

Ervin Vernon Oral History Interview

ROBERT GRINSLADE: This is Robert Grinslade. Today is November 3, 2012. I am interviewing Mr. Ervin Vernon. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the Nimitz Hotel. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies, archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Mr. Vernon, I'm happy that you took the time today to come and visit with us, and tell us about your experiences during the war. And to get started with, I'd just like to have you give us your full name, your date of birth, when you were born, where you were born, a little bit about your family, and then we can go from there.

ERVIN VERNON: Okay. My name is Ervin [Kevall?] Vernon. My place of birth is Enid, Oklahoma. November 21, 1924.

RG: And how about your parents?

EV: Oh! My father's name was Samuel Henry Vernon. His birthplace is somewhere -- Texas. Fannin County, Texas. And my mo--

RG: Was that "Phantom" or "Fanning?"

EV: "Fannin." F-A--

RG: F-A-N-N--

EV: --N-N.

RG: --I-N-G?

EV: No.

RG: Just --

EV: F-A-N-N.

RG: Just "Fann," Texas?

EV: In Fannin.

RG: Oh, Fannin. Okay.

EV: Fannin, Texas.

RG: All right. And how about your mom?

EV: My mother, she was born in Oregon, in Dalls, Oregon.

RG: How do you spell that town name?

EV: I think it's D-A-L-L-S.

RG: Okay. And what did your father do for a living?

EV: My father was a stationary engineer.

RG: Okay. What kind of --

EV: That --

RG: -- duty was that? Do you remember?

EV: Not sure. But he worked at Wichita Falls, Texas, for the
Wichita Falls Ice Company, I believe. And early on in his
teenage years, he worked for the King Ranch. He was a cook
on the chuck wagon on several of their cattle drives.

RG: So he was the most important man of the whole outfit?

EV: Yeah, yeah. He could make biscuits in the top of a flour sack.

RG: Is that right?

EV: Yeah. And cook cornbread in a cast iron Dutch oven, you know, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

RG: Did you pick up any of that ability?

EV: No. (laughs) No.

RG: How about your mom? Was she a homemaker, or did she work somewhere?

EV: My mom was a homemaker. The sad part -- my mother and father divorced when I was about three-and-a-half to four years old, so my father raised I and my two brothers.

RG: Okay. And how about your brothers? Do you have any sisters, or just brothers?

EV: Just two brothers, twins. They were twins.

RG: And what were their names?

EV: Ovie and Novie Vernon.

RG: So Ovie --

EV: Ovie is O-V-I-E.

RG: Okay. And Novie?

EV: And Novie is N-O-V-I-E. It was Ovie Harold and Novie Gerald. And Ovie was in the Navy. He was on an old four-stack destroyer called the [Sycard?], and -- which was a converted -- it was converted into a minesweeper. And Ovie

said when he was in the South Pacific, he witnessed one of the battles that the *Claxton* was in.

RG: Okay. Did you ever --

EV: And --

RG: -- see them during the war, when you were --

EV: We were at Manus or the harbor that the *Claxton* used to go in and get fuel and ammunition; well, he was there. He was a signalman on the *Sycard*. So he knew that I was on the *Claxton*, and when we came in -- we were both in the same harbor, and so he invited me to come over and visit. So I got an okay from the skipper, and stopped, let me take a little leave just to go over and visit with him on his ship and have dinner, and --

RG: Oh, that was nice.

EV: Yeah. It was real nice.

RG: Now, how about your other brother?

EV: Novie and I went in the Navy together. We were in boot camp together, and we got sent to Panama together. And then the Sullivan brothers got killed, and they came out with a directive that brothers couldn't serve together, so they split us up. They moved him to Nicaragua, and I stayed in Panama until the *Claxton* came through. And so Novie eventually ended up on the *New Jersey*, being a plankowner on the *New Jersey*.

RG: Okay. Now, where did you go to school? Did you go to school in --

EV: I went to school in Pueblo, Colorado. The grade school was the Fountain Grade School.

RG: "Fountain?"

EV: Fountain. And then I went to Park Hill Junior High School, and then I enrolled in Centennial High School. And then I dropped out of Centennial High School to enter the Navy in 1942.

RG: Okay. So you --

EV: September of 1942, I joined the Navy.

RG: And that's when you were 17?

EV: That's when I was 16.

RG: Sixteen? Okay.

EV: Yeah.

RG: Now, how old were you when World War II started? When December seventh happened?

EV: Well, '42, I was 16, so I was 15 when the World War II started. Nineteen forty-one was Pearl Harbor.

RG: Okay. Do you remember anything about that day? On December seventh, where were you? How did you hear about the war?

EV: Oh, we heard about it because President Roosevelt, there was -- well, at that time, the way the news got out, they

had newspapers, and they would deliver what they called an "extra." So you could hear the newspaper boys calling, "Extra! Extra! Extra! Read all about it!" And also on the radio. Roosevelt came on the radio and reassured the American people, and --

RG: And he told about the war starting --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- and the attack?

EV: About the war, and they --

RG: Now, did you guys have a television at that point in time?

EV: (laughs)

RG: No?

EV: No.

RG: It hadn't come along yet?

EV: No. That was long before television. We had radios back then.

RG: I think TV came along in the mid-50s somewhere, early --

EV: Oh --

RG: -- fifties.

EV: -- yeah. [A long time?], but...

RG: So do you remember the general feeling? I mean, at your age, were you surprised to hear this, or did you know where Pearl Harbor was? Or what kind of reaction did you have, or your family have, to this?

