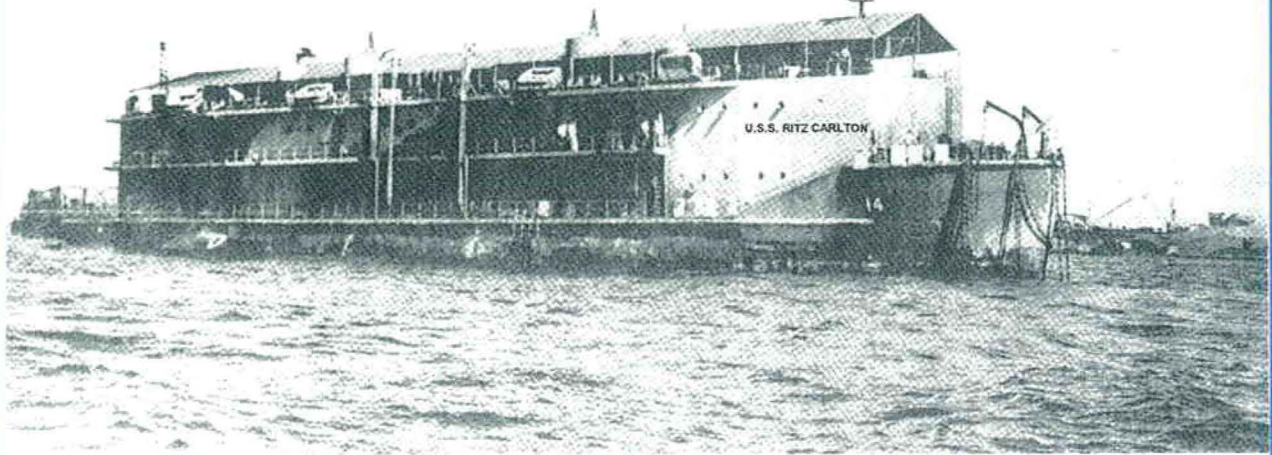


18TH SPECIAL NC. BATT.

ULITHI



Official U. S. Navy photograph

Walter Beusse

U.S. Navy Seabees

18th Special Battalion

APL 14 "USS Ritz Carlton"

World War II

Niles Public Library Veterans History Project Interview

14 April 2005 Niles, IL

Walter Beusse Interview
3 June 2005
Interviewer: Kate Wolicki
Transcribed by C. Olive

001: INTRODUCTION

This Veterans History Project interview is taking place the 3rd of June, 2005. My name is Kate Wolicki of the Niles Public Library District. I'm interviewing Walter Beusse. Mr Beusse learned of the Veterans History Project at the Niles VFW Hall.

So that's all I say. It's not very exciting.

The address or something like that?

Oh, yeah.

7914

7519

No, 7914 North Milwaukee Avenue.

Oh, there you are. So now we know where you are.

So, you were drafted into the Seabees in the Second World War.

Right.

009: DEFERRED THEN DRAFTED

Did you get to choose anything or were you drafted in--

Well, I asked for the Navy, and, as it turns out, I had about three deferments from Teletype Corporation where I worked -- and for forty-six years total, after all. But they, because I was in the machine shop, running milling department milling machines and gear cutters and profile machines and all that, I had been working for this government company that had made communications for the military. And that's what Teletype was all about in the early days. And I was, you know, eligible for the draft and, because of my job, I had three deferments.

And then I got drafted. I went down and asked for the Navy and wound up in the Navy Seabees. At the time, I wasn't aware of what the Seabees was exactly. But it was the Navy which, as it turns out, I was --I thought I was --they asked, "What is your occupation"-- I was a machinist, and I thought I would be a machinist in the Navy.

021: SEABEES 18th SPECIAL BATTALION TRAINING

Well, I wound up in the Seabees in the 18th Special Battalion. And that was a battalion that was geared for loading the ships. And we went to Williamsburg, Virginia, in a Seabee camp down there. And then I went, after two months of training down there, I went to Providence, Rhode Island. And there, we got hands-on instructions on how to load the ship with running winches and cables from one ship to another and being able to take care of -- at that time, we were just using canned goods, cigarettes, and stuff like that for practice. As it turns out, when we got overseas, well, at that point, we had like six weeks of advanced training in Providence, Rhode Island. We went back to Virginia in Norfolk, Virginia, and got aboard the USS Knox-- for it was like 12,000 guys were on the ship, and we went through the Panama Canal. We zigzagged all through the waters going down in that area because they had heard there were German submarines in the area on the Atlantic side.

039: ACCIDENT GOING THROUGH THE PANAMA CANAL

So, we went through the Panama Canal, and when you go through the Panama Canal, you get a special pilot that is trained by the Panama Canal organization staff. In other words, he is part of the staff, so he's supposed to know what the width our boat is --our ship is-- this ship, it's not a boat, it's a ship, going through this canal. So what does he do, he, unbeknownst to him, apparently, we had a couple of guys fixing the lifeboat on the davits, and these are little arched supports that allow the boat to go over the side. Well, there were three or four guys in the boat. And they were actually fixing the boat. Only he got too close, and he wrecked the lifeboat. And these guys were jumping into the Panama Canal to save their lives, for the pilot didn't realize how close he was to the structures along the canal. So these guys are in the drink, you know, and this guy was crunching and crunching and looking at this thing. And this boat is getting all tangled up, you know, and, to make a long story short, we stayed overnight there, because we couldn't go any farther into the Pacific without having full life preservers and the lifeboats. So, we stayed overnight and we got off the ship for an hour just to get off this boat.

Of course, on the way, everybody was getting sick, you know. I think I must have just had oranges, you know, for the seven days that I was there.

