seven, little squares for everybody. They said go pick one of those, take a number, and they gave us a box. They said, now, you've got to strip down everything, shoes, socks, no name. Everything goes in the box. And they gave you a pencil and on the box you've got to write your address where you want that stuff sent to. So, we're all standing around naked. So, we had to-- we'd all strip down. There was probably at least 75 or 80 of us by this time. And, so, then, the stuff went into the box. And I addressed it to my grandmother and grandfather's back in Battle Creek because I knew they would get it. Not that there was anything in there worth saving!

Not your shirt that you'd been wearing for quite some time.

I'd been wearing it for about a month. And that was hard. That was really hard because we had absolutely no money. We had no money whatsoever. If it hadn't been for the good people and supporting what was then the beginning of the USO in that area, we'd just—we'd have had nothing. But even then -- here we are stark naked. And then they run you through all these tests.

Naked.

Yeah. Oh, yeah, sure. By this time, it was about noon. So, they gave us a box lunch. So we're all standing around eating box lunch and naked as jay birds. And we're thinking, oh, my God, this is Navy... this is it!

So, after we ate the box lunch, of course, they're giving you tests. And they decided we had to have a blood test. Now, I'd never, outside maybe for measles or something, I'd never seen anything like that. So, they lined us all up in the hall. And they had a big curtain across the hall. And when they got just about to my place, they pulled the curtain back and here was the corpsman standing there, you know, and he had the biggest, bluntest needle for drawing blood. And he was blood all over. I thought, oh my God, here I got my first Purple Heart right there! That was it! And I thought, my God, guys were fainting like just dropping down! I finally hung on. But I was pretty green.

But even that-- and after we got through with all that, we had to take a shower. And in the shower, it was so hot. The floor of that shower was right over where they must have had the furnaces or something. Oh, my God, you could hardly stand it, you know!

So after we got through with the shower, they took us in for the clothing allotment and stuff. And we just lined it up. And they had GIs there and Corpsmen. They'd take a look at you and they'd say, well, he's about a size so and so. And they piled us up. We had a mattress, a hammock, pea coat, pants, dress shirts.

You were pleased to get the pants at least.

Yeah, oh yeah, they finally let us get the underwear on.

That's good.

And then, all of this now, here we are. We could hardly walk out of there with all plus a sea bag, you know, canvas bag to put all of that in there. And then they took us over to another room and showed us how you had to roll all that up. Now, the Navy had a special way of rolling up your clothes, you know, everything that you had. And they give you little ropes and things, not ropes, what else, cords -- little cords. And you had to tie it a certain way. You had to have it in a certain place. They'd measure it. It had to be in a square knot. Had to be, so forth. It had to be like that for inspections. And, oh, they were very fastidious about all that. So, we'd got it all. It would all fit except for the hammock and stuff like that. We'd wrap all that stuff up, you know, in the mattress and things.

They took us over to another barracks by this time and they got steel stanchions like bays. They were big steel girders around like tubes. They were round. And you were assigned your bay and then you had to put your hammock up. And, of course, you know, you lived out of your sea bag. There was no such thing as having dressers or even lockers or anything. And then you had to get the mattress in there. So, we slept in hammocks. But you had to tie that hammock up in a certain way. You had to get a bow tied just as tight as could be. And it was hard because the ropes they gave us were all new and they hadn't stretched out yet. Well, we finally got the mattress in there. And we got in there and that wasn't too bad because we'd had a hammock at home. And then-- but here it had to be, it was like a rubber band. I mean, those guys were flipping out of that thing that night! A couple of guys fell and broke their arms. And one guy got a broken leg.

Did you have to go above one another or was everybody

No, everything was all on one level.

Well, that's comforting at least.

207: MORNING AT GREAT LAKES

Oh, yeah. It was something else. When I got in there, of course, I'm dead tired. So, I did sleep that night. But they used to get us up about four in the morning. And then when you had to tie that up every morning. That was the first thing they wanted, it all tied a certain way. There had to be half inches on that rope. There had to be-- I think there was seven of them. But mine was always that short because it hadn't stretched out enough. And you couldn't pass, you couldn't go to breakfast until

oh

you had that thing tied in the right way. Oh, you'd stretch, and stretch, and stretch! In fact, every once in a while, we'd go over to help each other out to pull the rope to straighten it out and get it tied up. And then, of course, you had a little ditty bag. That was for your razor and, of course, I wasn't shaving then. Thank God, I didn't have to worry about that. But there was toothpaste and all that, soap and everything. And in the washroom, big steel, it was like a big assembly line and it was all right. It was okay. And you had to go in there to take care of all that. And then like I said in my letter, the first breakfast I went to -- and the Navy was big at that time on mixing everything all together. This stuff was, I think it was, salmon and mashed potatoes with ketchup

and so forth. It was just all gummed up, you know, and beans. And when the corpsman would come with your tray and slap it on there, it bounced right off the tray. And I had my pea coat tied around me

Oh, no

and it got on me and right away they said, "hey, keep yourself clean!" What are you talking about! Oh, it was a mess. So, I finally had to clean that up. But, anyway, we were so starved. I do say they fed us pretty good in Great Lakes.

If mixed together.

Yeah, it-- it was [?], of course, we'd have eaten anything, we were so hungry. But then the routine started. Drilling, learning, practicing, and so forth. And we'd get up every morning, early in the morning. And then the thing is that they had wooden floors in these barracks. They used to make us get out with steel wool constantly and keep that floor underneath your barrack area just absolutely snow white with steel wool.

Oh, goodness.

You'd put it on your feet and scrape it, you know. I got so tired of that. You get the steel wool all through your room. The worst part about it was the mud. And because they wouldn't let us come into the barracks, even into the utility room to clean you're -- you couldn't clean the mud off your feet. You had to clean it off outside before they'd let you in. Now, the water out there was in the puddles where all the digging had taken place. You had to break the ice off the puddles and wash it all. I wonder we didn't die of pneumonia or something. But once you got the bulk of it off, then they let you come in. The other funny thing was then we had to get shots, and some more shots after we had the blood drawn, and, of course, guys, being guys, the people would come out of there, those that were in ahead of us, they'd come out--- ohhh, groan!, and stuff. "Oh, God, you know, it was brutal!," you know. And they say—"And we won't even tell you where they gave the worst of them! I thought, oh, my God, and I thought I was going to faint standing there! And this corpsman would just practically throw the needle at you. Plink. The needle broke off. They had to break -- "take them out!" So, finally, that wasn't too bad. But when we came out, we did the same thing to the next group coming in. "Oh, my God, it was terrible!," you know. So, it was really funny.

249: "It was a good bunch": GUYS, RESERVISTS, OFFICERS

But it was a good bunch. We enjoyed and we got to be pretty good in drilling. The thing that was interesting is -- of course, I was the smallest guy. I only weighed about 120 pounds, 17 years old, about 5 foot 8 at the most. But I was pretty good at drilling. So, some of us that were good, they picked us out. Remember, well, you wouldn't remember this, but in the theaters they used to have Movietone news which was your news broadcasts and so forth. So, they would always have things that were going on in the Service which showed the Great Lakes. Us sailors marching and I was—I got two seconds of fame because I was the last guy on the end there carrying one of the flags. And, so -- but that was interesting.

And, of course, it was funny, too, because a lot of the officers came in. They were Reservists. Ninety-day wonders, as we call them. They all meant well. We were all -- but we were doing -- we used to have to line up all the time and we were using rifles and bayonets. I remember one time one smart aleck came through there, an officer. "You guys are not lining up right!" And so forth. And, so, he kept running up and down the aisles because we were standing there, you know, at attention. Anybody that was out of line, or so forth, he'd bump them and knock them down. So, the next time he came through, the guys all got together. We all stuck the guns out with the bayonets. He got cut up a little bit. He decided he wasn't going to do that anymore!

But the funniest thing that happened, well, two funny things, we were by the mess hall. And they used to put the pies out to cool them, you know, after cooking. We came by there one day and I don't know who in the world got those pies. I was part of it. I didn't take one but, I mean, once they gave it to me...so we came by and there were twenty some pies in that row that disappeared, you know. Because when we were marching along, we ate all the pies. Of course, we'd got pie tins and we knew there would be an inspection, so we stuck all the pie tins under the mud and so forth. They were all covered. They never did find them. So, we got away with that. And then, one day, somebody threw a bar of soap in the soup. Oh, that was terrible! That was the worst case of diarrhea you ever saw. It was awful. And, of course, in the washroom there was only just so many stalls, you know. Oh, it was awful. That wasn't funny at all. And when we got out of there after eight weeks, I made the vow, I said this was such rough duty and so forth. I never got any hardly enough sleep. I was always tired. And it was really rough. We knew it was rough. Of course, they made it rough. They wanted to teach us, and it was good. And I vowed that I would never go back in there again when they closed those doors in back of me. But the funny thing of it is, what was it, forty years or something in there, when I worked for the telephone company, I had to go back out there to make an inspection of the telephone system, the booths, you know, the public booths. I was kidding. I used to tell them, "Don't you dare shut those doors! Leave those open. I want back out there!"

So, were there a lot of recruits at that time? Were there a lot of people who joined up right after?

Oh, it was jammed. It was jammed. There was hundreds, thousands of us that came in.

And then

They were building all over the world.

Yeah, Great Lakes draws from a lot of different

all over the United States. It was very interesting. It was good. They did a good job.

Did you meet a lot of people that you wouldn't have otherwise met, do you think?

Oh, sure. You kind of buddied up. You had to for protection, and for comfort, to help each other out. It was a buddy system because you would have never made it by yourself... tying up those hammocks! One other last thing, and I'll move on to something else.

You can go on as long as you like.

When it came time for our pay now, when I signed up, it was \$21.00 a month. That's what we got. They lined us all up. It was going to be payday. And I thought, Wow, because they did have a canteen, I'm going to go get a big soda and so forth. They marched us around in back and then they gave it to us in cash. So, I went by the first table where the officers and the petty officers were. "That will be \$5.00—that is for this part, for your pants and jacket." "Oh, wait a minute. I thought I was getting this for nothing." "\$5.00." Time we got through all away around, I think I had six dollars left. I thought, my God, I made more than this mowing lawns back in Montague! But, fortunately, at that time my stepdad felt bad, and he sent me some money. So, I had a few dollars. But when we graduated from there, then they sent me, well, you take all kinds of tests for your aptitudes and stuff. Some are

Did you take them, I'm always curious about this, when you took tests, did you take them in a room with other people or were you alone?

316: "They did have tremendous entertainment up there."

323: TRANSFERRED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, TRAINING TO BE A SIGNALMAN

Oh, yeah. It was like a classroom. They had absolute, by the way, they did have tremendous entertainment up there.

Yeah?

Not every night, of course, but at least on the weekend. Oh, yeah, they'd bring the big bands that were popular at that time, and we used to see the stars when they'd come in and entertain us. It was -- the entertainment was great, and they did take good care of us. And even from the standpoint of guys got sick, fortunately, I didn't get sick, but the treatment was great. But then they transferred me into the University of Chicago which the Navy had billeted. They'd taken over Sunny Gym and Bartlett Gym, and then some of the classrooms, and then the cafeteria for my training. I say, that training to be a signalman was very, very good, very excellent. We learned the flags, the colors of the flags, what they represented, and that sort of thing. We practiced semaphore, had to learn the, you know, the wig-wag for the semaphore, blinker lights, 'cause they had it set up in the gym like a ship, like the mast. And then they would flash the lights and then we would practice on that, as well as doing homework, to learn. We had to do a lot of studies and spelling. Spelling was very important, because if we were going to communicate back and forth, we had to have the spelling, and several other courses that were I felt were very good. And the food was excellent. We ate in cafeterias and they treated us just like princes. It was really great, and I enjoyed that part. I stayed at Sunny Gym for quite a while. I don't remember just exactly how long it was. It was three, four months that we were there.

Wow.

And, of course, we had a lot of fun because once we learned the semaphore, we'd go down to Chicago. Wherever we'd go, we'd always semaphore back and forth.

343: SIGNALMEN

351: "One objection I have to the Navy"

Do you still know it?

Yeah, although semaphore got to be a problem, which I'll talk about a little bit later. But when you're out on convoy duty, you're out at sea, it's lights and flags, but semaphore, you're so far away, you couldn't see each other. And you have to keep practicing at it, because unless it comes second nature to you if you keep practicing, but we'd be out there, like at times I'd be out there for eight or nine months, and never have anybody, never use it. And there's one objection I have to the Navy. And Navy, I hope you hear this. They never gave me a Navy manual when I was at sea, never gave me anything to study on. The only way I learned my own mathematics and so forth that I had was they used to have kind of a partial library on some of the ships I was on. Some of the books were probably printed in the 1800s or something. But that was the only thing. They never gave me a manual that I could study, or practice, and keep up with things. Fortunately, I got to be pretty good on the blinker, and the flags, and stuff. It was second nature to me. But the course was great. I really, really liked that place and every once, well, three or four years ago, I got to go back. And I remember walking up and down all the streets. And we were there at Bartlett Gym. That was where the scientists were that were developing the A-bomb, but we didn't know that. They were way down at the other end. And, of course, that was off limits to where we were. And, of course, we weren't going back and forth to classrooms. We just slept there and so forth. But it was interesting to find that out after the War. That's where all that was going on.

Did, when you took tests, did they assign you to be a signalman or did they give you any options, or you just?

No they just

You just get to be

Yeah, "You're a signalman." And some of the guys that took the test at that time at Great Lakes were assigned over as radioman. Now, the radioman did not go in the same unit that we went to at the University of Chicago. We were all strictly signalmen.

That's interesting.

But the radio listening code by sound, you had to have just like us. It was funny because radiomen who knew the code, most of them couldn't read blinker. But I could read blinker, but I couldn't read radio fast enough. If they went slow, I was all right, but I wasn't accustomed to that, hearing that so....

That's interesting.

So, when they assigned us, they did a pretty good job of what our abilities were.

343: TO THE WEST COAST

And, so, we all got on a train then to be shipped off to the West Coast. And that was extremely interesting because I'd never traveled out there. I'd never been out that way before. But the train that we were on at this time was like one of those Pullman sleeper cars. And, at that point in time, that was when these porters and so forth, they were great. They were the nicest guys. They were really like our big brothers taking care of us, you know, wonderful. I remembered that. And if we had money, we tipped them or something.

But it was very interesting because they had like a senior petty officer in charge of the group. And I remember driving, well, we went-- it was the northern route. We were going up through Montana. And, out that way, we had no idea where we were going, but after two days on that, night, , because we didn't go straight through, they kept putting us on sidelines, and, somehow or other, I don't know whether that was secrecy or priority or what, but I remember

So, you could see the scenery?

Oh, the scenery was beautiful, and I remember going through Dakota, down in Tecumseh, where, down in Southern Michigan, I used to do a lot of pheasant hunting. Oh, my God, they had pheasants sitting all over the fences and everything else down there. Oh, my. So, I remember this one night. I don't know why I went to the back end of the train. In those days, the back end of the train was like a club car, which they didn't have for us, but they had a little platform on the back. That's where the politicians used to come out and make their speeches. I was on it. It was late at night, probably around 10:30, 11 o'clock. I wasn't sleeping, and I'll never forget the feeling that I had, because we were way out in the desert somewhere, some wilderness, and the moon was out, and it was just a little hazy. There wasn't a thing, just the railroad tracks, and that was all there was. No buildings, no shacks, no nothing. And as we traveled along, I thought, oh, my God, this thing is right out in the middle of nowhere, you know. And I got the strangest feeling. I thought I have no idea where I am going to go, but this is a real transition, a real change in my life, for what is going to transpire.

So, we got to California. That's where we went to Los Angeles. We didn't know we were going to be there. That was interesting. We were out there about six to eight weeks.

Wow.

For continuing training, well, they pooled us up waiting to be assigned. Now, some of the guys did go down to San Diego and then some of the fleet. That's where we thought we were going to go and-- but it turned out that we didn't. They were going to ship us back to New York. We didn't know that until they put us on the train. But they treated us real nice there. The movie stars would come in all the time. We would have entertainment. We'd have Andrews Sisters and all

that stuff. Oh, that was really nice. In fact, there was a couple of stars that were in our group. They were there.

438: L.A. & AIMEE SEMPLE MCPHERSON

It was very interesting. That one story I tell in there, about the time we got liberty to go ashore, we didn't know what to do with ourselves. We had about three or four dollars, I guess, so we bought a bottle of wine. And there were three of us. And this one guy, he kept drinking the thing. And, of course, I didn't care for that. But it was so funny because we didn't know what to do with ourselves. We saw a show. We walked around. We didn't know what to do, trying to find a USO, and, as we were walking down the street, he was really half drunk, and it was terrible. We were walking down the street and we didn't know anything about Aimee McPherson. She was one of these evangelists. And we went down the street, and there was a big balcony up there. All of a sudden, the floodlights came on and here's all these people in white robes. And, my God, we thought, oh, my God, the Lord's come down to get me. And it was terrible. So, it was funny because, as we were standing there, I figured I knew better than that. I knew that this had to be something going on a church of some kind. Somebody stepped out of the doorway and invited us in. "Come on in for coffee and cake." Well, we hadn't eaten anyway. We had nothing else to do, so we went in there. And I remember they had us out on that balcony, and the palm trees were around, and these people were all singing, and everything. And he's standing there, and he had this bottle, a big bottle of booze, up on there. And it kept slipping out and I kept thinking, oh, my God! So, I reached over when people weren't looking, and I got it out and I stuck it and poured it in the palm tree over there. And I often wondered what they thought. So, we decided, so, whoever it was, some nice gentleman says, "I'll take you guys back to the base if you're ready." We still had another day. We figured, ah, we'd had enough of this. So, we went back to the base. But that was a riot. It was really funny.

But then they had out that in the zoot suits' problem. I never ran into any of that because I just never got down into those areas. But we used to go up on Sunset Boulevard. And people, they saw you in uniform, they'd invite you in to go to a movie, or whatever else, and USOs, and that. And that's how we'd spend our life. But some of the guys apparently got down into the city and things. And they would have, the gals would encourage these guys to follow them somewhere and then the zoot suiters would come out and beat them up. And it got to be pretty bad.

Why?

Race riots, or something. I don't know what was going on. It was bad. It was bad. It was really bad. So, they don't talk too much about that. But I left, and I was going back to New York. But about a week later, I got a letter from, and, of course, we knew about it, we heard about it in the FTV when we heard about it in the newspapers, the guy was there, he wrote me a letter. He said, in fact, it turned out all the sailors that were there at that Naval Armory and the officers had reserved every cab that they could get hold of, and they went down into L.A. They knew where these zoot suiters were congregating. And there was the biggest brawl that you ever saw. And, so, that took care of that. They didn't bother the sailors anymore. They left us alone.

When I got back to New York,

Now, how come they sent you back to New York again just to go

I said, "how come?"

Why not

We just got out over here."

So you could go to Wyoming again.

