Jim Spriggs Oral History Interview

MIKE ZAMBRANO: This is Mike Zambrano. Today is August the sixteenth, 2007. I'm interviewing Mr. Jim Spriggs.

JIM SPRIGGS: Yeah, Jim Spriggs, yes.

MZ: Who lives in Cincinnati, Ohio. This interview is taking place over the phone from my home in Round Rock. This interview is in support of the Museum of Pacific War Studies' archives of the Pacific War and Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. And I'm just going to lay this right down near the phone here, and how are you today, sir?

JS: Oh, I'm fine.

MZ: Well all right. Well, let's start off with the most basic of questions. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

JS: I was born March the fourteenth, 1925, in York, Kentucky. And that's in Greenup County, Kentucky, which is the northeast corner of Kentucky.

MZ: OK. And what were the names of your parents?

JS: My father's name was Floyd Spriggs. And my mother's name was Grace Spriggs.

MZ: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

JS: I have one brother and two sisters.

MZ: Were they older or younger?

JS: I'm the oldest. I had a sister that was younger, a brother that was younger, and a sister that's younger.

MZ: Can you tell me a little bit about your growing up?

JS: Well, I grew up during the Depression era, on a farm. We had a farm in Kentucky. Anyway, we raised a lot of the stuff we had. We had timber, we used the timber to make some cash to live, and we'd sell -- we'd make railroad ties and stuff like that and sell them to railroads and so forth. And that's how we lived during that time. In the Depression time.

MZ: Really? Is there anything else that you remember about the Depression that made an impression on you?

JS: Well, I really -- during the time of the Depression, my father was sick and I was the oldest and I had to run the farm. And I was twelve years old when I was doing that, which kind of made it tough on me. Like any young kid, I thought I was being put upon, but I really wasn't, it taught me responsibility and so forth. So anyway it's kind of a learning curve at that time, and I look back on it and sometimes I think well, maybe that was the best time of my life.

MZ: Really? Because of the responsibility you learned?

JS: Yeah. How to take care of myself.

MZ: OK. What kind of farm did you say it was?

JS: It just was a -- actually, we had 259 acres and most of it was timber, hill land, we had like, I think 18 acres of tillable land. And we had cattle and teams and all that stuff, mules and horses and all of that, when I was growing up.

MZ: How about school? How did that work into all this work?

JS: Well I -- actually the first part of my life I lived in Denver, Colorado. Until age six. We came from Denver back to Kentucky. And then I went to school. I started the first grade in 1931 and so I went to a one-room schoolhouse and went to the eighth grade. And after I got out of the eighth grade there was high school, but the only thing is there was no bus service. So after that then, I didn't go to high school. Because it was sort of out of the question for me to go board or live somewhere. And of course we didn't have the money to travel twenty miles each way to go to drive or anything like that. So I didn't go to high school. But two years later, there was bus service. My younger sister also finished eighth grade, and she went to high school, and I didn't go to high school.

MZ: You pretty much stayed at the farm, working it?

JS: We worked -- I stayed on the farm and I worked on different places on farms, and so forth. Did things, worked on dairy

farms. After my dad got back to where he could move again, then I started doing other things.

MZ: About what year was this when you got out of the eighth grade?

JS: Well, let me see, let me think about it. Ha! I started 1931, so that'd be 1939.

MZ: OK. So a little bit before the War.

JS: Yeah.

MZ: Do you recall what you were doing when you heard that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor?

JS: Well, I know where I was at. I don't remember if it was Sunday or Monday. I think it was on a Monday. My dad and I were going to another piece of property walking, and my uncle came down, was coming down the road to meet us when it stopped and said "Well, they bombed Pearl Harbor." Now that was the first thing I knew about it. He had a radio and he'd listen to the radio. That's where I was. I was actually walking (laughter). When I found out.

MZ: How was he like when he gave you the news, do you recall?

JS: Well, I thought it was a dire situation. But I didn't quite understand all of it. At that time, I didn't really -- it took a while to figure out what was really going on.

MZ: OK. Between that time and the time that you went into the service... What happened during those years?

JS: Well, when I was sixteen, they was needing skilled people for different things in the war effort, in World War II. And I went and started school at a... Oh, gee whiz... trade school. I was studying to be a tool and die maker. Well I did that for a year, and it seemed to me that I felt like, that I was being put upon because I had a better than average ability to run machinery, machine tools especially. I was doing all the machining work for other people, who was designing and doing these things. And I thought, well if I'm going to be tied to a machine all my life, then I quit. Then when I became seventeen, which was somewhere around April of 1942, another boy and myself decided we'd enlist in the Navy. So we did. We enlisted. Well his family decided that would be a good thing for their son and they sent him on, and we both enlisted for six years. Well, my dad wouldn't sign my papers for six years. So then I went and worked, during that time that year, I worked in Cleveland at a factory up there, at a foundry. And did all kinds of things. Different things. But I kind of went out on my own at that time. When I was seventeen, when I didn't get to go to the Navy.

MZ: OK. I'm just curious, but other than maybe your friend talking about it, what was the influence to go towards the Navy?

JS: Well, I really can't tell you that. I thought the Navy was the thing to do, myself. I read a lot at that time. Anything I could get, I'd read. Books and all kinds of things. So I think somewhere along that I might have been influenced about going in the Navy. But I read a lot of seafaring-type books.

MZ: OK. So how did you eventually get into the Navy?

JS: Well, I was working in Cleveland, Ohio, and, of course when I became eighteen, well I had to register for the draft. And then August, I believe it was August of 1943, I got my greetings from Uncle Sam that said it was time for me to come and be inducted into the Navy, or into the service. Another fellow and myself, we went to Huntington, West Virginia for a physical. And when we got there, why, we were both big strapping hillbilly kids, if you will, so they gave us a choice of what we could go into. And so I consulted with my other friend, and I said, "What are you going to do?" and he said, "I don't know," and I said, "Well, I'm going into the Navy." He said, "That sounds good to me." So we went through the physical and when we got through, why, I'll tell you how little I knew about the military. Anyway, the corpsman at the end of the line says, "Go and see that Marine sergeant over there, and he'll fix you up." Well on the way over, it was about

twenty or thirty feet, I guess over there, I said to Peter, I don't remember what Pete said to me, but he said, "I thought we were supposed to be in the Navy," and I said, "I thought so too," and I kind of yelled over at that sergeant, "Hey, we're supposed to be in the Navy," and he said, "Sailor, you are in the Navy!" I didn't have a clue that the Navy and the Marines were the same.

MZ: (laughs). Oh boy. That sergeant didn't get upset with you?

JS: No, he kind of did, but he was an old recruiting hand, I'm sure he had retired and was brought back in. And he's working a desk job, you know.

MZ: Yeah. So where did you go from there?

JS: I went to Great Lakes. After... Well, we didn't go really.... We had a few days, a few days before we left. And we went to Great Lakes for boot camp. And we got up there, we was sworn in September the ninth. So we arrived up there around the tenth, the eleventh, I don't remember now. It took about two days to get from Huntington, West Virginia to the Great Lakes because we were sidetracked all of the time because of war material and all that. That had precedent over troop trains.

MZ: OK. So, Great Lakes, basic training... Can you tell me a little bit about it?

JS: Well, we did things that probably nobody else did. We were doing, instead of doing close-quarter drills, it was cold up there, and all that, in October-November, so we trained for hand-to-hand live in a drill hall, and we boxed for four hours at a time. Really, it was a splendid thing, and really it got easy, but really when we got out of boot camp all of us had -- I mean, we were fit for anything. Because, really, they put us through the bill. But it was kind of an experiment, I know it was, because no one else that I know of ever went through that. Of course, there were all kinds of rumors going around about what we was going to do. As far as I know, nobody out of that company ever used any part of it.

MZ: The boxing, or what was the other one?

JS: Well, they taught jiu-jitsu and judo, hand-to-hand with whatever you had.

MZ: That’s interesting. You know, I haven’t heard anyone that went to Great Lakes say that.

JS: Yeah, well we were the only company that I know of that ever did it. It was... You had sixteen-ounce gloves with no springs in them. Well, what you’d do is box, in three-minute rounds, and they’d blow a whistle. Then you took your gloves off and lay them down on the floor, because they didn’t have springs in them. And then you’d run over

to -- the drill hall was eighteen foot tall, and it had cargo nets on the wall. So then you'd run over, and you could grab that net and climb up and down it in one minute then you ran back and picked up your gloves and away you go again. The worst part was climbing that cargo net. But anyway, we did that. I mean, it was tough when we started, we were sore and everything. But then it got so it was easy.

MZ: Yeah, you kind of build up that resistance to being sore. Is there anything else you remember about boot camp?

JS: Well, it was really close to the railroad. I used to watch that train go out of Chicago, going to Milwaukee. And it was doing 120 miles an hour going right alongside Camp [Fury?], where we was at. That impressed me, that daggone thing. I mean, it would blow your hats of if you were 100 foot, 200 foot from that track (laughter). So that impressed me.

MZ: So just to be clear, what year are we talking about right now?

JS: 1943.

MZ: OK. And, after your basic training at Great Lakes, where to then?

JS: We went to Norfolk, Virginia. On a draft, just an open draft. To go aboard the ships, our ships. And we stayed

down there from... Well it was about, something like... It had to be around December. I think I was around there around Christmastime. And it was about the first of January or right along there. They were trying to entice us to go into submarine service, so I went aboard one of those 1918 model subs, that were refurbished about fifteen times since World War I. And so anyway, we were out there and it was January. I know it was January because the water was choppy. Well we're running on the surface and that sub is not too big anyway, so it's kind of bopping around, and then we got out there and decided to take a fifty-foot dive. Well we did, and that thing creaked and popped and kind of carried on and I thought, boy, if you're going to be in the submarine service you're going to charge too wide on that (laughter). So I didn't go and then later on I went out on a DE for one day. Two days. I went out on a DE for two days. And that was just to get us used to whatever we had coming up. And then finally they made up a new group with the Laffey, the one I was on, and went and loaded up and went over Little Creek and went up to Boston, Massachusetts. The barracks we were at up there was called Fargo Barracks, and it was actually, what it was was a nine-story warehouse. And they had it fixed up. In fact,

that was the best chow I ever had, I had anywhere in the Navy. I mean, you had anything and everything you wanted.

MZ: Really?

