

National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Eugene H. Strathman

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This is Larry Rabalais, and today is May 5, 2009. I am interviewing Eugene Strathman from Fredericksburg, Texas by telephone, though he is in Pocahontas, Iowa.

This interview is in support for the Center for Pacific War Studies, archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of the historical information related to this site.

And with that statement, Gene, I'll just let you start talking and tell us where you were born and so forth. Go ahead, Gene.

Mr. Strathman: This is Eugene Strathman, and I go by "Tike". I was born in Pocahontas, Iowa in 1925, August 16. I grew up here in this town, went through the high school and everything here, the Catholic school. In 1943 I got a letter from the government congratulating me that I'd been chosen...

Mr. Rabalais: What did your family do there in Iowa, if I may ask?

Mr. Strathman: My family was Frank Strathman and his wife, Ann. They were portrait photographers. My dad was the 2nd generation, and I ended up the 3rd generation. Now my family had 8 children including me. There were 3 boys and 5 girls.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you all live in town, or sort of on a farm?

Mr. Strathman: No, we all lived in a big house here in town. Of the 8 of us, all 3 of us boys went into the service. My brother Jerry went into the Air Corp. as a navigator bombardier. My brother Frank went into the Navy. He was a professional photographer until he got called. I was in the Navy. Then after I went into the Navy, my sister Roseanne, became a nurse in the Navy.

Mr. Rabalais: I'll be...that's a wonderful. So you all had a lot of stars and stuff on the windows I guess or whatever they did in those days.

Mr. Strathman: Oh yeah. In those days they had stars, but luckily we had no gold stars. I joined the Navy in 1943...

Mr. Rabalais: What made you select the Navy?

Mr. Strathman: Well, I didn't want to be crawlin' on my belly among the snakes. I knew basically that the "big war" was over, well not really over, but I knew we were going to go do something in the Pacific Theater and I knew what kind of land was over there, and I didn't want any part of that.

Mr. Rabalais: So let's see...how old were you then?

Mr. Strathman: I was just 18.

Mr. Rabalais: Just 18...so right out of high school? Did you join with some of your buddies from high school?

Mr. Strathman: Yes, there were 9 of us and we all had been drafted and hadn't served yet. We all went down together and they were lined up for the Army and I saw right next to it was the Navy office, and I went in and asked, "Is there any chance I can still join the Navy if I don't want to go into the Army?" And the guy said, "Yeah!" So he took care of it and 9 of us joined the Navy there.

Mr. Rabalais: Where did you go to your boot camp?

Mr. Strathman: My boot camp was Farragut, Idaho

Mr. Rabalais: Oh really? OK.

Mr. Strathman: Beautiful place up there, but colder than the hubs.

Mr. Rabalais: Now what time of the year would this be?

Mr. Strathman: December.

Mr. Rabalais: December! Oh boy!

Mr. Strathman: We did our boating instruction and stuff on Lake Coeur d'Alene. It was a lake that never froze over; it was too deep.

Mr. Rabalais: Well now that's not too far from the Canadian border, so it's pretty chilly. Well, let me ask you this...how long was that boot camp there? Some of the guys I've talked to had really short Navy boot camps, and some were longer.

Mr. Strathman: Well, I think it was 6 weeks.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, OK. So it was fairly long.

Mr. Strathman: Well, yes, it was.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you all do any rifle training at all?

Mr. Strathman: Not a bit. No guns. We had to learn to march, you know, with the wooden guns, but we didn't have any actual weapons.

Mr. Rabalais: After your boot camp there, where did they assign you then?

Mr. Strathman: I got a little leave then. I forget what it was, a week or two. Then I came back and then I worked up there...they kept me there for awhile shoveling coal off the cars. Then they sent me down to San Diego Group II schools for signalman school. So I went through signalman school and then after I graduated from there, they sent me to await an assignment.

Mr. Rabalais: Where was this now?

Mr. Strathman: San Diego sub base

Mr. Rabalais: At this time, this would have been early 44. So the war was well along, and we had just got through with the Battle of the Bulge, and so forth.
OK.

Mr. Strathman: Pretty much. So I was out there awhile waiting on my ship. I never knew what kind of a ship I was waiting for. I just knew they told me I would be held there until I got my assignment. We had to help scrape barnacles off of ships and stuff like that, just to keep us busy. I was getting sick of it,

and one day I mentioned to a guy I knew pretty well that was up in the office some place, "When in the hell can I find out where I'm going?" And he says, "Well, I'll see what I can do." A couple of days later, he told me, "You're waiting for the Chicago, a cruiser".

Mr. Rabalais: Chicago, the cruiser.

Mr. Strathman: The damn thing had been hit in service and was back in port for reconditioning. Well I mentioned one time to somebody else and an officer heard about it, and I got called in on the carpet and they were wondering where I was getting all this news and stuff and it was illegal to be putting it out and all that stuff. I said, "Somebody just told me that. Somebody that was up in the office. I don't know who it was." So the guy said, OK and they finally let me go on that. About 2 days later, I got a call that I was assigned to LSM-11, that's landing ship medium. I learned later that most of the guys in LSM division, and the LST, all the landing equipment (the amphibious section) were mostly guys who were just coming into the Navy. There were a few older guys who were the officers and stuff.