EV: Well, it was a real shock, you know? And the basic feeling was real shock. How could they do that, you know? And right away, you have got the defensive wanting to go --

RG: You want to go get back at them?

EV: Yeah, go retaliate. So...

RG: Now, had you done any kind of work? Did you have a job prior to going in the Navy? Or did you just drop out of high school at that point and go ahead and try and get in?

EV: Well, I went to Park Hill Junior High School, and then I started delivering telegrams for Postal Telegraph Company. So that was just kind of a part-time job. And then I enrolled in high school, and I was in my freshman year, and then that's when I dropped out to join the Navy.

RG: Okay. And this was 1942?

EV: This was 1942.

RG: All right. And during the time between Pearl Harbor and the time you joined the Navy; did you do any specific studying to do to go into the Navy? Or how did you choose to go into the Navy?

EV: Well, the reason I joined the Navy is because I didn't want to get drafted into the Army. It's just that simple. And so I chose the Navy. But my two older brothers, they were going in the Navy, and so that kind of gave me the incentive to want to follow them.

RG: Sure. Okay. And when you joined, where did you go to your basic training?

EV: I joined the Navy in Pueblo, Colorado, and I went through basic training at Camp [Green Bay?], and I think that's right somewhere out of Chicago.

RG: I think so.

EV: They were processing the companies pretty fast, so my whole company was -- we received our uniforms, and our bedding and equipment, and all of our shots, and we were drilled for probably at least a week.

RG: At least?

EV: A week's training. Then the company was loaded on a train, and we were transported to San Diego, California. And at San Diego, California, we got orders to -- well, we didn't get orders, but I mean, we started getting shots. So they were giving us malarial shots, because we -- they were going to send us to Panama, which we didn't know about at that time. But then, after we received our shots, they loaded us on an old World War I luxury liner, and we sailed off with disclosed orders, and we ended up in Panama.

RG: Do you remember the name of the ship?

EV: No. (laughs) No, I wish that I could. But I know it was a gorgeous old luxury liner, because I remember the long,

nice stairway. The bunks were built in there with two-by-four timbers. They just went in and installed bunks --

RG: Yeah, it wasn't built --

EV: -- with wood timber.

RG: -- for comfort, was it?

EV: No, (laughs) it wasn't. And --

RG: And about how many bunks did they have going up the wall to sleep in?

EV: Well, I'm not positive, but probably about six.

RG: So they were six high?

EV: Six high, yeah. At least six high.

RG: Okay. Did you have any problems on that voyage to Panama?

EV: No. It was kind of a luxury cruise, like, because I spent a lot of time watching the water, and you could see the different types of fish in the water.

RG: Sure. You never got seasick? That was never --

EV: Never.

RG: -- a problem?

EV: No, I never got seasick.

RG: Okay. So when you got to Panama, what happened then?

EV: We got to Panama; I was stationed in the advance base depot. That was a huge warehouse complex, and we supplied the outlying bases. And so I was a fireman, machinist's mate striker, so I worked in their equipment area. So I

drove different heavy equipment, like fork trucks, and bulldozers, and trains, and stuff like that.

RG: Now, how were you trained to do this? Were you trained in San Diego for this?

EV: No. I learned on the job. On-the-job training. And --

RG: So once you got to San Diego, what did you do in San Diego?

EV: We just got our shots, and stood in line, and --

RG: Just kind of waited for the ship?

EV: Waited for the ship. Waited for our orders. And evidently, they were concerned about the Japanese trying to invade the Panama Canal, [invade it?]. When we got to Panama, our extra duty was we were being trained as commandos. So I don't know if they were going to take us to another island or some-- where we were going to become troops; that they were going to use us in an invasion --

RG: So at this point, the only training you had had was your basic training in the Chicago area?

EV: Yeah.

RG: And then you went to San Diego, got onboard the liner and went to Panama, and that's when you started being trained to do all this other stuff?

EV: Yes.

RG: Okay. And --

EV: And in Panama, I got a Panamanian driver's license, because I was driving -- well, I would take -- from the barracks to the warehouse, I would haul all the sailors in this truck, like... I had to have the license because I was driving on the Panamanian highways or roads, you know? So --

RG: (inaudible)

EV: -- I got my driver's license, my Panamanian driver's license.

RG: Okay. Now, you say you were trained to be commandos, or they were training you to be a commando?

EV: Yeah. With fixed bayonets on -- I think they were basic .30-06 rifles, with fixed bayonets.

RG: So actually, you were being trained to do land fighting, like a Marine or --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- Army would be?

EV: I guess we were being trained in case we had to counter-invade the Japanese, if they wanted to invade Panama.

RG: So you were going to be the defense force for that?

EV: Right, yeah.

RG: And how long did you stay on Panama?

EV: Let's see. I joined the Navy September the ninth, so I was in boot camp, so it was probably before the end of September I was in San Diego. But it was probably sometime

in October that I got to Panama, because I did celebrate my birthday --

RG: Happy birthday.

EV: -- (laughs) in Panama. I remember that, because I could go to the commissary and buy beer.

(laughter)

RG: So you turned 18 in Panama?

EV: No, I turned 17. I turned 17 in Panama.

RG: So your dad signed for you to join the Navy, then?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. So you got in early that way?

EV: Yeah. That's how I got in then.

RG: All right. And how long do you think you were in Panama?

EV: Well, I was there from, let's say, September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May.

RG: So about eight months?

EV: Yeah. During that time, I spent time on the sub chaser.

And so I went aboard the sub chaser.

RG: And the name of that ship was?

EV: It was SC-677.