Yeah. So, they decided, they said, we need, there is a shortage of signalmen. The rate of signalmen was in demand at that time. They had lots of gunners and all that kind of stuff. But they didn't have signalmen that were trained. So, this train we went back on was not as plush as the other one. It was an old coal train, and we were right in back of the coal car. And this took about three or four days. We went down through Arizona. Oh, God, it was hot, and we were a mess! We couldn't take a bath. There were no showers. All we had was sinks. So when we got to New York, we went in to the Naval Armory. And, I'll never forget, the inspection was the minute you got off the train. And I remember we had a woman doctor there, was [?], but she would say, "Oh, my God, you guys are a bunch of dirty slob! Don't you ever take a bath!" And we just got off this train back of the coal car. I mean, man, we were -- it was filthy! In fact, we didn't even bother to try to change our clothes because you got to wash your clothes yourself, you know.

Yeah.

530: NAVAL ARMED GUARD: NAVY ON MERCHANT SHIPS

So, anyway, we were there. Then, that's the pool. Then, we found out that we were assigned to the Naval Armed Guard. I didn't know what that meant. Did that mean you go stand guard in some armory or something? I thought, all this training for nothing! No, we were the Naval on the Armed Guard part of convoy duty going over to Europe or wherever else, you know, and, at that point in time, this was extremely important because the Merchant Marine, people had no idea, at this point in time, America was in deep trouble. Britain could have lost that war. It was close. It was very, very bad. The German submarines were out there. And they were so efficient and there were so many of them. The books up there tell of the numbers. They're fantastic. You couldn't believe the numbers of submarines they had, plus they had surface vessels, too, you know. But England was being starved to death. They couldn't get the gasoline there to run their planes, you know. After all, everything they got was being shipped in. They couldn't even feed themselves, you know. There wasn't enough land over there. So, we found out we were going to be assigned to those kind of duties. I thought we were going to be on a destroyer, and so forth, guarding the fleet. It turned out, no, we were assigned to these Merchant ships as Navy. And we had our own officers. We had our own room that we'd eat in. We were separate from the Merchant Marine, although we got to be friends with them.

So, did you get to-- you got to do pretty much the same thing that the Merchant Marine was doing or were your duties different?

Well, I was a signalman. No Merchant Marine were signalmen. Except the first ship I was on, the Merchant Marine had a radioman. The radiomen were considered like an ensign or an ensign junior grade in radiomen. Later on in the war, when I got—I was -- they didn't have Navy radiomen, but later on, I was in the Pacific. We had a Navy radioman. He was a third class petty officer the same as me, and the other guy was an officer. He ate in the officers' mess. He was the guy that got to eat grand, while we got chicken feed all the time we were out there. But when we first-- the next morning after we got assigned there, of course, we all were still carrying our hammocks. So, wherever you went, you strung up your hammock. And, of course, they did have bunks there. But you had to put your hammock down on the bunk, and your bag, and all that stuff.

Why--what would the good be of putting your hammock down on a bunk?

I don't know. The Navy had its own way of doing things. That was years-- they used to tell us that you had to tie that thing up tight because if you were ever on ship, and they didn't have enough life jackets, that that would hold you up. It would be like a big, oh, a big float to keep you floating. And I thought, "well, okay."

But when I got assigned to a ship, that was a pool that we were in, I had no idea what the Naval Armed Guard was or anything. So, they called my name off and they were all-- it was like a big lottery, you know, pack up your bags. I packed up everything I got. And away we go—they put me on a little -- well, they call them livery bunks, you know, little lifeboat, little launches, took me out into the harbor. And they took one guy, and took him on the ship, and then took me.

572: "Here was an old rust bucket": THE SHIP

And, finally, here was an old rust bucket sitting there. It was dirty. And they said, "Well, Crandall, this is yours." And I thought, oh, my God! And there was a gangplank, you know, there were ladders, Jacob's Ladders. Well, it wasn't Jacob, it wasn't rope. But it was a regular ladder down all along the side. And I went up.

There wasn't anybody to meet me, except one of the gunners had been assigned on there about three or four days before. He said, "Somebody told me to look for you." And this was-- it was at night. It was garbage there, because they couldn't dump the garbage in the harbor. And they took me back. In the back part of the ship was they had a fo'c'sle. It was down underneath the deck. They lifted up, you know, like one of these, what do, you know, I'll think of it in a minute. But they had a door there. And you had to go up down the ladder and go down -- they had about six bunks down there. And that was for the gunners and for me. And it was terrible. It was down near the chain locker where they kept all the chains and all that type of stuff.

And then I thought, gee, here it is at night, and the said, "Well, the captain wants to see you." So, okay. I go up on the deck where the captain is up on the bridge. And as it turned out, this was not Captain Kozlowlski. He came on the next day. This was an older guy and he was -- I just said, well, "Yes, Captain, what is it?" Nobody's there to greet you. Now, I had never been on a ship before. And he says, "Well, we're shipping out at such and such in four in the morning. And just

be on duty. Let you know.” I said, “Oh, thanks. Thank you. Will you have somebody call me because I’m kind of tired.” “Somebody call you! You get your blankety-blank up here!” And I thought, oh, my God! “Yes, sir.” You know, I thought, wow, this is terrible. I hadn’t even inspected the equipment yet. So, I did run out, and I took a look. They did have a good flag bag, you know, where they keep all the flags. And they got snaps on them because when you pull those flags up, you know, and store them, but the halyards on there, were made up-- looked like clothes lines, you know, which turned out to be a disaster several times, because they’d break out in the cold and the wind.

Oh.

But the signal light they had was a little, dinky -- it wasn’t even a regular signal lamp.

620: SIDE CHANGE

What I have to tell you though

Oh, it was fantastic.

I was at the war museum in Canada, at the new, they have a brand new Canadian War Museum. It was absolutely fascinating. If you ever are in Ottawa, because it does talk about Canadians at war. It starts with the Indian wars and moves forward through time.

I went through

And there was a big section

couple of days when I was on Niagara, but I didn’t get to see any of that.

Yeah.

625: WHEN YOU GO OUT ON CONVOY

But they were fantastic. They really did a yeoman’s job. Now, when you go out in convoy, you know, of course, there’s the senior officer present, which they would call the commodore. He would be on one of the ships, one of the Merchant ships, or whatever. And then there would be the escorts. These would be like the corvettes. Once in a great while, you would have an American destroyer, because our destroyers were all over in the Pacific, or somewhere else, and there would maybe be about five or six of them. But the convoys would go out in blocks. And they would have rows across, like starting out from east to west, you know. And there would be like row one, row two, row three, and then, coming down, you know, there’d be 0-1, 1-1, and so forth. So, ships were numbered. And, of course, we were given that information. Of course, I got that the next morning so I’d know where I was at. And that would be your number and your station. But in the signaling, the corvettes would be all out here and then the escorts, you know, searching for submarines or for whatever else for protection. And we’d come along and sometimes the convoy would come out in groups. Well, the signals, the majority of them would

start from the senior officer present from the Commodore. And he would signal this way to the ship that way and this way and back. And then it would be your job wherever you were at in the line to either, if you were the first ship, to pass it to the next and, also, to those in back of you. A very, very, important type of thing, because, later on, when I was out going to Africa and those places, we would be signaling courses, and directions, and future locations, and everything else, to the Army transports. There'd be like five thousand guys on those things. It would be very important. I was seventeen years old, passing that information. Well, I got eighteen by that time, but I was like a kid out there with that kind of information that they were getting! Nobody else on that ship could read signals, just me. That's why, frankly, I told you, I got frostbite on my feet, because it was cold out there. I had no cold weather gear on my feet. It was ice, and snow, and sleet. And, oh God, it was terrible.

But that's the way the convoys would come which was -- there was that for protection. But the submarines, of course, if they knew you were in the area, if they got down below, the convoy would pass over. They'd sneak up at night. The worse time was in the morning or in the evening right at dusk where you couldn't see. It didn't look like it was sky or water or what. But they used to travel more or less on the surface. But you couldn't hardly see them with the waves and everything else. And, then, of course, if they came in close enough, they got ahead of you. They would drop down underneath, and then they would sight you with their periscopes, but they would fire across—we'd call this coffin corner-- because they'd fire their torpedoes this way. At that last ship there because if the torpedoes would go across, if they'd miss that ship, chances are they're going to hit something else by the time it went. And it used to happen. In fact, I actually witnessed this. Because one time, one of our lookouts yelled, you know, "Torpedo!" And, fortunately, it went underneath back, we were going fast enough, sped up a little bit, and not to miss the torpedo -- you couldn't outrun them, but, I mean, our ship was moving fast -- It went underneath our fantail, which is the back part of the ship hanging out. You could see the -- and this ship over there signaled to me. And I'd just signaled to him, turn off your lights, you idiot! You know, it's dark. Boom! You know, they got it, instead of us.

Now this ship, William Penn, was such an old rust bucket, they used to have florescent paint painted on certain spots on the deck. Don't step there at night. It may, because it was pretty rusty, you know, you could fall down on the tank.

Of course, you were light enough, so it wouldn't matter for you.

Oh yeah. It was converted into a tanker. It didn't look like a tanker. That was one of the things that saved us because, tanker, most of the crew quarters and everything was on the back end of the ship. And, then, there was a long space in between the bridge. But ours was like -- it looked like a regular cargo vessel, but we still had tanks. We were a tanker carrying 110 octane gasoline. That was what we were carrying!

Wow

And, but going down, the first trip was going down coastwise, down through this dangerous area -- went down into Galveston, Texas. That's where I got this. The big guys took me on

Yeah. What is your tattoo of?

Well, it's supposed to be, it is all faded sort of, supposed to have said USN, it's supposed to be an anchor

Oh, I see the anchor

with an anchor rope. And Captain Kowalski was a nice guy, and I really liked him. And then we came back,

Wait a second. When you were in Texas and you got this tattoo, how did you -- why did you get the tattoo?

Oh, guys went out and said, hey, you've got to get a tattoo.

So you did.

So we drank beer, and then we went out, and got a tattoo. "Come on,"-- they used to call us flags, they'd call you by your rank, flag. "Flag, you gotta get a tattoo." "Okay, alright." So, when the guys started, I, man, I thought I got an infection. I thought I was going to lose my arm! And I never got another one. I'll always remember that.

One was enough.

But we got down there

I would think it would hurt right there. That's why I was wondering.

Oh, it hurt.

That would be a bad place to have one.

But we got down there okay, and everything was fine. But we came back on that ship. All we had at that time was two 50-caliber machine guns, one on each side by the bridge. We didn't even have a gun tub. They were just, I don't know, you couldn't fire them. And one of them wouldn't shoot. It would shoot twice, then it would hang up. Something was broken in the thing. And they couldn't fix it. We had about eight gunners, but nobody, there was no guns on the bow. There was an old five-inch cannon on the stern that they had sitting there. I, the date was stamped, it was actually molded in the 1850s, 1888, or '89, or somewhere, couldn't shoot it.

Oh, that was good. It was useful then.

691: REFITTING THE WILLIAM PENN

But it couldn't shoot. It didn't have the firing pin mechanism. So, all it was, it was just for appearance. The guys would practice, but nothing there, so. But when we came back, we went

into Chesapeake Bay to go into Baltimore. And we didn't know, nobody tells you until you get there, but they were going to put us in shipyards. And they were going to refit us. And they did. They gave us -- I got moved out of that crummy place downstairs. They built a place for the Navy and another place up on the poop deck. They made a regular cabin and so forth. There was about maybe eight or nine of us in there and so forth. They still kept the guys in the back because then we had six twenty mile a meter machine guns with gun tubs. Those were powerful guns. And then we got the five inch 51, they got the mechanism for that, and they had a 3 inch 75 in the front.

But did they keep the cannon?

That was the old cannon.

Yeah?

701: SUBMARINE OFF THE COAST OF AMERICA: CANNON STOPS THE ENGINE

The five inch 51, that was the cannon. And every time we'd shoot that thing, it would jar the ship so bad that those diesel engines, it would crack the head, and we'd go dead in the water. You know, we almost got torpedoed one time because of that, which was another story, off the coast of America, we were shooting at them. And it was on the surface and it was way, way out there. I didn't realize. I thought it was a guy on a fishing boat. I remember the lieutenant we had, we were up on the bridge, and he says, "Hey, that's a submarine." I said, "Oh, no, its not." So, I said, "That's a guy's fishing boat out there." You know, it was right off New England. "Like heck!" So, he got the big glass out and checked. And we got the crew, and they came out. So, they fired at them. Well, it was a submarine all right, because we came pretty darn close to it, almost hit it, you know. It was way out there. And it went down. The sub went down under the water. But we had broken down when we fired that thing. It stopped the engines. And I thought, oh, my God, because the concussion was so great.

That was-- Of course that was later on in the war when we got all those -- that was when the war really started for me when we went into the North Atlantic. Now, this was in late January, early February, and none of those books you read up there will tell you that those were the worst convoys going out there. It was terrible. The one convoy

Was that 1943, was that

1943

1943 because you went through the year in the

Yeah.

Sorry to interrupt.

720: CONVOY IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC, 1943: "It was just hell"

Yeah, that had to be '43, the beginning of '43, and that was 32 ships in that one convoy. Now, I don't know what happened to all of them, but it was terrible. We went out and for the first six days, it was nice. We were going up the Gulf Stream, going up by Nova Scotia, and so forth. And it was really nice. And then, all of a sudden, all hell broke loose. The weather just was unreal, you know, so cold. They used to have the Merchant Marine crew come out to try to break the ice off because the cables were all getting, those clothes lines I had, they all got snapped off. I'd have to shimmy up the mast up there to try to rethread the thing because you couldn't lower the crossbar, the cross arm, because it was all froze. I tried to thread that thing through so I could pull-- that was scary, because I'd hang on one side and I'd see the ocean. The ship was rolling. It was the ocean over there. And, oh, my God, how did I get in on this!

But we were out there probably about ten, twelve, days. And those ship convoys were slow. Six or eight knots, that was about it. They could go no faster than the slowest ship unless you broke down. And then, all of the sudden, that first night, it just was hell, because the submarines would throw these flares up and, you know, like you see fireworks, these golden, twinkling things that come down, they would fire those things up. And you would stand out like a sore thumb, you know. You couldn't see them. They always looked black, you know, couldn't see a thing, and you would just sit there and wait and think, oh, oh, when's it going to come, you know. But it was so cold and so rough when we got over into the Irish Sea, which we thought relatively safe because we were out of bombing range. And, so, we were coming down the Irish Channel, and there's mines in there, too. Because we saw them. I tried to fire at it, and we went up to -- we were going to Bristol first, and I, by the time we entered into the Irish Sea, now, I don't know whether some of those ships that disappeared went off went to Iceland or what. But out of that 32 ships, I only counted eleven of us that got there.

742: "I saw ships get blown up in back of us"

And I saw ships get blown up in back of us. And that's scary. You see that ship get hit and, all of a sudden, the siren goes off, and fires start, and the ship starts to turn, and you see these poor guys out there, thinking, oh, my God, you know. Because they used to give us life jackets and they had a little flashlight on them. I thought what in the heck is that little flashlight-- you're out here in that wide ocean -- that little, dinky light, you know, I mean, what the heck, for heavens sakes! It was terrible. But that was scary. That was funny, that one that got hit right in back us, it was an ammunition ship. It really got hit hard. I was in the bathroom. It was about eleven at night, and I wanted to go to the bathroom, and it was so cold, the water in the toilet you used to have to break it out of there, you know. And I was breaking the water out and, all of a sudden, Kaboom! I got-- that hit so, the concussion was so great, it knocked me over the other side. I thought it was us. I thought, oh, my God, we're the ones that got hit. And I ran out and I could see these guys running off that ship. It was terrible. But that was a tough, tough one. In fact, they write that up about how bad it was. But that's why the Naval Armed Guard, there were supposed to be, I think, 145, or 165,000 of us, they had the highest casualty rate of any unit in the Navy.

Wow.

So, anyway, the captain we had was a 72-year-old guy, nice old fellow, it was funny, he used like to go out and take his-- he had a Luger-- he used to like to shoot at those flares. And he had Bull Durham cigarettes and he would roll those right out there in all the wind. I went, "How in the world could you" -- like an old cowboy, light those things up, and, oh, my God, it was fantastic.

And we got over there. And, of course, strange things happen. One of the guys that was on the ship, one of the Navy gunners and so forth, he should never have been in the Navy. He was so effeminate and everything. He lost his mind, and he jumped overboard. We had a terrible time trying to get him back. We finally got him back, but he lost his mind. It was horrible.

763: ENGLAND

We got over to England, and that was when I really realized that we were in the war. That was a somber place. All their, you know, barragements were up and everything. We went into Bristol and, wouldn't you know, that first night there, and there was a bomb shelter on off the pier off the side, so the ensign put me in charge watching the ship to make sure that nobody, you know, fired, because the guys get carried away. And they want to start shooting at those-- the bombers were up there so high, you can't hit them and all you'd do is -- so he I remember told me, "If anybody touches those, you got to shoot them." I thought, oh, yeah, big deal, you know. So I got the pistol, you know. And wouldn't you know, one of the Merchant Marine guys came up and he was going to take the cover off. "I'm going to get them!" And he happened to be a nice guy. But I said-- he was hysterical-- I said, "If you touch that gun, I'm going to blow your frigging head off," you know. "Oh, no! Come on, Flag, we got to get them guys, or them guys are going to get us!" You know, finally, I talked him out of it. But I thought, would I have really shot him? I don't-- I don't think so.

But, anyway, it was funny because when those bombs started falling around over there, of course, everybody started disappearing in a hurry. But you hear those wailing minnies go on, you know, the sirens go on. That's scary, but I have to tell you this, too, I'm not a hero. But out there in the Atlantic at night, I felt raw fear. I really had fear. Thank God, I was disciplined, because I did my job, and I did it well. And that's the only thing that keeps you from going nuts.

And I was so cold. The people used to give us-- the women in the country at that time knit sweaters. They're made out of wool. Well, you get up there. It was so wet and moist, the sweaters would drop down. They'd look like muumuus on you. But, at least, I'd wear them, because they kept you warm. But that's when I got the frostbite. Oh, God, I used to take those sweaters and wrap my feet up, because I couldn't walk. It was terrible. But that was a bad trip.

787: NEW CAPTAIN, NEW TRIP

And then we came back, and I went, and then they got another captain on. What a--he was an old, retired guy. He was a Dutchman. He was the dirtiest, filthiest man I ever saw -- a big guy about six foot six. Big hulk of a guy. He was terrible. I remember, in my story, he used to urinate off the bridge on the guys down below and think it was funny. And he was just junk. He wouldn't take a bath. He wouldn't use -- one of the old time sailors, you know, they'd have to

save the water, we said, "We got fresh water. This is a modern ship." You know, it was terrible. And he used to, like, he knew some of the other captains, and he'd want me to signal over to them. And he'd have a story written out all telling me a story with all kinds of cuss words and everything. I said, "There is this one thing that they will not allow me to do, Captain. I can not use that kind of language." "I'm telling you. I'm the captain!" And here I am a kid eighteen years old chattering and shaking.

He's a lot bigger than you too!

Yeah, but even my officer at that time, he sat in back of me—"Yeah, you're right." Tell him, don't tell me! But I would signal anyway. But I wouldn't use the words he was talking-- he didn't know the difference anyway.