Mr. Rabalais: So, real young guys then, coming in.

Mr. Strathman: Very young outfit. We had a few older guys, but most of them...depending on what field you were in.

Mr. Rabalais: Where was the LCM? Was it a LSM or LCM?

Mr. Strathman: LSM.

Mr. Rabalais: LSM, so that's a little bit larger than an LCM.

Mr. Strathman: LCM is pretty small, that's a craft. Ours was still called a ship...we were sea-goers.

Mr. Rabalais: Would you describe the ship a little bit?

Mr. Strathman: I can't tell you exactly...

Mr. Rabalais: Was it a couple hundred feet long?

Mr. Strathman: That's about right. We hauled tank destroyers. A tank destroyer which you know is a heavy tank...heavy armament and that stuff. But the ones we were carrying...because the big boys knew what we were coming up to over there in Japan, and we could haul 3 of them. That was all we could haul. Now tanks, it would hold a hell of a lot more than that, but these all had pontoons on them. I mean they were HUGE. So when we pulled up and finally got to where we were going, I'll tell you about that later, if I remember. What would happen...we were a beach craft.

Mr. Rabalais: So you had bow doors, just like an LST?

Mr. Strathman: Yeah. We only had one deck where they had two decks.

Mr. Rabalais: How big a crew would have been on an LSM?

Mr. Strathman: On an LSM, we had 55 and 5. 55 men and 5 officers.

Mr. Rabalais: That's pretty good size crew. Bigger than I thought. That was a pretty slow-going vessel, wasn't it?

Mr. Strathman: It wasn't very fast.

Mr. Rabalais: About 10 knots?

Mr. Strathman: We could keep up when the fleet was moving; of course they probably slowed down for all of the ship too.

Mr. Rabalais: Probably 10 or 12 knots, I imagine.

Mr. Strathman: That's about right. Anyway, we loaded these tank destroyers up and we went to Hilo, Hawaii. They took them all off there...the marines...we had 55 marines crew with us also then.

Mr. Rabalais: Was there sleeping accommodations for these marines?

Mr. Strathman: There was one compartment for the Marines, but most of them wanted to sleep up on deck because of sea-sickness. It was nice weather always over there.

Mr. Rabalais: Who cared for feeding these Marines? That's a lot of guys to take care of.

Mr. Strathman: Well, I tell you what. When we left the United States, I was a signalman for one night. The next morning...we had 2 cooks. One was called Frenchie and he had chronic sea-sickness, and we all thought he was going to die before we got to Hawaii, but he didn't. He made it. They took him off, and he couldn't come back to the ship, because he had been that sick. So we left with only 1 cook, and I went to the captain and I said, "Hey, Captain! (I kind of lied a little bit....) I've worked as a short order cook in a little café, and I'd like to strike for cook." He said, "Alright....I'll think about it and get you this afternoon." So in the afternoon, he came and talked to me, and took me down to meet the cook that was left. He told the cook that he'd need to help me out, to get going. I told this cook that I really don't know a hell of a lot about cooking, but I think I can learn. He said, "I'll teach ya!" So he helped me get started. Then I started cooking and just the 2 of us cooked...we were one on duty at a time. Then we had

2 mess cooks, which were enlisted men, the helpers. That's how we got 'er going. But we made it!

Mr. Rabalais: OK. When you got to Hawaii, you unloaded the...

Mr. Strathman: The Marines got off for further training.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, the Marines got off, and the equipment too?

Mr. Strathman: Yes. Then we went, I don't know where the hell that the island was that we went next, but we picked up another bunch of Marines with the same type of equipment, tank destroyers. Then we headed out...and we ended up going to the invasion of Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines. We were the first ship to hit the beach...

Mr. Rabalais: Wow!

Mr. Strathman: ...and we opened up and these things went off (I'd never seen how they were going to work with those pontoons) and as soon as they could feel the traction, take a hold underneath them, they'd push a button and they'd blow all the pontoons off at once.

Mr. Rabalais: Well, I'll be.

Mr. Strathman: And then they'd go on in, on the tracks.

Mr. Rabalais: So the pontoons are made out of metal, or are they inflatable?

Mr. Strathman: All steel. They just blew them off. They kept coming back to our ship all the time, because we had a lot of coffee, we had a lot of good food, a lot of food. They kept coming back and they would want something, or some of that, and I'd say for 2 or 3 days, we'd have some of them coming back, one at a time.

Mr. Rabalais: At the landing itself, was there any enemy activity that you could see?
Like planes?

Mr. Strathman: Oh yeah, lot of air raids. Kamikazes.

Mr. Rabalais: There were?! Did you all see them hit any of the ships?