RG: So it didn't have a name? It was just a --

EV: It didn't have a name. It just had a number. And it was made of wood, it was 110 feet long, and they needed a ship to try to combat the German submarines, so they made quite

a few of those. And so the sub chaser had two diesel straight-eight pancake -- what they call "pancake diesels." And we were having trouble with one of the cylinders, so we were removing the cylinders, and I strained my back. And so I was put in a hospital in Panama, and they checked me over, and released me into a pool. And this pool they used for shore patrol. Also, they used the sailors, the shore patrolmen, to ride transit on the cargo ships as they came through the canal. Since I was a fireman, I would be put down in the engine room or the fire room while the cargo ship would transit the canal. And so I was in this pool when the Little Beavers came through the canal. It wasn't the Beavers then, but when the *Claxton* came through the canal. But I think the *Claxton* and the [*Osman?*] or the *Dyson*, there was two destroyers together that came through.

RG: Now, you mentioned the Little Beavers.

EV: That didn't happen until later.

RG: Okay. Well, we'll discuss that when we get to it, then.

EV: Yeah. So they were short manpower, and so they came to the pool where I was located in Panama and they asked for volunteers. And so they, you know, "You, you, you, and you, pack your sea bag and ship out." So --

RG: And so you just became a volunteer?

EV: I just became a volunteer (laughs) by the point of the finger.

RG: You bet.

EV: Yeah. And --

RG: Been there, done that.

EV: And then I got my sea bag packed, and I reported to the *Claxton*.

RG: Now, that's the first time ever been a warship, besides the minesweeper?

EV: Yeah. (laughs) That's the first time. Yeah. [There was?] --

RG: I'm sorry -- the sub chaser.

EV: Yeah. Yeah, besides the sub chaser. And it was an awesome experience, because I remember going aboard the *Claxton*, it's like a monster. And there was a tremendous roar because of all the machinery. So that was a kind of a shock there. But since I was a fireman, a fireman first class, but a machinist's mate striker, but I was selected to do duty -- report to the forward fire room. And my bunk was in the aft end of the ship, the aftward part of the ship.

RG: So you had to go the whole distance of the ship to get to your duty?

EV: I had to (laughs) go all the way from the aft section to the forward fire room to do my --

RG: Well, it --

EV: -- watches.

RG: -- kept you in shape, then, huh?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Now, how were you trained as a fireman? Where did you get that training from? On the job again?

EV: Yeah, on-the-job training.

RG: And the same with the machinist striker? You were taught that on the job also?

EV: Yeah.

RG: So you had had no formal training before that time in either one --

EV: None.

RG: -- of these? None?

EV: None. Just --

RG: So this was a hurry-up-and-learn-quick routine?

EV: Yeah. Yeah.

RG: Okay. So your first job was as a machinist.

EV: Yeah.

RG: Correct?

EV: Yeah. And --

RG: Were you assigned to somebody, and you just worked under them, and they told --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- you how to do it?

EV: In Panama, there was a chief machinist's mate. I was assigned to a chief machinist's mate, and he was training me. He was training me on how to use a lathe and different things.

RG: And what would you make? I mean, what was your job to do to make things? What kind of things did you make as a machinist?

EV: Didn't really make anything. I just --

RG: Or repair things?

EV: Like we used to change brakes and stuff like that, wheels on heavy equipment. Yeah.

RG: And then when you got on the fireman duty, how were you taught that? What was your job as a fireman?

EV: I tended the boiler. I stood watch on the boiler. And the *Claxton*, in each fire room, they had two boilers. They had a forward and an aft boiler. And so they would have a fireman stand watch on each boiler. Where the burners were on the boilers, they had a fireman stand watch. The fire room consisted of two firemen, and a water tender, and a

water tender up above would keep control of the water level in the boilers.

RG: So the term "fireman" didn't mean you were going to fight fires, basically. You weren't a fireman like a fireman --

EV: No.

RG: -- [on the street?] --

EV: No.

RG: -- "I'm here to go fight" --

EV: No.

RG: -- "house fires."

EV: I was a boiler tender. I was one of the boiler tenders.

RG: So you kept charge of the fire in the boiler?

EV: Yeah. And the way they controlled the fire in the boiler, they had burners. They had burner barrels.

RG: "Burner barrels?"

EV: Yeah. Burner barrels were a long device about like that.

RG: So about two feet long?

EV: Yeah. And so these burner barrels had nozzles on the end of the barrel, and they, at the nozzles, atomized the fuel. So --

RG: So that was like the carburetor of that boiler?

EV: Yeah. And you control the temperature by the size of the nozzle. All the barrels were the same, but the nozzles on the end were different. If you wanted a hotter fire, you

would put on a barrel that had a larger opening in the nozzle.

RG: Okay. And this had to be done manually? You had to change that all --

EV: You had to change the nozzles manually.

RG: Okay. So it wasn't something you could do automatically by turning a valve or something? You had to physically change that nozzle out?

EV: You had to change the nozzle. But then each boiler had a fuel pressure control handle. Like you had four barrel positions on the face of the boiler. What you would do if you wanted to change the barrel, you would take and shut the valve off, and then you would take the barrel out. We had a rack that had the different-sized nozzles on barrels that were already prepared, so we knew if we wanted to go to a hotter fire, we would have to take the small nozzle out and put a larger nozzle in there.

RG: Okay. So you get more fuel going in there?

EV: So you get more fuel going into the boiler.

RG: So this was, like, right next to you? You could just reach over and grab another --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- nozzle?

EV: Yeah. The barrel racks were right in front of the boiler.

RG: Okay. So this was --

EV: Like right next to --

RG: -- [very close to?] --

EV: Yeah, within... And the barrels were held into the furnace by a screw-type device.