That second trip I went over there, we didn't get as much action as far as submarines were concerned. There was some. But that was a rough trip stormwise because this would be like, what, around April. And when we got these hurricanes-- the tail end of them coming in. So then I went back to New York. And then we went to North Africa. You know, it was for the invasion and we got in on the tail end of the invasions because they always, the tankers and all the other ships, they'd keep us out of harm's way because, you know, if those tankers go up, I tell you it was like a Roman candle! You know, those fires would burn! It was terrible.

810: NORTH AFRICA

So, we went in to Casa Blanca. That was not a-- except it was interesting. They wrote that trip up in the *Reader's Digest*. We had a fifth columnist somewhere in that big convoy. And there was an aircraft carrier. There were several troopships. Somebody was sending out signals of our location. They were reading the signals. And our destroyers were coming around to try to zero in on where it was coming from. They never did find it. Sure enough, ships got hit. They got blown up.

And I went in to where our ship broke down. That was interesting, too. We were about two days, three days, the other side of Bermuda, and, when next morning, here was two other ships. The French ship, *Lad*, I think was the name of it, a tanker; another ship way around the horizon; and us. Captain Kozlowlski, nice guy, he said, "Shall we go back or what shall we do?" Because we knew the position. I had the signal where the convoy would be if we could get the ship going again. We were dead in the water, you know. So, he broke out a bottle of Scotch and he let me in the office. I felt like a big wheel in to his office, a big, big shot, 18-years-old. Poured out a shot. Darn near killed me. Felt like. "Shall we go on? What's your vote?" And I said, "Well, I don't know. We know where we're supposed to go. Turn around and go back, I mean, they're only going to send us back, anyway." So, as it turned out, that ship, the French ship, no more than got over and then they broadcasted because they used to send out-- they got torpedoed right over the horizon. We'd have run right into that. Fortunately, we made the right choice.

834: SUBMARINE RIGHT OFF THE SIDE

And by going over to Africa, it was the dangdest thing. We were all up on the bridge. And we found the convoy. It was way off on the horizon and it was so calm that day. Ordinarily you don't see that water that calm. And the Captain was up there, and the gunnery officer, and myself, and a couple of the other officers. And all of a sudden I said, "Holy mackerel. What's that right off the side?" Here a periscope came up out of the water. We couldn't even-- it was so close we couldn't get the guns down close enough to shoot at it. Of course, it went down in a hurry. Of course, it was funny. I like to laugh about it. I said, "It came up here to look. It said, Wow! So, it went down." So, I signaled. A destroyer was about maybe three quarters of a mile or a mile away. So, I signaled to them. And, of course, we shut off their flares. And, of course, we got the ship going. And we were going the other way. And he unloaded his whole load of depth charges. I got the impression, because when they came back, they had success. They had sunk the submarine.

But that ship, the only other thing that was interesting on that was we had aviation gas. And we went in there and unloaded everything. But they couldn't take it all. There was so much gas stored up there. So, they put us back out on our way home, and they opened up the tanks, and we dumped hundreds of gallons of gasoline out into the ocean, because you couldn't travel with a tank like that. When I got back home, I got a leave. They wanted to give me five gallons of gas because there was a ration and, oh, my God!

849: MAN IN THE WATER

One thing happened, they had troop ships coming back at that time. They had Italian prisoners that they had captured. And one of the Italian prisoners right on front of us on the ship either got thrown off or jumped off. But he was floating. And I'm telling you Kate, it was like from here out to your parking lot. And the poor guy was out there in the middle of the ocean. So, we threw him a life ring, you know, one of the rings, but the rope wasn't long enough to reach him. And he crawled up on it. And I signaled another destroyer, man in the water, you know. Now, whether they came over and got him or not, I don't know. But that would be a long way. It would be hard to see somebody out there like that. What a horrible thing!

858: ON THE SINCLAIR OPALINE TO THE SOUTH PACIFIC

But that was the end of my-- then they took me off that ship, put me on Sinclair Opaline. That was a ship-- in 1941, you had a bathtub in the thing. There was going to be bad weather statement for passengers like steerage and stuff. We used to laugh about that one. Who was going to get into the bathtub?

Yeah.

But that was when we went into the Pacific. We went down to Aruba through the canal, went down to Sydney, Australia. That was a long trip. The trip was fast. We didn't have-- we didn't need escorts once we got out into the South Pacific, because we were fast. That ship could go! We traveled 13 knots, maybe 15 or so.

Why did they have such a fabulous name?

Sinclair Opaline?

Yeah.

That's the company that owned the ship.

Oh, the company had a fabulous name.

Yeah, Sinclair Gasoline. That was a first class ship. We had good guns. We had good sailing equipment. Finally, I

Nothing dated 1888!

No. Everything I needed to signal that I learned how to operate. It was fabulous! And then the radioman, that's the guy who came to my wedding here in Chicago, was the officer. A nice guy, but he had a cabin that was right off the radio shack. And it was two bunks in it and a day couch. So, I got the day couch. They slept me in it. And I even had what they call a corpsman come in there and make my bed for me in the morning. He had to make his. He'd make mine. He was a nice guy and the other radioman. And that was a long trip. We went out there. Nothing much happened.

886: NEW CALEDONIA TO ELLIS ISLANDS TO MANCHURIA

We came back through Aruba. To Aruba, we went back again this time. We went up to New Caledonia. That was a staging area, you know. And that was the first time I really saw really Polynesian, and not Polynesian, well, they weren't Polynesian, but I mean the Somalian type, not Somalian

Aborigine?

Anyway, they were very dark skinned with bones in their noses and all that stuff and everything else. They were fascinated because they used to show moving pictures for us, you know, on the screen, you know. And they used to like to go watch that.

But what a hellhole that thing was! There were just all kinds of servicemen, sailors, Marines, and everybody in there. So we sat out at anchor there for about two or three days. And I got very upset at that time because it was so stinking hot. It was terrible. So they came on board. The Navy -- they lined us up, took us over on another little cutter out to another ship of service. We had to unload beer for the officers. They were having a big party. And we didn't even get a can of beer. We got nothing!

Somebody else told me that same story.

And they brought

Would you believe it!

And they brought the nurses. You could hear them giggling and laughing. They didn't let the storeman have in there. And, us poor guys, we were soaking wet with sweat from hauling that beer and all that stuff. We thought "holy cripe!" That did more to break our morale or discourage us, because the officers on my ship, even though they were Merchant Marine, this was when I had that real nice guy, lieutenant junior grade, to help me with my education, he was disgusted. Everybody was disgusted. That-- why they would do such a thing like that right within earshot? It wasn't on our ship. It was the other guys. It was terrible.

So, anyway, from there, we went up in to the Ellis Islands. We went up there to the island, Funafuti they call it. It was an atoll. And it had been occupied, and the Coast Guard was there. I didn't realize the Coast Guard was out that far. But they used to bring men in at the islands that were occupied. And they would patrol them. And they were on a Coast Guard cutter. Those guys had been out there for maybe about a month and they were getting squirrely sitting on it because there was nothing there. Just, what, a dozen palm trees. And they had all captured little pigs, these little island pigs, and they had the little pigs on leashes and stuff. God almighty, they were half nuts! And I thought, thank God, I'm at least on the ship. I can get away from this stuff. And then we went up north. But the destroyer escort took us, because we were up in the battle area, and they went over to shell some of the islands where they still had some Japanese stragglers and stuff.

926: BATTLE OTHER SIDE OF THE ATOLL, ROWING IN A FAST TIDE "Well, Flags, I didn't think you were that damn stupid!"

But we went into, I think it was Manchuria. I can't remember just which one of the atolls we went into. And we no more than got in there and, of course, there was Navy fleet ships and everything. This was at the time when the battle was going on over on one of the other islands in that same atoll group. And it must have been Japs, because I heard a bunch of planes flying over. But they came so fast and we weren't on duty, you know. We were tanker. We aren't going to draw attention. But ships on the other side of the atoll over there, the sky was black, you know, with jet aircraft and stuff. But whether they got anybody or not, I don't know. But the next day we decided we were going to go over to one of the islands to pick coconuts, of all the stupid things. And the captain let this radioman, the officer and myself, and four-- we had four hours, four places, and there was six of us in total. Little did we realize! We knew there was tide, but we forgot the time. And we went so fast, we got away from that ship it was like, you know, 6 or 8 knots a current, and away you go! And I thought, oh, my God! So, we turned around. We were trying to come back. We could not row fast enough. And all we could see was the breakwater out there. And we thought, oh, my God, if we get out in there, this thing will swamp, or we will be out floating around the ocean. And, so, finally, and my arms, my hands, were raw, you know, from just trying to row, fortunately, one of the Coast Guards sent over saw us. And they sent over one of these powerboats. And they came over. They sailed over. And they just said, "Hook on." And, apparently, other idiots had tried that! So we got back to the ship, and we had to take, and, I'll never forget, the captain, the captain we had, said, "Well, Flags, I didn't think you were that damn stupid!" And I said, "I guess not." I said, "I learned." Nobody told us what time the

tide was out there. That tide was fast! But that was about the only interesting thing that happened.

And then we came, well, we came back to Aruba. We'd been out now—we'd been to Australia, and back, to New Caledonia, and back, out there. That's why I mentioned the show *Mister Roberts*. You'd get stir crazy out there, because there was not that much to do, you know, so when we got through the canal, somebody was firing flares in back of us. They said there was a submarine on our tail. Well, we didn't see it. It wouldn't have made any difference, because we would have taken care of the sub. We were pretty well equipped.

954: VENEZUELA, RIOT IN THE MESS HALL

But we went to Venezuela. They had a pier out there for the oil, and we were going to go in and take on a load of oil. Now, we were combat, so we had to wear dungarees to go ashore. They would not allow anybody in uniform. But on the end of the pier, they had a little canteen that was made out of this corrugated steel, and stuff, and dirt floor, and so forth, chickens running around. So, we went in, thought, "Well, we'll get a beer or two." So, the other radioman, and then the officer, and myself went in. And I'll never forget. The guys were in there from the Merchant Marine. There was another ship in there, too. And everybody was drunker than lords, you know. Drinking banana rum and everything else. And a little guy comes in. He had a little panama suit, barefoot. He said, "Me, constable." You know, "Me keep order here." I thought, I wouldn't tell that to one of these guys around here! And he did. And, all of a sudden, bam! They laid him right out, laid him out. So, I told them, "Let's get out of here." I said, "This is not the place for us!" So, I went back to the ship.

And these guys, the Merchant Marine, they got so drunk! And they came back with all carrying bags of liquor and stuff, gunny sacks full, even the captain of the ship. I thought he was smarter than that. And I said, "Oh, my God," to the officer, my officer, "What are we supposed to do?" So, the lieutenant came up, our gunnery officer, and he said, "I want you to take this gun. They're having a riot down in the Merchant Marine Mess Hall." Well, what am I supposed to do? Go down and shoot all them guys! If I don't shoot them, they're going to shoot me! And no way am I going! I said, "You take the gun." Now, they did like me, because I was the signalman. I used to tell them a lot of stuff. So, I went down. And, sure enough, they were all drunk as lords, singing, and rarin', and getting in fights. One guy, he got hit in the head with a chair. The blood was running back and forth on the floor. Another guy that was throwing them down over the engine room right off the stairways and down the bridge, oh, terrible! So, about dusk, we had to put on, close off all the portholes for blackout. One of the Merchant Marine guys that was on deck was supposed to be in charge of that. He was drunk himself. But he came up the ladder and he walked up. And the captain was standing there right by me. And the guy just got up, just about where his head was up on the platform level, and he said, "Captain," he says, "Oh, listen." And the captain kicked him right there in the-- down he went. And I said, thought, this is the guy who is the captain of the ship! You know, the whole thing, I mean, oh, my God! So there was a riot that broke out. So, we had to signal, break radio silence, call Aruba, which is fifty miles away. And the Coast Guard came on board. And they patched up some of the guys. The guy who got hit on the head with a chair, they had a big bandage on his head.

So, they sent us back to New York. So, I went back to New York. That was on June 4th. They gave me a leave. Takes me a day to get back to Tecumseh, Michigan, on the train. Next morning, I wake up, and D-day had started. I had missed that. And I felt so bad. I really wanted to-- I knew that was coming. So, I'll never forget -- I thought, and they announced on the radio at that time, everybody go back to your ship. Well, I didn't hear that. No sense of me panicking. But I'll never forget -- I went downtown, went in to get a beer, and a couple of these old farmers were saying, "Don't you know you're supposed to be over there in France? What are you doing? One of these goldbrickers," and so forth. Yeah, that's it. I just got back. I was out at sea for about three years, you know.

012: AMPHIBIOUS TRAINING, DREW

But, anyway, I missed that. So, when I came back, I decided that I wanted to get into something else. The war in the Atlantic was pretty well over. And the Pacific, unless you got on a fleet ship, so I volunteered for amphibious. So, I went into amphibious training on Leto Beach, New York. And that was tough. That was hard training. I still was only about 130 pounds. And they used to put you on those 22 mile hikes. That was good training. The Marines trained us, you know, where they'd throw you off bridges and into the water and

That was good, huh?

Oh, that was good training. Yeah, I enjoyed that. It was hard. Except that I was totally exhausted. Of course, they used to have gas mask drills. And I could never get that thing on right. So, they'd tell, you know, you were supposed to just, what to do. I said the heck with it! I'd go running down this place and them yelling at me. The heck with you! But then I got transferred, you know. We were going to go overseas. We were called DREW: Damage Repair Enemy Water. And we were taught how to use our guns. Of course, I knew how to use a gun. And, so, I buddied up with a guy that it turned out it, he could have been, he was an assistant professor out in UCLA.

Wow.

040: INVASION PRACTICE AT LETO BEACH

He could have been an officer, but he didn't. But he and I got to be very good friends. But they put us on a troopship on--oh, I got to tell you a story! We were on Leto Beach, so we used to have to practice drills, you know, about landing. So, we were all on these landing craft and all that stuff. And this one time, we were going to make realistic--so, they had planes flying over us, you know, firing over our heads, of course, and, of course, we had the enemy-- it was the other, our people, was up there with blanks shooting at us. And we were supposed to come-- I'll never forget because Leto Beach was very wealthy people and they had their mummies, and nursemaids, and so forth. All of a sudden, all the smoke was rolling in, planes flying in. And we come in, we come charging up, and some black gal was standing there. "Oh, my Lord!" She went screaming off.

Oh no!

052: DREW, SHIP TO ENGLAND

074: “We’d have been cannon fodder.”

It was a riot. It was funny. Poor thing. Half the people in there saw her screaming around. They thought, sure, they could talk to her. And it was funny, but, anyway, I got back on the ship that was over to England. This time we were part of the just the passengers. I was no longer assigned on the bridge.

You didn’t get a bathtub.

They put us down in the bottom of that hole. And those bunks were so close together. Those canvas racks you couldn’t turn on your side. They were that close you couldn’t roll over. And I got the bottom bunk. And the guys up above, it was so hot, they were sweating and dripping down all over you. Oh, God, guys were throwing up! Oh, God, it was a mess! And I thought, oh, my God, if we ever get hit down there! I’d seen ships go kaboom! I thought, we’re dead. Don’t even, they used to give us practice, you know, to get out of there. Forget it, took twenty minutes, and we’d be long gone, you know.

And we got to England. And, of course, we were pretty well trained by that time, you know, and so forth. So, we were supposed to--that night they put us in some Quon huts right off this little town just north of Plymouth. And the boats were out there in the harbor. And they said go back to the Quonset huts. We’ll call you when we’re ready. We were supposed to invade -- they were going to have us invade Brest. And I woke up the next morning, the sun was shining under the window, and I thought, oh, my God, I missed the whole thing, you know, what’s happened? All the other guys were there too, you know. What happened? Come to find out, they called it off. They found out we’d have been cannon fodder, because we didn’t have-- all we had was light armory and so forth. So that turned out to be a fizzle.

084: BAPTISM

But, anyway, I stayed in there. That’s where I had that religious experience. This buddy of mine decided that he really wanted to become a Christian. He was an atheist before that. But he was sunk in the Mediterranean, and he went swimming around in there for about two or three days before they got him. And all of a sudden, you know, there’s no atheists in foxholes. There’s none out in the ocean either, you know. So, I went with him to training. And it turned out that he went over to a Jesuit which was Catholic. I was Protestant. But, all of a sudden, I—we’d get up in four in the morning. We’d go over and talk with this chaplain. We went over for several weeks. And it really made a lot of sense to me. And, so, I, and the guys that were in my company, most were Catholic, too, so, I got baptized. And it was a very, very wonderful experience.

093: TO GLASGOW, BACK TO HULL

106: BUZZ BOMBS

And then they sent me up north to Scotland to Glasgow. And ship’s company and so forth, but then they kept taking certain numbers in. They’d call them by pool, and so forth, to go over to

France, and everything, to act as signalmen for crossing the rivers and stuff. And I never got called. I couldn't figure out why. Came to find out because, by this time, I'd made second class pay officer, I thought that was the reason. They said, well, we need you-- you got sea experience. So, they put me on a train, I went back down to southern England to Hull. Hull was the closest to the French coast -- so close that even in the early part of the war, they could still shell it, you know, from there. And, of course, it was bombed all to heck. It was bombed the first thing I was there. And then I got on to a ship. And that's when the buzz bombs were still flying over. Those were scary darn things, you know. You heard about the buzz bombs?

No, tell me about them.

They're not the rockets. But they were the beginning of the rockets. They were like jet airplanes, you know, and they would sound like a cheap motorcycle. And in the morning when it was misty over there and you're out on in the north, in the channel out there in the Thames River, it was always foggy. You could hear them coming. They would sound like a motorcycle coming. As long as you could hear them, it was okay. But when they stopped, that's when the motor would shut off, and they'd come down. So, you'd watch for those. You couldn't shoot at them, because you couldn't see them, because it was all foggy and everything. So, we went through that.

And then I got on a ship. And this was a bad trip. I came back to New York, and the ensign that we had on there as part of the crew was really screwed up. He was in bad shape. They took him off. They took us guys off. He was lousy. I was supposed to be senior petty officer, and he had his own buddy that he wanted to. That was bad news.

128: SOUTH AMERICA

So, that's when they put me back on another ship. And that's when I went up and down, then I went up and down the coast of west coast of South America. Two ships down there, there was no shooting going on at that time because the war was over with Germany. One of the interesting things, by the way, we went into tour in Ecuador and it was like a big, wide river. And the ship went up there. And you talk about being primitive. Those people come out in dugboats and so forth.

Wow.

And they had nothing. They would come in, and they would be so grateful to even get an empty ketchup bottle. Anything they could get. And, so, we went in there to take on fresh water and stuff like that. We made a couple of stops down all the way down to Valparaiso, Chile, which is kind of a fancy place. One time when we went down because, see, this typically was a liberty ship that we would haul cargo down, as long as we were going down that way, they even put a fighting bull on the crates, one time. They took us down to Panama to Lima, Peru, so I saw the bull -- I saw the bullfights. Some got killed. I threw up.

Yeah.