Mr. Strathman: Yep, I did. I came out of the radio shack, which is on our up deck. One day I was just up there, nothing going on, pretty quiet. We were in port. Out of the clear blue, I stepped out of the radio shack, took 2 steps and I looked up and, hell, right in front of me was a Japanese plane, a Kamikaze, coming right at us, and I thought...I couldn't even say anything...I can't remember exactly what happened, but his tail caught the guide line along the outside of the ship, you know the steel cable?

Mr. Rabalais: Um hm.

Mr. Strathman: He really made a noise when it went, but he went into the ocean. He missed us.

Mr. Rabalais: He just missed you. Wow.

Mr. Strathman: And I stood there dumbfounded but I kept watching him. He was probably, oh 50-60 feet away from the ship.

Mr. Rabalais: That close!

Mr. Strathman: Yes, and he was going down, but I could see him trying to get the hatch off of the top, so he could get out, you know. He got part way out, but then the plane went down.

Mr. Rabalais: So he was actually still alive when the plane hit?

Mr. Strathman: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I looked out and I saw him, and the first thing I thought was that he's got a mother too, somewhere you know.

Mr. Rabalais: That's right.

Mr. Strathman: That was the end of that one.

Mr. Rabalais: He died with the plane I guess. I'm surprised the plane didn't explode or anything.

Mr. Strathman: It didn't. It just went right in. He didn't sink instantly, but damn near.

Mr. Rabalais: I assume it was a single engine plane...it wasn't a bomber or anything?

Mr. Strathman: No, it wasn't a bomber. It was Kamikaze. They had bombs on them, you know, one bomb, I suppose. I don't know what he had on him.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you see any of the American ships hit by Kamikaze?

Mr. Strathman: Oh yeah. I don't know which ships they were but I saw a lot of Kamikazes. I did see the Kamikaze hit the Missouri. That was a hell of a fire, of a mess there.

Mr. Rabalais: OK, so how long were you all there at Lingayen Gulf? For quite awhile?

Mr. Strathman: Well, yeah. When we took them in, we had them in and empty within 30 minutes. Now, when we got done with that, then we started going out to the supply ships and bringing in ammunition and oil and gas and supplies.

Mr. Rabalais: So they would off-load stuff onto your ship, which was smaller, and then take it into shore.

Mr. Strathman: Our well deck was open. You could unload fast onto us. Then we would pull into the land again, and then the army boys would unload us. Everything was done by hand in those days.

Mr. Rabalais: What was your battle station whenever there was alert or something?

Mr. Strathman: My battle station was a 20mm anti-aircraft.

Mr. Rabalais: So you all were there for awhile. What direction did you head to after Lingayen Gulf?

Mr. Strathman: Well, that the question I don't know. We went to some place where there was no fighting going on, in order to get things back in shape and re-supply ammunition and stuff. We had 4 20mms and 1 twin 40mm.

Mr. Rabalais: A lot of guys went back to Eniwetok or Ulithi or one of those places.

Mr. Strathman: Ulithi, yes we've been there but I'm not sure where we went after each operation. We did stay in Lingayen Gulf for 5 or 6 days.

Mr. Rabalais: OK. What's the next thing you might remember that would be notable?
That you might remember...what your next assignment might have been?

Mr. Strathman: Where we went from there? Well, we ended up back down in Guadalcanal at one time...this is after a while; don't know exactly when it was. It was kind of a rest and recuperation, because things had all quieted down there.

Mr. Rabalais: Right. That's what I understand. So this would have been, let's see, sometime during 1944, I guess?

Mr. Strathman: Yes, 1944. Lingayen Gulf was in 1944.

Mr. Rabalais: Right. Do you know what time of the year it would have been? Was it in the fall?

Mr. Strathman: I honestly can't remember.

Mr. Rabalais: Was it pretty warm?

Mr. Strathman: Oh yes. Very warm. Always warm over there.

Mr. Rabalais: Warm and muggy, yeah. OK, what's the next memorable thing? Did you all do any of the other invasions?

Mr. Strathman: Any of the other invasions? Oh yeah.

Mr. Rabalais: What was the next one?

Mr. Strathman: The next one came along and I can't tell you where we came from, but it was Okinawa.

Mr. Rabalais: OK. THAT ONE you would remember.

Mr. Strathman: We were the 3rd one on the beach. I know what I wanted to say earlier...as we approached for the invasion, they would go full-throttle on the engines, and we would head right into the beach. At so many feet out, they would drop a big anchor on a cable.

Mr. Rabalais: So you could pull yourself back off.

Mr. Strathman: That's right. When we got rid of all that weight, we could pull ourselves back off. We got hung up once or twice, during our operation, when the high tide went down while we were there and we couldn't get off the beach. But that didn't happen too often.

Mr. Rabalais: Um hm.

Mr. Strathman: Then we went to Okinawa...I don't know when that was...still in 44 I believe.

Mr. Rabalais: Right.

Mr. Strathman: We were there for 5 days, and then after that we went to Ie Shima, first invasion again. That's where Ernie Pyle got taken away.

Mr. Rabalais: Right.