RG: It had threads on it?

EV: Yeah, it had threads on it, and you would put the barrel in, and it was actually the oil feed. And you would bring the oil feed over and hook it up to the barrel, and then you would tighten the butterfly valve on it. So that's --

RG: So this was all very quick? You could do this relatively quickly?

EV: Yeah. Yeah. You could do it really fast.

RG: So if the captain were to order this to go higher speed, you would just change out a nozzle to a bigger nozzle --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- and then it would go faster?

EV: Yeah. Yeah. We had what they called -- they were Babcock furnaces. You looked at the furnace, and there was the main furnace area. And then over next to it, there was another furnace, and it was for superheated steam. So the main furnace was the one you kept running, both furnaces, forward fire room and the aft fire room, The forward fire

room provided steam for the forward engine room, and the aft fire room provided steam for the aft engine room.

RG: Okay. So you had how many engines onboard the *Claxton*?

EV: Well, they had two engine rooms, and they had two -- [wheeled?] two propellers on there, so they had at least two turbines. They were steam turbines.

RG: So the aft --

EV: Turbine.

RG: -- turbine would be fired by the aft one, and then the --

EV: The aft --

RG: -- forward --

EV: -- fire room and -- yeah.

RG: Take care of the other one?

EV: Right. And the forward fire room could actually feed steam to the aft engine room. Like if we were going from the States to Pearl Harbor and we are only doing 11 knots, or -- then -- but one fire room could actually handle both engine rooms.

RG: Okay. So they were independent of each other? They worked together --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- but they could be --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- independent of each other --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- also?

EV: They could work independently.

RG: Okay. So in case one got damaged or one had to be shut down, the other one --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- could still operate?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Now, could you get the same speed out of one as you could both?

EV: No.

RG: Okay. It would always slow down, then?

EV: Yeah.

RG: All right. Any problems ever with doing that? Did you have to shut one down to fix something, or...?

EV: No.

RG: They all ran pretty smooth?

EV: Yeah. Because the black gang on the *Claxton* took pride in taking care of their boilers. The boilers had to be serviced. In other words, we'd go alongside of a -- the *Dixie* was a repair ship --

RG: The *Dixie*?

EV: *Dixie*. And then we would shut down. We would take steam from the *Dixie* to run our systems -- you know, run the

generators for electricity, and the steam for heating water and everything, and --

RG: In other words, while the *Claxton* was down, the *Dixie* would run the --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- steam for the --

EV: Provide the steam. Or we'd get shore power to do that. But then we would open the boilers. We would go in the boilers, and we would clean the tubes, and clean the firesides. So the guys that worked in the fire room, they called us the "black gang," because you would get black --

RG: All that soot and stuff.

EV: -- working inside of a [mud?] drum, which is a drum about this big.

RG: Probably about three foot in diameter?

EV: Yeah. And it had thousands of tubes. So to service that mud drum, you had to go in there with an air-driven wire brush and run the wire brush up through the tube, and clean all the scale out of the tube.

RG: Whoa. All the steam was fresh water steam?

EV: Yes.

RG: Okay. So you had your own fresh water storage tanks, and that would --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- heat up, and then you would just recycle the steam?

Okay.

EV: Yeah. Well, we had what they called the "evaporator." The evaporator, it turned salt water into fresh water. It distilled into fresh water. So that's where the oil king came in. The oil king, one of his duties was that he had to check the salinity of the water. And so he would test the water that was being produced by the evaporator, and when it became too salty, then they would have to shut the evaporator down and clean it. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

RG: You didn't want salt water running through your tubes.

EV: No. For showering, and cooking and drinking, yeah.

RG: Those evaporators, how many were onboard the *Claxton*, evaporators?

EV: I know they had at least one, and the evaporator, I think it was in the forward engine room. But they --

RG: How big an item are we talking about here?

EV: Well, it was a pretty big chunk of machinery. Yeah.
But...

RG: Now, were you in charge of that also, or that wasn't part of your duties?

EV: No. The evaporator was run by the guys in the engine room. But the oil king had the responsibility to make sure that

you are evaporating or you are distilling fresh water, because the oil king would chemically test the water for salinity. And so that's what I ended up doing.

RG: Eventually?

EV: Eventually, yeah. But I --

RG: But your main function onboard the *Claxton* at that point in time was you were the fireman, and --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- you took care of those boilers?

EV: Yeah. I took care of the boilers.

RG: All right. When you first came on the *Claxton*, it was in Panama. You got on the *Claxton* in --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- Panama. And from there, where did you go?

EV: Where did the *Claxton* go?

RG: Yeah.

EV: Well, from there, the *Claxton* was heading for the south Pacific. One of the first places I remember the *Claxton* going was Bora Bora. And Bora Bora was this really beautiful place. I mean, the water was so clear you could see --

RG: See forever?

EV: -- deep into the water, and so... Then we went to Noumea, New Caledonia. We are getting closer to the war zone. And then --

RG: Now, when you -- go ahead.

EV: Then after we went to Noumea, then I think that's when the squadron was being put together. At first, the *Claxton* went by "Click with the *Claxton*" because it had a couple of dice painted on the bridge, and so that was the theme we had: "Click with the *Claxton*."

RG: "Click" --

EV: "Click" --

RG: -- "with" -- okay.

EV: -- "with the *Claxton*."

RG: Okay. Now, let me go back just a little bit. On your way over from Panama to Bora Bora, and then on to Noumea, were you in a convoy, or were you by yourselves, or with another couple of ships? What was your status going over there? How did you get over there?