I got so sick of that. I couldn't stand that.

162: TROUBLE IN THE PANAMA CANAL “We rammed into those lightships...”

But I made two trips down there. But the terrible thing that happened. The captain on that ship, he used to wear an old railroad hat. He had no teeth. Now, the other officers were great. But this guy, why he ever got to be a captain was beyond me. He was usually always roaring drunk. And the thing of is, I had good equipment, good guns, good signaling, and everything that I needed. We came down to Panama. And when you go in the Panama Canal from the Atlantic side, actually you're going to go north, northwest, because that's the way you're going up in. And there's a current down there. Well, they always have a lightship out here about three or four miles out and another one about a mile out before you enter into the harbor. The harbors had submarine nets. And they always had two small lightships, they would call them. They would be like 100 foot launchers and stuff to work open the gates and stuff. And I got the signal to go to the lightship, and then come in, line up on the lights, where you could see the lights. So, the captain, it was at night, and the wind was blowing, and roaring drunk. I gave him that. Blankety-blank, you know, and just really having-- he was foul, you know, just a foul guy. So, we kept going. And we had 100 tons of dynamite caps in the front end, in the front hole, to take down so, we thought we were going on out in the Pacific, you know. And, so, then, suddenly, I get a real flash rapid signal from this other ship. “Immediately turn North”, you know. “You're drifting in.” So, I answered it, but I didn't have a recorder. You're supposed to have somebody record your messages. I never did have that, never had that present, because we winged it. We were all by ourselves. That's one of the objections that I really had. The things that we were trained in the University of Chicago just didn't happen, no way. And, sure enough, I gave that message to the captain, and he ignored it. And, sure enough, we rammed into those lightships almost on the rocks. We had the harbor tied up for about twelve hours.

Oh, my gosh.

Because the cables was all over, you know. It was terrible. And we blocked off Panama Canal there. So, the Navy Intelligence group, and so forth, took us all. The captain printed out a letter right away. Sobered up fast, you know. And he said this is what's happened. And then he told me, because there's guys on the bridge, “Remember, I'm the captain. My word, not yours.” Well, I made up my mind. I said I'm not going to lie, but I'm not going to tell the whole truth either unless they ask for it. So I thought, because they questioned me: “Why did you ask for a repeat on that signal?” I passed it on, but I wanted it repeated, because I wanted to yell it out again. Fortunately, his executive officer backed me up. Because I thought, there goes my stripes and everything else. Do you know, even a year later, I got messages from Navy Intelligence and so forth. Keep us informed of your address. We're still investigating. Not me, but this captain. It turned out he had other incidents like that. Of course, during the war, they took anybody, you know. But that's the end of it.

224: PETTY OFFICER IN CHARGE: “You're supposed to be discharged”

Then I got back to New York. They sent me out, because this time I was the petty officer in charge taking recruits out to the West Coast and so

Did you have a plush train again?

Yeah, it wasn't bad, that time.

So, I went out there, but when I got out there, they said, "You're supposed to be discharged." They didn't even have a bunk for me. They didn't even pay me. I said, "What am I supposed to do?" I used to have to go down to the Salvation Army. I could get meals if I got in the chow line there in the base. But at night I had no place to stay, so I went down in the Salvation Army. They gave me-- I slept in the flophouse. That's where I got lice again, you know. And I came back to Chicago

240: TAPE CHANGES

Question here was about whether military service changed his attitudes about war or the military, and about his father who was also in the military.

241: RED: GUN ROLLED IN THE OCEAN

250: "We were undisciplined"

... a captain with a gun. And then he has a helper, 20 millimeters, you know, they lock in. They're pretty good size guns. And when you clean them, you have to clean the barrels to keep them greased up. But you lock them in the 45 angle position because the ship was rolling. So, stupid Red, he, the ship would roll, plop, the gun went right-- I'd never forget the captain, the guy, he just was not a sailor. He was in charge. He turned around and said, "Where's my gun?" I'm up on the bridge, and you wouldn't believe it. It fell in the ocean. The barrel went right out with the springs and everything. So, we had to get the officers involved.

Think how confused that's going to make some archaeologist! Somebody studying the ocean in 200 years is going to go, "Why? Why is this here?"

There were so many interesting things that would happen. So many, because we were totally undisciplined. We had, because the officers that they had, the gunnery officers, that were in charge of the Navy crew, they were all kids, themselves, twenty-three, twenty-four-years old. Probably got just ninety day wonders and so forth. Some of them were good and they did the best they could. But they just didn't know how to handle a group of guys, you know. You got about 12 or 14 really rough, tough, guys, you know. We were undisciplined. A lot of these people, too, that came from the backwoods, the back hills and so forth, that fire is routine and everything else. In fact, there were so many accidents with guns and so forth. Shooting, we all had guns, sidearms, and one guy almost blew his knee off one time just trying to shoot somebody else's shoes. And it was terrible.

Oh, trying to shoot someone else's shoes!

But one thing I want to say really, truly, that we were not-- we did not go through what the guys did that were making those invasions and on those island ops, you know. And that sort of, I realized how serious that was when I was in training even though we were just practicing. Because, man, you're so vulnerable. And, so, I'm not trying to take away from anything the people in the actual, in anything that they did do. Everybody contributed what they thought they

should contribute. They had an awful lot of courage, particularly like the Army that was in Italy and going through of all that. The guys that invaded on D-Day, those that were in the Battle of the Bulge and stuff like that, I wouldn't take a thing away from them. They deserve all the credit and honor and glory that they should deserve. But, yet, all of us guys did the best that we could with all we had. It was an important thing. That's the one criticism that I do have about any of the information and any of the things that they were telling about from after the war, about the things that turned the tide of the war. I think we had a big part of that in that convoy duty. And you were sitting ducks, even though, sure, we had guns on. But unless submarines came up, we couldn't shoot at them. And there was a lot of people got lost. And once you got out there on that ocean, that ship went down, that's it. I mean, just forget it. If you got to a lifeboat, you'd freeze to death before you go. And you couldn't stay in that water three minutes before you'd be totally frozen to death or, you know, out of commission. So, it was a very difficult situation. But, yet, yes, we served as best we could. And, so, I appreciate that fact.

279: MY FATHER VOLUNTEERED

I feel that it's such a surprise, when I was in amphibious, that was two years or so after I'd been in, and I was in that amphibious in England. And one day, I got a letter from my father that he was in the Navy out in-- He was my father out in the Hawaiian Islands! And I thought, what in the heck are you doing in Pearl Harbor? He had volunteered. And the funny thing of it is, I'd worked so hard to become a second class petty officer and they made him first because he was a pattern maker and he could do things. And they put him into the shipyard out there, and when ships would come in, and they would need pieces and so forth, why he could do that. And I used to laugh about that. He'd say, "Well, that's the way it goes." But he stayed, and he was in about a year, year and a half, two years. But I never saw him until the day he got discharged. He came home from Great Lakes. I was home on leave in between my ships. And he got off the train there in Battle Creek. And I'll never forget. He got off, he got down, and he kissed the ground. And he had a bottle of booze, and it slipped out, and it broke. And he sat there trying to pick up the booze but—so, I give him credit, yeah, he volunteered.

Why did he volunteer, do you think?

I don't know. I just think that he-- people were very patriotic in those days, plus the fact that my stepmother was a nurse, Percy Jones, you know in the government, for the government, nurse, and she was—see, my sister and brother, my half brothers, they were part of my mother's family. I think he just felt that he wanted to go and serve to do something. And he got very much involved in the American Legion after the war, which gave him status, gave him some station in there. But it was a very interesting time. At that time, it was entirely different then.

I think when, yeah, when the Korean War started, it was a little different thing. I was married by that time and had a child. A friend of mine had, that I had, a buddy of mine, part of my wife's family had signed up to go back. And they offered me another stripe if I wanted to go back. And I thought, well, I'm a civilian now. But you had to go back in and take a physical and so forth. I saw more guys coming in there that needed an eye doctor, and wearing glasses, and walking on canes, and everything else. But, fortunately, I did not sign up. The next week, that buddy of mine

got called. He was going to go. That would have changed my whole life. But by this time, I had gotten into the telephone company, and I enjoyed what I was doing.

And I did not appreciate-- I was not really interested in Vietnam. By this time, I got a son, myself. I thought that was a bad place to go. I didn't think that war was right. And that wasn't my call. I mean it was the country's call. But it was so much subterfuge that took place on that thing. And I knew full well, like President Eisenhower had always said, General Eisenhower, that's the worse place in the world is to get caught in some goddam Southeastern jungle down there. You just can't win. We're experiencing the same thing over there in Iraq today. I agree with the President. I think what he had is a very altruistic point of view, you know, to give those people democracy. They don't want democracy. They're Al Qaeda. And it's a tough situation. Of course, we got to support that. I do support him, what he's doing. But that's a tough situation. We haven't heard the last chapter on this, either.

324: AFTER SERVICE, COLLEGE

354: WOOING A GIRL

So when you came back, did you go to work, or did you go to school on the GI bill?

Oh, when I came back I took, well, my stepdad, I went to work down in his shop there, because he was superintendent of that other foundry and machine shop. So, I took a job down there while I was waiting to get back to college.

The only college I could get into that quick, I got out in November, I wanted to start school the first of the year, was Adrian College, which was twelve miles away. It was a ministerial school, and not that I was interested in that, but—so, they would accept veterans. But it was a bad place to be as far as a veteran was concerned, because the principal and the assistant principal had both been in jail because they had led people to resist the draft when they were in Albion College, and they got fired from those jobs, and this school was one of those bleeding heart type things. It was a ministerial type of school really. They were really evangelical to the extreme, you know. So, I had two strikes against me. Number one, I was a Catholic at the time which the history professor couldn't stand. But everybody got a straight C because that way the government would pay. If you got anything less, they wouldn't pay. But they wouldn't give you anything any more. When they used to address us in the assembly, they'd say, "Ladies, and gentlemen, and you veterans."

Well, anyway, so I decided that, I went through, I got my eight hours of English and a couple of other courses and stuff, thought I'd transfer over to Western Michigan, which was Kalamazoo. And, somehow or other, my GI bill got all fouled up in that transfer. And when I went over there, I had to buy my own books. They hadn't had that thing straightened out yet. And I had no subsistence for a place to live or anything else. And I used to hitchhike back and forth from Kalamazoo to Battle Creek, which was about, what, twenty-five, thirty, miles.

Yeah.

And I didn't even have the fifteen cents or the dime to ride the bus across Kalamazoo. I used to have to walk all the way across Kalamazoo to go over to the place where I could hitchhike and

stay at my grandmother's, which was on that side of Battle Creek. And it got pretty rough, so I took a job in the foundry working part time trying to make money. But after you work eight hours at the foundry pouring hot metal, you weren't ready to, you know, for much study. So, they came through the college at that time, and there were various industries and companies were advertising for people. And I read this ad for Woolworth Manager Training Program and so forth. So, I had enough credits that they said we'll take you down. Well, that turned out to be nothing but a glorified stock boy. That's what it amounted to be. And that was where I met my wife. I came to Chicago. I had thirty-six dollars in my pocket, some of my raggedy clothes that I had in my bag, still saved those. And, so, I got a job for twenty bucks a week. It cost me, I think my room and board was twelve, didn't give me an awful lot of money to go wooing a girl. But she was a senior in high school. She was nineteen at the time. She had been out one year. She'd had some disease or something. So, she was working in the office as part time, and she was very classy, you know. I thought, oh, my God. So, she used to work on what we call the money desk where people at that time couldn't cash anything more than a twenty dollar bill. So, they would have me at night, and I'd have to run around, and get the money, and bring it over to her. That's how we got acquainted. But she was really a good looking gal, and I felt kind of humble, and so forth. But she was so nice. And, so, one time, I did, I said, "How about a cup of coffee?" Of course, we had a counter in the store, but I said, "Let's go across the street," because they would always call on us to do things. So, that was our first date, to have a cup of coffee. It was funny, because I guess God had something in charge or a plan for me. Because she said, "I won't go with anybody that isn't Catholic." It just happened the good Lord was looking over your shoulder. And, so, it was funny, because her parents used to come down. They would sit at the lunch counter. I know they were checking me out. And a wonderful, wonderful family. They are all dead now. I miss them so much. Her brother was a policeman in Chicago. He was a sergeant. And the whole family were just absolutely wonderful.

And, so, I went to work. Finally, the telephone company was a dead end job. Or, I mean, the Woolworths was a dead end job. I finally got up to where I was making seventy dollars a week. Of course, by this time, we'd had a baby. But my mother-in-law kept saying, "You got to get into something else. I want you to go into the telephone company," she says, "Pretty hard to get in there, but see what you can do." And I took the test, took a day off, and went down, and apparently, I did all right. But they sent me a letter of acceptance, but I never bothered to open it. Just let it rest there.

380: WORKING FOR THE PHONE COMPANY

Oh, no.

It was there for about three or four weeks. Finally, I got upset down at Woolworths, so my wife opened it. She said, "You know, you've been hired. They'll take you." So, I took the letter and went downtown. In those days, they used to have the nickel phones in people's houses. That's before your time. People either had direct service, or they had the nickels, and people would do that. They'd have to put a nickel in the phone in the house to make it work. But my job at that time was to go around and collect all those nickels and make bills. Because if there wasn't enough in the box, then they had to pay. Part of that was also to sell people, to get rid of those nickel phones, to take the other type, flat-rate service. So, I did pretty good on that. So, they

promoted me, moved me up to what we called bag and tag. That was for the public telephones. And I would collect those. They gave you a truck, and I had the west side of Chicago. I used to collect five to six thousand dollars a day. And I got held up, robbed, and then hijacked, and threatened, and all that stuff. It was a bad scene, but it turned out I identified one of the guys. And my brother-in-law being on the police force helped me. And because I went to court, and got things settled, and made a good impression upon people in the phone company, so, they made a service engineer out of me, which was double jump, you know.

Wow.

So I went to Evanston. Service engineer was where we would go out with people at the primary business. And we would analyze their communication needs, whether they would need all the way from just a simple key button set all the way up to huge switchboards arrangements. And I got pretty good at it. My wife was pretty good too, because I used to have to do a lot of paperwork, fill out a lot of forms, and diagrams. I taught her how to do it. So, we used to sit at night and do all that stuff.

So, I got promoted again. I went up to Rockford to sell two-way radio. They didn't have radio telephone that would reach out that far. That was before all the modern stuff, so just had two-way radio like for police departments, ready mix. I had the territory, the north part of Illinois. I did pretty good on that. I sold to trucking companies and ready mix companies. And I even figured it out that veterinarians are like doctors. They're on call. So, I talked veterinarians into having those systems.

So I got promoted. They moved me back to Chicago and they made an instructor out of me. And then I ended up being district marketing manager out at Oak Park. Then I went downtown to headquarters staff. That's where I became an editor, and an author, and all that stuff. I wrote the marketing handbook. And I had a staff at that time of about five or six people, all management people

Wow

because I had to have people who had experience.

413: WHAT THE MILITARY TAUGHT ME

And did you feel like that the stuff you learned in the service helped you at all?

I think it taught me discipline. It taught me to

Well, it taught you how to be a good manager, too, you know, having seen

Oh, yeah

good managers and bad managers.

It did, plus the fact it taught me that to be independent but yet to cooperate, and rely, and don't try to be a one man army, yourself. And it taught me respect for management, even though, some of them, I didn't respect very well. But it taught me that. It did teach me the value of discipline. I'm not talking about regimental type of thing, but honesty, decency, and trustworthiness. Which I think that's innate, that's in people, I think, but it enhanced a lot. It did a lot in that sense. It taught me how to cooperate with people, even a lot of people, some of those guys that they brought on in that NAG, those gunners and so forth, some of them couldn't read and write. It was terrible. It taught me how to work with people, and get along, and that sort of thing.

432: NAG UNRECOGNIZED CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WAR: "Never even got one battle star"

I think the only real disappointment that I had was the fact that the country really was not made well aware of the contribution that we NAG gave to this country. Now the Merchant Marine, here the last ten years or so, they've been getting a lot of publicity, you know. There's a lot of documentaries and so forth. But none on NAG. There isn't any of them on NAG. None of us got any. And some of the stuff we had to work with, we had to be self-reliant. When I went on board this old tub, by the way, I understand, I don't know whether it's true or not, but when I got off that ship, one guy stayed on, and they told me, when I came back six months later on another ship, that it got blown up next time it went out. And there was only three guys got off it. Because it was a tanker, it went up in flames. I would have been-- I was going to sign over again. I was going to say, "Gee, leave me on." Good thing I didn't. The good Lord was watching over me, I guess. But that I feel very shortchanged on. We didn't even get a battle star, and we were in battle out there constantly. That was the battle of the Atlantic. I can remember a couple of times, we would come into New York, and there was a guy, a nice fellow I met at the USO, and we buddied up, you know. So, and here he had all kinds of battle stars on. He was a cook. He was a cook, you know, on a battleship. And I said, what the heck! He said he never even-- the only thing he would hear, he would be down in the bowels of the ship when the ship was going on. He never saw a gun. I got shot at in Casa Blanca, you know, when we were on board, because the Arabs in there, and the Vichy French, they were still hostile, even though we conquered the place. But we wouldn't wear uniforms at night. We'd stand out. On the deck of the ship, every once in awhile, you could hear "ping." Somebody would take a shot at you. I don't know whether it was the Arabs or who it was. But having been out through all that, we never even got one battle star. Nothing. No recognition whatsoever. Only thing I got was the ribbons for the Atlantic or the American area of operations. I thought it was a shame, particularly some of those guys that were right down in the invasion of Crete. I thought that was where I was going, it was after we left Casa Blanca. A lot of those guys, you know, really got mangled up down there. In fact, this buddy, that was where he was floating around in the Mediterranean.

463: WE NEEDED MORE SUPERVISION

But it's-- I think, too, they could have done a better job of giving us more supervision. First of all, because it was an awkward situation, because the captain was in charge of the ship, but he had nothing to do with us. And he felt kind of reluctant to take charge of any of us or to issue anything. Sure, it's his ship, you know, and anything that we would do, it-- that would affect the ship. Yeah, he had to respond, but as far as military means?

And like I said, all the time I was out there, never got a Navy manual, never got anything else. So, when I made second class, I made it strictly on the ability that I had as a signalman. A lot of things I didn't know the answers to because I didn't have the books. I didn't have anything to study with, and I think that's a shame. I think a lot of people that are going into the Service, particularly today, people are volunteering. They're going into-- that those opportunities should be provided for them. I guess they do that today, but maybe they weren't. But we sure didn't get it.