Mr. Strathman: We were, when Ernie got hit, I guess we were less than 400 feet from him. We were on the beach, and there was a road that came down that the Army was using. Not a regular road, but a path. I guess he hit a mine...I didn't see it happen, but we were there when it happened. I checked on the internet since then, and they did build a nice monument or memorial to him over there.

Mr. Rabalais: I believe he was hit by a machine gun bullet or something like that while he was there. Well, let me ask you this...at Okinawa, there was quite a bit of kamikaze activity. Did you all see any there?

Mr. Strathman: Bad. Really bad.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you all have a lot of warnings and alerts and stuff like that?

Mr. Strathman: Most of them were in the darkness of the night, you know.

Mr. Rabalais: Uh huh.

Mr. Strathman: When they would hit.

Mr. Rabalais: So it's hard to figure out what was going on, other than there's a lot of flashing and fire, I guess.

Mr. Strathman: Well, when you look in the sky, on the 20mm, every 5th shell was a tracer. There were a million 20mm guns on the fleet that was there, so you could see a lot of that going on. The only way you could pick a plane up was if you got a spot light on it.

Mr. Rabalais: What about the engine exhaust on the planes? Could you actually see that as they went by, low? I assume they came in...

Mr. Strathman: They didn't come in that low.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, they didn't come in low?

Mr. Strathman: Most of them, if they came in that low, they were Kamikaze or they were crashing in the water or into a ship.

Mr. Rabalais: What kind of armament did you LSM have? I know you said you had some 20's. Did you all have anything bigger?

Mr. Strathman: 4 20mm and one 40mm, a twin. There was one, then the other.

Mr. Rabalais: But you didn't have anything like a 3 inch gun or anything?

Mr. Strathman: No, not on ours. 40 was the tops. We had a 30 caliber machine gun, that when we went in on an invasion, on the bow of the ship, right next to the 40, in case we ran into troops you know.

Mr. Rabalais: Yeah.

Mr. Strathman: I don't mean our troops, but the Japanese. If they would make a rush on us or something.

Mr. Rabalais: Do you recall whether the gunners ever hit any of the planes in the area?

Mr. Strathman: Our ship got credit for one.

Mr. Rabalais: For one.

Mr. Strathman: Yeah. We got credit for that. That one that we could actually see. We don't know whose bullet, because hell, there were thousands of them up there.

Mr. Rabalais: So at Okinawa, you all were there, also shuttling supplies back and forth? You said you were also...

Mr. Strathman: After we got rid of our troops and tanks, we go back and start hauling supplies again.

Mr. Rabalais: So you were at Ie Shima also?

Mr. Strathman: Yes, sir. Ie Shima.

Mr. Rabalais: So after Okinawa, where did you all head for there?

Mr. Strathman: Basically we went right from Okinawa to Ie Shima. They were pretty much at the same time. Right after we got this one, they moved right over to the other island.

Mr. Rabalais: There were a lot of U.S. ships in that invasion, all around you guys.

Mr. Strathman: Oh yeah. But nothing like the one that was just before the war ended. We had a bigger fleet.

Mr. Rabalais: So where did you go from Okinawa and after Ie Shima?

Mr. Strathman: You know, I'm thinking that we went to Guadalcanal for the rest and recuperation. I think that's when we did it, but I'm not positive.

Mr. Rabalais: A lot of guys went there. A lot of ships went there. At that point, it was pretty quiet there.

Mr. Strathman: Yeah it was. And the big thing was...I think about 6 of us went over to...when we hit land we'd go over to the Army bases and get something to eat or buy some stuff. We didn't have a ship's store to speak of.

Mr. Rabalais: Um hm.

Mr. Strathman: I remember we went to this one in Guadalcanal and they had this big old Quonset set up there with supplies. We went in there and they had a whole bunch of magazines. We never got any magazines, or stuff like that.

Mr. Rabalais: Um hm.

Mr. Strathman: I went over there and I was looking at them, and these other guys were just mingling around, and pretty soon they all ended over there and said, "Hey!

Let's each just buy 4 and then we'll switch 'em back and forth!" So we just started down the line and one guy would take 4, I would take 4 and the next guy 4, and we got done and we'd just trade with one of the guys, so we had a lot of magazines to read, finally.

Mr. Rabalais: Well, that's good. So you all did some resting in Guadalcanal in preparation...

Mr. Strathman: Got to go to the Army PX, the beergarten...

Mr. Rabalais: Did they let you all drink beer on the island?

Mr. Strathman: On the island.

Mr. Rabalais: Yep. Was it regular beer or 3.2?

Mr. Strathman: I can't answer that. We thought it was beer. When we had, later on...talking about the beer...we found out that each sailor was allowed 2 cans of beer a day. Not on ship, you had to be on land, you know. We pulled into the island of Samar, and I'm not sure where that is.

Mr. Rabalais: It's in the Philippine area.

Mr. Strathman: I thought it was too. There was nothing going on there, action or war stuff. It was divided by a big fence by the Navy used for recreation...softball, stuff like that. We could draw our beer. Well if we were on an island for 45 days, you'd get 90 cans of beer! We didn't take it all at once, you know, but we put a dent in it. We went ashore and had a good time.