JS: Yeah. So we were there a while. I don't know how long it was. Maybe a week or two. Then, they put us on a ship. February the eighth, 1944, we went aboard the Laffey. And they brought that down from Maine that morning, and they had to send a work crew up there to chop the ice off the deck so we could stand at quarters to have the ceremony. So they chopped the ice up, but all the lanyards, the cables and stuff up to the mast and everything was about a four-inch diameter of ice. I mean, it was cold. Something way below zero. And of course, we had a short ceremony, all of us bailed out, went below, where it got out of that wind. And we went in dry dock. Of course, there were some things that had to be done, they don't do it all, so they had to come back and get the rest of it done. Well anyway, while we were in dry dock, I stepped on a hose that was going across the deck, and broke my ankle. Eight days after I went aboard the Laffey. So they went on a shakedown cruise, went to Bermuda and all that, and I was up in Chelsea Naval Hospital, with a cast on my leg. Then when they came back to Boston I was discharged out of the hospital and went on the Laffey. Then we went from there

to New York, Brooklyn Navy Yard, and then we hooked up with a convoy going to Europe. And they was thirteen destroyers and every destroyer had an escort. Of course, I don't know what was on those ships but it must have been a high priority because everybody had a ship to protect and the radar, sonar and everything for submarines. So we went to England and -- actually, first we went to Greenock, Scotland. And while we were in pulling in to some of those fjords up there, there were ships everywhere. I mean you couldn't even imagine how many ships it was. But we knew what was going off because it was June the sixth, the invasion in Normandy, see. So we went from there to Londonderry, Ireland and down to Plymouth, England, which was on the southern part of England. And so then on the fourth of June, the Meredith and the Laffey picked up thirty-six LCBPs. We was supposed to escort them across the Channel, help them. Well anyway, the Channel picked up, and out there in the Channel we had those thirty-six LCBPs, and they had a squad on each of them, which is 50 men. And they were on those open boats all night the fourth because they delayed it for twenty-four hours. They delayed but they didn't want to take them off, the troops on the troop ships, or anything, because they felt that somewhere there'd be some sympathizers that would get the

word that they were on the way. We rode in the Channel with those poor guys bouncing around in those Higgins boats, really what they were. And so that's all night the fourth, all day the fifth, all night the fifth, and the morning of the sixth, those guys were in there. Then we made the landing on the morning of the sixth.

MZ: Now what beach was that?

JS: We was at Utah. Utah Beach, yeah.

MZ: And... I didn't ask you, what was your job, or what was your rank or rating?

JS: I was actually at that time, I was a fireman first class in the fire room. I was a water tender, striker, I guess you'd call them. Excuse me (coughs). So actually, on General Quarters, I was down in the fire room, see. When we got over to Normandy, we only had thirty-five LCBPs. We lost one somewhere, I guess it capsized or something, with all hands. We didn't know. And radio silence then. So then they made the landing. And up until that time, I didn't really -- well, I don't know what you might say about... I was not, really, into it. I didn't understand, really what was going on. Well I got the chance to come up on deck and see those poor guys hit the beach, and I changed all in twenty minutes from a boy to a man. I was nineteen years old then.

MZ: Well what was it that you saw?

JS: I saw the landings at Mt. Utah beach. How they was getting in, the LCBPs. All the other things coming in there. And the people getting slaughtered trying to get up that beach. So that changed my outlook on a lot of things. We were there... Oh, I don't remember how many days. But anyway, during that time they had a raid one night where the German eagles came in with their PT boats. And they move real fast, those torpedo boats, come in, drop a torpedo, stuff like that. Three of them came in and we were close to one too, and we started chasing them and we don't know for sure, but one of them flared up when we were firing at it and we must have hit something, because then it went down. Of course, we think maybe we sunk one of them, but I don't know for sure. Then after that, for a quite a while, a few days, we would cruise along the shoreline, and there was a lot of bunkers they had bypassed, and they still had German soldiers in them. Well, they do that at dawn and dusk. And what it was they'd fire at us, then we knew which one was occupied. They had these armor-piercing shells that they put in through the slips and naturally that was the end of 'em. So we did that for quite a while, a few days.

MZ: Now that was at Cherbourg?

JS: No, that was at Normandy.

MZ: Oh, OK. It's just, I had been reading a little bit and I guess, the Cherbourg Peninsula kind of stretches out there.

JS: Right, it does. But we were actually at Normandy beach, you see. Utah beach, I'm sorry. Then we would shell, they'd have spotters inland and we would shell in different areas they wanted to bombard. And finally got to the point where we couldn't help them. Our five-inch thirty-eight could reach twelve miles but was accurate to nine. Once they got beyond that we couldn't help them.

MZ: Right.

JS: So then, we went back to Plymouth, England. And actually, twice -- I'm going to back up. Actually, there was two ships sunk at Normandy. Out of all the ships, five thousand of them, only two sunk. One was a destroyer S class, the other was a minesweeper. And both of them hit mine. We were closest to the minesweeper, which was the Osprey, and we took the crew, what survived, we took them on board. Well, the destroyer, like the Laffey, we didn't have room for extra kids, and we were on General Quarters most of the time, all of the time. So we went back to England and took on ammunition and oil, and then back down to Normandy, see? And took the crew off, the crew of the Osprey. Then we went back to England, and I gotta say,

this was the twentieth of June, right around then. They was having trouble getting into Cherbourg, because the Germans had guns out there in the bay that they could turn inland, shore batteries. Well what we did, I think one battleship, two cruisers and six destroyers, we went right in the harbor and drew fire on that wiped out almost all of those gun placements. Because we found out where they were coming from, see. So that night they took Cherbourg, they wanted a deep water harbor, see, Cherbourg had a deep water harbor. They took Cherbourg. But every ship in that group got hit. Somewhere. Including the Laffey.

MZ: That's what I'd heard, yeah.

JS: Yeah. Anyway the Laffey was hit by a dead shell that hit the water and ricocheted. And what it did is it went up through the bow and went into the chainlock room. And then that shell was landed inside. It was probably six inches in diameter and about two and a half feet long. Pretty good-sized shell. But anyway, what it did, we were on our way back across the Channel, back to England, and I was in the after-engine room at the time, but meanwhile I'd been changed -- no, I'm sorry, I was in the fire room. And I noticed that we didn't have degaussing. That was a magnetic thing, for ships, that repulsed mines. Well, I called the chief engineer which was in the forward end.

The forward engine room. Told them we didn't have any degaussing and they started looking for it, and that thing was laying in the chainlock room! It went through the skin of the ship! And where it went through, the metal had flipped back, so you couldn't bring it out through the same hole it went in. You had to get a hold of it and carry it -- excuse me (coughs). You had to carry it up through the ship and throw it over the side. And they surmised that probably it was a dud, because the markings on it indicated that it was made in Poland or one of the -- Czechoslovakia, maybe, where the Germans had slave labor, and they made a dud out of it. It was almost every ship that got hit somewhere. In fact I think it was every ship. Then we stayed over in Plymouth for a while, Weymouth, then Plymouth, day or two, three, then hooked up with the Queen Elizabeth and headed back to the States. And we're running twenty-five knots with the Queen Elizabeth, I think they had a load of GIs on the ship, wounded and such, bringing them back to the states. Well we hit a storm out in the middle of the Atlantic, and we couldn't run twenty-five knots in a storm. It would tear the thing up. Last time we saw the Queen Elizabeth she just kept on going right over the horizon, without the escort. She was running twenty-five knots.

MZ: Because of the size of the destroyer, I guess?

JS: Well, the destroyer did a lot of porpoising and flying. It'd jump over the waves and really plow in, and it was kind of a rough ride.

MZ: So you get back to the States, and where do you arrive?

JS: Beg your pardon?

MZ: When you get back to the States, what port do you arrive at?

JS: Boston, where we left. And we got a new radar, then had to calibrate so went down to North Beach, Maryland, and they had a -- we were based there, flinging out on the end of an anchor, and they were taking planes and bringing them in all different angles, and all that sort of thing, to see how far they could -- to calibrate the radar, that sort of thing. Then when we got that done we hauled tail down to the Panama Canal as far as we could go, then San Diego, then hit Pearl Harbor. I saw the Arizona sitting there, still had a superstructure on it. So anyway then we went about as fast as you could go to the Philippines. We didn't get there for the invasion, for the initial invasion. We got in to the -- some of the good stuff had already happened.

MZ: Well let me ask you something. What did you think about going through the Panama Canal?

JS: It was quite a thing, I enjoyed it. Really, I did. Except for the fact that I was on the throttle when we were going across that and the pilot might run me wild. He was running blank speed and then stop. You gotta shut her down, and you can't blow steam, and there's lots of things you can't do. I mean, it worked me to death (laughter). But it was interesting, going across that. We got through that, then gone up to San Diego, we stayed in Pearl Harbor for a few days, then took on chow, then took off for the Philippines. We got there... I believe the initial invasion was the twentieth of October, and we got there like the twenty-fifth or the twenty-seventh.

MZ: OK. And what did you do when you got there?

JS: Well, we did a lot of things. We patrolled, they were chasing different things... We made a landing up there in Ormoc Bay, I think with the men of the 77th brigade or something. And while I was on board they cut the island in two so they couldn't go North or South. Excuse me, I've got to get some water. But anyway, we made our landing up there in Ormoc Bay, well, the Japanese, they still controlled Manila up there and had airfields and everything, but they came down to us like bees, because they knew what we was doing and they was trying to stop it. And Halsey had his pairs up there, and he shot down a lot

of them. But altogether the ships in that single action, we were in our stations for eight and a half hours. We lost two destroyers up there. To the *kamikazes*.

MZ: At Ormoc?

JS: Yeah, and altogether we shot down, in planes, with those pilots in the B-38, and ships and planes, we shot down 64 planes that day. At Ormoc. And Halsey got a whole lot of them up in Manila.

MZ: Now did the Laffey receive any damage?

JS: No, not there.

MZ: OK. There was something I read about... I think it happened a bit before Ormoc... You know what, before I go on, let me ask you: is there anything else you recall about Ormoc?