477: "One of the boilers blew up" CHESAPEAKE BAY FIGHT, NAVY RESPONSIBILITIES

And how they would cut us loose! Like when we pulled into Chesapeake Bay that time coming back from Africa. We were in Chesapeake Bay, and one of the boilers blew up on the ship we were in. We thought we were hit, you know. Of course, we were dead in the water. So what happened, they took the gunnery officer, which was our officer, the captain, and some of the other officers off the ship. We sat there for two days. We didn't know where anybody was. And we were out there in the middle of the-- you know, you can't jump off the ship. You were ten miles from shore, you know. We sat there, and it ended up that one of the hillbilly Navy guys and one of the Merchant Marines got into a big knife fight. I don't know what all happened. There was blood all over the place. Somehow or other, somebody was able to get hold of somebody to get them off the ship. But that kind of --that should never be. Same way I was telling about the guys having guns. The first guns we had were 45s. They were automatic, you know. The guys were never trained on how to handle those things. They'd strap a 45 on you, tell you to go stand guard. Well, this one guy, I was in my bunk down-- that was when we were down below in that fo'c'sle. And a guy was standing there by the-- there was a bench alongside the ship, and he was sitting there, aiming at, fooling around, aiming at his knee. First thing you know, Kapow! We all look up. Of course, in that small room, we thought, Oh, my God, we've been torpedoed! I looked. He blew, fortunately, he didn't hit his-- all he did was break the skin. But his uniform and everything was all tore up. The guy on the bunk right there just put his new pair of shoes out there. And that bullet went through, tore one of his shoes all to pieces. And the other guy had just raised up on the next bed to go to the john, and the bullet leapt in his bed. But we should have gotten up and just beat the living heck out of him by then. But we didn't. He would have reported nothing happened. Oh, no, you know.

Do you think you were old enough, because you enlisted when you were seventeen, do you think that was -- do you think that wouldn't have made any difference?

No, it depends on the background. Now, I was pretty self-reliant because of the breakup in my family and going back and forth. But the--no, I think a lot of guys through the draft at that time, you know, they always said, if you could see lightning and hear thunder, why you were in, you know.

509: THE GUY I FELT SORRY FOR "The current was so strong, it swept him away"

But I think the guy I felt sorry for was the one that wanted to jump overboard and go swimming when we were over in Cardiff, Wales in the harbor, and he went down off-- he was down on the ladder, a Jacobs ladder, and the current was so strong, it swept him away. And we couldn't lower a boat fast enough for him. We threw the rings out. But he was gone. I got in trouble. That was when the old captain we had at that time-- and I ran up on the bridge, he had just painted the deck. And I ran through it, and I'm blowing the ship whistle with the signal, and he comes up there. Oh, he was screaming and yelling at me, "What are you doing?" I said, "A guy fell off." "Oh, he was drunk. He ought to fall off." I said, "This is one of our guys. You treat your senior people your own way. This is ours!" And that time, I have to say, my ensign backed me up. And you had to be tough. But this guy, when he came back, another picked him up and brought him, he was wacko. He was out of it. We used to have to stand guard. We had a special fo'c'sle for him in sickbay. It took four of us to hold him down. He was violent. He still thought he was struggling in the water. And it was a good twenty-four hours or so we had to switch off to hold him down. And, finally, he came out of it a little bit. But they still had to have us stand guard on him because he would just go bananas. They brought a guy. They brought a psychiatrist on board, an Englishman. And they put him in a straightjacket. And I'll never forget the guy. He was pretty coherent at the time, but he cried. And he kept saying, "They should never have done this to me." He couldn't even-- he used to freeze up. He was a gunner. He would shoot the gun, and he would never stop pulling the trigger the whole round. The whole magazine would go. And I used to say, "You know, Ensign Stall, this guy is not capable. You should not let him up there on that gun." Of course, I'm a kid. I'm eighteen years old telling them this was terrible. Of course, I used to speak up about that, too. But that was awful.

537: RED & COOTIES (See second 241)

But, see, they bring those kind of-- and Red, they used to have a guy that's in the funny papers they called him Red or I forget the name of the comic strip now, but that was him. He was about that tall. He was built funny, you know. And he had red hair. He was like an orangutan. He had hair all over him. And he was-- he was the guy that lost the gun off the side of the ship. I thought maybe I could do something with him. I needed somebody to help me practice my semaphore, so I tried to get him. He couldn't even hold the flag. He was really in bad shape. My bunk was up above his, so one night I'm in the washroom getting ready to take a shower, and I said, "God, this cold weather gear that we got on, you know, this heavy underwear and stuff. Fuzz was all over me!" And I picked up-- that fuzz was moving!

Yeah.

That was me, and I thought, Oh, my God, you know, I got cooties or something! And it turned out the guy below him had cooties. I had cooties. It was like the Eisenhower Expressway going up to my bunk. It was terrible. And, of course, outside, when it was cold, it didn't bother you. But when I went into the wheelhouse where the steam was going, oh, my God, you would go crazy, you know. So what they had at that time, they used to have-- they had sulfur, and lard, and they would rub you down all over with that stuff. Oh, my, time we got to England, that was the first trip to Bristol, man, I was so glad! I spent two hours in the shower room.

564: "The way we won the war"

But, now, that kind of stuff I understand. But the way we won the war, really truly-- a lot of it had to do with small groups of people using their common sense. I mean, whether it was in the Army, or the Marines, or whatever else, these were the small groups that hung together and did that stuff. But most of those had some kind of discipline.

575: HOW GENE SURVIVED PEARL HARBOR

We did not even respect our petty officers. On my first ship going out, guy named Gene Radisson was a first class petty officer, boatswain mate, which is a pretty high rate. Next thing would be chief petty officer. He had been on the Arizona. He's the guy that I remember that he was there at Pearl Harbor. He was in the crew that all got sunken down on the bottom. But he escaped because he was out drinking that night and he got back late, so for punishment they put him on a little lighter, one of those little boats in the harbor, took him out on a buoy out there to chip the paint, and he sat out there on that paint when all that was going on.

That was amusing.

580: DUMB THINGS : "Because we just didn't have the organization"

And then the ship went down. Now he was a first class boatswain mate which was a pretty high rate as far as enlisted personnel is concerned, and then in our fo'c'sle, we had some of these hillbillies in there. They were practically challenging him to fight and everything else, doing dumb things. We had a guy come in there one time on one of the big shells, on one of the three inch shells, open it up, pour the gunpowder down, put it into the cigarette container, the case, lit it. Oh, my God, thought it was going to burn the ship down, you know. The officer never did anything. And even though the boatswain mate went up and said, "This guy should really be cashiered out of the service, that's stupid," the same guy, when we went over to England, had a 38, supposed to be standing on guard, didn't have the 45, we come walking down, three of us, there was myself, another guy, and a friend of mine down the gangway, you know, so it's still inside the gangway, this guy comes out of the mess hall, so he points that gun right straight at me and he says, "I'm going to—" he was as drunk as a lord—"I'm going to shoot that." And he pulls the trigger, but it didn't quite go off. And he lifted it up. Bang, it went off. I got gun powder and everything, bullet went up on the steel hull, it came went down, hit my buddy on the arm, knocked him flat, tore his uniform. I told the officer, "Hey, you can't have an idiot like that running around with a gun. He's going to kill somebody. He don't know who the enemy is, you know." He did nothing. "Yeah, well, we can't"-- he was just a young guy, twenty-three, twenty-four-years old. I said, "You're in charge. We're in port. You should ship him, take him." "Oh, well, you know, he's just a poor country boy." So, the other guy that nearly got killed, and I almost got killed too. That's unconscionable, that kind of Service. Of course, on a regular Navy ship, you wouldn't have that. They're so strict there. They have places you're supposed to be at certain times. You get off those places, you're in difficulty. So, they really watch it.

This guy Radisson, first class, after that trip, that was the bad one, when we were out, he went into submarine service. And he got his training. We had a code system, we'd write back and forth. He was a good guy. I liked him. And, finally, I got the message he was going through the

Canal on his way to the Pacific on a submarine. This was about several months later. I wrote him again, and again, and again. It came back, unable to deliver, address not available. Never heard from him again. He went down, finally met his destiny.

But I think the message out of that was for me, here was a guy was a first class petty officer, and the officers wouldn't pay any attention to him, because we just didn't have the organization. That's terrible. It was unconscionable. But, thank God that it worked out. There were a lot of bad things that could happen because of that. That's the complaint I got.

Plus the fact, no recognition that we still hung in there, and did what we did, and couldn't even get a battle star for it. And we were in battle out there for months. Every day that you went out of that harbor, they were out there to get you. And it wasn't a pleasure cruise at all.

That's my story. Thanks for letting me tell it.

It was wonderful, and I really want to thank you for doing it. It's great.

I hope I'm not talking too much.

You didn't talk too much at all, you know.

MY WAR

(Bob Crandall, serial No.# 622-52-28)

December 7, 1941 through November 30, 1945

The Beginning

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, I was a senior in Montague High School at Montague, Michigan. Three friends and I were driving back from an afternoon of bowling in Muskegan; someone turned on the car radio and we were shocked! Pearl Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese and our Pacific Fleet was very badly damaged! We could hardly believe what we were hearing. Our happy-go-lucky afternoon was shattered and our world would never be the same again.

The war news continued to be very discouraging and demanded most of our attention, it was very difficult to concentrate on school subjects. Also my family was planning to move to Tecumseh, Michigan where my Stepfather was offered the superintendent's position at the Bruce Foundry & Mfg. Co. Life was not at all stable for me, the relationship between my Stepfather and I was not good, in fact it was downright ugly at times. This intended move of the family would leave me 'high and dry', it was pretty late in the school year for me to transfer to another school and I had already transferred to Montague High in my sophomore year from Battle Creek, Michigan. There was nowhere for me to live in Montague when they would move. Montague was a small village and I had no relative there; joining the Navy was the answer.

The School Superintendent knew of my distress and offered me my High School Diploma if the Navy would take me; patriotism was running very high at the time. My Mother really didn't want me to go and hesitated about signing a required release for me since I was only 17 years old at the time. But after my Stepfather, who was drunk again, and I had a near fist fight my Mother did sign and I was off on my way to the Navy. This took place during the first week of February and I was bussed from Muskegan with some other young men to Detroit, Michigan where we took our oaths. Note that my discharge papers are misdated showing the oath in March.

Several of us volunteers were billeted in a second class hotel in Detroit for a couple of weeks; we had very little money, no extra cloths and very little leadership. This was a very confusing time. Then a large group of us who had taken the oath were sent by train to the Great Lakes Naval Training Base in Illinois. We were glad to be going because while in Detroit we were fed in some 'hash-house' restaurant with barely enough to sustain us; we said to each other: "war is hell all ready and we are still in the USA". Of course this was a joke but we were really hungry.

Off to Great Lakes and a whole new adventure! I was flat broke but full of enthusiasm and hope.

Great Lakes and Boot Camp

We arrived there sometime in mid-morning and were immediately assembled in a large gymnasium where a floor was marked off in three foot squares by some kind of tape and we were told to take a square. Then we were each given a cardboard box and were told to completely disrobe and put our cloths in the container. We were to write the address on the box where our cloths were to be sent. I did not know what my Mother's address was in Tecumseh so I sent my things to my Father in Battle Creek.

Well, there we were stark naked as 'jay-birds' and the tests were about to begin but first we were fed a box lunch standing around naked, this was a peculiar feeling with not even a fig leaf to hide behind. The first test was a urine sample. There were bottles on a table across the room by a wall and we were told to 'pee' in a bottle; one smart-aleck said: "do you mean from here Doc"? We all laughed but the Petty Officer in charge didn't think it funny at all; he had probably heard that a hundred times before. Then a couple of doctors came in and told us to bend over and spread our cheeks and sure enough some got confused as to what cheeks they meant; we had another good laugh except that I was in the back row – I shut my eyes! Then we were tested for all sorts of things like our reflections, our teeth, our hearing and again our sight and whether or not we had any color blindness. Then they put us in showers and the water was so hot that it near scalded us. And then came the blood tests! We were marched single file down a corridor to where a sheet was hanging across the aisle. When I pulled the sheet aside as instructed I nearly fainted; there was a core man drawing blood who looked more like a butcher than a sailor, his apron was splattered with blood. Well, I got through it even though I had never seen anything like that before. I felt that I had won a purple heart already and so did most of the other guys; many dropped like flies. Later came a haircut with only clippers, all my blonde locks were on the floor never to come back as before.

By late afternoon we were given uniforms, sizes were guessed at! We walked down a long row of bins where all the stuff was stored. We were pile high with underwear, pants, jumper shirts, a pea coat, white and black hats, leggings, socks, two blankets, a thin mattress and a hammock, shoes and boots. We were also supplied with toilet items and a bag to carry them in, this was called a ditty-bag. We were also given a length of rope which we were to tie everything up in. I could hardly walk but I was glad to get some cloths on.

Great Lakes at this time (early March 1942) was in the midst of a huge building project of making barracks for all of the trainees expected for the war, mud was every where because the bulldozers had piled it up in great mounds and all over everywhere. The weather was wet and cold and miserable all around and we were tired and hungry. Then we were taken to a barracks and told to get dressed as best we could and finally led to a mess-hall and given a good dinner. After eating we were sent back to what was to be our barracks and assigned a Company number. We spent some time stenciling our names on all of our cloths. We were introduced, that is told. Who our Company commander was And what he expected of us. This was a Chief Petty Officer who we were sure was an Admiral. There were no bunks in those days, enlisted personnel slept in hammocks and what an experience that was.

Life in the Barracks

Our barracks were two stories and each main sleeping room was equipped with steel stanchions and cross beams laid out like a checker board. These were about 3 feet high. Each of us was assigned one of these squares as our place to hang our hammock. We were told how to tie the hammock between the cross beams in a certain way; each had to be drawn up tight with no sagging like a bow-string. The real trick was getting into one of these with out flipping over took much skill. We were finally allowed to try to sleep, I was so tired that I had no trouble but several fell and there were many bruises and even one broken leg.

The next morning we were up at 4:30 and had only a short time to get washed and dressed. Then came a task that I hated "lashing up our hammock and mattress the Navy way". We were to use the rope that had been given the day before and we had to lash the hammock with 7 half hitches exactly as told. The problem was that the rope was about a foot short; this did not make any excuse – do it over! My hands were raw. I was beginning to hate that damned place.

At 6:00 AM we were led to the mess hall for breakfast. This consisted of mash potatoes, a salmon patty, beans and ketchup all mixed together. The mess cook who served me slammed it onto my tray so hard that some bounced off and got on my pants: I was told not to be so messy! Well, I was so hungry that I ate it all.

After chow we were given many more exams and shots. Those who gave the shots were not very gentle, sometimes the needles broke off and had to be pulled out with tweezers. There was a standard joke that today we were going to get a shot with a square needle where it would hurt the most, of course we played along with it and when we came out passed those waiting we moaned and groaned like it really happened. There we many pale faces that day. I was groggy from all these shots but kept on going, there was no rest.

Keeping our uniforms and shoes clean was a real problem because of all the mud around. We were not allowed to enter the barracks with any mud on our shoes, not even to the lavatory where the washing sinks were. To clean our shoes we had to break the ice in the mud puddles in the street and scrub with our fingers until acceptable. The only good thing that happened during that time was that my Stepfather wrote a letter and apologized and sent me 3 dollars, it sure came in handy because that is all that I had.

Life consisted of drilling, drilling and more drilling and polishing the decks with steel wool. I also got stuck with KP for one whole week and it was quite difficult because we had to arise at 4:00 AM and work until late at night, there was very little sleep. I also had to take my turn with fire guard duty, this meant walking around the barracks from midnight until dawn, the mud was awful. I lost much weight at that time and often fell asleep while standing for inspection; many of us did also. After about five or six weeks a Commander or something like that learned how we were being abused, several men had collapsed, he gave us all a two day rest. We slept for most of those two days.

Our Revenge!

One day as we were drilling by a mess hall bake shop we spotted a long table with many apple pies set out to cool. As we marched by most of those pies mysteriously disappeared. This set off a big investigation to learn of who did this, of course we were all innocent. They hunted and hunted for evidence but even the pie tins disappeared, we had buried them all in the mud. At another time an over eager young officer was never satisfied with our drilling. One day he lined us all up about 5 rows deep with our guns fixed with bayonets. Then he charged down the rows at full speed but someone stuck a foot out and there were bodies, back-packs and rifles in one big pile. He was cut up pretty good from the bayonets; we never did see him again.

Once someone put laundry soap in the soup pots, what a mess? This mess hall served several companies. This set up the worst case of diarrhea in the whole boot-camp. There were not enough toilet bowls to care for the demand. At that time the inspectors didn't care if you had mud on your shoes, come in they said, don't do it on the street; which many did before they could get to a barracks. They never did find out who did that dastardly deed, it wasn't me, I was a victim.

One day they picked out the best marchers and made a special drill team for the "Movietone" news reels that were used in the movie theaters at that time and I was chosen. I was the last guy in the third column in the scene as the marchers went by. I had about 5 seconds of fame but: "gee Ma, I'm in pictures!"

After a month we were lined up around a big room in a hall and paid our \$21 for a month's service, but we didn't get to keep it. We had to pass by a series of tables with officers who each took out money for our uniforms and I don't know what all? I ended up with about \$6 for a whole month of service of constant drilling, scrubbing decks and no sleep!. The training and discipline was necessary to toughen us up and weed out those unable to cope with stress and take orders, but they overdid it. Some of the Petty Officers went far beyond that which was correct, some of these were unqualified for the authority that they had. Unfortunately some of the trainees lost it and went nuts. One poor soul climbed a tall tower and tried to commit suicide, I don't know if he made it or not. One group of southern backwoods company threw a Petty Officer out of a second story window; I don't know what the results of that were. I do have to commend the Telephone Company's operators who gave us special service; it was comforting to call home on occasion and know that I still had people who cared.

I was so glad to get out of Great Lakes that I jumped for joy. At that time we were advanced from apprentice seamen to seamen 2nd Class. We did not have to wear those cussed leggings (boots) except while on guard duty. I went down to 120 pounds, but I was healthy. I vowed that I would never ever go back to that cussed place again. But I did 30 years later on business for the Illinois Bell Telephone, but I made it a short visit. Upon graduation my Father, Grandmother and Aunt Dude had driven down to visit, it was a coincident that on that same day I was given a furlough and so went home with them. Upon the end of the furlough I was to attend a training program at the University of Chicago to be a Navy Signalman. This was OK by me, I was so glad to get out of Boot Camp that I would have gone to dancing school.

Training in Chicago

The University had leased some classrooms and housing areas for the trainees. My group was billeted in the "Sunny Gym" at the start but after a month or so we were moved to the Bartlett Stadium. The classes were conducted in various nearby university classrooms and out in a field area where practice signal masts etc. were in place. The training consisted of learning Morse code, blinker light, signal flags consisting of all the alphabetical and numeral flags semaphore, spelling and message procedures. It was all very interesting. We were promoted to 1st Class Seamen and were treated very well. We ate in the University's dining rooms and fed first class and there was no KP duty. We were given liberty and would often go to the Loop. There were USO facilities and the people of Chicago really treated us warmly; some even invited us to their homes for Sunday dinners. We could ride the city trains and busses free and so traveled around as much as we had time for. It was interesting though, I never did get to Navy Pier. It was during this time that I turned 18.

During the time that we were at Bartlett Stadium the scientists were there developing the Atom bomb. We never knew that they were there since we were at one end and they at the other which was off limits to us. One afternoon we were assembled for a special inspection in our woolen dress blues and it was very hot. Some Captain was to inspect us and he was very late in coming. We stood on the field for a very long time and I passed out. I was taken to the poolside in the stadium which we were never allowed to go into and they poured water over me. When I revived – back out on the drill field!