Mr. Rabalais: After this rest at Guadalcanal, I guess you were all a part of the big fleet that was getting ready to go, in theory, to invade Japan, right?

Mr. Strathman: Yes. Now I want to go back to Samar for just a second. When they took us over there by small boat for our recreation that day, there was an officer there explaining the rules of the road. He explained that this fence...you do not cross this fence. It was pretty high, I guess 6 feet. He said that's all natives over there, and they're friendly as long as you stay on this side of the fence. Well you know you always got somebody who thinks he's looking for a girl or something. This one guy, not from my ship (there were a lot of ships that had crews over there) he evidently had decided to do it. We were playing softball down by the beach just a little ways. All at once a big commotion was coming from down a ways from us and we started going down there to see what was going on. We thought it was a fight. It turns out the natives had brought a guy back and thrown him over the fence. He didn't have any hands left.

Mr. Rabalais: OH MY GOODNESS!!

Mr. Strathman: They had taken them off.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, they did that?

Mr. Strathman: Well, he was fooling around, we assumed. We never heard.

Mr. Rabalais: Was these those bushy-haired Polynesians I assume?

Mr. Strathman: You know, I can't tell you. We never saw the natives.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh, you never saw them. From there, you all were preparing for the invasion of Japan.

Mr. Strathman: Yeah.

Mr. Rabalais: I assume, like everybody else was. Dreading it, I assume.

Mr. Strathman: We didn't know we were going to Japan honestly. But we figured it was going that way...we didn't find out until the last minute. Our ship was put in dry dock and checked underneath and checked and painted to keep the guys busy. Finally we picked up our load and...

Mr. Rabalais: Did you all hit one of the big typhoons that caused so much trouble with the fleet a couple of times?

Mr. Strathman: Yeah, I got a story about that too, if I can remember. I forgot what I was about to say...

Mr. Rabalais: Well, you all were preparing for the invasion of Japan...loading...

Mr. Strathman: We finally got our load...time came to take off and we didn't know what we were doing. When we left harbor, port, we probably had, I'm guessing about 30 ships.

Mr. Rabalais: Um hm.

Mr. Strathman: Different kinds of ships...LSMs, LSTs, destroyers, you know, that stuff. We took off. It was in the afternoon. The next morning, when you woke up, we got up and we must have had, I'm saying 80 ships. A convoy.

Mr. Rabalais: Wow.

Mr. Strathman: We kept going and the next morning when we got up, we must have had 150 ships. So they knew we were getting damn close...

Mr. Rabalais: So they just kept accumulating in the convoy size...

Mr. Strathman: They were coming from all directions. So when we finally, about the last day I can remember, I can't even guess how many...everywhere you looked you saw American ships.

Mr. Rabalais: My goodness!

Mr. Strathman: The convoy. We knew where we were going then, without being told.

Mr. Rabalais: So this would have been probably the summer of 45? August. Right before the atomic bomb was dropped, right?

Mr. Strathman: That's right. On the way up there, the bomb was dropped.

Mr. Rabalais: When you heard about it, did you understand what that bomb was?

Mr. Strathman: Yeah, we had a pretty good idea.

Mr. Rabalais: Was it called the atomic bomb?

Mr. Strathman: You know, I can't answer that, I can't remember.

Mr. Rabalais: So you all talked about it among yourselves and said, "OK, hopefully this is going to be the end of the war".

Mr. Strathman: Yep. And we thought this was going to be a big one...with that many ships. We knew it was going to be a damn big one. So anyway, we go along...I don't know if it was August...now when the war ended, it was August 15 here, right?

Mr. Rabalais: Right.

Mr. Strathman: What was it there?

Mr. Rabalais: I don't know exactly what the time/date was. It was mid-August. I don't know exactly when.

Mr. Strathman: Well, when it finally ended, it was August 15 here, but there it was August 16. I was telling one of the guys that it ended on my birthday! (But I might be wrong...you know how that is). This one night we were cruising, I think we were 2 nights away, maybe 1 night away from the actual invasion, and word had come across the radio that the war was over. Japan had surrendered.

Mr. Rabalais: Had you all run into that typhoon yet at that point?

Mr. Strathman: Nope. It was after that. Anyway, Japan surrendered and everybody went crazy. The boys on the ship broke out the pyrotechnics and were shooting

off rockets and doing this and doing that, and all at once the radio coming from the Flag (I think Nimitz was the flag at the time...that's what we call the Admiral, "the Flag") anyway, it came over the radio, it said, "WE know the war is over, but do all the submarines of the Japanese know it's over?" Then I'll tell ya, it was just like a...

Mr. Rabalais: It put a damper on it, didn't it?

Mr. Strathman: Yes, right now! So we proceeded onto Japan. We did go into...was it Nagasaki where the battleship was beat up so bad for Japan? They just pulled up and beached it right there. We pulled up right there, and as we went in, my God, they had that thing fortified with big, big guns.