So, I wound up getting to Hawaii. We saw a few whales out there and stuff like that. I got to Diamond Head.

It was on my grandfather's birthday, April 23rd.

Shakespeare's birthday, too.

Yeah. Yeah.... As it turns out, it was memorable from that standpoint, but then I found not too long after that, that he had passed away, you know.

064: IN HAWAII IN THE NURSES' QUARTERS

But, so, as it turned out, we stayed there and had more training, waiting for some kind of a ship. We didn't know what we're --because we were actually on the USS Knox as a transport. So we get over to Hawaii and then we occupy what was previously nurses' quarters. They were in Quonset huts, and they gave it to us.

What did they do with the nurses?

They moved them out somewhere, I don't know. But as it turns out, we had six hundred guys in our outfit. And they gave us their quarters.

070: HONOLULU IN WHITES

Now in Hawaii, the thing about a Navy guy is that he wears whites. And the thing that we were allowed to do because we were there for like five weeks, I can't remember exactly, but we were allowed to go to Honolulu on liberty. Well, that's great, you know, but how do you get there? So, we wind up having to get a ride from the jeep or some other guys going there. And we have, in Hawaii, they have all this soil is lava, red lava, so, when we came back from there, we had to spend like two days of soaking our whites in the Clorox barrel because they were all red from this dust and all this stuff in the car flying down, you know, and getting--

So, we wind up getting into Honolulu. I went to Waikiki Beach. I went to swim in there. And it was terrible because the coral rips your feet apart, you know, and stuff like that. But they did have some nice stuff.

It was, next to Waikiki Beach, at the time, was the Beachcombers. Well, that's where they had dancing at night with the girls, not the guys, but they had girls. And, I think, you paid fifty cents, or something like that, for tickets, or something like that.

A terrible price!

Yeah, it was tough at that time, fifty cents was-- you can't even buy a Coke for that now!

So, we stayed there for a while, went into Honolulu, and it had all these shops for souvenirs and stuff like that and then you could take a picture of yourself with a Hawaiian girl, you know, and stuff like that, so.

Did you take a picture?

I think so. I couldn't find it. I don't know what happened to that thing, you know.

Give me just a second. Let me pause this one first. Sorry to interrupt --so you have no picture of yourself with a girl.

No, I just have a picture of myself somewhere.

Well, that's not bad.

Of me and my whites, you know, and my white hat and white suit, you know.

090: OUR SHIP, OUR BARGE, APL-14

But—so, we wound up going from there. Our ship was --we were told our ship was out there in Enewetak. That's where they had some practices for the atomic bomb, you know. But we didn't go ashore. We were just out there. And we were on a merchant ship. And that was our transportation. Merchant ships were our transportation. Getting to our Ritz Carlton was the barge. And I have a picture out there, in fact, of this barge. Come to think of it, everybody laughs at it! So do I! Six hundred guys on this thing and, fortunately, I was sleeping on the motor deck which is, you know, level with the sea. Guys were below us, and then we had another group on top of us, and then we had the officers above that. And when we had a storm we had a nice roly-poly barge, you know. And this hotel was really rolling! At some times, we thought we were going to go over. In fact, all our gear would fall on the next guy, you know. And, well, we got aboard this thing, and it was APL-14. That was the Navy name for this thing. They didn't give it a name per se, but they had APL's. They had up to 17 or 19, and we had number APL-14, so.

What did the APL stand for?

I think it was something about personnel living or something, you know. It was-- but so we wound up going aboard this ship, this hotel, and then we went out to Ulithi. It was the largest harbor in the world, a natural harbor, that we wound up supplying all these fleets with ammunition.

113: "TWELVE ON AND TWELVE OFF": WHAT WE DID IN ULITHI

We actually moved a hundred ton a night of ammunition. And we worked twelve on and twelve off. And in those twelve hours, you had to do your washing, sleep, have any liberty, write letters, and stuff of that nature. That was your twelve.

And what they would do, they'd come along in a Higgins boat. Now, a Higgins boat was like the first wooden landing-- a beach landing craft. The front door would flop down, and then they would be on shore, so you had to start out with them. And then they came along, and they had an LCM-- that's a landing craft mechanism-- where tanks were put in there. And they had a steel body, and a coxswain, and, as it turns out, they would drive us to the New Jersey. Any ammunition ship, and we would load sixteen inch shells, and the powder, and the eight inch shells, and the powder, five inch shells, for antiaircraft guns. And that was our whole thing. We were preparing for Halsey to attack Japan.

133: MINISUB ATTACK, OIL TANKER ABLAZE

So, we were there from, oh, I'm not quite sure how many days or weeks we were. Then, all of a sudden, I woke one day, and here one of the oil tankers that was in the harbor was set ablaze. And the Japanese had come in with six minisubs, one-man subs, and they were supposed to have an air attack at the same time. But they got this tanker and blew it up. And I could see it out the

portal. I could still see it as I stood there. This thing was blazing like heck because these oil tankers were the supply of all our Navy ships for fuel. And they went after that, and they were supposed to have this attack. But, somehow, the Air Force that, the Japanese Air Force either was intercepted or didn't get in there. But what happened, these Japanese subs were so small that they would come in under our battleships, under our cruisers, and they would sneak in. And when they opened the nets for our guys, they would be right there. And you see this in the movies. It's fact.

Six of them came in. I think there was another -- one of them was found after this. We were on three days of what they call general quarters. And for those three days, our destroyers were sending off depth charges all over. So, the guys that were on the bottom-- the six, I don't know, we had like two hundred guys down there sleeping. All you get was boom boom, like boom boom, of these depth charges! I couldn't sleep, you know, three days of this. So, as it turns out, we finally found the end result was that they got --one was beached on the coral, and they got the other five. They sunk them, you know, but I don't know if they had got prisoners, nothing like that.