One late afternoon, I and another seaman were assigned for Night Shore Patrol (SP) duty. We were given an arm badge clearly marked SP and a night stick and told to patrol an area around 63rd St. and Cottage Grove. We didn't know Chicago and certainly not this area. We were to assist Navy personnel who needed help or were disorderly. Both of us were kids only 18 years old. We were small town boys and were not prepared for the jungle of rabble rousers that we encountered. I had always had good relationships with the black people in Battle Creek but this mob was like right out of mayhem. We were surrounded by scores of screaming men and women and young people. They taunted us and hooted and hollered: "Hey big-police mans, wants a fight? We dare ya!" They did not know that we were Navy, not police and we were just there to aid our own. Since then I have had many fine relations with African Americans but this mob didn't even know where America was and where the jungle ended. This left an indelible memory on me. I never went into that area again and I never plan to. If this bothers some it is not half as bad as that which we experienced, we were really afraid that we would be harmed before we found our way out of there. It seemed to me that the Navy should have prepared things a little better.

I don't remember how long we were in training there in Chicago. One day we were packed up and put on a train and shipped out to the West Coast, rumor had it that we were going to San Diego but it was Los Angeles instead.

To The West Coast

The train we were on was a fairly new Streamliner and this was a pleasant 4-day journey. We were given a couple of Pullman sleeper cars and we ate in a dining car. The Porters were really nice guys, not at all like that mob in Chicago and we enjoyed each other all the way to L.A. This was a great trip and the scenery was really beautiful. I had never seen a mountain before and many of these were spectacular with high ridges and deep valleys and some had water falls with fast brooks cascading along beside the train. When we passed through South Dakota there were thousands of pheasants all over the fields, some even perched on the fences.

One night while on this train I walked to the very last car, it was like a lounge and there was a small open air platform on back end. This was a very clear night and I could see the desert for a long way. I said a little prayer as I stood there and wondered what life had in store for me. I had a very strange and lonesome feeling and I didn't stay there long. It is odd that I still remember that experience even now almost 60 years ago.

In Los Angeles

There was not much excitement for us in L.A., just more signaling practice and waiting to be assigned somewhere. The war news was not very good except that the Battle of Midway had been won but all other news was not comforting. We were stationed in the Naval Armory where conditions were pretty good. We were entertained quite often by movie people and saw several stars. One night I had a few hours liberty and while walking around with very little money I passed by a fancy theatre on Sunset Strip and the manager came out and ask me to carry in our flag and lead in the Pledge of Allegiance, he let me see the show free and gave me a couple of bucks to get something to eat. Then I walked around to see the sights up and down the strip and even saw where the stars like Shirley Temple had their foot prints in the cement.

At another time two friends and I had a 36 hour pass, we pooled our money and went to a movie downtown but we got bored and so bought a cheap bottle of booze. We had nowhere to go so went to Pershing Square and drank the booze. After a while we all got pretty sick and decided to go back to the Armory where we belonged. While walking back we passed under a high balcony that was out over the street. We did not know it at the time but this was the headquarters entrance of Amie McPherson's temple; she was a famous evangelist at the time. Just as we approached the balcony suddenly brilliant search lights lit up the whole area and there were people dressed in white robes and all were singing. My buddy who was still pretty drunk sobered up fast! Someone reached out of the doorway and then we were led up to where the singing was. The people in the robes started to pray for us, my buddy was really shaken and started to cry, he was sure that the Angels were after him I guess. He still had that bottle of booze under his shirt (i.e. jumper) and it was slipping out so I slipped it out quietly and put it in one of the potted palms nearby. I often wondered what happened when someone found it later?. Then some kind soul drove us back to the Armory. I don't think my buddy stuck to his religious commitment of that night because he became very ugly from that time ,he was probably very embarrassed by his behavior.

A sour note

While we were at the Armory there were bad feelings with some of the local area people. They were known as "Zootsuiters" because of the baggy pants, long coats and gold watch chains they wore. They would try to waylay sailors and beat them up. And there were occasions when someone would fire a rifle shot down from the hills in back of the Armory down into our building. It happened once while I was there; no one got hurt but this was the only place that I had been in while in training that some of our guards had access to live ammunition. Shortly after I was transferred from there a real riot broke out. The Navy had had enough and most of the whole personnel hired taxis and went through that area and around town and attacked the Zootsuiters. I understand that it was a bad scene but it stopped the waylaying. I'm glad that I wasn't there but a friend of mine was and said that it was not good.

Transferred to the East Coast

Sometime in September our Company (all Signalmen) was packed up and sent by train to somewhere on the East Coast, we didn't know the destination. This was not a good trip. We were assigned to several box cars that had been equipped with steel bunks. There was also an old time passenger car to be used for sitting during the day but there was only one toilet per car. When the toilet was flushed it emptied out onto the tracks and you could see the railroad ties passing by. There were no showers and only a dinky little wash basin. These cars were right in back of a coal fired engine at times and the smoke would roll into the cars. The engines were often changed and we spent time quite often waiting on the sidings. The train took a southern route down through New Mexico, Arizona and Texas and it was hot – stinking hot! This was a miserable 5 day trip. We ended up at the Naval Armory in Brooklyn, New York.

The Brooklyn Naval Armory

This was an old and huge building right on the harbor. As we arrived once again we were to strip down for inspection, I began to wonder about these doctors? As we were standing only in our stocking feet we were surprised by civilian families coming by who were apparently going to visit the place – oh well, this was war, right? Then one of the doctors was a woman and she complained about what a dirty, unclean bunch we were until she learned of our bad train ride. Finally we showered and stowed our gear away and got fed.

The Armory was the Naval base assembly area for a pool of Signalmen, Radiomen, Gunners and junior Officers for convoy duty. We were known as the Naval Armed Guard (NAG) for merchant ships. We were not the Merchant Marines who were the civilian crews and who ran the ships. We reported to a Gunnery Naval Officer however my role was unique as a signalman because I worked in unison with the ship's officers on the bridge. My job was to pass signals to and from as the situations required to the Captain and others in charge. This caused some problems for me since I was a part of the Navy crew but worked with the officers, some of the enlisted men resented this, many

Convoys were very important at that time. Most people in the USA at that time had no idea of how desperate the war situation was. England was being isolated by the German submarines and long range bombers who were closing down the supply of every thing they needed. Actually the Germans were winning the war. Many of our ships were sunk before they could get there, in fact we lost scores and scores right outside of our harbors. The New York harbor was cluttered with hulks of ships that were torpedoed but managed to get to port. Some were split in two, one outside of our base had a hole that a train could have driven through. Thus the need for more protection, thus the Armed Guard and thus we found the war that we were assigned to.

After a few days, one evening after dark I was called to report with all my gear and was told that I was shipping out. I was loaded onto a 'water taxi' and taken out in the harbor to a ship. I was very disappointed, instead of a sleek escort war ship I was taken to what looked like an old rust bucket, which it was. This was the S.S. William Penn, a converted tanker that looked like a cargo ship because the super structure was amid ships. This ship was first launched in 1922 with coal fired engines that were later converted to diesels. The top speed was 11 knots but it could only hold it for a short time or the engines would break down so we cruised at 6 to 8 at best.

I was led to a fantail hatch where below the deck was a forecabin with about 10 bunks for the Navy crew; it was a dark hole. The toilet (head) was a mess. The scuppers on the latrines and stools led to the outside water line outside and when the ship would roll they didn't always close and the ocean would rush up and spray like a fire hose: what a thrill that was?

After I stowed my gear away a seaman took me to the Captain's quarters. The Captain was an elderly man who had been retired but was brought back for the war effort he was a nice person but didn't say much. He gave me the ship's code to use as identification when appropriate – what was appropriate? He didn't say and said that I should that! Our Navy Officer had not come aboard at that time so I went out on the bridge to examine the signal equipment in the dark. This was another disappointment. The signal equipment for blinker light consisted of a small 8 inch very old lamp with a trigger finger to flash the light, not at all like the navy style that I had been trained with. There was also an Aldis portable battery powered lamp that used a steady beam and the lens would move up and down showing a steady light when moved also by a finger trigger. The flag bag was OK and in good shape and had all the alphabetical and numeric flags but the halyards were like cloths line and would snap in the cold weather.

The William Penn was near 500 feet long and 60 feet abeam. We carried aviation gasoline when loaded. The armament was almost non-existent, only two 50 caliber machine guns and one wouldn't shoot. And a 5 inch cannon (like a 105mm) on the stern that was made in 1898 and that would not shoot either because the firing pin couldn't be located.

Well, there I was all alone on the flying bridge wondering what I was to do. After about an hour or so we got underway and someone was signaling. I guessed it was me.

The call signal was a series of the letter 'A' i.e., dot-dash, dot-dash. I responded with 'K' (dash-dot-dash) go ahead. And sure enough The message was "What Ship"? Should I answer? Should I reveal our code? I remembered that the current phrase was "a slip of the lip could sink a ship" and it was known that there were German agents around the harbor. Well, I responded correctly and was told that we were to proceed, I passed this on to the Captain through the voice tube and all he said was "very well". I thought that I had done something great

I didn't sleep that night and stayed up on the bridge. By daybreak we had cleared the New York harbor but were close enough to land that I could see the Parachute Drop and hear the music of Coney Island. People were already at the park and things were going full blast, this was amazing. Didn't they know that a war was going on right out in front of them? It didn't take long for this to be known because an Escort Corvette dropped a load of depth charges near by and the ocean exploded. I do not know if they had detected a submarine or not but it sure was a sobering awareness that things were no longer just fun and games. Here was real war going on right outside of the harbor. In truth many ships were lost along the coastline and most Americans were unaware of the seriousness of this situation. It took a law to get the building of New York to turn off their bright lights at night since these made surface ships stand like silhouettes far out at sea.

We left port early in October of 1942 and headed for Galveston Texas to take on a load of gasoline. We had one Signalman, (me) and 8 Gunners. We were all just 1st. class seamen, there were no petty officer and one Navy Ensign. There I was barely 18 years old, confused, scared because I wasn't sure of what I was supposed to do. But the trip was uneventful and we got to port OK, then the big boys took me out and got me drunk on beer and got me a tattoo – which I sincerely regret.

On our return we came north as far as Baltimore and put into dry-dock for re-fitting. The shipyard workers installed 6 20mm anti-aircraft guns in gun mounts. They made another mount for a 3" 50 dual surface and anti-aircraft on the bow. And they fixed the cannon on the stern. This was formidable equipment and could handle a sub on the surface. There was also a new large cabin built on the boat-deck for more of the Navy crew, I was one assigned there with 8 or so other men. The Navy Ensign had a cabin in the officer quarters.

We remained in dry-dock for at least three weeks and it was a terrible time. All the officers were not on board during this time including our Ensign. There were no cook fires allowed so we lived on cold cuts and were given a small amount to buy meals ashore.

This was a miserable place, the civilians could care less about us. There was much drunkenness and bad fights broke out, one was even a knife fight. Some of our Navy personnel were practically illiterate coming from the backwoods of the South, they still wanted to fight the Civil War. There was no supervision, the Navy sure let us down In time some of these misfits were washed out but in the meantime it was bad. There were accidents with side arms and several shots were fired in the crews quarters. On one occasion while three of us were walking in passageway one jerk fired his hand gun at us, the bullet missed me but ricocheted of the ceiling and came back to hit my friend in the arm it knocked him down but only bruised him, There was no one to report too and the

jerk said he was sorry but that was all. On another occasion another nut would fire his 38 at the buildings on the shoreline. I was so glad when the re-fitting was done and we went back to the New York harbor for another convoy. This time bound for England or Russia, we didn't know which but it was out on the stormy Atlantic and the War began in earnest.

The North Atlantic

During the first week or so we left New York with a full load of aviation gasoline but we chose not to think too much about that. We formed up and I was able to tell from observation and from the secret papers on the Captain's charts (which I wasn't supposed to tell about) with 32 other ships. Our escorts were Canadian Corvettes and a Destroyer or two. My hat is off to those Corvettes, they did a real job even though they were rather small, only a hundred or so feet long, they took a real beating in stormy weather. We also had a Commodore on the command ship who was in charge of the Convoy. We formed up and started going Northeast toward the Grand Banks, we could only travel between 6 to 8 knots for the slow ships to keep up, mine included.

The first 4 or 5 days were quite pleasant, the sea was calm with only rolling swells. At this time I really became an accomplished signalman. I handled the signal flags with ease and became quite proficient with the signaling equipment that I had. I learned how to use the code books quickly. Each day the Commodore would signal his position now and where he expected to be in two and in three more days and each ship would respond likewise. But just as we got to feeling comfortable things changed.

The weather became stormy and very, very cold. It didn't take long for ice to build up to a point that it had to be axed off. The sprays from the sea coated everything even my signal halyard ropes that would snap off, then I would have to climb up as far as I could with a hook and pull then down. The wind was so strong I could hardly hang on to the ropes at times. There was ice all over the bridge. I couldn't wear gloves and work the equipment and my fingers almost froze, in fact I got serious frost bite on my feet. My feet were so sore that I could hardly walk. I tied woolen sweaters over my shoes to help ease the pain. But there was no sympathy, I was the only signalman and had a job to do. The Gun crew also suffered standing watch. We all wore face masks but I had to take mine off most of the time so that I could see to use the binoculars needed to read the signal flags. Then the submarines found us.

The next days and especially the nights we were on constant alert and were under attack. The submarines would fire star shells at night that would light up the whole area around us in an eerie yellow light. Ships were being hit but we could see nothing, all of our armor was of no avail during the darkness. I did see ships get hit, in fact one was right in back of us in line. This happened around midnight, I had come off the bridge to go to the toilet and just got there when it was torpedoed. This must have been carrying ammunition because the blast knocked me off my feet. It was a sad sight to see a fire breaking out and men trying to get into life boats, the ocean was so black and so cold. I could see the little red flashlights on their life jackets that we all wore hoping to be seen in the water if so that maybe a rescue ship might (just might) attempt a pick up. I knew of other ships that were hit but this really shook me up. I always did my duty but I was

scared and knew real terror. The ocean looked so black and so cold one knew that there was no survival if one was in that sea for more than a few minutes.

It was so cold and the danger so real and I was constantly called to the bridge I didn't take my cloths off. Then I discovered that something else was living in my underwear with me and I itched. It was not noticed when outside but when I would go into the Wheel House to get warm things started moving. I went into the head to check things out, I thought that the fuzz had come off from my thermal underwear. I picked up what I thought was a piece of lint but it was moving! I had cooties, lice or whatever they are called. It turned out that a couple of others had them too, but where did they come from? There was an odd fellow named Red who was a 2nd class seaman who was always crumby. Red was covered with red hair like an Orangutan, his bunk was just below mine and he was alive with those critters. They had a highway up to my bunk and those close by. Even in the cold the crew gave Red a GI bath and he thought that it was swell. We were all treated with a gooey paste all over for days but it got rid of them. Red was happy enough but he was illiterate and not very bright, his job was to keep one of the 20mm guns well greased and free from ice. This was done by removing the barrel and a big spring with the gun in an 45 degree upright position. One day I was up on the bridge and Red was busy but he forgot to put the gun upright and left it level as he released the barrel; the ship rolled and there went the gun, spring and all into the ocean.. Fortunately we had spares. When we got back to the States Red was taken off the ship and he probably was discharged.

Days went on and the attacks continued. My job as signalman became more important since we went into more Zig-Zag patterns with the convoy. The command ship would give the courses either by flags during the day and blinker during the dawn or dusk. Convoys traveled in a box like formation. The Commodore was in the center of the front row and the other ships were lined up in columns. Signals were spread from ship to ship across the rows and down the columns – accuracy was a must!

Submarines could out run these slow convoys on the surface. They would get ahead and then go under during the day to attack but most often attack at night from the surface if there were no escorts close by. After they launched their torpedoes they would submerge. The ships that were in the back corners were the most often attacked, this was known as the Coffin Corner. If a torpedo missed the target from this position it had a chance of running diagonally across the convoy and hit some other ship and it often did. Ships that broke down with engine trouble and fell back were very vulnerable. On one occasion my ship lost an engine and we were left behind. There was another ship that had trouble also and was close by during the night. This ship made a fatal error and turned on his signal light to ask us something. I signaled back with only a little flashlight with my hand over the light to “knock it off, you are making a target” and sure enough one of our look outs yelled torpedo, it went passed us toward the other ship and sure enough a big thump was heard and then all was still. Our engine got going and we left full speed.

There were many incidents on this trip and others that I had during 1943 these are only a few things to give an idea of what convoy duty was at that time. When I got home later people would say “Boy you sure had it easy, a warm bed, good food, sight seeing, whow what a deal”. There were 145,000 of us who served with NAG, we had the highest

death rate in the Navy. But the Navy never gave us much recognition and very little supervision. But we did much to help win the war.

England

England looked very somber as we cruised down the Irish Sea to our destination of Bristol. We could see the barrage balloons flying over the towns, even though most of the big bombing raids were over but some raids still continued thus the need for the balloons. We traveled up the Bristol Channel and I had asked the Captain if I could steer the ship, I just wanted to know that I could do it. Steering with the big wheel was not as easy as I thought, the ship would roll and rock some and even though we had a gyro compass but keeping on course was a task. I learned to appreciate the professional helmsmen.

Bristol was as somber as all of the coast, it had many barrage balloons over the whole area. We were docked and allowed to visit the city. There were some beautiful buildings there and many bomb craters but very little to do, everyone who was able was working or on duty. Let me say here and now that I admired the English people during each of the trips and the time that I was there. They had courage and determination in spite of their terrible trials. I was impressed by how they would travel about the streets going about their business and singing, singing! They sang in Church, in pubs and everywhere it seemed. Everything was rationed of course, only two glasses of beer, one shot of the Irish whiskey that would take the rust off of your teeth in a second. At that time their restaurants could only serve a melted cheese sandwich; but that with a glass of stout and something to soak up the Irish whiskey tasted very good. When docked, because of all the gasoline around the cooking fires on our ship were put out and we ate cereal and cold cuts.

During the first night there the 'wailing' sirens went off and the search lights lit up the sky and we had a bombing raid. Those planes were high flying twin engine bombers. As soon as the raid was started the merchant men were led to a shelter but the Ensign placed me in charge of the deck and to keep our guns covered, they were useless for planes that were flying high. I had been promoted to a 3rd Class Petty Officer and given a side arm. One of the merchant seamen got over excited and tried to uncover a 20mm. I tried to tell him that he would only hurt the civilians with our shell falling shells. I had to tell him that I would shoot if he didn't stop, he did and he calmed down. This sounds like I was real brave, that guy was probably the only thing that kept me from shaking in my boots when the bombs started to drop and the guns were firing all over the place. It was something to see real German planes flying overhead.