JS: Well, what I, really, yeah, I do. Because when we made that landing up there, all we had was destroyers. We didn't have anything bigger than that. Of course landing craft, LSTs, and so forth. But there was a sugar factory there, and I don't think that the Japanese really understood that we were coming or really had any idea... Well, there was a ship, they call it a logger, which is a small cargo ship, was in the harbor, in the little harbor cove. And that sunk, and it was Japanese sailors and soldiers, I'm sure, on there, the whole area was full of

people swimming. The Japanese. And we went right on over them and made the landing. Anyway, the Japs was on there... And behind this there was a sugar factory, the space was cleared, didn't have any palm trees or anything on it. And of course when we started coming in, they started leaving town, the Japanese soldiers did, and they're running back into the jungle. Well anyway, that's kind of asinine what they did, and they were right out there in the open. You know, gee whiz, it's tough going, I'll tell you, for them. But everyone was bombarding them, shelling them and all that.

MZ: Right. How many destroyers took part in the landing, do you think?

JS: I'd have to say about four? I don't remember, really. But I'd have to say there was four there.

MZ: OK. That doesn't seem like a whole lot.

JS: No. And also they was some old converted destroyers, old four-pipers, that were also in there. We lost one of those, and another one. And anyway what they are or were was a fast attack-type thing where they could take groups in like a couple hundred had let them off real quick. But anyway... Something else was I going to say about that, but it slipped. Later on, after Ormoc, we were doing a patrol in the island up there. All of a sudden our radar picked

up a ship that was dead in the water out in the... there. Well, they tried to raise it up high on mast. You know, with radio, so finally the skipper said, “Well, we’re going to go straight in.” And we gave them high up mast with the blinker. And, well, actually, it was a spur of one of ours that didn’t have any power. Well, there was a fellow on the bridge that had a life sign. Maybe a battle sign. And he gave IFF return, see. And we went out alongside and took the wounded off. And hooked up on to them to tow them, and we towed them the biggest part of the night. Back in towards Leyte Gulf. They got hit right smack where it lost all its steam and power, everything. But later on that morning, a tug came out and went on. This is a thing that happened. All kinds of things that happened, we didn’t know, but it all came together. I would work later on in the Ford Motor Company, and I was a maintenance -- I was a Mill Ride maintenance. Mill Ride. And there was a good friend of mine who worked there who was an electrician. We had a fire in the heat-treating area of the plant. Oil fire. And of course, all the maintenance people were all in the fire brigade, we were prepared for fire. Factories have fires practically all the time. So anyway we put the fire out and it was on the afternoon shift about this time of year. So then we went to lunch.

So this fellow, this guy Christian, says, “Did you ever see metal burn?” And I said, “Yeah, I’ve seen metal burn.” He said, “What ship did you see that at?” I said, “I was on the destroyer that got really whacked with *kamikazes*.” And he says, “Which one?” And I said, “The Laffey.” And he said, “Do you remember the Hughes?” And I said, “Absolutely I remember the Hughes.” And here we are, ten thousand miles away and I meet the guy, and he was on the Hughes!

MZ: Really? Now was that the destroyer you came across, that didn’t have any power?

JS: Yeah. He was on the Hughes. Served on the Hughes. So anyway we kind of... later on I went in supervision and he was one of my employees and he needed to kind of give me some cheek and I said, “I saved you one time and maybe I can save you again, but maybe I won’t.” Or something like that (laughs). So anyway, small world when things like that happen.

MZ: That is funny. Well, that is certainly odd.

JS: So anyway, that’s what happened. You got anything else you want to talk about there?

MZ: Yeah, actually there was... I think this happened a little bit before Ormoc, something about a wounded Japanese pilot?

JS: Oh yes. Yeah. Yeah. Well, what he did... I don’t know whether he was a *kamikaze* or not, like that, but he went in

the drink and he swam away from us. He got out of the plane. He had a broken arm, I think it was or something happened to one of his arms. So he was floating around out there, and we pulled alongside and tried to throw him a buoy and get him to grab a hold of it, but he'd swim away from the ship. He did that about three times, I think, and finally this fellow, Bill Kelly was a part of the -- he was a signalman, really. So on the afterstack, pretty low on the stack we had a twenty-millimeter gun mount up there. So Bill gets up there, and when we came alongside this time, he took that twenty-millimeter and ringed him with the shells, fired them around him. So then he decided to come aboard then. So of course we had some guys, two three guys up on there over side, I'm sorry (beep). And helped him up on the ship.. He was... Wouldn't look down, wouldn't look up, or anything. Then later on that day, we transferred him to a carrier, and I don't remember which one it was, it was in our group.

MZ: OK. What did you think of this pilot?

JS: Well, really I -- personally, I didn't have any animosity, because he was another human being and probably doing... Had to do what he was told to do, just like we were. I had... Speaking of my animosity about the Japanese, I kind of had a lot of animosity right after World War II, and

things like that, you know. But then I just realized they're just people like (beep). They were doing what they was taught to do. And we were too. And our philosophy of what they were doing was one hundred and eighty degrees from what ours was.

MZ: OK. Just to let you know, if you hear some beeping that's just one side of the tape coming to an end and in a second I'll just have to flip it over, but I'll let you know when.

JS: OK, very good, all right.

MZ: OK so... I think we're up to December of 1944. Let me just ask you some real general questions.

JS: OK.

MZ: Can you describe what living on a destroyer is like? I'm just asking because a lot of destroyer folks say it's a lot like a family.

JS: It is, absolutely. I had people my age on the ship that were dear friends. Really, truly, the whole... We had a lot of camaraderie between groups, like the people who worked the machinist mates, the snipes that is, and the different people that worked in the agent X bases. Really and truly we didn't have any disagreements. We had disagreements, but not anything dire. I wouldn't say that... We would go, all the way if we had to, for anybody

on the ship. Not looking at them more than they was a gunner or what they were.

MZ: Right. What would you and your shipmates do when you had some downtime, when you weren't in any major action?

JS: Well, I'd read a lot, myself. And other people would get together and play poker, play cards, all kinds of things on the ship. Then of course you always need sleep. If you could get sacktime, we'd get sacktime.

MZ: Now, on destroyers, did everyone have their own bunk, or is it like you're alternating bunks with somebody else?

JS: No, we had our own bunks. The only time that I was involved in what they called hot sacking was after we got hit up at Okinawa. Because we lost, let's see, three compartments, including the one I was in, and we lost all of our stuff. We didn't have any bunks. We had some-- (break in audio)

MZ: OK, you were talking about hot tacking?

JS: Hot sacking.

MZ: OK, hot sacking.

JS: Yeah, we called our bunks the sack, and it meant it never got cold. Because there was somebody in it all the time. But anyway, I didn't have a bunk. My area was all burnt out and all of my goodies, my stuff and everything was burnt out. I didn't have anything. But anyway... I lost

my chain of thought now, just give me a minute. I found a hammock. I had noticed one time I was going down and checking our walk-in cooler. Well, we had a walk-in cooler and it was part of the responsibility of the machinist mates, and I was later on a machinist mate, we had to check the walk-in every so often. And I saw that hammock. Well, I went and dug that thing out and I went up on deck, and you probably have seen the pictures of the Laffey after the war, after we got hit by *kamikaze*. But anyway, on that number three mound, or around machine gun number three, there was lots of pieces of jagged metal. And I hung that hammock from a piece of metal over there, and then over another piece of the gun mount. And that's where I slept, in the hammock, when I could get in it. And once in a while you'd get a little wet because sometimes you'd hit a lot of spray that would come over the top, because we were out on deck, see. But it was a place to sleep, you know? And somebody was in it all the time. Out on the deck. But I had -- where I worked, I was in the engine room down there. So if I couldn't get in the bunk, why I would go down to the engine room and they talk about asbestos, how you shouldn't use it to do this that or the other thing, but the only thing is we had these great big asbestos mats. And I say great big but they were almost like, big enough

to sleep your whole body on. And what it was, in case of emergency, if you needed to keep from getting burned or you were working on something you'd lay down the mat over the steam pipes or something. Just to keep you from getting on the steam pipes. And I'd stretch those out on deck and the noise and everything, I'd just go sound asleep. So I never lacked for a place to sleep. But a lot of them did, a lot of them didn't have a place to go. They sure were hot sacking.

MZ: OK. You already mentioned about the food a little bit earlier... How was the food aboard ship, as opposed to that other great meal that you had?

JS: Well, it was good food, really, because no matter how much you grabbed or anything like that... It was good food. I looked at it that way, because I guess I had a bit of a different outlook about it than probably most people, because I grew up rural. You at everything on your plate. So I kind of looked at it the same way. Food is food. You have to use it... It has to sustain you, so you can't just cry about it or anything, unless it's real bad. Like bad meat.

MZ: What about mail? Did you get a chance to write home very often, or did you get mail very often?

JS: Well, we'd get mail quite often. Not every week or anything like that, but we'd get mail about all the time. Anywhere. Because we'd get mail drops wherever we'd go. And of course, we sent a lot of mail at that time.

MZ: Is that the same time you'd get resupplied with food and ammunition, things like that?

JS: Right, yeah.

MZ: What kind of ship would resupply you?

JS: Well, carriers, mostly. Sometimes we had ships that were basically cargo ships, but with supplies on them. That's all. I don't know what they called the thing anymore, that ship, but they had everything in the world on that. One time, we took on board a bunch of chow in about twenty-five minutes and just put it on the deck, because that's when we was going to the Philippines. And then stowed it under on the ship after we just kind of went away. So we had bananas and stuff like that for a while, a few days, and so forth.

MZ: What kind of clothes did you wear? What was the daily uniform, was there one?

JS: Actually, there was no dress code during World War II. You had dungarees and that was it. For some reason. I'll tell you another thing too. During World War II, you did not tie your shoes, you didn't have any laces in your shoes.

MZ: Really? What did you do?

JS: Well, the reason you didn't, is because if you ever have to go over the side, you want your shoes on, but as soon as you get in the water you want to take your shoes off. So most people didn't have any heels on their shoes, or laces in their shoes. And the reason they didn't have laces on their shoes is we as young guys learned to run up and down on those ladder with their backs to the ladder. Well, in those days they didn't have glued-on heels in the shoe. And when you do that, you'd hook your heel on those rung, and it eventually it would pull the heel off. So you'd actually walk around with no heels on your shoe. Half the people, more than half, didn't have heels or laces on their shoes.

MZ: So you would go down the ladder with your back to the ladder?

JS: Yeah, just walk down. Well, I tried that recently. I can't begin to do that now. I'm much larger around the middle and other places. Anyway, I had to hold on. But I've seen guys run all the way down a ladder, like twenty foot, make it all the way down to the bottom and never hold on to anything. You kind of put your heels in and you lean back to it, and you just step down to the next one and go straight on down.