150: JAPANESE PLANE HITS THE CHOW HALL

Another incident at this particular, Ulithi, I was watching a movie one night. So, I was looking out from the movie. You won't believe this. I was looking at the movie from the back side. The place was loaded up front. That's why. I'm in a little corridor watching this movie. I don't know what the heck it was. It's been so long ago, sixty years or so. But as it turns out, I look out, and I see all these airplanes. And they're our airplanes practice landing on one of our aircraft carriers just maybe a mile away. So, I'm watching these guys, you know, and they're coming in one by one. They're landing on this thing, you know. There comes another guy and there's another guy. They had about twelve guys coming down landing at the aircraft at night, now. This was sundown, is there. And I could see these guys just when they came in. They were practicing and then, all of a sudden, I see one guy go on beyond. And here he hit-- there was a Japanese plane, and he came in and hit the chow hall. And he thought, because it had a tower, that it was a battleship. And he went to the chow hall and killed a dozen guys, you know, and himself as well, you know. But he crashed into this building which he thought was a battleship. And he knocked off some of our guys and he killed himself at the same time.

167: BARGES FULL OF SHELLS

But it-- as it turns out, we would load depth charges, for, they were this big in diameter, that would go aboard a plane. And they were for Tokyo Harbor and stuff like that. We'd have, oh, fifty caliber machine gun bullets in metal cases. And if they were too old, we had to dump them overboard in the ocean. That's because they wouldn't allow those shells that came from World War I, say, or were stocked too long that they wouldn't fire-- or jam the guy's gun. So we had to dump, oh, barges full of that. I mean, barges that -- they were, you know, like eight foot high of these metal casings from fifty caliber machine gun bullets. And we had to do that, as we were told to do, because they wouldn't take a chance on any of this stuff. So, we were in Ulithi for a while. And then we went out to the Philippines, what they call Samar. If you look on the map of the Philippines, there will be Samar -- Samar. So, they were doing the same thing. It's -- all our

job was-- is to move this hundred ton of ammunition or whatever was needed for these guys up front.

Did you move it by hand or did you move it--

Yeah.

Wow.

183: MY JOBS

Well, my job, whether you want to visualize this, but do you know what a winch operator is? Probably not. Well, here's two ships. We're out here at sea bouncing around like any storm or anything that-- normal waves could go. So, we had one cable from this ship that comes over here and one cable from this ship that comes over here. Now, he's got the control of this one and say I got the control of this one and what between us we've got, say, a sixteen inch shell or two five hundred pound bombs. And we take it off of this ship and put it over on this ship. And that's what the winch operator

In the middle of the sea!

At sea. And this we did twelve hours on and twelve hours off.

Must be very nerve-wracking.

Oh, I went though-- I was a signalman. I was in the hold, and I became a hold boss. And then I was a signalman, and then I was a winch operator, so-- once they'd feel you had the confidence that they could trust with you, say, a whole skid of bombs or detonators or whatever from one ship to the other, then they put you in that job. And I loved that job. It was so-- you had to coordinate yourself. You had to have coordination with this other guy because you didn't know what he was going to do or what the water was going to do to the ship. But they're pretty stable because they're big, you know. They could be—Oh, I don't know. Let's say fifty ton or something like that-- something really heavy. And they're stable, but the water still—we had storms. As an example, we'd be out there in the Pacific. And we'd be bone dry. All of a sudden, here comes a hurricane -- comes through us and knocks us all around. And we're soaking wet, and five minutes, we're dry. And back to work.

The thing that was very dangerous, we would take Higgins boats that were damaged in the first part of the war and send them back to be repaired until they got all these steel ones. And they were landing craft, LCM's. They were just fantastic. That was our taxicab. Having a taxicab of an LCM for a whole year on the ocean! I hate the ocean. I don't go on cruises.

Did you hate the ocean before you started? Did you know

A little bit. But I never hated it any more than when I came out. Because I just, although I got over being seasick and all that jazz, and I could be on a whale boat that was-- that would pick up

up sometimes and we'd have water up to here, mind you, we'd have, you know, it was fit for twenty guys.

Up to your waist

We'd have thirty-six guys in it, you know.

Yeah.

Because the storm's coming, they'd want to get you back to your ship. So they would load up this little whale boat, you know. And my wristwatch was all salted, you know. I lost it because I got salt on it because I'm trying to hang on to this-- but the most, then let's see. So, I was in Samar. We were doing the same thing.

223: WOLF AND TATTOOS

And then we were-- I don't know if this is-- if I should even print this, kind of off the record on this one, we're, well, I should go back. I was --when I was in Providence, Rhode Island, I was a sparring partner for this Indian fellow. And what the heck was his name? Wolf was his name. Husky. Full-blooded Indian. So, I'm his sparring partner. And as a fool, I'll put it mildly, in Rhode Island, they had a smoker. Well, he's supposed to fight somebody else. So, the other guy doesn't show up. So, who do you think was in the ring with this guy? Me! So, I didn't last too long because it was for real, you know! As a sparring partner, you just play around. So -- but we were pretty good friends and, while we were in Hawaii, I should go back and pick this up, we used to play Ping-pong, you know, because we were waiting for our ship, you know, and had a lot of time. And this guy, Wolf, went into Honolulu and got tattooed. He had a battleship tattooed to his chest.

Oh!

And I can still see this guy moping around outside in agony. "Oh, my chest! My chest!" He had a broad chest. He could put a battleship on it. This kid was pretty broad. And he was an Indian—full-blooded Indian. Wolf, I can't remember his first name, George or something like that. But, anyway, this guy was in agony!