EV: Oh, I was in training. (laughs) Basically, yeah, training. I had watch duty, but it was still training, so it was...

RG: So you were always in training?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Pretty much?

EV: Pretty much.

RG: But I mean, how did you get over there? Did you go over in a convoy? The *Claxton*, it went over in a convoy? Or was it by itself when it went over to Bora Bora?

EV: I don't know. (inaudible), but --

RG: You were --

EV: -- as far as I know, we were by ourselves, but we might have had a cargo ship or taking -- you know?

RG: Because I guess most of the time when you were on duty, you were down inside the belly of the ship?

EV: Yeah.

RG: You didn't see --

EV: Yeah, I --

RG: -- much outside?

EV: Yeah. I had no idea what was going on --

RG: Now, how long were --

EV: -- outside.

RG: -- your shifts?

EV: We would do four on and four off.

RG: Okay. And what did you do in those four hours you had off? What was your free --

EV: Well, I did--

RG: -- time like?

EV: Well, when you had four hours off, some of the four hours you could sleep. But you still had duty, so you didn't get eight hours' sleep. So for part of that four hours, you had to do your responsibility, your job assignment.

RG: Okay, now what --

EV: Which could be cleaning, burner barrels, and stuff like that, or cleaning -- like in the fire room, we had to keep all the floor plates polished and everything. Yeah.

RG: But the four hours you were off, that was your sleep time, eat time, write letter time --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- polish shoes time, whatever you --

EV: Right.

RG: -- did? That was just time you had to get your own personal work done?

EV: Right.

RG: Okay. I'm sorry. After you left Noumea, what did you do there? The same thing?

EV: Yeah.

RG: And then once you left Noumea, where did you go from there?

EV: Well, once we left Noumea, we headed for -- I think it was Manus.

RG: "Manus?" M-A-N-U-S?

EV: Yeah. M-A-N-U-S. So I know we were headed towards -- I'm pretty sure it was Manus, because then we started training with other ships. And I think that's when Burke started putting a squadron together.

RG: Okay. Now, Burke, was he the captain of the *Claxton*, or was he --

EV: No. He was on the *Osborne*. And the *Osborne* was our command ship. That's where he resided.

RG: That was the flagship? That --

EV: The flagship, yeah.

RG: Was there a task force name for that, or was that squadron given a name or a designation?

EV: There was a task force. I think it was Task Force 38, but I am not positive.

RG: Okay. And so did all of these ships gather out at sea, or did they come into Noumea and then start getting into a task force and then leaving, or how did that work? How did all your ships get together to form this task force?

EV: [I'm not sure?]. I don't remember that kind of detail.

RG: Okay. That's fine.

EV: Yeah. Because --

RG: Like I said, you were down in the bowels of the ship, so you --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- didn't see much --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- happening upstairs.

EV: Yeah. Mount five, the five-inch 38, was --

RG: Mount five --

EV: Mount five. It was a five-inch 38 gun. And there was five of those guns on the *Claxton*, and mount five was the engineers' gun. So I ended up being -- like I was a handler. I worked not in the gun mount, but down in the magazine.

RG: Okay. The magazine was below the gun turret?

EV: Below the gun turret.

RG: Okay. Was that one deck down? Two decks down?

EV: One deck down.

RG: Okay. That's where they stored the powder and the --

EV: That's where --

RG: -- shells?

EV: -- they stored the projectiles and the powder. But they had a lower magazine where they stored more of the powder and projectiles.

RG: But everything that was going to be used for a particular battle was up in that deck right under the gun?

EV: Well, yeah.

RG: Okay. And how did you --

EV: And when they ran out up there, you had to go down below and start pulling it out of the lower --

RG: The lower one?

EV: -- magazine.

RG: Now, how did they get that stuff? Was it like an elevator system that would bring it up to you? Or did they have to hand carry all that stuff up?

EV: Well, from the lower magazine to the upper magazine, all hand.

RG: All hand done? Okay.

EV: But at the bottom of the mount, the mount rotated.

RG: Rotated? The turret itself rotated?

EV: Yeah. So there was an elevator on the mount. A "hoist," they called it. There was a projectile hoist, and so you would take the projectiles and set them on the hoist. And as the projectile was brought up through the hoist, the projectile had a fuse on the top of it, and the hoist would set the fuse.

RG: Oh, it was done automatically?

EV: Yeah, automatically. And then they had a loader that would take the projectile off of the hoist and put it in the breach. Then they add the powder case, and they were, oh, about like that. And --

RG: Probably about 18 to 24 inches long?

EV: Yeah. Let's see. A five-inch 38 -- five inches in diameter and 38 inches long, so that... But the powder was added up by hand through a hole up there. As a matter of fact, that's what Robinett did. Robinett was a powder handler.

RG: And that was his name, "Robinett?"

EV: Yeah. Richard -- Dick -- Robinett. He is one of my shipmates that's here. He is being --

RG: Do you remember how to spell his last name?

EV: R-O-B-I-N-E-T-T, I think.

RG: Okay. That's fine. We just get that for the transcriber so they can know how to spell the name.

EV: Yeah. And --

RG: So you handled the shells, and he handled the powder?

EV: Yeah. And the powder had to be loaded in the breach first, and then they would snap the projectile on top of that. And then they would do the ram that [would arm it?]

RG: How heavy were those shells? Projectiles?

EV: Sixty-two pounds.

RG: Sixty-two pounds? And how many of those did you have to put on that hoist?

EV: I figure at one time, that we could actually fire 21 rounds in seven minutes. But we could -- you know, it was almost automatic.