MZ: And we’re talking about those ladders that go straight up and down, right?

JS: Yeah!

MZ: That sounds like a skill to me (laughs).

JS: It is. There’s a little slope to the ladder. It wasn’t steep, flat straight up and down. It had a few degrees slope. Probably over ten, fifteen feet it would probably stick out four feet or five feet from center. It had a little slope to it.

MZ: OK. What was I going to... Let’s look at my questions here real quick. Oh! Can you tell me about your primary duties when you were off-duty and what your General Quarters was?

JS: My General Quarters, I’ll start with that. My General Quarters... see, when I first went on the ship, I was in the fire room. Then I was transferred to the engine room. So... Give me a minute. My General Quarters, then, was in the fire room. That’s where I was at when they called General Quarters. But wartime crew, you have a dual group of everything because you had four on and eight off, when you stood watches. So anyway... During that time you tend to your areas that you have. You paint, you clean, whatever. And... I lost my chain of thought again.

MZ: Oh, that’s OK. Well, primary duties, that’s what we were talking about.

JS: Yeah. Primary duties, I did several things. We stood watches on the pumps, the feed-water pumps where the water goes in the engine room. And actually, when I was in... I'll go back a little bit. When I was in the boiler room, I mostly stood watches on the burners on the boiler. We had two boilers and these were each in the fire room. One boiler in one end. And then, during the time that you're off then you turn to. Sometimes you had to make repairs, sometimes you needed to clean up a certain area, or clean the bilges, or all of those things. And they'd be done. But we managed to take care of it. And paint, sometimes, in the engine room. And then we'd do all kinds of things like that.

MZ: OK. Let's see... I'm sure you remember Captain Becton.

JS: Oh yes, I sure do.

MZ: What did you think of him?

JS: Oh, I liked him. He was a fair... He didn't let you get away with anything, but he was fair. And I respected him tremendously. I'll give you an example of that. When I was in the Naval Hospital with my broken leg, ankle rather, they had transferred my records to the hospital. Well, when I went back on the ship, the records didn't follow me. In the meantime, when I was in the hospital they gave me a ten-day leave. I went home on a ten-day leave. They just

out of the blue said, you can go home. Well I had fifty cents maybe, and I needed thirty-four dollars for a train ticket. So I went to Red Cross and borrowed thirty-four dollars and went home.

MZ: Went to who?

JS: Huh?

MZ: Oh, you said you went to somebody to borrow thirty-four dollars?

JS: Red Cross.

MZ: Oh, Red Cross, OK.

JS: So anyway, when I went back onboard ship wasn't very long before we were headed for England and I haven't been paid. And so we go to England, meantime I start getting letter from the Red Cross, when am I going to pay them that thirty-four dollars that I borrowed? Well, I sent letters back, a little note saying, well, "I haven't been paid, and I can't pay you but I will as soon as I get paid!" And in the meantime, we went back to Boston, and that's where I was at when I borrowed the money. So we've got back to Boston from England over there and Normandy, and pretty soon within a few days the Red Cross found out we were back in port, and they called the captain. Of course, when we were in port we had a phone on the quarterdeck. Well, anyway he called me up to his cabin, and says, "Why haven't

you paid that thirty-four dollars to the Red Cross?" And I gave him the circumstance, that I hadn't been paid. I told him that I would pay the debt as soon as I could get money to pay it. Excuse me (coughs). So anyway he kind of looked a little funny, kind of grinned and he said, "Let me take care of that." Never heard anymore (laughs). Evidently, he kind of chewed somebody out. Later on, after... He became a retired rear admiral. So we were having a reunion and I asked him one time if he remembered it. And he said, "Oh yes, I remember that, we took care of that one, didn't we." That's all he ever said (laughter). But he was that way. But I liked him, really really liked him. And actually, I kind of credit him -- well, I do credit him for being a real naval seaman, as far as keeping out of the way from... He could anticipate what was going to happen when we were fired upon. He knew, for example, when we were over in the Cherbourg, there, they... We were going away from the shore and they dropped shells in behind us. And what he did, he turned and went back towards them (laughter). Well, anyway, everybody on the ship said, "Woah, we're going to get killed. We're going right back where the shells are." Well, really what he was doing, the Germans had followed him, then they have his range, and the next time – there was probably two of them – probably the

next time they'd be right in on the ship. So he did the opposite. Well he was doing the same thing April sixteenth, 1944 -- five. And what he was doing was speeding up, slowing down. Speeding up, slowing down. Well the planes always would miss. Them and the *kamikazes* would miss. So he had a knack for seamanship, how to take care of that.

MZ: Sounds like he was throwing them off, in other words.

JS: Yeah, he was.

MZ: Wow. Now... Let's see. Let me ask you about another one of the landings -- the Mindoro landings? Do you recall anything about that?

JS: Well... No, I can't remember anything about that. I tried to remember and I can't remember that. We were busy at that time and I just, I had other things... Some things I can't bring up.

MZ: OK. Well, I'll just toss out some names and if you could remember, that's great, and if you don't, that's OK.

JS: OK.

MZ: Lingayen Gulf?

JS: Oh yes.

MZ: OK. Do you recall what the ship did there?

JS: Patrol, mostly. In, Lingayen Gulf, well no, I remember now... We made a landing over there. And there's kind of a

funny story on that. We were coming to make that landing up from Luzon, there. And there was a Japanese ship who was swinging on the anchor in that harbor, there. And there was nobody on it, it was just swinging around on the anchor out there, see. Well, we had a torpedo man, he was a... He had a nickname of Spook. So an officer says, "Spook, let's torpedo that thing and sink it and get it out of the way." It was in the way, it was right in the middle of the harbor, see. So Spook, they gave him how deep to run the torpedo and everything so he fired the thing and just waited and waited and waited, of course I was in the engine room, and anyway I didn't see it happen but I know it happened. So anyway, nothing happened. So right behind this ship was a Japanese truck that was set up on the beach. Well this torpedo hit this Japanese truck and blew it sky high (laughter). What that torpedo had done, it went under the ship, clear into the sand, went under the truck and blew it to smithereens (laughter).

MZ: So, I guess maybe your destroyer was the only one to blow up a truck during the war?

JS: Yeah (laughter). Probably was. And, you know, I saw that in a movie. One of the comedy movies. I forget what it was.

MZ: Oh, *Operation Petticoat*?

JS: Yeah, something like that. I forget what it was. And that really happened, the Laffey did that.

MZ: Oh my goodness. So, you keep using the term patrol. And just for the sake of the interview, what are you doing when you're on patrol in a destroyer?

JS: Well, really, you go areas where there may be, or you know that there's somebody there. And also you patrol, another part of the patrolling, is to be the bumpers for the carriers and what they call the capital ships. You stay so far out and use radar, sonar and everything else. You're a blanket for the capital ships. You're expendable, for a destroyer at least.

MZ: Let's see. Is there anything else you remember about Lingayen Gulf?

JS: One of the things I remember is I guess about D plus three, I guess, maybe four, just at dusk dark, the Japanese put on a banzai charge, up there. It was dark enough that we could see the lights and stuff from the muzzles that are firing over there. And it was just lit up. And I was sitting and talking to people that was involved in that, and they said when they was just brought out up there, they were using the bodies, the Japanese bodies, and just were getting behind them. When they were firing.

MZ: Kind of as a cover?

JS: As a cover. I remember seeing that.

MZ: Goodness sakes. Anything else?

JS: Well, whenever we made the landing there was a... the Japs realized what we were doing, and so they had some planes about eighty miles from there. And they're coming boiling up that Manila plain or something through there with tanks and everything else. To repel the invasion. Well, the battleship, I can't remember whether it was the Texas or the New York, one of the older battleships, fired rapid fire at those convoys coming up through there. They could reach that part way up there. And the word came back to us that they'd almost annihilated a whole people... And we were out on deck watching the big shells go from the carrier, I mean the battleship, go through the air. Because we could see them. Looked like a Volkswagen bus or something going through the air. And they fired like that for twenty-five minutes. The paint was burning on the side of the ship. Because of the heat. Those things would fire, there would go that big shell, and kind of wiped out that convoy coming up through there.

MZ: What do those shells sound like?

JS: What do they sound like?

MZ: Yes, sir.

JS: Well, I ain’t never heard one, yet. I heard them from a distance, but heard it never from up close. But then, they say it makes a wobbling “boo” sound. I don’t know.

MZ: OK. Did the... The Laffey being the ship that you first got on, did you make a lot of close friends on it?

JS: Very much so, yes.

MZ: Could you talk a little bit about some of them?

JS: Yeah, I had one friend who was from [Portsmouth?], Ohio, which is right across the river from Kentucky, where I was born and raised. So we were naturally hitched up because we were neighbors. So we were good friends. And then some other people... This fellow’s name was Jack Williams, and he lived in Portsmouth, Ohio. But he was... We left when our ship got hit by... Then when we got to Seattle by... We went home together. In the train. Then, I had other people. One fellow who was particular was, his name was Ray Hallas. He was married and had one son. And so one of my duties was, we had a twelve to four watch, I’d go wake up the watch and relieve the watch. Hallas was one of those people who was a joy to be around. He was really... He always had a smile, and always was... he never really had any problems or anything. So anyway, one morning -- this is about two weeks before we got hit at Okinawa -- and so, before all I had to say, “OK, Ray, it’s time to go,”

and he'd just say, "OK," and he'd be there. That was it. But this particular morning, for some reason I touched him. The bunks were... You had to turn sideways to go down through the officers' bunks. They were close together. There were a lot of people on the ship. So anyway, he came out of that bunk, the fists were flying, you've never seen such a man right now. And he stood there a minute or two, and he said, "I'll be down in a few minutes. I want to take a shower." So I said, "OK, that's fine." So I went on back down the engine room. And he came down about fifteen, twenty minutes later and he had to tell me, felt he had to tell me why he did that. Because it was so out of character that I couldn't imagine what was wrong. Anyway, he told me, he says, "You know, I was dreaming that the Devil was taking my son." And he said, "Every time I felt a touch," he said, "I got a shock." So when I touched him, he felt that shock. So anyway he told me that. Well now, the first hit we got on April sixteenth, Ray Hallas was one of the people who was killed. I figured that was a real omen.

MZ: Wow, that's really... a bizarre omen.