We left Bristol in about 3 days and anchored in the Cardiff harbor to form up for a convoy back to the States. The weather was rather mild due to the Gulf Stream currents and one of our Navy guys decided to go for a swim. This was crazy. He and a few men gathered on the fantail and lowered a Jacob's rope ladder and Luey (not his real name) went down but lost his grip as soon as he hit the icy water. The tide was coming in real fast and Luey was swept away. Someone threw him a lifebuoy he held on but was going beyond reach very fast. Someone ran and told me, I tried to signal an other ship that was nearby who I saw had a small lifeboat in the water but they didn't respond. Then I went

to the bridge and ran over the deck that the Captain had just had painted and I blew an SOS on the ship's whistle, that raised their signalman but it also raised our Captain. He was furious with me but our Ensign exercised his authority and demanded that we save Luey's life and he patted me on the back for good action. Luey was brought back to us by the people that I had signaled, our Captain didn't want us to lower one of our boats and said the "man overboard was probably drunk and fell in". I was surprised by this comment since I found the Captain usually very good with his men. He didn't know that this was one of ours and I'm glad that our Ensign who was usually not aggressive insisted that Luey be saved. Luey should never had been in the Navy. He was quite large but also very effeminate and soft. He was afraid on gunnery practice and seemed to freeze up when he held the trigger on his 20mm gun and wouldn't let go until the magazine was empty, then he would be 'spaced out' for a long time. When he was brought back to us he was passed out and was like a comatose person. We put him in 'Sick Bay' but we had no doctor so we took turns watching him during the next 24 hours. When he seemed to come out of it he became very violent, he struggled like he was still in the ocean. A day or so later a British Naval Psychologist came aboard and determined that he was in bad mental shape and took him away. I never heard about him again. I think that it was very wrong for a boy like that to have been drafted into the Navy and very wrong to have him be assigned to the unsupervised and difficult service as the Naval Armed guard. God knows that it was hard on us all.

During our return trip to the States there was still some submarine activity but it seemed to have tapered off somewhat, this was possibly due to the violent storms that we encountered. These storms were 'Northern gales' and were as bad as it gets and still survive. The waves were at least 40 feet or more high, they crashed over our bow so violently that we had to abandoned manning the gun or the crew would have been washed overboard. We were battered so strongly that the life boats on the starboard side came loose and were almost lost. One wave seemed like a mountain coming at us literally smashed our steel blackout door to our mess hall door flat up against the bulkhead, later it had to be cut away. Of course the cooking fires were out and we ate cold cuts and boiled eggs. Our ship had a gauge that measured the roll and list that a ship was making, I saw that gauge measured near 45 degrees a couple of times, if it goes over this there is a real danger of swamping. I understand that some smaller ships did sink in those gales. The wind and sprays and the rocking and rolling were so bad ropes were strung up for us to hand onto just like in the movies but this was no movie, it was real.

After a few days the storm stopped and then fog, fog so thick one could not see one end of the ship to the other. During these fogs collisions were a real possibility, in fact we had a near scrape so close that it tore off one life boat davit on the port side, we could have stepped from one ship to the other and did talk to each other on deck. In these fogs in convoy each ship would signal its position by blowing the ship's whistle according to its place in a row and in a column, e.g., row 3, column 2 = 3 long blasts + 2 short ones. The escorts used sirens that were very shrill. It was weird.

One last episode to record on this trip: we ran out of most of our food. We only had black eyed peas, boiled potatoes, bread and very strong coffee. When we arrived in New York someone brought us cartons of milk and sandwiches, this was so good!!!

Well I made other trips, one more to England and one to North Africa on this ship and some long ones in the Pacific and to the West Coast of South America as well as several months in an amphibious group to England. I'll tell of some of the highlights as I go on but my memory is not as vivid as that first real experience of real war at sea.

A signalman was a very important person during convoy duty and had much responsibility even though we were only Petty Officers. We were called "flags" by the officers on the bridge and were usually treated with respect; we were needed for the safety of hundreds of lives. On other convoys there were troop ships in line with many of our soldiers on board, it was my job to see that all the signals that affected them were passed on correctly. I became a pretty darned good signalman and once when there were two of us, I was always asked for when things got hectic. This was a lot of responsibility for a boy only 18 or 19 years old. Most often I stood watch alone in all kinds of weather either out on the wing of a bridge or up on the Flying Bridge.

The second voyage to England

Just a few highlights:

We had a new Captain, a retired old sea dog. He was at least 6 feet 4 and weight 300 pounds. He was mean and dirty, in fact he stunk. He would never take a bath and thought it fun to stand on the bridge and urinate on the men below. His officers gave him a wide berth. He would give me messages in foul language to send to the other ships. I cleaned them up and he didn't know the difference.

When we were leaving the coast of New England to join up a day later with a convoy we spotted a sub on the surface trying to get close enough for a shot at us. At first I thought that this was a fast fishing boat but our Gunnery Officer recognized it right away; so much for me as a gunner, I stuck to my signaling. Our gun crew loaded up our 5 inch cannon on the stern and fired a round. They darn near hit it and came so close the sub submerged and we out ran it.

After a few days on our way past the Grand Banks we ran into a large flow of icebergs. Some of these were gigantic; as large as a city block and as high as a 6 story building. The weather was quite warm since we were in the Gulf Stream but as we came within a few hundred yards of a large iceberg it would feel like stepping into a freezer. These were really beautiful in the sunlight, they had a tint of blue inside of them. Some of the ships used them for gun practice and the shells would bounce off and go whiz in the air.

This trip took us to Liverpool England. It was relatively quiet, there were only a few bad days and as far as I could tell only one ship got torpedoed, however one night far out on the horizon the whole sky lit up like a ball of fire, we all assumed that a gasoline tanker got hit.

During our return we encountered more bad weather and heavy seas. When we were only a short way south of Nova Scotia the weather cleared and I saw a strange little cloud coming in our direction. This turned out to be huge ball of wild canaries flying

north. These were probably blown off course by the recent bad weather. These little birds were exhausted and lit all over our ship and the one next to us. We had to be careful not to step on them. Our Cook broke out some bread for us and we fed them ^{the} little guys and they ate it up. They stayed with us for a couple of hours and then on some strange command they all took off and flew toward Nova Scotia; I ^{hope} had they all made it.

North Africa

My next trip was to Casablanca North Africa. This was a very strange trip right from the start, in fact this convoy was written up in the Readers Digest some years after the war. There was a 'fifth columnist' who would send out our position on the radio periodically. Our Escorts tried to detect who it was but without success. Whoever it was remained with us all the way to Africa.

There was a small Aircraft Carrier in this convoy. I don't know how the pilots could land on such a small area; this ship was no where near as large as the Pacific Carriers. Once while watching planes take off one nose dived into the sea, it looked to me that it sunk immediately and I don't know if any one was saved. We enjoyed having this air protection and admired those pilots.

When we were about 3 days East of Bermuda we broke down again. It was toward evening and looked like we would be dead in the water for hours. Our Captain at this time was a real great man and we all respected him, called a meeting of the ship's Officers including our Lieutenant J.G. and I was also asked to join. We met in the Captain's cabin, I felt kinda out of place but was told that I was important to help in making a decision if we should try to go on or go back to Bermuda when repairs were made. We all elected to go on since we knew where the convoy was to be for the next 2 days, The Captain then opened a bottle of Scotch and poured us all a shot, he laughed as he included me. He said: Flags you are growing up fast and take all the chances that we all have to take. This was a good decision because there was another ship, the French ship the 'Lot' that did turn back and before the night was over we heard an SOS, it had ran into a waiting submarine.

After the repairs were made and about 2 days later the weather was very calm, the sea was like glass. In the afternoon the Officers came up to the flying bridge where I was since we had spotted the convoy up on the horizon and we would catch up in a few hours. As we were standing there a periscope broke water, it was so close that we could not lower the guns enough to shoot at it. I can't understand how that Sub had not known that we were so close and that it did not hear us; but while the German commanders were smart some of them made mistakes also. There was an escort vessel only a quarter of a mile away and it charged up and dropped a huge load of depth charges, the sea exploded. I don't think that anything could have survived that.

The invasion of North Africa was over by the time we got there. The French had put up a slight resistance to our fleet. The harbor of Casablanca was a real mess. The French battleship (Richelieu or something like that) was a wreck with huge holes all threw it. There was a cruiser that was literally blown out of the water and was up on the docks on its side; a whole salvo must have hit right under it. Debris was everywhere. The

Vichy French sure took a beating. While the battle was over we had to be careful at night and not make a silhouette of ourselves because there were still snipers around who would take pot shots at us.

Casablanca was a messy place, and very dirty. The Arabs were very poor, I felt sorry for them. I was glad when we put out to sea again. When we were out about 3 or 4 miles the ship emptied its tanks with hundreds of gallons of gasoline that the storage area couldn't handle. It was an irony because when I was given a leave at home the Ration people would only give me 5 gallons and I had seen hundreds pumped overboard.

On our return trip there were two large transports carrying Italian prisoners back to the States. As I was watching at my signal position I saw a man either jump or get pushed overboard. He drifted real close to our ship and we threw him a life buoy ring. He got it but looked very pathetic out there floating in that big wide ocean loaded with sharks. I signaled an Escort but don't know if they stopped to pick him up or not.

During this time and very near where we were at that time the capture of the German sub U505 was taking place. We did not see any of this going on.

This was my last trip on the William Penn. I had been aboard for 11 months and was glad to get off in Brooklyn and ready for reassignment.

My next Ship

This was the Sinclair Opaline a new and quite fast tanker that had been launched in 1941. This had very nice quarters for most of the Navy crew. There were two cabins equipped with bunks for them, one in the housing super structure on the stern and one amid ship's that was originally planned for paying passengers; it even had a bathtub in it. I was housed in the cabin for the Merchant Radioman who was considered an Officer. This was Bill King who years later was at my wedding in Chicago. We also had a Navy Radioman (3rd Class) and we all shared this cabin. Since Bill was considered an officer he had cabin service and we got it too; our beds were made up for us each day and we had other privileges. This was pretty high living except we didn't get to eat with Bill in the Officer's lounge, our place was in the crew mess hall.

This ship had first class signaling equipment, a regular 12 inch lamp good strong halyards etc. This was a fast ship and cruised at about 14 to 15 knots and could do more if needed. We made one fast uneventful trip to England and then went to Aruba in the Caribbean Sea. The sea was very pretty at night because of the phosphorus in the water that glowed with a blue light following the ship's wake. We loaded up and headed for the Panama Canal. It was very interesting going through the Canal. When we got to one of the lakes after passing through the locks on the Atlantic side we decided to go for a swim off the ship. We just about hit the water when the Coast Guard rushed out to get us out of the water, those lakes were loaded Baracudda, and that took care of our cooling swim.

After passing through the Canal we headed out into the Pacific we were not sure where we were to go. We were told that a radio message would direct us, we thought Australia and we were right.

The Pacific

It was a fairly long voyage to Australia even though this was a fast ship. We could outrun any sub under the surface and it would be difficult to catch us because of our speed and that we also followed a 'zig-zag' pattern. Each night a group of us would gather on the gun mount on the stern and talk for hours under the stars. There are more stars to see in the southern hemisphere since it faced out to the Milky Way galaxy. We could see the Southern Cross. The stars on a clear night were so bright that it made shadows, you could almost reach out and touch the heavens and it was quite spiritual. There was little for me to do since there was no one to signal to. I found some math books and did some self study and our J.G. was very helpful, all though he confined me to the ship for one day when we reached port because he thought I stayed overtime in Aruba. I wasn't AOL but he had put a young Coxswain (the same rate as me) on duty one afternoon and told him to stay out of my way I am the signalman and have nothing to do with you, but the J.G. wanted to teach me something I guess but it didn't work no Coxswain had any business on the bridge!

There was a different atmosphere or 'feel' in the Pacific than in the Atlantic, one senses the sheer vastness of this ocean. While the Atlantic is sure big enough but in the Pacific we traveled for weeks and could only see ocean because we were alone. There was danger for us but not until we went further up into the island chains where the Japs were. It was interesting when an Albatross would follow along with us. Those birds were very large, almost 6 feet across, they rarely flapped their wings but glided day and night over the top of us. Sometimes in the silence of night they would quietly fly over and then let out a squawk that would sent chills through you. During these weeks at sea as we traveled alone it was a lot like the movie 'Mr. Roberts'. Some went a little stir crazy and one man did, he apparently jumped overboard during the night and he was no where on the ship. Some started rumors that he was pushed overboard and there was a mad person aboard, this was not true but it did stir things up for a while. One night three us coming back from the fantail walkway on a catwalk under a row of portholes, some jokester reached out as we passed by and grabbed my buddy by the hair a screamed "gotcha", with that we ran to our quarters so fast we ran over each other and he laughed at us for days after that.

We finally got back through the Canal and back to Aruba. Aruba was a Dutch owned island about 50 miles north of Venezuela and it was a hell hole. We always docked in the oil refinery area. There was a small village about a block away that had saloons and nothing much else. It was policed by Dutch Policemen who carried big broad swords that they used to swat the behinds of unruly sailors, I was not one of them. There were also a very large Company of very hostile Cuban Soldiers stationed nearby, these hated Americans and we were warned to avoid them since they were armed. But the worst of the bunch was the Navy Shore Patrol people. These were huge and mean expolicemen we were told and they were angry to be stationed there. They often beat sailors for no apparent reason. They enforced the curfew at sundown and would prod anyone with a night stick just to start a fight. I saw one hit a sailor in the back of the neck and he fell like a dead duck. They threw him in t a truck and carried him away. I'm sure that they broke his neck. I understand that many Navy Officers filed complaints but they did no good. It was better to stay on board a ship.

Australia

We were only in Sydney about 4 days and I only got ashore for 2 days. Sydney was a beautiful city and the people there were real nice. There is a big amusement park in the bay area and ferryboats were used to get there. My friends and I went there for a day and coming home on the ferry I got seasick. It was the only time this happened to me even in stormy weather, it could be that I was drinking wine and eating ice cream and cotton candy all day that had something to do with it! Well I stuck it out and got better soon and we went to a restaurant and I ordered what looked like meat loaf, it was great. They called it lamb fries. The next day I got some more, lots more and it was great also. When I got back to the ship I learned what these were, I'm glad that I didn't know what it was at the time that I ate it.

The Panama Canal

I have been through the Canal several times during the war. We usually were allowed to go ashore on the Atlantic side in the harbor area near Colon. At that time the streets were filled with honky-tonk cafes and saloons. These reminded me of the Old West with their swinging doors and pianos plinking away and cheap rum that bombed you real quick in that hot weather. There were lots of fights and drunks lying around, it was bad. Yep, I got bombed! After being confined on board of a ship we all liked to loosen up or else you would go nuts.

Back to the Pacific

This was a very long voyage and we were not sure where we were going. As we passed beyond the Canal one of the Merchant men had a severe fever, we had no doctor or even a Medic aboard. The Exec. had a medical chest with lots of stuff in it and an instruction book, he read it over and decided that since we were passing the Galapagos Islands that the man would be turned over to the Coast Guard there. This man by the way was a real fraud, he was a real goof-up and a gold-brick through and through. And we suspected that this was not a case of appendicitis since he had bragged that he was not going out to the Pacific again. Fate is a strange thing. When he got to the hospital on the island Eleanor Roosevelt was there on a sight seeing journey and made a big news story about this "poor, brave" sailor risking his life for his fellowman. The only good thing that happened out of this was that that fraud got an operation whether he needed it or not and he didn't get the big pay the merchant mariners got when not on duty.

As we traveled on we passed by Pitcairn island the one famous for the Mutiny on the Bounty. This looked very desolate out there a thousand miles from any land. Then we learned that we were to enter the port at New Caledonia just north of Australia. This was a

staging area and rest stop for many of the armed services, i.e., Navy, Marines, Army, etc. and I guess that it was the headquarters for Admiral Halsey. It was a hell hole and so overcrowded that it was hard to move around. They had picture shows and I saw the "Grapes of Wrath" for the thousandth time. I really got ticked off one day, it was steaming hot and some big shot ordered a bunch of us off our ship to unload cases of beer from a barge onto a Navy Cargo ship. We were not allowed to step on any area marked as "Officer's Country" and that was where the beer was going. Then came the women, nurses and I don't know what all and they had a party, with giggling, laughing and who knows what? We didn't even get a beer. I have to say our J.G. was very upset about this but what can a J.G. do with all that brass around. I never forgot that episode and really resented the Navy Commanders for that, not that we wanted to party but we were all in this war together and all die the same. This made up my mind that as soon as the war was over I wanted out. Rank has its privileges but this was very rank indeed.

Up to the War Zone

We traveled North to the Elice Island group, these were atolls who were formed by the tops of ancient volcanoes. The water in the center was really clear and we would go swimming when anchored but always had a lookout watching for sharks. One day we caught a whole mess of fish that looked like tunas. The cooks made a feast for us that was well received because our food was starting to turn a little bad in this tropical climate. Much of our flour had grubs and we threw it overboard and used it for target practice. When we ate bread we would hold it up to the light and pick out little worms, but if you toasted it some special flavor was added! We only ate meat that was thoroughly cooked. Our dry cereal had bugs in it, we would put it in a bowl of water and skim off the bugs then it was ok. In time we ignored these little problems.

We anchored in a very beautiful atoll, we called it 'Futi-Futi'. There was a small landing strip with about 6 trees on it and the largest isle was not much larger than a city block. I felt sorry for those poor G. I.'s stationed there. The boredom was awful, they made pets out of pigs, it was bad. We often ate coconut meat and the milk and this works better than a bucket full of Epsom Salts, they tasted good but don't cough unless near the head.

We were joined up with a Destroyer escort and told to follow them in the course that they had given me by blinker light. We followed this escort for a couple of days. While traveling we could see planes observing us from time to time. One night our escort left us to shell the enemy on a small nearby island and returned the next morning. Then a whole flight of our dive bombers flew over us so fast that I had hardly enough time to break out our flag; it's a good thing that we were friendly or we would have had it.

Finally we arrived at the Marshal Islands and I think we put into either the Majuro or the Eniwetok atoll, I have forgotten which one. There was a whole fleet there, Carriers, Cruisers, Destroyers, large Coast Guard Cutters, supply ships, it was crowded. Just after we arrived about dawn some planes flew over very fast, it must have been Japs because every ship unloaded on them, the sky was black with exploding shells.

We all do dumb stunts and six of us did a good one. We lowered a 4 oar skiff and decided to go across the atoll to land to get coconuts. We forgot about the terrible tides and when we turned to get back to the ship the tide had us and as hard as we could row we were being swept out to open sea. Fortunately the Coast Guard Cutter saw us and sent a boat to get us. Our Captain didn't need to ream us out, we had learned our lesson, thank God! I thought we were goners, our hands were raw to the bone. Then we learned that the place where we were going had natives that were not too friendly to people taking their coconuts.

After we departed from the Marshal Islands we headed back toward the Canal and again we traveled alone. To keep ourselves busy we played cards, chess, studied and even played 'Quick Draw' cowboy games. We started this game out by play shooting with our fingers, then we made it more realistic by whittling out wooden guns. I went so far as to make a holster and a pair of chaps out of canvas. I even wore a bandanna. We would play 'High Noon at the OK Coral' by hiding around the hatches etc. One day as I was stalking my man up the Catwalk toward the bridge the Captain came out on the Boat deck; I was embarrassed at first, then quickly he pulled out two big wooden guns that he had carved. He laughed and said "gotcha Flagg". We all had a good laugh about that.