RG: Okay. So you just got used to doing that?

EV: Yeah.

RG: You must have been in pretty good shape at that point after lifting 62 pounds.

EV: I had a 28-inch waistline, and I weighed probably just barely over 100 pounds. But what the destroyers have, they have a machine that's on the midship; it's called the "loading machine." And they have dummy ammunition. They have bronze projectiles, and then they have phony powder cases.

RG: Okay. Is this for training?

EV: For training. So every day, we spent so much time training on that machine.

RG: That was just to --

EV: And --

RG: -- keep you sharp and keep you (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

EV: Yeah. And so actually, we had competition between the five mounts. So the mounts were all competitive. That's something that Stout had with him.

RG: That was your captain?

EV: Yeah. That was our captain. And it was his influence that created that competition.

RG: I see. Well, that's a good way to do it.

EV: Yeah, really. Because (laughs) I hated that machine. Those projectiles, you could imagine handling those projectiles -- God!

RG: How long would this training last, usually?

EV: I don't know time-wise, but, I mean, it --

RG: I mean, did you have to load 20 shells, or 50 shells, or 100 shells, or --

EV: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We would do so many shells in so much time. And it was all timed. But...

RG: Now, on the *Claxton*, is that the only turret-mounted guns they had, the five-inch guns? Or did they have different -

-

EV: They had 20 millimeters, and they had 40 millimeters.

RG: Okay. So there was antiaircraft guns as well as --

EV: Yeah, yeah.

RG: -- the big guns?

EV: Yeah. I know after the Japanese started using kamikazes, then everything changed. We had to get 40 millimeters, so we had what they called "quad-40s." I know they added more 40 millimeters. But basically, we had 20s on both sides, 20s, and then we had some upper 40s, and on the fantail, we had 20s. In the beginning, before the kamikazes, you had to be real accurate when you were shooting at an airplane.

You had to hit the airplane with the projectile almost, yeah. But then they designed this special shell --

RG: A proximity fuse?

EV: A proximity fuse. And so that helped a lot, because when the shell would get within proximity of the airplane, it would blow up.

RG: So you would get the shrapnel coming out?

EV: So the shrapnel would take out the airplane.

RG: Mm-hmm. That must have been a big help.

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. So from the time the task force started, it was just after Noumea or right about that time when you formed the task force?

EV: Yeah.

RG: What happened after that? Where did you guys go from there? What was next in your series of things to do?

EV: Well, basically, we would gather and do war games, you know? We'd do fueling at sea, and that was another challenge, to get in and -- we fueled off of either cruises or aircraft carriers. Sometimes, if we had a tanker with us, we would fuel off of it. But the key to fueling was to get in and take on the fuel, and break away, get away, because you --

RG: You didn't want to --

EV: -- didn't want to be caught alongside of a tanker when there is some action.

RG: (laughs) If that tanker blows, you blow.

EV: You want to get the hell away from that.

RG: You bet.

EV: Yeah. So...

RG: So how long would a normal refueling take?

EV: (laughs) I don't know.

RG: You don't know? You --

EV: I don't recall.

RG: Did you ever watch them doing that?

EV: Oh, yeah. Yeah. When I was the oil king, I used to actually keep charge of the fuel system, because I had my crew stationed on these different fuel tanks, and we had the fuel feed hoses coming from the tanker or wherever we were getting the fuel from, and dumping the fuel into the cofferdams or --

RG: What did you call them?

EV: Well, the main fuel tanks see, it was gravity fuel. So you have two large tanks; they are called "cofferdams."

RG: "Cofferdams?"

EV: Yes.

RG: C-O-F-F-E-R.

EV: Yeah. They are the main tank that the boilers feed off of.

RG: Okay. So that's the fuel tank?

EV: The fuel tank, the main tank. And you have two of those: you have a forward and an aft one. And when you are fueling, you take two hoses. You take a fuel hose forward, and a fuel hose aft. So you have got fuel being pumped into those tanks, those cofferdams, and then you have manifolds. Down in the fire room, you open the manifolds, and the fuel builds up in the cofferdam, and then the gravity of the fuel pushes the fuel out to your storage tanks. So you have a guy stationed on each storage tank with a set of earphones, and the oil king's up on deck with the earphones, and so he is conference with all your guys on the tanks. They have these measuring -- they are brass, like yardsticks -- dipsticks.

RG: "Dipsticks?" Okay.

EV: So they are keeping track of the level of the fuel flowing into the tanks, and so --

RG: Don't overfill it, yeah.

EV: You don't want to overfill it, because the fuel will come right out of that dipstick.

RG: And you don't want to catch on fire or anything.

EV: No. And this has happened.

RG: Oh, I bet.

EV: Yeah. I had one guy on a tank, and his name was
[Vonhartz?].

RG: "Vonhartz?"

EV: Vonhartz. He is still living. He lives in Maine
somewhere, but he was German. He had a heavy German
accent, and... But the thing is, some of the guys, when
you are in charge, they don't -- like he was kind of a
stubborn guy. So I would say, "Hey, Vonhartz, give me a
reading," and he would say, (imitating German accent)
"Don't worry about it."

RG: (imitating German accent) "Don't worry about it?"

EV: Yeah. (imitating German accent) "Don't worry about it."
And pretty soon, here is screaming, "Shut it off! Shut it
off!" The fuel is coming out of -- this black bunker oil -
- is coming out of this tube where the dipstick goes down.
I mean, it was really flowing out of there, and it was
flowing out into this compartment, running down the stairs
down into the galley. God, a hell of a mess by the time I
got it turned off.