JS: Yeah, it is, and I had some other friends too, some real good ones, and all of that. But that particular one stays with me. And I think of that all the time.

MZ: So, what other friends did you have on board?

JS: Well, we had... The first class machinist mate was John Michaels, and he was probably the most astute engineering guy that I was ever around. He was a first class machinist mate. I was third class. Well, he and I clicked because of the fact we both looked the same way at different things that happened, how to fix things, all of that. And we was good friends. And then on top of that, Becton said that every officer in the ship should go down the engine room and learn something about the engineering spaces and what happens down below. So he would send them down there, tell them to go down there. So either John or I or both of us would walk these people around the engineering spaces and tell them what it was, and it got so that really, we were kind of an lead group, really, the two of us were. Because really, I sound like I'm beating my own drum, but the thing is I understood all of the different things of both the fire room and the engine room and where everything was at and how it worked. So anyway, because of that, why, we had... People looked up to us. But then of course, we never did lord it over anybody that we knew better. But we had a lot of people wanted to consult with us what to do and how to do.

MZ: Do you remember who your immediate... I don't know, supervisor or boss or whoever was in control of your group? Do you remember who that was?

JS: OK. I'm trying to think of his name now. He was a chief machinist mate... Anyway, he was, the chief machinist mate was our leader for our group. Now, we had an officer who was Harvey Shell. He was what was known as a mascot Mustang. He started out in 1936, I think it was, or '32. He was a seaman, he worked in the builders' and he worked everywhere. He worked every place that a man could. And of course World War II came along, and he became an officer and ensign, and when he retired he was a captain. He was probably the most astute man on how to handle people of anybody that I was ever around. I always looked up to him. You could talk to him and he knew what you was talking about, and we could solve our problems or whatever we had to do.

MZ: OK. Let's see... Do you remember Kerama Retto?

JS: Yeah, yeah.

MZ: What do you recall about it?

JS: That's where we went after we got hit.

MZ: Oh, I thought... Did you go there before you got hit, also?

JS: No, no.

MZ: Only after?

JS: We were there because we helped take that place. We thought the Japanese was occupying the Atoll but they weren't. We went in there and bombarded, and all that stuff, but there was nobody there. But it was used for ships like the Laffey that were all banged up. Some of them cut in half and everything else, that was the anchorage where they put them.

MZ: Let's see... I got my list of names here. I guess after that, we'd be talking about Okinawa. Let's start on the landings and what the Laffey did during that point in time.

JS: We bombarded, and different places and different parts of the landing.

MZ: Were you bombarding coordinates that were being sent to you, or were you--?

JS: Yeah, yeah. Usually they were smarter, on the beach, Army or Marine that would give us the coordinates of what we had to have, where we had to fire. And really, we were, even in England, over in Normandy, we hit most of the things they were sending us to hit. Because they would kind of would request the ship, the Laffey, because people got to know that we could do it.

MZ: Gosh. So, you participate in the bombardment, and I guess at some point the ship gets requested to go to Radar Picket One?

JS: Yes.

MZ: Can you tell me a little bit about what radar pickets do?

JS: Radar pickets basically were stationed in an area, we didn't move a whole lot, just kind of sat there, and all we were doing was what we called the bench frame for the antenna was going around and were doing radar and picking up signals. We were close to... Radar One, it was close enough to we could see them, just about, before we could see Japan. We were way out there. We were sixty miles out from Okinawa. By ourselves.

MZ: So, let's see... Do you recall taking aboard a fighter-director group?

JS: Yeah.

MZ: Oh, OK. Before then?

JS: Yeah, there was five of them.

MZ: Right. And I think... So... I understand the crew saw some other destroyers that had been hit by *kamikazes*, some of them before they went out to Radar Picket One.

JS: Oh yes, we did.

MZ: What did you think? And what did you hear?

JS: Well, we knew that we was in for it, but I personally didn't have... I'm going to say something now that... And maybe you're going to think I'm nuts, but anyway, I felt, I don't know why I felt this way, that somebody was taking

care of me, and I'm going to be all right. Even during the time we were being bombarded by the *kamikazes*. And I was not scared. And I think that I had the same feeling all the way through that. I was talking about an omen Ray Hallas, but at the same time I think that was kind of an omen for me telling me I was going to be OK.

MZ: OK. I'm just curious, but are you a religious man of any sort?

JS: I... Well, yes, I'm involved in Church, and I go to Church, and I do the same things that other people do. I believe in God, believe there is a God, and all of that.

MZ: So you thought, pretty much, that you were being watched over?

JS: Yes, exactly right. I wasn't so much religious at that time, but the only thing is, this is a feeling that cushioned... You kind of look back on it, you find that the things that happened, and you put two and two together and that was what that was.

MZ: Hm... OK. I've heard about that, actually, about people having a sense that even in a dire situation, that they'll make it through.

JS: Oh, yeah.

MZ: OK. All right, so the ship heads out to Radar Picket One, and can you tell me about that first day?

JS: The first day, we saw, I think... We shot down one plane, I believe it was, that was nosing around. We shot him down. The second day, in the morning of the second day, I was in chow line. I was the last one in line and the GQ alarm rang. I was probably ten people from having chow. It was the very end of the line. Of course GQ went off, and of course you're meant to hightail it to your General Quarter station. So I was in General Quarter station, and history says that everybody got fed, but they didn't. But anyway, in the fire room I went, and went on my GQ station like I'm supposed to be. Put my helmet on and life jacket, put those on, that's just precaution. So whatever the annunciator said, we knew to go do what we did, I mean now. Anyway what we knew, we knew that we'd need his name. And actually, we would know what was going on without seeing the annunciator. Because the five-inch guns, when they're firing, they're all turned quite a ways out, you see. Then when the forties chime in, well you know it's close, so then when the twenties go, you know that they're right there. So you get the steam up, you make sure you've got plenty of steam, and they tell you what they want to do. All a-stern, or stop, or plank, or whatever they want to go, see. So that was a thing, what our duty was was to have what we needed to go, do what we needed to do. And

during that time, there was a fellow... He was on one boiler and I was on the other, right behind me. Probably there was about five-foot between us. And he froze. He couldn't get going. He'd stand there holding it and couldn't make himself do things. He was an Italian fellow, and he gets really excited and he'd be really... He'd do things. Anyway, he was standing there, and this water tender, his name was Russo, said "kick that so-and-so." So I did, I kicked him, I kicked him off the deck. Well from that time on, he couldn't speak English. And he looked at me like he wanted to turn loose that barrel and whack me with that steel barrel that we called a murder barrel (laughter). But anyway, you know what's funny about that? I never mentioned it, and he never mentioned it, after this war was over with. He knew I'd kicked him, but he didn't get tightened up, it made him more Italian.

MZ: What happened after that?

JS: Then, every time one of the planes would hit, or one of the bombs, whatever hit us, whatever hit it wouldn't just go "wham." But I mean, really, "wham." And the reverb to the ship, it would go "wham, wham, wham, wham." And you'd hear it, like it'd goes through the ship, see. And the only thing I could think about was who got hurt. I wasn't concerned about myself. Who got hurt. And boy, every time

one of those things hit it made a noise. Because a five-hundred pound bomb and an airplane will get your attention, I'll tell you. Because I think most of them had five-hundred pound bombs on them. The plane hitting, by itself, would make a lot of racket. The bomb, of course, that's really... It would really get your attention.

MZ: Now how long did the attack go on in whole?

JS: Eighty minutes.

MZ: Eighty minutes. And where did you spend most of your time at?

JS: In the fire room.

MZ: OK. So how close did one of the *kamikazes* come to hitting where you were?

JS: Probably sixty feet. Actually, right over top of us, really.

MZ: Really?

JS: Yeah, because it hit... We had two quad-forties, that's two barrel forty-millimeters, and they, one plane came in and hit those, right in those quad-forties. Well, the ammunition, this is over the engine room. So whenever it caught everything on fire, well the ammunition for those forties, those five-round clips, like a rifle. And what you did, you just hung those things in a rack and it fed itself in as it fired. But anyhow, those shells that were

hanging on the racks around there, when it was burning and it was exploding and the projectiles were going... Can you wait, I'll just keep going in just a second. OK, I... Anyway... What was I talking about? The telephone was ringing. I got my wife to get it.

MZ: Projectiles... The plane landed on the forty-millimeter?

JS: So anyway, those projectiles went all the way through into the engine room, the after-engine room. Now, I didn't see this, but this John Michaels I was telling you about, we had two people who were trapped in a compartment which was an emergency diesel generator with which you could generate power if you lost steam pressure. Anyway, they were trapped in there because the compartments, the three extra compartments were full... Well, not full, but they had enough water in them that they couldn't open up the hatches and get out. Anyway, they were suffocating because all this fire was burning up above them, and the smoke and things was getting around and hitting things, into that room. And they were suffocating. Well, they could talk to him because the phones kept working so that Michaels didn't have a drill or anything, but he took a chisel and beat a whole in a bulk head, and put an air hose in there, and pressurized that (beep) there, so they could have air. So

they stayed in there for another two or three hours, and then we cut a hole in the deck and got them up on the deck.

MZ: So they were OK?

JS: Yeah, they were OK, other than the fact that... I didn’t see them when they came out, but they were black as tar, I guess. All that soot and stuff from down underneath the compartment where they were at.

MZ: Well... What else do you recall? It must have been, well, sort of chaotic. I mean, everyone had a battle station, and they were doing their job, but at the same time all these planes are slamming into the ship. Anything else you recall that stands out?

JS: Well, this Jack Williams I was (beep) talking about earlier, he was a passer that was seated on the twenty-millimeter mount. There was a passer, a loader, and a gunner. There were three people on a mount. Well anyway, they were firing at a plane that was coming in, and it was strafing, the plane was firing, I don’t know what they were, eighteen-millimeter or something shells, bullets. So naturally, they hit the deck, like you normally would, just flatten out so that you don’t... Well, it just so happened that in that gun tub, all three of those people hit the same area. So they stacked up one on top of the other.

Now that stack was about, probably was twenty inches high (beep). I hear a buzz...

MZ: Oh, I think I have about a minute left on the tape. But go on.

JS: OK. So anyway, they hit the deck. Whenever that happened, they shot that plane down, and it exploded right on the starboard side of the ship. So anyway, two or three days later, we were in Kerama... I can never pronounce that, but anyways we were there. And we decided to go up and have a look at that mound. And here were these stitching holes, that were eighteen inches off the deck. Now, none of those people had gotten hit, and Jack turned white, because he didn't know that's where they hit. That's another thing that happened. How in the world can you think about (beep) that happens and he never got hit.