Mr. Rabalais: Um hm.

Mr. Strathman: It would have been one hell of a battle.

Mr. Rabalais: That couldn't be sunk, because it was beached there as a gun mount, really.

Mr. Strathman: Yeah. There were permanent guns right along the harbor on both sides. I don't know how big but I'll bet they were at least 8 or 10 inch, or bigger.

Mr. Rabalais: I'm sure it was bigger than that. Did you all go ashore there?

Mr. Strathman: Yeah, I did. We got to go to shore. I told you, I was a cook at the time. As a cook, you started at 4 in the morning, and you ended the next morning at 4. You were on for 24 hours, and 24 off. The other cook was a radio man. But if he wasn't on duty during an air raid, he was assigned to a gun. We had a couple of air raids that night, good ones, and when we got done we had a break, we went down below deck to smoke. (We didn't want the light flashing up above). And he got done, and he reached back to scratch his behind and he was having a cigarette, and all at once he brought his hand up and he saw blood. He said, "What the hell is this?" About that time, he stood up and someone said, "Your butt's all red!" He had a piece of shrapnel. Just shrapnel, not a shell.

Mr. Rabalais: Did it come from a nearby Japanese plane?

Mr. Strathman: Something caught him. Wherever it was, it caught him.

Mr. Rabalais: Well, I'll be. All in all, it sounds like you had a pretty decent time in the service.

Mr. Strathman: I did.

Mr. Rabalais: No really bad stuff, that was obvious.

Mr. Strathman: The other injury I would say, was a good friend of mine. Richie was his name. We had a strange thing toward the end of the war. A baka bomb...

Mr. Rabalais: Yeah, I've heard of those. A piloted human bomb.

Mr. Strathman: It had a light on the front of it. They used them at night. This damn thing, they use it...like putting a light bulb, and the light bulb would swing you know. This thing was going over, and you would swear it was coming at you, and then it would turn and do this. Wherever you were, it looked like it was coming at you. Then this poor kid kind of had a breakdown. I never did hear how he came out of it. They had to take him off the next day.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh my goodness.

Mr. Strathman: That's the only real fatality (as I'd call it).

Mr. Rabalais: So you never did come together as an LSM-11 group?

Mr. Strathman: No.

Mr. Rabalais: A lot of the larger ships did. The smaller ships, everybody went their way. So it sounds as though you had a nice, pretty decent war time. You shared your experiences with us. So there really weren't bad, bad memories.

Mr. Strathman: In recent years, I'd say maybe 10 years ago...I have grandchildren, of course, and one of them asked me to come to their school to talk some time. I kind of enjoyed it you know, for the kids. And I started doing that in different places. So I've been up to Minneapolis and put it on in different schools and different places. You don't talk about the blood and guts, you know.

Mr. Rabalais: Yeah. Well, if you're ever down there this way in Fredericksburg, stop in to our museum. Now we're opening the new wing on December 7 and it's going to be something else. It's going to be well worthwhile. Everyone's going to want to come back and go through the whole thing again.

Mr. Strathman: If you have any promotional material, I'd be happy to hear from you.

Mr. Rabalais: That's why I was looking for your address so I can send some of this stuff to you.

Mr. Strathman: That would be great.

Mr. Rabalais: I really appreciate you taking the time and the effort to sit and talk with us about your experiences. As I told you, we'll be typing this up and we'll send you a draft. You can edit it, you might think of something you might want to add. Then you send it back to us, and we'll finalize it and send

you a final copy. Mr. Gene, thank you so much for your time, and from the Admiral Nimitz Museum and the National Museum of the Pacific War, we thank you. Good night.

Mr. Strathman: Good night.

Following the interview, during the proofing and editing, Mr. Strathman decided to include a few additional anecdotal stories. His telling of the stories was video taped on December 11, 2009 and are transcribed here to be included with his oral history interview for the Center for Pacific War Studies of the National Museum of the Pacific War.

Mr. Strathman: Just before we left the U.S. to go overseas, my ship was in port in San Diego and we knew we were leaving very soon, we were loaded and ready to go. The day we pulled into San Diego we got mail, and I got a letter from my sister that she had been moved to the Naval Hospital in Long Beach. So anyway, I went to my captain and showed him the letter and asked if I could get permission to run up there overnight to see my sister one more time before we left, wherever we were going. He said, "Well, I'll see about that." He evidently had to check to see if we were going to be leaving during the night or something, I don't know. But anyway, he said later that he had a pass for me, but that I had to be back the next morning by 6 o'clock. So, I got ready and I went to up Long Beach, I hitchhiked up because they didn't have any buses running. People were very nice; they'd pick you up if you were in uniform. The people I rode