And then they had-- they had another guy that went there. He had Alice put on his. Alice. And he had a big snake.

Oh, like the name Alice.

Alice. He had Alice. So what happened

With a snake.

With a—Yeah, he had a dagger, and a snake, and then he had Alice across there, you know.

Poor Alice!

Alice was his wife back home. So out on the ocean-- and he gets a Dear John. He tried for a whole year to get that bugger off of his arm! He didn't want any part of that thing, you know. He couldn't stand looking at Alice, you know. He wasn't waiting. She wasn't waiting for him. And he wanted to get rid of her, too. But his name was Williams. I'll never forget that guy's name. Forget his first name. Williams. But, so then, he had-- I can't tell you where he had these other tattoos, Wolf, he had other tattoos as well, but

Did he get them all in Hawaii?

Yeah.

Or did he have any before?

No, he got them all in Hawaii. So, that's Wolf, ok.

260: WOLF, THE ISLAND OF SAMAR, AND LEAVENWORTH

So now we're in Ulithi. We're going out to Samar. We're in Samar again. I'm back in the story again.

Ok.

So what happens is we're real close to the island of Samar. So, I don't know if this should be printed or what. But this guy jumped ship and marries the chief's daughter just like you see in the movies.

Wow.

He stayed thirty days on the island and he came back when we were going down to Peleliu. He got back. He climbed the chain, and they wrote him out, and he climbed the chain, and got back in there. And he got seven years in Leavenworth, you know, it's so funny.

I can't believe that even happened!

Fact!

What did you think at the time?

You can actually take some of this out. Because I don't know if—it's true. But I don't know if they're going to appreciate it as I do. As we're doing.

We appreciate it. I don't see why someone else wouldn't. Oh, my goodness! So, where did you go from there?

I went to Peleliu.

How did they take him away? Did he have to serve the rest of his time?

No after he got --He stayed for as much as they could get, you know, him transportation. They went back and court-martialed him. And then we found out after because we didn't know what happened to the guy, they just took him away, you know. Once he came back, he had to go to court-martial. We didn't know where it was going to be held or nothing. When we were coming home, they said, yeah, he got seven years in Leavenworth, you know,

Wow.

which was a pretty price to pay, you know, for twenty-nine..., you know, but he would laugh at us every day. He said --I heard some stories, after he got home, before they took him away. But he was watching us, you know, and laughing. We had the last laugh, though, you know, because he got nailed.

284: PELELIU: ONSHORE DUTY AS A RIGGER

So, then we went to Peleliu. Now, Peleliu was an island that MacArthur and some other, what would you call, strategists argued about. Some wanted it to be bypassed. Others said -- MacArthur, in particular, said he wanted that island so when he hit the Philippines that he wouldn't be attacked from the back while he was going in there, because it was only a stone's stroke from the Philippines and Samar.

So, as it turns out, we went ashore. And this was our first time we had onshore duty. Now, you know, other times, the whole year was on the ocean. So, I was given a truck. I was a rigger. I would make cables and that. You know, I would have a rigger's loft. I had a truck and I would get orders for these slings that they wanted to have a certain sling. They'd be, say, ten foot long, twelve foot long, or twenty foot long. And it was wired cable, all metal. Some were rope. But they didn't use rope much because they didn't have much faith in it. So, they used metal slings, wire strands, in other words, and I would tie the loops in them and actually weave the tail end of this thing back into the body of the thing. And they would have tests on it, you know, and then they could haul anything they wanted whether it was a tank or whether it was a box of shells or whatever.

Did you learn how to tie knots beforehand?

Yeah. Yeah, I was

Did you learn that in while you were in the Service or were you a Boy Scout?

313: ADVANCING IN THE NAVY

Yeah, I learned that in the Service because I had to go through --see, I went in as the lowest grade. It wasn't even first class. I went in below that. And then I could be first class, and then

coxswain, and then boatswain, and then boatswain second class, so it was like a sergeant in the Army. So, I had to learn all this thing. I was reading books all the time to pass the tests. I had to take tests like every three months to try and get an increase in my pay. You have to have a rate change to do that. So, I had to go from a boot right up to taking all these exams. And I passed them. So, I was able to do that when I got there. And I really appreciated the fact that I had a responsibility. I didn't have to go, although I have a story to tell you in regard to going out to sea again, so, but that was my job.

324: MY COUSIN'S BODY IN THE CHAPEL ON PELELIU

When I --when we were there for a while, I got a letter from home and it was from my mother. And she said, well, she says, I don't know if you were there but, she says, Frank Buckley was killed on Peleliu. My cousin. My mother's sister's son. They were the Buckley family. My mother was born in Dublin, Ireland, and that's another story. But this one was pretty sad because they said that Frank Buckley, from the story, he was -- one of his buddies was shot by a sniper, and he went out to get his buddy's body, and he was killed bringing his buddy back. And what they had, I don't know who built it-- if the Seabees built it for us or the Army-- but they had a chapel. And this chapel was loaded with crosses. Because, as I toured the island, after being there for, say, five or six weeks, I come across a pillbox that killed six hundred of our Marines coming ashore. And the bones were still around the shore. And it was-- the machine gun bunker was like two foot thick, and they were headed right out on the ocean. And as happened so many times that the tide was out, so our Marines had to come across in knee-deep water and really had to slow down. And they shot six hundred out of this thing. So that was pretty tragic. And then I'll make a long story short. I did find my cousin's body with the cross there, Frank Buckley, PFC. And as it turns out, it was kind a shock to the whole family, but ironic that I'm there, three or four thousand miles away from home, and my cousin is buried right there.