MZ: Yeah, that's a lot.

JS: Well, there's another part of this thing. Later on, what happened is these bullets went through the outer area of the stack, which was the air intake for the combustion in the motors, you see. Now, it also went through the inside on in to the stack. Well, when they repaired it, they put a skin on the outside of the stack but they didn't repair the holes on the inside. And later on in the fifties and sixties there was a fellow that was... Every once in a

while they had to inspect the inside of that stack to make sure there wasn't a burnout or a hole on the inside of stack. See, on the inside. So anyway, he went in there and they make an inspection and he saw the bullet holes in there. So we were talking one day and he said, "I never did figure out why that thing had bullet holes in it," and I said, "Well, I can tell you." (laughter) So he was just totally amazed that I could tell him about those holes.

MZ: Well, how long were you on the Laffey?

JS: I was on... I went on November the eighth, 1944. I had a short time when I was off the Laffey, and I got off on the twentieth of March of 1945, no '44, no '46. Then I went on another destroyer and came back to the States and went through the Panama Canal again.

MZ: Let me ask you a couple more questions about Okinawa. Were there some LCSs or some LCIs with you out there?

JS: No. Oh, sorry, there was one but they were about thirty-five miles away. Yeah.

MZ: And did she, provide any kind of -- could she provide any support for you guys from that distance?

JS: No. They came along and took the wounded off though.

MZ: OK. And what about air cover?

JS: After, when they got the CAP guys, you know the Commandant Air Patrol group, got the Corsairs, what we call the Wayne Corsairs... You still with me?

MZ: Yeah, I'm still here.

JS: And they shot down some planes too, see. And in fact, one of them was on the tail of a Zero and he couldn't pull out enough and we don't know whether he did it or whether the Jap Zero did, but it cut our radar mast off. Hit the mast, chopped it right off and dropped it right down on deck.

MZ: Mm... OK. I'm just curious, but are you aware of the... well, it wasn't really a special, but it was part of a show called *Dogfight* that the History Channel did on the Laffey?

JS: Oh yeah. Yes, I saw that, and it is... I looked at it, and it's accurate. It was animated, yes.

MZ: So it was true that the back, or at least it looked to me, that the back half of the ship was pretty much in flames at one point?

JS: Yes it was.

MZ: And you were back there below deck?

JS: Yup. Actually, the flames probably stopped right before where I was. After that, everything was completely on fire.

MZ: When all was said and done, were there any pieces of these Japanese planes on the Laffey?

JS: Yeah, there was engines, and there was big pieces. Yeah, there was. I have some little pieces in there that I've taken, which are name tags and stuff like that that I found.

MZ: Japanese name tags?

JS: Yeah.

MZ: Wow. Anything else you can add about that action?

JS: Well, I'll tell you, whenever, after we got... When they hooked up to us to pull us... And by the way, I'll start back again. There was a destroyer down on what we called Picket Number Four, which was farther down... Actually, there was thirty picket stations around Okinawa during that time. So anyway, this number four heard on the radio that we were all under attack, but he was doing all right down there, so he left his station and went past the first one and took care of the wounded and all that. The sub-lieutenant wrote this up that was on the destroyer that came up there. And he said the honest thing was all the bags, the body bags was on the deck, see. Who had it under control. Then he went farther up, and the other ship had everything under control. Then he came on the Laffey, and the one thing he noticed, and in other words his dissertation, he said the thing that amazed him was he got there, and here's a ship with mangled up... The fires was

out at that time, but the guns that were operable, they had people still on those guns, stayed right there. Never left their GQ stations. And he said it just amazed him that they were that dedicated to what they were doing. But literally, they had us. Another plane would probably have sunk us.

MZ: Wow. I understand the ship started to take on water close to the end of the action?

JS: Oh yes. Oh yes.

MZ: And someone had mentioned that water was being pumped out with the help of another ship?

JS: Yeah, the other destroyer threw a hose across, then when the subs came out then they pumped out water all the way back to Okinawa. It took twenty-four hours to get back to Okinawa.

MZ: Gosh, I guess... Well, how fast were you going?

JS: Very slow. Because, see, the first thing was that the first hit we had jammed the rudder hard left. So all we could really do was go around in a circle. What Becton did was he slowed down, picked his feet up, and let the current take us.

MZ: I guess that’s where Captain Becton’s good seamanship came in to play.

JS: Yeah. So he... I lost my thought again, I'm... My short term is not the best...

MZ: That's OK, you're doing fine.

JS: Anyway, I'll think about it a minute here... Oh, yes, I know what it was. Whenever you tow a ship, you had to have two tugs. Because since the rudder was jammed, the fan tail would go to the starboard, hang way out. So it would pull the ship sideways. So they had one sub, one tug that would hold it straight and the other guy would tug. And that guy that was holding us straight, they put hoses down in and they pumped water. That's how they did it.

MZ: I was surprised that the Japanese, once the ship was going around in a circle, could never quite coordinate an attack on it. You pretty much know where the ship was going.

JS: I'll tell you what, it was known fact that these pilots really basically knew how to take it off but they didn't really know how to land it. In other words, pretty much that caliber at that time. They had very little experience on how to fly an airplane. They basically had one guy who was an old hand, and he would lead them there, he would be navigation to get them where they'd need to be, and they'd go for it.

MZ: I know you mentioned one gentleman, were there any other friends that you lost during the attack?

JS: LaVerne Hazen was a machinist mate and Rob Thomsen, he was from Huntington, West Virginia, he was a machinist mate. Jack Johnson was a machinist's mate on a twenty-millimeter gun. A little fellow named Kelly. George Falotico.

MZ: How many casualties did the Laffey have that day?

JS: We had thirty-two killed outright, and seventy-three wounded.

MZ: You know, before I saw that *Dogfight* special, I hadn't heard of the Laffey. And I was really amazed that a destroyer could take that much punishment and still stay afloat.

JS: Excuse me. Do you know the quote that Becton made during this battle to a couple of officers on the bridge? We were damaged real bad, and the officers said "Captain, we are damaged badly, we need to abandon ship." He said, "I will not abandon my ship as long as the gun will fire." Now, that is in the Naval History, along with John Paul Jones and Merrygood and all the other people who made quotes or statements. That's one of the things -- that's why it's called "The Ship that Would Not Die."

MZ: Now how many *kamikazes* in total hit the ship?

JS: Five hit the ship, three dropped bombs. That animated thing said there were six. Five or six. I don't think

there was. I'm not... That may be correct, but I don't think it was.

MZ: OK. So you get towed back to where again?

JS: Huh?

MZ: Where was your ship towed back to? Okinawa, you said?

JS: Yeah. Well, actually the anchorage was an atoll that we took that had nobody there, because that's where they put all the wrecked ships. It was about fifteen miles away from Okinawa.

MZ: Someone else had mentioned to me that that first night back at I think the Atoll that you're talking about, that there was a Japanese attack in the area but your ship was ordered not to fire?

JS: Oh yes, yeah.

MZ: Can you tell me a little more about that?

JS: Oh, I know about it, but I don't know all the particulars about it. But there was a... The reason that is, is we had been buzzed by what we called "Bed Check Charlie", and he would come over on nights and shine a light. And what he was doing was, we were making smoke, what they call making smoke, and ships were hidden in that smoke, so this Bed Check Charlie had a little slight plane and he would fly in there and he would shut it off and listen for noise on the ground to tell where a ship was at. So we would be

welding, working -- we worked twenty-four hours a day, when we were down there, and of course Bed Check Charlie would come in and we'd sit around for a while, and when Bed Check Charlie would leave we'd start again.

MZ: Bed Check Charlie?

JS: Huh?

MZ: Bed Check Charlie?

JS: Yeah. That's what we called him. Just to harass us. Just to spy on us.

MZ: OK. So how long was the ship there and what kind of repair did it receive?

JS: Well, what we did, and I helped to do it, is we cut out all the damaged stuff and put plates on and welded them on and did all of that work in there. Enough to get us under way. And then next we got the water out, got the water pumped out, and fixed the steering gear to where we could use it. In fact, we had to steer the ship by hand all the way to Seattle, Washington. Including through a storm.

MZ: Did she go unescorted all the way back to the states?

JS: Yeah.

MZ: Wow.

JS: Yeah. One of the plates we put on start leaking, and actually on the horizon was a convoy of oil tankers. And they were going towards the Philippines and Okinawa and up

there. Well, we were taking on water and the captain radioed that we needed help because we were taking on water, and they didn't even slow down. Just kept on going. So then we made it to Saipan, (inaudible), I guess it was. They had two people on and they went down to the hospital ship, and we did a little oaring and then we got to Pearl Harbor and went on dry dock there. To put the plates on, to get underneath to put the plates on. Good we did, because we hit a storm when we were out to sea getting along to San Francisco. Going to Seattle up that way. We probably would've sunk then and there, because it would've ripped those plates off or something.

MZ: Now you ended up in Seattle, right?

JS: Right.

MZ: And what happened there?

JS: Well, they took everybody off and put them in barracks. I wasn't on liberty. I got the first liberty thirty days later. So then... Actually, the ship went on display. The first time the American public had seen a *kamikaze*-damaged ship. And there was people from everywhere coming to see it, and they were estimating between sixty-five and seventy-five thousand people went on board the ship in three days.

MZ: Why would they do that? What was the purpose of it?

JS: Well, just trying to sell war bonds. Basically. But it wasn't too much necessary then, because the war was over in August and this was in May.

MZ: So you went home for thirty days. What did you do? What was the first place you went?

JS: Say again?

MZ: What was the first place you went?

JS: Home?

MZ: Oh, so when you went home, did you go to your parents' house first?