with took me right to where the nurse's quarters were. Anyway I get there and I go on in...there's this pretty little thing sitting there working at the desk, and I walked up to her and I said, "I'd like to talk to Rose Ann Strathman." She kind of looked at me because enlisted men were not allowed to be dating officers. So she picked up the phone and called one of the floors, and pretty soon there came Rose Ann down the steps and she called to me and hugged me. We did a little talking and said, "Are you ready to go?" I'll get a cab, and we'll get out of here". She said, "Yeah, I'll go grab my coat." We got in the cab, and I said, "Where do you want to go?" I didn't know much about Long Beach. She said, "Let's go to the Skyroom for a drink". So we go up there, up the elevator, and we got in and there's 100% officers in there, with their wives or girlfriends, whichever. We found an empty booth, sat down and ordered a drink. We no more got our drink order in, when in walked two shore patrol, which is like a police. They came over to our booth and asked us politely if we would follow them, because they had to talk to us. So we followed them, where we had to go, because you always believed in the police. We went down the elevator with them, and they had a jeep back there and they put us in the back of the jeep. They took us down to, I suppose, their headquarters. It wasn't the city police, it was the Navy. We had to sit on a bench and wait for them to call our name. My name came up, and I got called in to the Office of the Deck's office and he said, "What is your name?" I told him my name which was always necessary. He said I heard that you were with an officer at the Skyroom. I said, "Yes, that's right".

He said, "Have you read your manual to know that you're not allowed to be dating any officers?" And I said, "Yes, sir." Then he said, "What do you have to say for yourself, to protect yourself?" I said, "I don't have anything to say. I can't believe it would be wrong." He said, "Well, it is. These are the rules of the Navy." I said, "You mean to tell me that...well, I tell you what. Why don't you just fill out some papers for me to get a discharge right now? If I can't even take my sister out for a beer or two, well hell, I don't want to be in this Navy." They guy just leaned back in his chair and he was just floored. He never thought about a sister. He leaned back and he said, "Are you telling me the truth?" I said, "Of course, I'm telling you the truth." He said, "What's your sister's name?" I said, "Rose Ann Strathman." He sat back down...he didn't know what to do about it and he said, "Why don't you step out and have a seat for a minute while I see what I've got to do about this." So I left the room. It wasn't long, and then he called Rose Ann in. I imagined that he wanted to confirm that she was my sister. So anyway, she goes in, goes through kind of the same routine, you know. Then he called me back in and apologized all over the place for bothering us you know. Then he called in the two shore patrols that had picked us up. He told these shore patrols, "I tell you what you're going to do. You take these two people, take them right back to where they were...take them right back to the lounge, put them into the same booth that you took them out of. I don't care who is in that booth, if these two want to sit in that booth, you put them back in that booth. Out we go, we get back into the jeep and we're laughing because

we pulled a good one on them. We got back there, and up we go, up to the top, and of course the place was full of officers, girls and stuff, and our booth had somebody in it. The shore patrol said, "You wait right here", and one of them went up to the booth...we said, "There's another empty one...we'll take that." The shore patrol said, "Oh no! We've got our orders; we've got to do exactly what he says." So these people in the booth got up nicely and went to sit somewhere else. We got in there and there was only one enlisted man in this whole place. It was all officers and their dates. We just had the best time sitting there laughing and people were looking at us and talking about us all night long. They knew something had to be right because the shore patrol had brought us back. So anyway that was one of the highlights of my life; I finally got back at some of the officers. Enlisted men are smarter than you think. That was the last day before we left port, and the last time I got to see her before we went. I wasn't hurt and she wasn't hurt and we got together after the war again, and we were friends for a long time.

Another great story I remember is, one night while I was up in the galley making bread, I would guess between 1 and 2 o'clock in the morning, the captain came up from below. He walked through the galley, over to the pharmacist room (we didn't have a doctor but we had a pharmacist) and he walked in there, and I didn't pay too much attention. You know, you didn't talk to the officer unless you talking about duty. I kind of kept my eye on him, and he was in there and he took his shirt off, and he reached

up into one of the big cabinets and unlocked it, and took a can. He poured something from this can, and he poured something into a soup bowl and got a great big swab of cotton. He dipped the cotton in there and kind of squeezed it out a little bit, and he would take it and do his arm pits. Real lightly, he would wipe his arm pits, both sides. He'd do this quite awhile, and after so long, I thought, "I wonder what he's doing that for?" I decided I could talk to him, because nobody was around. I said, "Captain, you got a problem?" He said, "Oh yeah, I really do. I've got boils in my armpits. I can hardly put my arms down and my clothes drive me nuts." I said, "Oh really...let me tell you a little story. Maybe we can help you. When I was a little boy, my grandma used to come and visit from Kansas. She was a German lady, didn't speak any English. When she came in the house, she saw that I was awful careful that I didn't bump my rear end because I had boils on my rear end. She asked my mother what was the matter with me. My mom said I had a boil on my butt. So she went over to the cupboard...she asked mother first, where the raisins were, and mother told her, and Grandma pulled them out of there. She grabbed a whole handful, and put them in my little pocket, and she said, "You eat." I had some in my hand to eat right away. She said, "You eat". I could understand that. As time went on, my mom would check once in awhile to see if I had any raisins in my pocket. I had eaten most all of them. They kept me eating raisins and I didn't that for I don't know how many days, maybe three or four days, and finally that was all I did, and within a week or ten days, the boils weren't gone but they were a lot better. In two to