360: LIKE THE CHICAGO STADIUM: A MOUNTAIN DUG OUT BY THE JAPANESE

So what we did in our liberty, there was-- go up into the mountains and see what the Japanese-- the back trails of these mountains were donkey trails that they would bring up their ammunition, and this one hill that I went up there, I can't think of the -- they have a shrine up there. I can't remember what it was. But inside this mountain, they had it all dug out where the ledge was around the whole thing like the Chicago Stadium. I'm not kidding. It was that hollow. Then they had all their trucks down here. And they had machine guns, or not machine guns, cannons, that they'd pull back and fool you where they were, because if you shot back, they weren't there, you know. But they went up and took this hill by hand-to-hand combat and even when we were there for the six weeks that we were there, or a little bit longer, the Japanese were coming down in their diapers and surrendering while we were loading something or doing something on the island.

385: TYPHOON ON LCM AND LCT, WITH NO STEERING GEAR

But this one case, they had a big job and they -- before I got my truck and my rigging job, we went out to sea one night, and we went on the LCM, this iron taxi, and we went out to load the ship. And coming back, there was a typhoon came up. And we--they warned us and, as it turns

out, they said you'd better get back to your island and have something safe, because we don't know where we're going to go during the night to ride out this storm. So, we got in the LCM, and we're coming in, and we go up. There was a channel that might be as big as this room, I mean the other wall and the LCM.

Twenty feet.

Yeah, it might have been thirty feet, but it was all rock. So, this guy's guns were going through and we had cross water coming across the entrance of this thing. And we go up the rocks so I'm in the bottom and, as it turns out, we came back down. But three guys were sitting up in the well. See, this boat is-- this boat is like this, and it has a thing like that, and then it has this front thing like that. And the propellers were back here. He sits up in here, but the guys were on the back sitting here and sitting on a box. And they didn't see what was happening. There was three guys here, and they all went into the ocean as this thing went up like that.

Yeah.

And these guys just fell into the ocean so -- this crosscurrent was so strong that we didn't know where they went. And the box went with them, so we didn't know. We were out at sea. This was like nine o'clock at night, and we're trying to get back in. We can't get in because the crosscurrents in front of this thing were so hard and it was raining like heck out there.

So, as it turns out, we had to go back out in the ocean. And going out in the ocean, we didn't know where we were going because we didn't have anything bigger than this boat. And we came across an LST, no, LCT. Now, that's a landing craft, say, tank or truck. Now, on it was high octane gas, these fifty-five gallons of high octane gas were on this thing, on its deck. So, in the transfer from our boat to their boat, I fell in between these things in the storm.

Gosh.

And a guy caught me by my belt, and he saved me from getting drowned, you know, because I - - when you're in a storm, you don't know where -- you have to time yourself. Well, I timed myself. I thought I was right, but then something kicks in, and I fell between these boats. And I was almost crushed. And a guy grabbed me from behind my belt and he threw me into the LCT. And I slipped on these fifty-five gallon drums all night long. As it turns out, this ship was battered up so bad that we lost the steering apparatus for the ship so we don't know where we're going. And they said, well, there's an island six miles away. We got to try and make that just to stall. But we have no steering gear, so what they did-- they got some rope, some heavy rope, and they rigged up a hand-- a hand-- what they would call a tiller that had, say, they would wrap this around the rudder, and then they had some pulleys up here and some wheels. And they would just by hand try and steer this thing all night long. And then we went out to the six mile and came back. And I slept there all night and it was all hand job on this particular LCT to steer this thing from going into any reefs around there. We had to be out on the ocean, but we didn't want to lose sight of where our markers were, you know, so then they came out in the morning in another LCM and picked us up. And it was calm, everything was sunny, and like you wouldn't even

know it happened. So, we went back in there, and we looked on the shore, and here were three guys sleeping on the shore and we said, "What! We thought we had lost these guys."

They were the same guys.

They were the same guys and what they did-- they hung onto the box, we heard, and they went over the reef, and landed on the shore, and the -- our chief officer gave them a fifth of booze, and they were drunk. They couldn't -- they had drank each a bottle and went to sleep, and they were still sleeping there.

466: IF AN AMMUNITION SHIP BLOWS UP

477: I SAW THE FRANKLIN GOING TO SALVAGE

So, that was a little, exciting thing, but in a sense we were under, you know, always some danger, because if an ammunition ship, which we unloaded, blows up, it's from five to ten miles around that gets wiped out because there is so much on there. Because we had torpedoes, we had depth charges, we had five hundred pound bombs, you know, and you put two slings on them, and hook these up, and they go together. We put them on the other ship aboard aircraft carriers. In fact, people don't realize the strength of the ocean and the fear of the ocean. I was-- I don't know if you ever heard of the Franklin. I saw the Franklin which was hit by Kamikaze airplanes at seven o'clock in the morning. This ship lost like seventeen hundred people, killed, seventeen hundred sailors. And I saw this thing, and it was listing like that. And an aircraft carrier is pretty big, and this thing was in some harbor, I can't remember just where-- but they were bringing it back to the States to salvage, which they did, and they had a priest on it. One of our gangs, we were in gangs, like I was in company A, in Gang 5, or something like that. Well, one of our company C gangs went into that thing, and they said it was just dreadful. All of our dead sailors were all over yet. But they had to drag it away from where they were before it would sink, you know. In the meantime, they were trying to keep this afloat by shifting the water in the ballast to keep it afloat. So, one of our outfits, one of our gangs, did go on that, from our 18 special, did go on that unit. And then I saw an aircraft carrier. It was called the Bennington and, you know, this was a regular carrier and as it turns

506: THE BENNINGTON

Go ahead. Tell me.

I was going to fold this thing.

You were going to tell me in a picture.