JS: Yup. I'll tell you a little story about that first. Whenever we got hit at Okinawa, I'd been up for about... I would say thirty hours, maybe thirty-six hours. I don't know. A long time. So when we got hit by it, I still didn't sleep, because I had things to do. So we got to Okinawa. Somewhere in the morning, I don't remember when, somewhere like nine o'clock or ten o'clock in the morning, I went down to the engine room to set up and sleep. Well they held a muster to see who was missing or whatever. But of course, naturally, I didn't go to the muster. So later on that day there was a little yeoman, good friend of mine whose name was Vernon Strauss, saw me and said, "Where you been?" Well I said, "Been right here." And he said, "We had a muster, you didn't come to muster, and they got you

marked as Missing In Action. I was trying to stop it." Well he didn't, he wasn't able to stop it. So on the way home, we didn't write too many letters now that we knew we were going home. So we got to Seattle and we were rushing around trying to get plane, train tickets to go down cross-country to go home. We got into Fargo, South Dakota and here's big headlines, papers, the ship! So Jack Williams and myself gave a porter who was leaving the train in Fargo, we gave him five dollars apiece and wrote a note for him to send a telegram. Well, that was ten bucks, and ten bucks in 1945 was a bunch of money. Well, he didn't send them. So I got home, I got on a train in Cincinnati, I got to South Fork, Kentucky and my dad drove a bus for a company called Pastor Bus. So anyway, I knew where he was at, and of course I got off the train on the Kentucky side of the river and walked across the bridge down to where my dad was working at. He was on afternoon shift, we got there late, so he finished his shift we get in the car and we go home. I think we had a car, maybe a truck, I don't remember what it was now. So anyway, we get home around one, one-thirty in the morning, so I went in and my Mom was there, and she said, "Well, I got the telegram two days ago. I didn't believe it." That's what that was. So, I

almost beat the telegram home, when they sent the telegram that I was missing in action.

MZ: So he got it but he didn’t believe it?

JS: Yup.

MZ: Wow, well it’s a good thing that he didn’t believe it. That would be horrible news for any parent to get.

JS: Yeah, I think it was two days before that that she said. My mother said that.

MZ: So, you spent your thirty days of leave, and then you go back to... Well, did you go back to the Laffey?

JS: Yeah, Seattle, yeah.

MZ: And what did you do there? I imagine the ship wasn’t ready to go by then.

JS: Well, actually, they gave us... We’d go down the ship and turn to on the ship. We weren’t allowed... Well, we’d do different things that we could do. We were limited to what we could do to repair the ship. In fact, we couldn’t do anything for repairs. Later, some time there, I don’t know when it was, but they gave us the chance to go work after four or five in the evenings until eight o’clock in the morning, so you could work nights if you wanted to. So a lot of the people, in the Harbor Islands, they had flour mills. So a lot of people went to work at the flour mill. And it was like ten dollars for a night, ten dollars is ten

dollars I guess, and they paid you every night. So a lot of people went down and worked in the flour mills overnight. Eight hours. So I said, I'll go down to the shipyards to see if we got any jobs down there. I went down and applied for a job and they asked me what my experience was and I said, well, high-pressure steam. I'd worked on steam turbines and all that stuff. Immediately, they gave me a job. I was making a dollar and a quarter an hour. Big money in 1945! And I had a crew of six people. And why they gave me a crew I'll never know. I'm twenty-two years old (laughter). And so we'd go down to work on different ships. One thing to work on is Kaiser Liberty had a terrible whine in the reduction gear when you'd go out, so we'd work on that and it was... We couldn't fix it. So finally, a little guy in our group told one of the engineers that that none of the pieces they made would get into the gear, you see? So anyway, he said "I'll tell you what's wrong with it." So he told him what's wrong with it, and they made a new gear, and we tore that reduction unit apart and put in the new gear and fixed it. It was interesting to work on that stuff. Great big gears and stuff like that.

MZ: Now this was a job that you got when you got out of the service?

JS: No, I was still in the Navy.

MZ: Ah, you're still in the Navy.

JS: Yeah, and I'm making big money, because all of the people I'm working for started working for eighty cents an hour, or seventy cents.

MZ: And this is all while you were waiting for the ship to get repaired?

JS: Yeah, sure was.

MZ: So the crew was expected to, I guess, re-man the ship then, right?

JS: Oh yeah.

MZ: All right. So, once the ship's ready to go, where to from there?

JS: Well, actually, we... Actually, the Navy would not accept the ship until the shipyard took it out for what they call a shakedown, to see if anything's wrong, before they accept it. Well, we did that, and they accepted it. And we stayed there for a little while, a few days, weeks, I don't remember now. And we went to Seattle, Washington. Or no, not Seattle... San Diego, California (cough). Then, we stayed on... And in the meantime, I'm trying to get out of the Navy. Because we had a point system that says that if we have sixty-five points, that we could get a discharge. Well I had sixty-six the day the war was over. So anyway,

there was eight of us on the ship that were in the same boat. And we're irritating the executive officer about getting replacements. He wouldn't turn us loose until we had replacements. So we're in San Diego, and we're doing all kinds of things, doing rendezvous with submarines, doing plane guard for the carriers when they were training pilots and all of that, and so finally they said, OK, you can go if you transfer to another destroyer that's going back to the States. You can take your chances on going cross-country and go to Great Lakes to get discharged. Excuse me a second. So, we got on there. Well, on the way back, we're taking fifty marines back with us. Going back to the States. And one of the Marines was sick. We hit a storm, one of the Marines was sick. And we had one we were worried he was about to die, he was in bad shape from seasick. So we're getting pretty close to... We're heading for San Diego, well, San Pedro, California was closer. So we made a full fire run into San Pedro, California.

MZ: They made a what run?

JS: Full fire. You know, full speed.

MZ: Oh, OK. Full fire, all right.

JS: And when we got there, it was about ten o'clock at night, and here's all the media there and the lights and everything else, and this GI — Marine walked off, walked

across that night. He got the ambulance. There was silence and it took about ten, fifteen seconds and everyone realized what he did and applauded him (laughter).

MZ: So I take it he lived?

JS: Oh yeah, he lived. But anyway, we lay around there for about a week, I guess, in San Pedro, and posting on the bulletin board says we get underway at 600, 0600, to go through the Panama Canal to Portland, Maine (laughs). We went through the Panama Canal, all the way up to Portland, Maine.

MZ: What was the name of this ship?

JS: The Laff-- The Bede.

MZ: The Bede?

JS: 456, yeah, 456.

MZ: 456, OK.

JS: It's exactly the same thing that I came over on. So anyway, we get up there and we lay around for a while. But in the meantime, I got sunburnt in Panama. We went out and went fishing. Everyone went ashore and we decided we were supposed to get retirement, so we went and decided to go fishing. We didn't want to go and get all messed up so we couldn't get out because we'd be in the brig or something. So anyway, I got sunburnt. Well, here I am, in Portland, Maine, and I mean, I'm in misery. I've got great big

blisters on my back. And just five days after we left Panama we were up there. And it was cold, man it was cold. March, about March sixteenth. Well, I don't know what it was. March something. So you had to wear long johns if you did anything outside, and I was miserable. I managed to get ashore and get a haircut. So I spent most of the time, and after that I CI'd my uniform to get it spiffy clean and shoes shined and everything, all that for just something to do. And so all of a sudden we had an Admiral's inspection. Well, here I am with blisters on my back and all that and had to go stand in orders. And they'd walk through for inspection. As the Admiral walked by me, he went a step and turned around and reached for my peacoat and opened it up to see how my stripes looked, and looked at my calves and my shoes and everything. And he said, "Very good, son." And I was the only one (laughs) who got a commendation from him. I did the things I was supposed to do to make me look sharp (laughter). Everybody else in the whole watch, they didn't get a haircut, their stripes were dirty, and all everything like that.

MZ: Right. You don't remember what Admiral that was, do you?

JS: No I don't. No, I don't, I really don't.

MZ: So then what? How long after that was it before you were discharged?

JS: Well, we went from Portland, Maine to Boston again, stayed a week or two. Stopped overnight in Philadelphia, going down the coast. And then went to Norfolk, Virginia. Well, we're sitting around there and every day we was irritating the XO, the Executive Officer, as to when there's going to be replacements. So all of a sudden there's another bulletin on the bulletin board. "We will get under way at 0600 for Guantanamo Bay for a six-week shakedown cruise with the new carrier, the Roosevelt." So I said to my buddies, I said, "I'm going to AWOL. I am not going to Gitmo," is what they called it. So then I calmed down a little bit, I said, "Aw, let's do something. Let's pack our seabags." So, we did. We packed our seabags and kept out what we needed. Soap, shaving gear and whatever. So at four o'clock the next morning, here comes the MA, the Master of Arms. He says, "Get your seabags together, you're going ashore." Well, that was the easiest thing in the world because all we had to do was open up that drawstring and drop it down the hole, pull the drawstring, put it over your shoulder and up the ladder you went. So we're sitting on the dock, waving bye-bye. So then we stayed there two or three days and then we went to Great Lakes and got discharged. But you know, when I left Great Lakes, there was a yeoman, a third-class yeoman, who was in

my company in Great Lakes, and he took away all the papers when we went on the draft going to Norfolk. So the first thing I saw when I got back to Great Lakes is he's there taking up all of our papers again, and I looked at him, and I said, "Oh, I'll get you over there, I'll bust you right between the eyes." He lived in Chicago, and every other week he'd be able to go home. His home. He had every other weekend's duty. He'd never left Great Lakes. And I'd been all over the world (laughs).

MZ: Gosh. Well, you'd seen quite a bit compared to him.

JS: Oh yeah. But he was able to go home, every other week.

MZ: So... Oh! Do you recall when you were when you heard the atomic bomb had been dropped?

JS: I was in Seattle, we were just finishing up repairs of the ship. I don't know the day that it dropped, but I do remember the day that the War was declared over, the fourteenth of August. It was in there, must have been, somewhere around six or eight. Somewhere on seven or eight. I was on the ship. By then they'd taken us back on board ship and we were staying on the ship.

MZ: OK. Were you surprised the war ended? When it did?

JS: No. We knew pretty well, we'd heard rumors what was happening. So we were not surprised. Happy, really, because we knew it was going to be over.

MZ: Well I can imagine, really. You had been at war for around four years.

JS: Yeah, it was quite a thing. I was in the shower whenever they announced that, so I put a towel on and got up on deck and I knew where the whistle and the siren manual control was, and I went up all those lanyards to get that thing whistling and firing. Get going, see. Well, by doing that... I had liberty, you know. In the time I got dressed again, why gee whiz, there had to be somebody left on the ship. If they didn't stop us from going ashore, there was going to be no one left to keep the ship going. Because it was actually going at that time. There were different things that had to be maintained. And I couldn't get ashore (laughter). And the parties and everything were over, and the next day I had liberty and went over to Seattle and there wasn't a soul I don't think on the street, around anywhere.