One day when the sea was quite calm we saw two huge whales just ahead of us, we turned enough to miss them but the biggest one swam right along our side, it was huge, over 60 feet long. I had seen many whales but none so close that I could reach out and touch it if I could have gotten down on the seawall. Later we traveled through miles of the 'Red Sea Algae'. The ocean was blood red all around, it looked real weird.

When we came to the Canal we did not stop but passed straight through heading for Aruba again. This was very upsetting to the Merchant Crewmen, they had expected to go back to the States and had had enough of those long Pacific voyages even though they were paid very well for their time at sea. I as a Navy Petty Officer only made about \$70 a month, even the lowest merchant deck hand earned hundreds. While I respected the abilities and the bravery of the civilian Merchant men but their pay seemed to me to be extravagant. In addition to a good hourly pay they also received bonuses when in a designated war zone and an additional one each time there was any significant attack by submarines or aircraft. We in the Navy didn't even get an acknowledgement from the Navy high command, and I resented that we didn't even get a beer when unloading cases so that someone could have a party.

Many of the Merchant men onboard were getting unruly and discipline was not good, some hard feelings were starting to develop. Even our Navy people became somewhat lax in expecting any enemy action, but this was not the Pacific, we were back in the Atlantic and the Caribbean was a prime hunting area for submarines. We learned when we arrived at our next stop a day later that another ship over the horizon from us had fired tracers into the air to tell us that a sub was tracking us, fortunately we were too fast for it to catch us. Instead of Aruba we tied up to a very long wharf on the coast of Venezuela to take on a load of oil I guess. Venezuela was a neutral country in the war and the USA military people could not go ashore but there was a canteen of sorts at the end of the pier that we could go to. This was a make shift large saloon, it had only a dirt floor but did sell some food and lots, and lots of booze and this made a real story. The

Radiomen and I went there and had a beer or two and something to eat and then came back to the ship because the place was getting real rowdy. There were many Merchant men from our ship and from another ship in the area, all were really getting bombed. There was a local Constable who was to place a curfew a dusk but he allowed anyone to buy and take out as much booze as they could pay for; he probably had a real interest in the business. Our crew bought and brought back sacks full of rum and what ever else they thought of, even our Captain got plastered and brought back a bottle or two. Then the fight began, all the pent up hostilities over the long months, plus the boredom all let loose at that time and the brawling began. The Lieutenant had secured our Gun crew in their quarters and the Radiomen in the locked Radio shack, he and I were up on the Flying bridge. We could hear the brawling going on in the crew areas. He handed me a loaded 38 revolver but I said that was a bad idea, I wouldn't want to shoot anyone and I could get shoot too. After some time I went down to the crew's mess hall, I was pretty well liked by the Merchantmen and wasn't very worried about myself. On the way I saw two guys trying to throw another down into the engine room which is a very long way down, it would have killed him; they stopped and they all laughed about. I when I went into the mess hall one man was beating another over the head with a chair while a bunch off others were singing and laughing. Even the Captain got in on the act, one drunk came up a ladder to complain about the chaos. As his head was level with the Captain's feet, the Captain kicked him right in the chops and knocked him down a flight of stairs. Well there is more to tell but it was obvious that the ship was out of control. I think that it was our Lieutenant who broke radio silence and called to the Coast Guard in Aruba about 50 miles away to assist. Someone did manage to get the ship out away from the wharf and the Coast Guard came aboard and we again docked in Aruba. A day or two later after the broken bones were in casts and the heads bandaged and everyone sobered up we took the ship back to the New Jersey oil fields and all of the Navy personnel were relieved received a 10 day furlough and went home. I got home June 5th. 1944, the next morning was June 6th. D-Day and I missed it. I felt bad about that.

On D-Day I went to the local coffee shop to see if I could see anyone I knew and sure enough said: "why are here, aren't you supposed to be over there in the fight"? I only said that I had just gotten back from 2 years at sea and was waiting for reassignment. It was sad in a way that even my own family did not have any idea of what I had experienced in the Atlantic and the Pacific for the past 2 years and thought that because I was not yet 20 years old and spent my time in the Naval Armed Guard on convoy duty that I had it real easy, this wasn't the real war. Tell that to all those lost at sea, and those near frozen, and to those who lost their minds. I knew what I had accomplished and am proud of it.

A Change

When I returned to the Brooklyn Naval Armory there was an announcement that Signal men were needed for a new unit called D.R.E.W. (Damage Repair Enemy Waters). This was an amphibious battalion, my regiment was DREW 6. Our physical training was conducted at Lido Beach, Long Island, N.Y. This was a hard intensive physical activity. We were under the supervision of Marine instructors who gave us the works including rifle practice, 20 mile full-pack hikes, jumping into a pool with a full pack and rifle, gas mask drills, climbing up sheer walls and even close order drills on a

A funny incident happened in training that I still laugh about. One day we were loaded on invasion crafts and were to simulate an invasion on the beach. This was complete with dive bombers firing overhead in support of those who were to land. Our faces were blackened and there was smoke bombs all over and then we came charging off the boats yelling with our bayonets out in front like we meant business. Someone had failed to give good notice to the civilian people of the area. As I charged ashore there were maids and mammys and one poor soul was right in my path, she grabbed up her child and screamed: "Oh Lawdy, Lawdy." She thought that the Germans had surely landed. I really felt sorry for her, we gave her an awful fright.

Back to England

One morning we were packed up and marched to a transport ship. The Salvation Army gave us hot coffee, a donut and a prayer and off we went. This transport was huge, I understand that it was over 800 feet long. Our company was billeted way down in the bowels of the ship. The bunks were only canvas ledges on a frame and were stacked so close that you had to lie flat, there was little room to roll over. These were stacked six high. The air was bad and some got seasick and the vomit splashed to those below. In addition to these things I was very uncomfortable about being so far down in a ship, I had seen too many go down and when we had escape drill it took 20-30 minutes to get topside; far too long if we were torpedoed.

England Again

We landed at night some where on the West Coast and given a short train ride to Fowey near Plymouth, then marched to an area of Quonset huts and told that we would be boarding invasion boats early in the morning, there was no need to undress, just be ready. During the night some German low level planes flew over, they probably knew that we had landed and intended to bomb or strafe us. Some of the guys ran outside with flashlights trying to see the planes but the officers put a short end to that; these guys were making targets of us. Well, our part of the invasion was called off because it was learned that there were too many German troupes in Brest where we were to land and we would end up being cannon fodder.

We spent a few weeks in Fowey, it was a quaint little village, I'm not sure it is even on the map. It was very near the Land's End area and right rear the sea shore. Again I honor and respect the English people, they treated us very well.

It was here that I had a deep religious experience. One of my buddies who had been an atheist and who had been torpedoed twice and rescued while in the Mediterranean Sea decided that he didn't want to be an atheist anymore. We had been talking religion for some time while in training. He asked if I would go with him to a Chaplain for some instruction. I agreed but had no idea that he would seek out a Catholic. Well, I was sure that I did not plan to be a convert. The Chaplain chosen was Father McCauley a Jesuit. We would go to his office at 4 AM each morning until 6:00. Father was really had much knowledge about scripture and the dogmas of the Church. Both my buddy and I were baptized by Father a few weeks later in a Chapel named St. Monica's in

buddy and I were baptized by Father a few weeks later in a Chapel named St. Monica's in the town of St. Estelle. This was truly a holy experience and has certainly had a lasting effect upon my life. Amen!

On to Scotland

One of the Regiments was sent to France but mine was sent to Scotland. We ended up at a place called Naval Base Two in Europe near Helensbrough a small village and the railway station to Glasgow which was about a 45 minute ride. This was quite a large Naval base located on a peninsula in the Clyde River estuary across the bay from the city of Greenock. This base was somewhat international since there were some military from Russia, Denmark, The Netherlands and others who had escaped from Europe. Also there were many Italian prisoners of war who were 'trustees' and were allowed to go anywhere they wished, even in to town. The Russians were there to outfit the ships that we were turning over to them under some kind of an agreement. They were a pain; too demanding and no gratitude. While my group was waiting to be assigned I was given the job of standing a 4 to 6 hour watch with the Officer of the Day and to sign in all visitors and new detachments etc; sounds important but it was just a glorified yeoman's job.

During this time I was promoted to Petty Officer 2nd. Class, that's equivalent to a Staff Sergeant in the Army. Also I received a package with cartons of cigarettes from my Father from Honolulu, Hawaii who I learned was also in the Navy and was stationed there. I was sure surprised to learn that he had volunteered. Sine he was a good pattern maker in civilian life they made him a 1st. Class Petty Officer as a 'Shipfitter' there In Pearl Harbor. I never got to see him until he was discharged after VJ and he was home.

There was not much excitement for us in Scotland although I really liked the people, after all my Great Grandaddy came from there. We used to go into Glasgow often, there was a large Military Red Cross USO that provided a bunk for a shelling and a breakfast for a little more. Then we would take the early train back to dock at Helensburg to catch a Navy Liberty launch back across the Clyde to our base. One day The launch was so full and the waves were kicking up so they asked if some would remain until they could send another, they said that they would tell our officers so we wouldn't be charged AOL. They didn't tell because I was charged and given a Captain's Mast and made a P.A.L. for a day or two even though my story checked out. I was in a gang with other PAL's (prisoners at large) and made to dig holes and fill them up again. Some of these others in the gang were pretty tough characters, some waiting for prison time; you can be sure that I was as agreeable with them as I could be, I didn't dare tell them my so called crime and let them think I was a pretty bad customer. Because of this incident the higher authorities realized that many of us were being wasted toward the war effort and we were again transferred, some to France and elsewhere, me back to a ship because of my rate and my sea experience.

I was put on a motor skiff along with other men and sent up the Clyde to Glasgow. This was an open deck and low and behold one of the Pal gang., a big ugly guy with scars who was in handcuffs on his way to prison was there with me. I had my personnel sealed records with me to be turned over to my new commander. This Pal

decided to look into all the records which was a Court Marshal offense, but he was already Court Marshaled. He was smoking a cigar and used the fire to open the sealing wax. When he opened mine there was no serious offense, just a hand written note stapled to an inside page and he read it. Tsk, Tsk, guys we got a real mean character here, a real bad apple, then he busted out laughing and said Flags I'll take care of this and he undid the staple and the page fluttered away down the Clyde River. Then he resealed the wax with his cigar. I said: "thanks ole buddy" and so know one ones until this day that I was a P.A.L. Anyway the charge was silly in the first place, I was only helping out. The officer that did this was one of those 90 day wonders who had never seen any duty at all. It was things like this that made me dislike the service. When at sea we had no barber and if your hair was too long you were penalized so we would chop off our hair for each other. Washing cloths with no machines was also a big problem. Oh well, on to my story.

Another Ship

I was sent by train from Glasgow down the East Coast of England to a town called Hull. This was a port city that had had much bombing and shelling from the Germans; and once in a while a plane would fly over. Once again I was disappointed, this was a Liberty Ship. It was relatively new and well equipped but I was hoping for a Destroyer or even a PT boat. The English Channel was considered relatively safe by then but during a fog we were fired on by who knows who. We anchored in the Thames outside of London because of the fog and then the Buzz bombs came. These were pretty scary and more so in a fog, you could hear them coming like a cheap motorcycle but you couldn't see them, but you could sure hear them when they exploded. Again my hat is off to those brave English people who had to endure this.

This Convoy took us back to the States. It was an uneventful journey but with much cold wet and stormy weather. I was bored silly and had enough of the Atlantic. It was during this cruise that we learned the news that President Roosevelt had died and Harry Truman was now the President.

We landed in Boston and again all the crew was shipped by train to the Brooklyn Naval Armory. A few days later the whole base was assembled and we were told the Germany had surrendered. We wondered what now, but there was no celebration for me I was assigned to another Liberty Ship, the Walker D. Hines. I wonder why they needed a Navy crew since there was no more submarine threat in the Atlantic, then I learned that we were to go to the Pacific. This ended up being a voyage carrying supplies etc. down the West Coast of South America. Our first stop was in Beunaventura, Columbia. This was just a small village up a large jungle river to a two ship wharf. The river was full of all sorts of creepy stuff, snakes, alligators etc. The native were so poor and so backward that it was like a movie setting, they were using dugouts as canoes and were desperately in need of everything. We traded cartons of cigarettes for bananas. We shared as much cans of food as we could. These people we glad to get catsup bottles or anything of use. Some times one of our people would trade for some native booze, one swallow of that stuff and all your teeth fillings were melted. We used it for lighter fluid, but were careful!

We went on down to Lima Peru where a bunch of us went to a see a Bull Fight. It was disgusting, just a slaughter of animals for the amusement of people. The bulls would

be stabbed until they bled to death as the people cheered. The Matadors would cut off an ear of a dead bull and hand it to a girl in the audience and she would practically swoon. After the third fight (three more to go) I almost vomited and we all left in disgust. The natives laughed at us. They can have it, the bulls don't stand a chance of a fair fight.

We also went down to Valparaiso, Chile where some of our Pacific Fleet would come into for R & R. It was strange because the police there wore uniforms that were just like the Germans, and they would greet us with a hail hand salute, this was a little upsetting, but the war with Germany was over so let it pass. While tied up to a pier a short distance down the coast there was a violent earthquake. I was in my bunk at the time and woke up thinking that we were back at sea, I ran to the deck and realized what was going on. The water was churning and when I looked to the town a short distance I could see some of the buildings falling down. It was funny to watch the sailors running out of the near by saloon as fast as they could for the safety of the ship. We kept hoping that we would go out to where the action was but were sent back to the State. While in New York harbor a B-15 bomber flew into the top floors of the Empire State Building. I heard it but couldn't see what happened until a sight fog lifted, then I used my telescope and could clearly see a big hole in the building; this was quite a story at the time.

Shortly our ship headed out to sea again, down toward the Canal and we suspected back to the Pacific since there was no need for Navy on that ship in the Atlantic. The Captain was an old drunken soak who was bombed most of the time and very ugly. He usually left his teeth out, didn't shave and wore an old railroad engineer's hat pulled down over his ears. What a mess? The Exec. was a first class officer and helped keep things together until overruled.

A Real Donnybrook!

Approaching the Canal was always to be done carefully especially at night time. This was a vital place for the U.S. and everyone and every thing was scrutinized carefully. Marines would come aboard every ship that passed through and they would have an armed guard at every vital station on the ship. Telescopes, hand guns and all were secured. But even entering Balboa harbor was under tight control. There were two very long stone breakwaters on each side of the entrance with two small Navy ships on each side tending the submarine nets. The approach was made by lining up on a guide, a Light ship about 5 miles out that signaled with a blue signal light to give instructions. There was another Lightship about a mile or so from the entrance, this too gave signal instructions.

As we approached that very windy night as usual our Captain was roaring drunk. He was hollering and yelling at everyone on the bridge. Thank God the Exec. (1st. Mate, i.e. No 1.) was there trying to keep things together. I received the first signal to head further North and line up on this ship and on the next in line with their light on. Our Captain said to hell with them, it takes too long, I'll just cut across on an angle and save time. He totally discounted my message and the fact that the tide currents were very strong as was the wind. He did not slow the ship down at all. Shortly I received a frantic signal from the second light ship to heave to the North. I passed that signal on and the Exec. heard it, but then I asked for a repeat which was ok practice. As I turned on my

light again it was horrific, we were headed straight for the rocks. The Exec. ordered a turn but it was too late. All I could think about was the fact that we had tons of dynamite and caps probably for the war zone. Well, we crashed into those gate tenders, smashing them up and ripping up the submarine nets. We had pieces of those ships, and the nets all over us and had blocked the entrance to the harbor up tight.

The Captain tried to sober up real fast and called all of us witnesses to a meeting and threatened not to say he had been drinking "only a little" and that it was the wind and the tide that we miss calculated. He reminded Us that he had been a captain for a long time and had much power. Well, I was pretty scared because I was vulnerable as the signalman, I only hoped that I could prove that I had not goofed, I thought, "there goes my stripes and probably more. Sure enough, the Navy investigators took us ashore, and separated us. I was taken into room with two officers, one a Commander, a Lieutenant and a Petty Officer. I was the "good-guy bad-guy" routine. First I was given a cigarette and then told who do you think you are the Smoking Lamp is not lit! I told the truth up to a point. I agreed that the tide, the wind and that it was stormy that caused the problem. I did not say that the Captain was stone drunk but I did say that I passed both messages on but only asked for a repeat so that I could write it down since there was no time on the last call to do so. I think that the Exec. must have also reaffirmed this, maybe even the Captain, because I was excused of any fault. However even a year after the war I was instructed by mail to let the Navy know my whereabouts. They knew something was not quite right and I learned later that this Captain had had other collisions before and was known to be a drunk even on duty.

A week later we went back to Beunaventura., there was another Liberty ship at the wharf. And we were refused to tie up. It turned out that some of these crewmen, not the Navy, got drunk, pushed the natives around and killed a local police man who tried to stop them. We finally let up to the wharf but told to maintain General Quarters. It seemed that the whole town and country side was outraged and were in a riot. There were hundreds of them on shore with torch lights, and beating drums, it was scary. We broke out our side arms and stood by our 20mm guns. The next day two Columbian Cutters came into the river and some Admiral came aboard. Things settled down but we left the next day.

Big News

As we left Columbia we got the news that a really big bomb had wiped out a whole Japanese city. This changed things and we continued on but came back to the States a few weeks later and that was my last sea voyage of the war; Germany had surrendered (VE Day) and so had Japan (VJ Day).

When I reported to my base in Brooklyn they said I had enough points to be discharged and gave me 17 days to report the Armory in Detroit. When at Detroit instead of a discharge I was ordered to lead a group of recruits to Bremerton, Washington by train. When I arrived there after another 4 days on a train ride I was told that I should have been discharged that this base was swarming with men and there was no room They told me that I had a choice to either sign up on the Carrier Wasp and go to Japan or wander around the town and just report in daily. I had not been paid for 3 months so I

guess what? I got lice (cooties-crabs again) Finally I was sent by train to Chicago. Here again the Naval Armory was jammed, no room, no bunks and we had to stand in line for hours to get something to eat. Again we were put out on the street and just report in daily. God bless the people of Chicago for their kindness, they fed, gave of theatre tickets etc.

Finally I was sent to Great Lakes for discharge but since I had lice I had to go to Sickbay and be painted with DDT for a couple of days. When I was given my discharge. I was offered another stripe if I would sign up again but I had had enough. I finally was paid and took a train to Chicago and since I was now 21 I bought a bottle of booze got on a train to Battle Creek and got plastered.

There are many more stories to tell, some funny, some sad and some scary. I went into service a naïve 17 year old and came out a veteran at 21. And even though the approximate 145,000 of the Naval Armed Guard who served on Convoy duty were basically the Unsung Sailors who were poorly recognized and were poorly supervised, we accomplished much to win the war. Would I do it again for my Country, yes I would. Amen