No, this was an aircraft carrier and, in its flight deck, because it's long-- I will do it this way, but this is the way an aircraft carrier flight deck is.

Right.

But these two front parts of the flight deck were turned over like this from the force of the ocean, and the wind

Oh, my goodness.

came in like this. That's the flight--

Wow.

Just bent them. This is steel. This isn't something out of cardboard. This is steel! The ocean is so hard at times. It's drastic. Things can happen.

515: INJURED & IN AN AMMUNITION BOX

But, so, where was I? I was floating around, and we did get back, you know, and then I was working this detail, as I say, as a rigger. And so I'm having a beer with my buddy on the beach, sitting on a picnic table, and we both had a beer. And this was a buddy. He was a medic. Because I had --I had something happen to me when I was in Ulithi. I had two five inch shells in my hand. They weighed a hundred and five pounds in a wooden box. So I fall into a hole. I couldn't see because I had this in front of me. I thought it was clear because I could see ahead.

Right.

I thought it was clear, but, somehow, this thing so, as it turns out, I flip with this thing, and go down, and tore my back apart. And then I had to get in what they call an ammunition box, a wooden box that might be something like this. So, I'm in this box by myself. Well, I didn't have enough counterweight on either side, so I'm going down on my LCM. So, I tried to stay in the middle, but I had nothing to hold onto, so I finally made it down there. And then I had to climb aboard my own ship out of this big, well, I think we were as deep as this thing here. I had to jump up there. And I was in such pain. To make a long story short, I was out for five weeks on light duty. And I went to a hospital ship and they had -- bend over. So, you'd bend over and the medic comes in and he had a needle

Oh!

or a tube like this

Oh!

and he, what did he give me? Oh, Novocaine or something like that. He shot that into my back, you know, so I maneuvered a little bit better. And I came out, and who was out there, but Eddie Peabody playing his banjo like crazy, you know, entertaining the troops. Eddie Peabody. So, I went back to my ship the hard way. It was really tough, even with that shot, because it was supposed to numb you up a little bit and kill the pain.

567: "THERE WAS A WAVE...A REPURCUSSION"

So, I had six weeks, but I met this medic, John Taylor, and I was sitting—I'm going back now to tell you-- I was sitting on this picnic bench. We both had a beer, just talking and talking. And I says, "Hey, John, take a look at what's happening out there!" And he says, "What?" And I says, "Take a look at the ocean." And he says, "I don't see nothing." And I says, "Look at that! Look at where the water is at the beach and look at what's happening to it!" So, he says, "What's going on?" And, so something's happening to that ocean. And "Sure as hell," I says, "John, we better get out of here!" So, we run up about a block off the beach, way off to high ground, and sure enough, the picnic tables that we were on-- the ocean came in and took all the picnic tables and put them out on the ocean. There was a wave. It was a repercussion. At the time, they had a big storm in Okinawa and Japan. And we felt the tail end of it down here in the Peleliu Islands. So, he said, "Yeah, that was a little bit too much for us." You know, he just sat back, and let it all go by, and drank our beer, but it was a little--

Oh, you took the beer with you when you ran away.

Oh, absolutely! Couldn't leave the beer on the bench. That would be terrible.

Concerned for your life, but not that concerned!

Yeah. So that was, you know, I don't know what else—oh, we had, while we were in Ulithi, the Japs had hit a cruiser. And the cruiser came back in the Ulithi and they opened up the area, the compartments, I should say, where the torpedo had hit. And out came about four bodies of the crew. The cruiser was ok, but this one section was flooded where they to go in there to see what was going on. Somehow, these bodies got out and were floating around you know in the Ulithi harbor. But I don't know the name of the ship or none of that stuff but—it's too long ago.

606: MISHAPS ON BOARD

But, you know, we had one mishap. We talk about the ocean and its uproars. We had a night duty, and one of our chiefs was on a barge, and he was on the roof of a barge directing his gang to unload whichever way he was going on or off. And this barge took a terrible beating from the weather, and he fell overboard. And some of our guys dived for over ten hours to try to find his body and they couldn't find him. And one guy, and I remember the name was Sullivan that fell in—constantly, for ten hours, he was trying to find him. He just-- and daylight came, and they didn't know where he was at.

631: SIDE CHANGE

But so that was the only -- aboard ship, they usually cover a hatch with hatch covers. And these are planks that might be, say, three foot wide by six or eight foot long. And they fit between beams, so that makes a floor. Now, that covers these hatches that are filled with all your ammunition and all your supplies. Well, sometimes, the guy doesn't put the hatch cover on, and they put a tarp over this thing so you don't know if there is the proper support for you. So, this guy was coming aboard ship to do his time, and he ran across the top of the tarp, and fell right though went down two stories.

Oh, how awful.

It broke his arms and one leg, you know, and he wasn't killed, but he had a hell of, uh, a injuries on that.

So, you said there was-- when you were hurt, there was a hospital ship.

Yeah, in Ulithi, yeah, but we didn't always have a hospital ship that was just

Did you have someplace on board where people went? Did you have like a sickbay?

640: SMOKING, DANGER, AND ETHER

Oh, yeah, you had a sickbay. You couldn't smoke either aboard the ship.

How come?

You couldn't smoke in the hold, but we could smoke along the side of the ship. We'd have a Coke and used to smoke two packs of cigarettes. There was nothing else to do-- finally quit in '53, thank God.

Yeah.

But as it turns out, there was a lot of danger on smoking. They say the lamp is lit or the lamp is out, you know, on no smoking. And that was—normally, when you were aboard ship, but they had the gangplanks, gangways, along the side of the outside of the ship in the open air and that's where you could smoke. Couldn't smoke on deck, open deck because, as a few cases we had, you know what ether is?