MZ: Really?

JS: Yeah, and me and another fellow who was on the ship, I can't remember his name but I can remember what he looks like, we were downtown Seattle and there was nobody around. And here's a guy who came along with a great big old Century Buick, that had two spare tires, one on each side, on the fender belt, and they had turned the gasoline loose.

So you could get all the gasoline you wanted. It had been rationed until then. He stopped and he said, “What are you doing?” We’re just looking. “Do you want to go to Vancouver? British Columbia.” I said sure. So we got in the car with him and went up to Vancouver, British Columbia. Just because he could do it. OK. Anyway... I have to change places here, and I’ll be right... I’m right here.

MZ: All right, OK.

JS: Well, I got a chance to go to Vancouver. Then, we came back and then for... Actually, what happened, whenever they announced the war was over on the fourteenth, that afternoon, everybody went home. All the shipyard workers, everything. Even a lot of sailors went home. Military people. Just packed on a train and went home. The war was over, you know? Anyway, it took two weeks to get enough people into the shipyard to crew the ship to take it out for shakedown.

MZ: Really?

JS: Everybody went home.

MZ: Well, when the war was over, I guess they figured that was OK, I guess.

JS: Yeah, I didn’t actually see this, but I heard it so many times where they’d go gather up and bring them back, back to work.

MZ: Get back to work.

JS: Yeah, but wherever they went, back home, the military MPs and SPs go get them to bring them back.

MZ: Well, tell me... But first, what rank were you when you got out of the service?

JS: Third class machinist mate.

MZ: Machinist mate third class. OK. So, I assume you went home right away when you got out?

JS: Yes. Two days... There was a fellow in Chicago that I knew and stopped for two days before I went home, but I went home shortly after that.

MZ: OK, and what did you do? Did you decide to go back to school, did you decide to just find a job, what?

JS: Well, try to find a job. And I met my wife, got married, and then went to work for Armco Steel Corporation in Ashland, Kentucky. Worked for that a while, about two years I guess it was, then I moved to Cincinnati and I’ve been there ever since. Since 1950.

MZ: What did you say the name of the steel company was?

JS: Armco Steel?

MZ: Armco Steel.

JS: Yeah.

MZ: Well, is there anything else about the war that stands out to you? Any stories, any recollections I might not have touched on?

JS: Well, actually, I think I talked to you one time and said there's a lot of humor in some things that happened, even though they're dire situations. And I'd like to tell you that one. There was a fellow on the ship, his name was Gebhart. Gebhart was thirty-six years old when we got hit. Of course to us, he was a grandfather. I mean, he was an old man. Well, he was in that number three mound when it got hit and there was fourteen people in the mound, total, and six of them survived. Because it got hit in two times, almost simultaneously. Now... Anyway, it blew him out of the mound, and of course there's a five-hundred pound bomb there. And the concussion from that will get your attention, and it knocked him out. Well, when he when he came to, which may have been a minute or two, I don't know what it was, he sat up. And in the meantime, everything was on fire, all the gasoline burning. And this fellow from New York, his name was Mark Anderson. Mark was the kind of guy who had a voice that never changed, no matter what the situation was. He'd never yell or scream or whatever. He'd just talk in a normal voice. Anyway, Gabby

sat up and he felt this warm stuff running down over him, so first thing he knew that he'd been hit, because that would be blood running down on him. So anyway, he yelled, and in the meantime Mark was fighting fire, he had a fire house and he was kind of forcing the gasoline off the deck, to get it out of the way of the fire. So he says, "Andy, Andy, have I been hit?" And Mark says, "Yeah, Gabby," he says, "If your blood is green, you got hit." What it was, that hydraulic oil in the mound, it blew about five gallons of the stuff onto him. And when he sat up like a start, because he was startled by the warmth, it started running down over him (laughter). So, he never lived that down. Every reunion that we ever had, somebody would mention that to him (laughs).

MZ: Oh, boy (laughs). Well, I guess at the moment he was pretty glad it was just that hydraulic fluid and not really blood.

JS: Oh, yeah. He was quite older when we were in. He came to every reunion until he died when he was eighty-six years old, I think it was.

MZ: Do you still have reunions?

JS: Oh yeah, every year. Every other year it's at the ship, and then this year, this time, it's going to be at Virginia Beach. In October.

MZ: Oh, OK. Any other stories? Anything else?

JS: Oh, I probably could think of some other things, but I tell you what, I'm getting a sore throat.

MZ: Oh, I'm sorry.

JS: Oh, that's all right, no problem, I'm glad to do it. Because I'll tell you, I look at this as being an extension of history, period. Because if you don't, if we don't talk, there's a lot of people (beep) who have been through a tremendous thing that happened to them that don't talk. But I think that's a waste. Because you have to talk. History has to... You have to show the things of history. And I personally would do this all day long just to keep things going.

MZ: Right, right. No, I agree with you. It's... World War II changed the United States in a lot of ways and it took civilians to create armed forces to go out and fight and defend and protect and that's not everyday occurrence.

JS: I'm going to tell you a little story that that little thing reminded me of. I, basically, when I went down to the ship we have a work party, we have... Twice a year they have work parties. We go down, scrub and paint, and scrape and patch (beep) and whatever needs to be done, see. And usually there's anything from twenty to forty, sometimes fifty, show up. I mean, a whole gang of people. We do a

lot of work on that ship. So anyway, well mostly I'm kind of the ambassador to the ship when I go down there, because I tour guide. Yeah, I'm eighty-two years old, I don't do a lot of climbing around anymore. But anyway, I was talking to a group of school kids. The USS Georgetown was there, and they have a facilities for scouts, school groups, that can come and live on the Georgetown for a weekend. And they charge a minimal fee for them, and they beat them, and they take them through the ship, take them to Fort Sumter, and stuff like that. Historic places. But anyway, I'm talking to that group, and the man says, we got to go to the Georgetown, we're supposed to meet some people. And they left. Well, there's a lady standing off to the side, about ten feet, and she says, "My turn?" And I said, yes, she says, "I'm Brit-ish" (laughs). So she said that she lived alongside of the air field for the Eighth Air Force in England. And she said she was very appreciative of the United States, who helped them, otherwise they'd been talking German now, see. She said, "Just to show my appreciation, I'll give you a hug and a kiss." (laughs) And she did! I mean, she planted a good one on me. And that's... She went on, her husband was (beep). So anyway, the next day I'm doing two couples, British husband, doing a tour, and I told them about that incident that happened

the day before. And he says, “I’ll give you a handshake but I will not give you a kiss!” (laughter)

MZ: Oh, man. Well, at least he was grateful!

JS: Yeah? Yeah. Well, I’ve had all kinds of things happen to me. All kinds of things doing this. It’s very rewarding. And then I’ve had some things that really bothered me, too. I was doing the tour of a group... I would say there were about twelve boys, maybe fourteen. And they were all about the same age. And I think they were a church group, to tell you the truth. I don’t know where they came from, but I do know they were from Georgia, down... And they had a chaperone, had a man with them. And so we’re going through the ship, and every little bit, one of them would say, “Did you kill anybody?” Well, I’d say, “No I didn’t.” And then instead of listening to what I got to say, what I was showing them, what I was talking about, another of them would pipe up, “Did you kill anybody?” I kind of got peeved about it, and I turned around and I told the whole group, “I was a crew member of the USS Laffey. And it was designed and built to kill people or to destroy different things.” And I said, “I was part of this crew, and we evidently did kill people. And I don’t want to hear any more about that.” And that was the end of that. And the

man was trying to tell them, that was with them, was trying to tell them that that's improper, see.

MZ: Right. No, it is.

JS: But anyway, that's the kind of stuff that bothers me.

MZ: Yeah, I don't know for some reason that seems to be such an interest for some people, but...

JS: Well, I think they get it off the tube, really. They see it all the time on the tube and they don't see anything else. They don't really understand. I think the thing we have to do is the thing we're trying to do, which is to be able to show both sides of this thing. So that maybe they can understand what's going on and they can manage to see.

MZ: Right, no, I understand. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

JS: Well, I, really... I could talk the rest of the day, but I really think we've done all that I can do. I hope that I've given you enough to make a good thing out of it. One thing I wanted to ask you, what will this be on... Can you get that from the Internet and go and get this stuff and read it, or...?

MZ: Well, what happens is it'll get it transcribed. A copy of it goes to the museum and if need be they'll send you a copy to edit.

JS: Hang on a minute. What did you say?

MZ: Oh. They'll send you a copy to edit, if it needs to be edited. And you'll send that back to the museum, and eventually I understand that they will send you a bound copy of the interview.

JS: Oh, OK, that's good.

MZ: And another copy will go into the museum's archives. And the other thing I need to talk to you about when we get off is the agreement form to allow researchers and scholars to be able to read the transcript.

JS: Sure. I'm fine with that.

MZ: So that's about it!

JS: Well, I'll tell you what, it's been enjoyable on my part, and I hope I can tell enough to have an impact on what you're trying to do and all of that. I've enjoyed it, really.

MZ: Well, I think, I always think that each interview that's added to the museum helps to add to the overall experience of what happened in the Pacific, or what happened in World War II.

JS: Right, and the other thing too, is you got... I started to say something, I lost it. I'm sorry. I don't know what that was, I don't know what it was.

MZ: That's OK.

JS: That’s another thing, too, this... People my age, you better start getting them, because we’re going to lose it.

MZ: Yeah, I think people understand... This might sound corny, but to understand the future and the present you have to look back to the past.

JS: Oh yeah.

MZ: And if you don’t have some type of oral or written history, then I mean, you’re right, it gets lost. I always remind myself that I need to get as many of these as I can, and it’s kind of a regret of mine that I didn’t start things a lot sooner, or didn’t start working for the Museum a lot sooner.

JS: I have a daughter that just started working with the Historical Society at Ohio State University and she said the same thing. She wished she had started doing this quite a long time ago.

MZ: Yeah. History is the type of thing that’s out there to collect right now. But in forty years, maybe someone will start thinking about that.

JS: Right.

MZ: Well all right, I guess we can wrap it up now.

JS: Sure.

MZ: On behalf of the Museum and myself, I just want to say thanks. I really appreciate that you made the time for me this morning.

JS: Well, I’m glad to do it, glad to do it.

MZ: I guess that’s it!

JS: Well, thank you very much, it’s been a pleasure.

END OF AUDIO FILE