RG: So when you were up on deck watching him, you were actually
in contact with the tanker. And so if you said --

EV: Yeah. Well --

RG: -- "Shut off the forward one," they would shut off that
tube?

EV: Yeah. No, I was in contact with the guys on the tank, and the phone system was in contact with the bridge, and they were in contact with the tanker.

RG: So it took a couple of seconds to get all this --

EV: Yeah. So when you tell them to shut it off, then it... It can be a disaster sometimes.

RG: It can be hairy, yeah.

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. And I'm sorry: you were on deck when all this happened, right?

EV: Yeah.

RG: You were watching all the stuff up there, and you were in contact with the ones down below?

EV: Yeah.

RG: How did they get the hoses from the tanker over to the *Claxton* to hook them into the tanks?

EV: They pulled the hoses over. First, we go alongside. Then they would throw what they called a "monkey fist."

RG: "Monkey fist?"

EV: Yeah. That's a hard ball with a line, a real fine line. They get the monkey fist over, then they pull the howitzers over.

RG: And the howitzers are the big tubes with the fuel?

EV: The big lines. And then they secure those, and then they bring the oil hoses over. And the oil hoses are pretty good sized. Yeah, like --

RG: Probably four inches in diameter?

EV: Yeah. And I --

RG: And about how far apart are the ships when you are doing this?

EV: They are about from here to the wall there. They are pretty close.

RG: Probably about 40 feet, 50 feet? Something like that?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Max?

EV: They are pretty close, yeah. They had to be careful. Sometimes, if the sea is running rough, the hulls will get into the water, and then you have a problem, so...

RG: So you did this in rough seas or --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- calm seas, or whatever?

EV: Yeah.

RG: If you were out of fuel, you just took on new fuel no matter what?

EV: Yeah. But 70 percent was a crisis level. If you got below 70 percent, you were in trouble. That's a danger zone. So you had to refuel --

RG: Right away?

EV: Yeah. As soon as possible. And before you could refuel, a lot of your storage tanks have salt-water ballast. So you have to dump all that salt-water ballast before you can refill the tanks with bunker oil. So that takes a while, because if you only have one stupid pump -- we have two; you had one forward, and one aft -- that you'll pulling all that salt water out of the -- and dumping it in the ocean.

RG: So let me see if I have got this straight. You had the oil in the tanks, in your storage tanks?

EV: Yeah.

RG: And where would the salt water come into this? Would that just keep the level, or keep the tank full? Would the salt water float on top of the oil, or --

EV: No. The way the fuel system works, okay, you have two cofferdams: one forward and one aft. The boilers feed off of the cofferdam. And so you have these outlying storage tanks, and as the boilers pull the oil out of the cofferdams, you have to replenish it. So to do that, you would take oil from these storage tanks and move it to the cofferdam. So the way that was done -- when the cofferdam would get down so far, and you had this tank over here, you knew that you could dump that whole tank into that cofferdam, then you would move it. And then as soon as you

moved the oil out of that outlying tank, you would fill it full of salt water.

RG: So that tank had to be empty of oil before you put salt water in it?

EV: Right. So they have a different system now.

RG: Okay. So at that time, then, whenever that tank was empty and it was getting time to refuel --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- then you would dump the salt water out, clean it out, and then they would put the oil back in?

EV: Yeah. Yeah. The tanks had two outlets: had an upper and a lower one. So the salt-water bunker oil, it creates a brown goo, and it floats on top of the water in the tank.

RG: And that's what you had to clean out?

EV: Well, you never get all that out. Some of --

RG: But you had to clean some of it out?

EV: Yeah. You had to remove as much as you could, so that's why you had those two levels. Because when you are moving oil to the cofferdam, you would never use that lower level, because you would be sucking maybe your salt water or some [crap?] in that.

RG: Yeah. You don't want to get that in there.

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. Well, I'm glad you explained that. I had never heard that.

EV: But for protection, you never want to have an empty fuel tank, because of the fuel vapor. And also, stability. Rough seas, you always want to have the ballast. And if you are using your guns, you always want to have the ship on an even keel, and so you did that by ballast.

RG: That's what the salt water would kind of do?

EV: So that's why you would fill the tanks full of salt water.

RG: Okay. All right. When was your first battle? When did you remember having your first battle onboard the *Claxton*?

EV: (laughs) Oh, man. Well, I think the first major battle was -- I remember the -- we would do -- like on the Philippines, the invasion of Leyte Gulf. But before Leyte Gulf, I think we did some shore bombarding.

RG: Okay. Do you remember which islands that was?

EV: I don't. And I had a map, and the chief quartermaster had this map that he kept track of all the islands and stuff, and he gave it to me. And I moved, and in the process of moving --

RG: It just got misplaced?

EV: -- the map didn't get moved.

RG: Oh, that's too bad.

EV: Yeah. And also, I had spent a couple of years on genealogy, and I had my family history in this genealogy book about the Choctaw Nation, and it didn't get moved either, so...

RG: (inaudible) history.

EV: I do remember the battle of the Philippines, because we went to sea with the whole task force, went to sea, and I think we were at sea for at least 18 days straight when they were forming. Then the day before the invasion of the Philippines, or the night before, the *Claxton* went into Leyte Gulf and dropped off some First Marine raiders. And it was dark, but it was scary.

RG: Now, did you actually watch that?

EV: Yeah, I was there. I was up on deck, and you could see the shoreline and everything, and --

RG: Oh, so you were real close to shore, then?

EV: Yeah. And they dropped these Marines off, and took them ashore, and they had some of the Philippine liberty fighters, or what they called -- they had a special name for the Philippine fighters that were --

RG: The guerillas?