Mmm hmm.

Well, ether is a substance they put on the powder bags to ignite to force the shell up the gun. Well, we would, unbeknownst to us sometimes, we'd say what's that's smell, you know, and the guys would be looking for the powder keg. And they were metal, these cases for eight inch shells, they were metal. And they're all like tubes. And inside was the powder and the ether. And that's the way they're packed, ready to go. So several times, oh, I can't remember how many times, we'd smell this ether. We'd have to find that broken can and get it out of there because it would put us to sleep.

Oh.

Used to be used for medicine, you know. So, we had to watch a few things, you know.

665: "THERE IS SOMETHING TICKING DOWN HERE"

One time, we were down in the hold, and we had these depth charges. And they were going to Tokyo Bay. And we relieved this group, and what did they say? "Hey, there is something ticking down here! We can't find it, but hope you can," you know. And I said, "Oh, thanks a lot!," you know. So, we were down there for hours trying to find it. And these things are stacked up. You know, there must have been four hundred of these things around that we had to search through. We couldn't find it. And all of the sudden, the ticking stopped but we were—we'd never know! You never know when you were dealing with ammunition because—So, what else?

So, where were you? We didn't get you all the way home.

Pardon.

Where were you in your story? We didn't get you all the way home yet.

Oh, well, I was in Peleliu and I saw my cousin, like I say. And got all that under my belt. And the war was over, and then you start looking at how many points you get. So, as it turns out, I had enough points, and I get aboard a troop-- you know, a submarine tender. I don't know how many guys from our outfit went aboard this thing-- a couple hundred. We left Peleliu, went up to--went into San Diego, and, boy, I kissed the earth when I got on U.S. soil! I kissed that sucker and I said this is for me! No more -- no more boats!

678: GOING HOME: COLD, A CAR, A BUS, A TRAIN

So, you got to San Diego.

Yeah, and then had marching bands and cheerleaders and all that stuff, you know. So, I stayed overnight there. And I stayed there for a week or so. And when I got from the Pacific to San Diego, we were put in -- it was in December. Now, I'm in the Pacific for a year and a half. I was aboard out there in the ocean for a year. And my blood's pretty thin, so I'm freezing when I get in there. I've got a peacoat on. I've got two blankets. I'm sleeping next to the potbellied stove, and I'm freezing. So, it was cold. But my blood was so thin I couldn't stand it, you know. So, to make another part of a long story short, this Taylor, the medic, had an aunt that he got six hundred dollars from her. We went out and bought a car, a '50, no, a '36 Chevy. So, the medics were in the car with me. Maybe there was five or six of us, so we're going across the lower part of Arizona, going to Gila Bend, Arizona. And I'm out there because the car is smelling gas. I'm out on the running board with the hood up looking to see where the gas is leaking. Here it's on the manifold. And it could have blew up in my face, you know. So, as it turns out, we were going through this Gila Bend. And we went back, and we had a mechanic fix it. So, then, we're out there on the open road again going hell bent for election, you know, and we blew three pistons out the engine! And they're laying on the road, and we're stranded with the Gila monsters out there. And to make a long story short, I stayed there for a day. I got a bus, because these guys had to go get a new engine for three hundred dollars from Phoenix, Arizona

Oh my gosh!

to Gila Bend.

I said, "I'm leaving. I want to get home for Christmas." So, as it turns out, I get a bus in Gila Bend. I go up to Oklahoma and then I get up to Alton. And I got my duffle bag with me and the suitcase and I'm running for a train in Alton. And I get aboard a train and I paid two dollars, two fifty, for a passage to Chicago. I'm sitting there relieved and, all of a sudden, I feel a chuga oveh boom. As it turns out, I fell asleep and at three o'clock in the morning, we're still in the place

Oh

because we went to the yard.

Oh, no!

and stayed there 'til about three or four in the morning. And we finally went out and I got home the day before like Christmas Eve. Noon at twelve o'clock before Christmas. Just made it, because I had to take a bus. Oh, man, I tell you, it was terrible!

Was it great being home?

Oh, yeah, I gained, you know, I gained like ten pounds in a week, you know. I used to weigh 139 pounds when I came out of the service. I went in at 169. It was all muscle. I could lift 100 pounds like nothing, but, hey, I'm sorry to keep you so long.

No, no, that's what it's for. You know, what I wanted to know, did you go back to Teletype?

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Did you ever use anything that you learned?

No, because it was a different occupation. It was aboard ship. I became a senior engineer at Teletype. And I wound up designing computer keyboards -- touch, you know, and all this, Teletype and that, so forty-six years.

Forty-six years.

Yeah, I came out of high school. Tilden Tech High School.

Did you ever go back to school?

No, I was thinking of taking -- They got a tour that I understand is available for people now. You know, it was a technical school -- Tilden Tech. It was like Lane Tech, only on the South Side.

Yeah.

I was in the upper, say, quarter of my graduation class. And Teletype asked for a South Side person rather than a North Side from Lane. Me and another guy went there. I was too young.

And they hired me in September, 25th, and -- because my birthday was July 5th and I worked there ever since.

Oh.

From deburring parts, so. I'm sorry to take up all your time for nothing.

That's not for nothing! Usually, it takes about an hour and a half.

Does it?

Usually, it takes most people about an hour and a half.

Did you celebrate holidays on board ship?

Not too much. The only thing we celebrated was the end of the war.

733: CELEBRATING THE END OF THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC

So what did you do for the end of the war?