three weeks, there wasn't a sign of them anymore. So I'm telling this to the captain. I said, "We've got plenty of raisins. Why don't I get a five pound box and you take them down to the ward room, and cut the top off. Every time you go by, grab a handful and eat them. They'll be good for you. I think that means you've got iron. You need iron. So, I did that. I took it down, and I started making stewed raisins and raisin and rice and things that I could use raisins in. Everybody needed more iron. Anyway, time goes by and I suppose two weeks later, he came up one night about the same time. He went back into the pharmacist's office, did his little thing with the soup bowl and the cotton and just put the cotton in, got it wet and wiped it, both sides, then put it away again. I said, "Are they doing a little bit better?" He said, "Come here..." I went in there, and they were just about gone. He said, "Boy, is I glad that you had that Grandma!" I said, "Well, I'm glad about that!" That was the end of that story. I never talked to him again about it and he never mentioned it to me. But there was a payoff to this story. The payoff was that much later, after the war had ended, of course all of the conversation on the boat was who gets off first, and how many points do you have because you had to have so many points for time in the service, time over seas and different things. We were talking about that.. and I said, "I ain't counting mine...I got a ways to go yet." I let it go at that. A few days later (I can't tell you how long), in the fall of '45, not too far from Christmas...maybe November or something like that, the Captain came up to me and said, "How would you like to go home for Christmas?" I said, "I'd love that!"

He said, "I tell you what...if you get packed and can be ready in an hour, you can go home." I thought, "Whoa! He's going to let me get out?" So, I went down and did just as he said. I got everything ready and within an hour, this small boat came along and picked me up. It took me to a bigger ship...and it took me to an island in the Philippines. I got onto one of the Army planes that was going to the United States that was going to fly us back. We got airborne and we got over Samar, heading back to the United States and all at once we lost an engine and the plane dropped. We were over the ocean, and it was scary because you never knew how far down it was going to go, but anyway, he made it Samar. We landed on Samar, and we got off and I waited there a couple days. I got an aircraft carrier, the Ticonderoga, and it took me all the way back to San Francisco. So the payoff for doing a good deed for him with his boils, was that I got to go home that year for Christmas. Another funny thing about that was, that when I got back to the States, I took a train to Omaha. I had to be taken off the train in Omaha...I was supposed to go all the way to Minneapolis, but I had to get off in Omaha because I was really sick. The Red Cross had a unit in the depot at Omaha and I was put up there and taken care of. The next night, I was feeling good enough to call up one of my old girl friends. I decided to go out and have a beer with her, which we did. When I went to pick her up, she had a friend with her. I got to know the friend, and it happened to be my wife. I didn't know her until then. We met that night, our little romance started and I ended up marrying her. The point of this story is that sometimes you do something for somebody, and

you don't expect anything back. But sometimes you get an awful nice gift back. I thank my Skipper very much for letting me go home that Christmas. After Christmas, I reported back to Minneapolis and they reassigned me the Destroyer Escort 640, which I served on after the war. On the escort, they put me on a 5 inch gun and the gun was a pretty good size gun. You ran it from the control tower up here with your sites and stuff, One day, they decided we needed target practice and we towed a target out over the ocean. It was my turn and I was following it, and following it, and I finally fired. All at once, the sock just started dropping. I hadn't hit the sock, I'd hit the cable. I got called on the carpet for that, because that was a pretty expensive piece.

And finally, one last story is that when I was in the Philippines somewhere, we were on the beach loading or unloading...I'm not sure what we were doing. Somebody hollered down at me, "Hey Tike! Somebody wants to talk to you!" It was the signalman calling down. I said, "Who is it?" He said, "I don't know, he just said 'Sandy'". Well it turns out he was Dean Sandy, who was a friend of mine from back in my home town area. I went up and let the signalman do the calling, because he was faster than I was. Dean says, "Where in the hell have you been?" I said, "We've been all over..." Dean said, "Well I've gotten a letter from my mother, and she and your mother get together all of the time. She told my mother that she thought that your ship was missing." I said, "Well, I don't know anything about it...we haven't even been hit yet." So we had

our little conversation about other things and I went down and got a hold of the Captain, and I told him the story. I told him my mother thinks I'm missing. He said that he'd check that out right away, and he went into the radio shack, and I didn't hear any of the conversation or who he talked to, but I don't think it was over two or three hours, we had a boat pull along side and we had BAGS of mail. We hadn't had any mail for a couple of months. They evidently had been holding the mail to see what was going to happen. So we finally got our mail, and when we got our mail, the Captain announced that everybody would sit down and write a letter to their wives and parents to let them know that everything is fine. He explained that there had been a fake deal telling that we were missing. Everybody sat down and wrote a letter. Within a couple of hours, they got those letters off the boat and the letters were headed back to the States. So it scared the hell out of them, but rumors get started. OK, that'll do it!