They had all kinds of flares going up. And, oh man, they had the sky like the Fourth of July out there in the Pacific, you know. It was really something. But it was an experience that I think, in my opinion, I don't know if this would go. But I think all high school kids should take two years in the Service. It gives you character. It gives you the facts of life that you have to sustain yourself, take care of yourself, and you have to work with kids your age that your life depends on them as they depend on you. It gives you that self-respect, I think, too. It keeps you in the straight and narrow, I think. But it is hell, I mean, you know, I used to write on a bus going from one shift to another, and go down these rope ladders, these cargo nets, you know, it was nothing for me to do that, you know. But I showed my grandkids. What's that? You know, they just don't -- the kids aren't shown enough of what war is all about.

Did you change your attitude about war or the military between when you

No. I always felt that you should go.

Yeah.

Except that my job kept me from-- those three deferments, you know, and they felt I was more important there, than in the Service at the time. So, we had, like I say, six hundred guys. I could show you the picture of the thing. You could laugh at that one. What else can I ?

I don't know. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

No, I don't think so.

Well, I want to thank you. That was a great interview. Very interesting.

I don't know. I don't have the war stories that -- I wasn't in the Battle of the Bulge and stuff like that, you know, where guys were dead, you know.

Well, I always say to people that everybody's experience was different and everybody's experience is important. You know, we don't just need stories from people who did one thing. We need to know what it was like for everybody.

Yeah, you have to get a cross-section I guess, you know.

Yeah. We want to know what it is really like, not just what it's like when you're in a battle or

Two and a half years away from your family is a long time you know.

Yeah. Did you-- Did you write letters?

762: LETTERS HOME, MY BROTHER

Oh, yeah. Yeah, I'd write to my mother and my aunt. But they were censored. I didn't put stuff in—I'd never seen my letters cut up because I never even attempted to make it, so they'd get a clean letter at home for the most part. But my dad saw my picture of our Ritz Carlton in the paper and he sent it to me. Yeah, I got it somewhere. It's yellow. It's like -- the paper's like this.

Yeah, I would imagine, real dark, all that acid in the paper.

Well, my brother had a harder time than me because he was shell shocked in the islands and he was blown off of a telephone pole. And six guys were killed below him through a mortar shell. And he was laid up for two years going to Michael Reese Hospital in Washington and then one in Ohio. But he married, had seven kids, but his smoking got him early. He died when he was fifty-two.

Very young.

Yeah, with seven kids, and some of them were like eight years old.

Yeah, they must have been little.

Yeah. So, it affects us all, you know, in some way.

Did you --you belong to the VFW.

Oh, yeah.

Did you join any other veterans' organizations?

No, not veterans'. I'm Niles Museum membership chairman. I'm a Baseball League treasurer for three years and a commissioner years ago. I think I've been, without a doubt saying, I've been with the Niles Baseball League for thirty-five years straight in some capacity.

782: CHAIRMAN OF OUTFIT REUNIONS

And you said you keep in touch with the guys that you were on board with?

Yeah. I started that in '81, and I'm chairman of reunions, you know. And I'm sort of the spokesman for sending out all the mail. The guy who will be chairman, say, in Florida, he sends me all this stuff and then I send it to 185 guys.

Wow.

And I search these guys through the Internet. I must have found 145 guys through the Internet of my outfit.

Isn't that amazing!

Yeah. It's -- I went with a guy some years ago, and he was looking at telephone books, you know, like this, you know. He'd go to the Skokie Library and then I says, "Ed" -- Ed Lesniak is his name -- I don't know if he still goes over there by you. But I said, "There's an easier way to do this. We've got to have a computer, you know, and get online." So I took him over to Skokie, and I saw these computers, and we'd make contact. Because I started -- I started the M-NASR [Maine-Niles Association of Special Recreation.] I was park commissioner here in Niles for twenty-two years and, in that group, I wound up starting M-NASR which was for the blind.

[Pause]

799: LATER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

As it turns out, I started through the Niles Library. I wrote a letter to a Jewish millionaire and got these monitors, and these magnifying glasses, that you put your check on there, and you can read, you know.

Like a VTEK machine.

Yeah, right, I started that in Niles many years ago. I also started the Niles bus service many years ago, the first, in '69 as a park commissioner.

That's a great thing, that bus service.

Yeah, and with this monitor, and that-- I went to Skokie and saw they were using that and brought that back, you know.

[Pause]

You were telling me about the bus service, then you were telling me

Oh, yeah, the bus service, I started that in '69 because I became a park commissioner and I was having a drink at the Lone Tree Inn with the president. And I says, "Jerry Sullivan, I'd like to suggest we have a bus service because our parks are so spread out all over down Milwaukee Avenue. It's hard for the people to get to do everything." So, he says, "Yeah, let's try it." I couldn't get a third vote until 1971 when Bill Keener came on, and then our director wound up saying that he had enough money for the bus and for the driver, so.

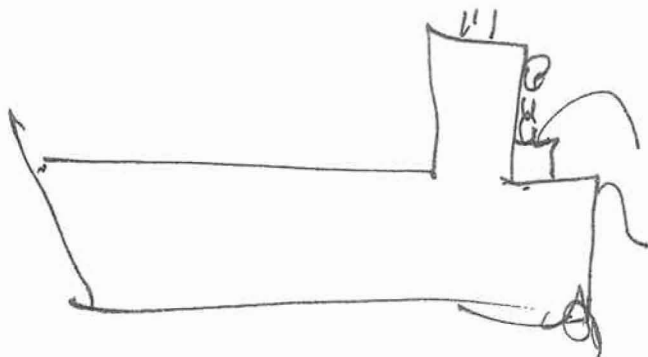
820: END

18TH SPECIAL NC. BATT.

ULITHI



Official U. S. Navy photograph



LCM in a Typhoon: "...this boat is like this, and it has a thing like that..." (counter 385, page 10)