EV: Yeah. But they had communicated, so they knew where they were going to be dropped off. And so they were positioned,

and then the next day, they were controlling our fire direction.

RG: So they would tell you --

EV: So --

RG: -- where to land the shells, then?

EV: Yeah, where to land the shells.

RG: Okay. Now, at the time while you were underway at sea, you are down in the fire room; you are the fireman.

EV: Yeah.

RG: But come time to do battle or come time to use those five-inch guns, you went up and became the --

EV: Part of mount five, yeah.

RG: Yeah. So --

EV: That --

RG: -- who was taking over for you down in the --

EV: Oh, they had a regular crew that was assigned to the fire room and the engine rooms on general quarters. So we all had a general quarters station.

RG: So you weren't necessarily stuck in the fire room --

EV: I wasn't --

RG: -- all the time?

EV: -- stuck in there, but I was stuck in that magazine under mount five.

RG: Was that pretty loud when those shells went off?

EV: (laughs) Yeah. Yeah. It was --

RG: And you said that's where your hearing aids come from, from all the --

EV: Well, that plus being in that explosion, and being in the wrong place one time.

RG: Okay. After you dropped off the Marines, did you then scoot back out to sea?

EV: Yeah. We went back out to sea, and we took our position between the shore and the battleships and the cruisers.

RG: Between them, huh?

EV: Yeah. Between the shore and them. And they were firing over us, and --

RG: Well, that had to be pretty remarkable.

EV: (laughs) Yeah. They fired over us, and we were in there close to the shore firing on the shore.

RG: So everybody took part in that --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- bombardment? You, the *Claxton*, did, as well as the rest of the ships? Everybody was doing their firing?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. And so you were on the guns at that particular time?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Now, did you ever get a chance to get out and look and see what the damage was afterwards?

EV: Not really. That one sea battle that we were in, the next day -- the night battle -- the next day, I got out; I remember the whole top side was covered with empty power cans.

RG: The top side? The decks?

EV: The decks were cluttered with -- you know, they were everywhere, the powder casings that when they fire the five-inch cannon, well, they had that empty casing. That they would have a guy on the gun crew that's called a "hot shell man."

RG: "Hot shell man?" okay.

EV: So when the gun is fired, then it ejects the hot shell, and he knocks it down through the chute in the back of the mount, and it falls on the deck.

RG: On the deck of the ship?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Are these metal shells, like an --

EV: Brass.

RG: -- [individual?] case of brass --

EV: Yeah, they're brass casings.

RG: What do they do with those once the battle is over?

EV: Well, they would throw them overboard. I think eventually, they tried to recycle some of them. I think they are recycled now, but then... The lifeline on the *Claxton* had

a web-type material, like a fishnet, a web that went around the lower part of the rail, and so the shells wouldn't roll off, but in a case like that, to get rid of those shells, they just tossed them overboard.

RG: Tossed overboard? So that lower part of the rail was also so men wouldn't fall off of there if they --

EV: Right.

RG: -- got swept off --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- the deck?

EV: So --

RG: A big safety net.

EV: A safety thing, mm-hmm.

RG: All right. And that was during Leyte?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. After that battle, what happened next? Did you have any experience with kamikazes at that point?

EV: Yeah. That's when we encountered the kamikaze.

RG: Okay. Tell me about that.

EV: Well, right after the major engagement of Leyte Gulf, then the kamikaze came over. When the kamikaze came over, we were not at general quarters. And Stout, he wasn't the captain, and he had been promoted, but we had a different captain, and I --

RG: Do you remember his name?

EV: No. But it was mentioned with the presentation.

RG: Okay. That's fine.

EV: Because of the general quarters, the crew was getting pretty well washed out. Because we were just [standing?] so much time at general quarters. So what he did after that, he just said for the gun crews to man their guns, and so some of the areas of the ship wasn't really secured. And so I was on watch in the forward fire room. And when the kamikaze attacked, you could hear the gunfire, and then all of a sudden, there was this big boom that the whole ship lifted. At that time, the oil king, his name was Fred [Allen?]; I was his assistant. We were fortunate because where the kamikaze had dropped the bomb -- or the bomb blew up at the waterline -- it was a little bit aft of the fuel storage tank.

RG: Lucky.

EV: Lucky, yeah. If it had hit that fuel tank, it would have probably --

RG: Sunk the ship?

EV: -- sunk the ship. And so Fred Allen, the oil king, right away, he started moving everything off of the damaged side. He showed up in the forward fire room, and he told me what his plan was to get... And so I took over the pump in the

forward fire room, and he went back to the aft fire room for the other pump, transfer pump. We moved all the fuel off of the starboard side we could. We put as much as we could in the forward cofferdam, so that was forward; that was the weight up forward, and off of the damaged site. And then the ballast, any ballast on there, was pumped overboard. The key was to get all the fuel off of the starboard side.

RG: That's where the damage was?

EV: So we were able to do that. And there was a picture (inaudible) in there, but...

RG: That was somebody else at the --

EV: That was somebody else.

RG: So this damage, was it a bomb damage, or did the kamikaze actually fly into the ship?

EV: Well, no. The kamikaze came over, and, well, it was headed for the bridge. And one of the gunners on the bridge fired on it, but at that time, you had to get permission to fire. So this is the story I am getting from one of my other shipmates, and he said he was waiting for the permission to fire on that airplane, but finally he fired, and it hit the airplane, and did enough damage to divert it. And so the airplane, instead of coming in on the bridge, it swung.

RG: Oh, okay. So --

EV: And at that same time, the *Claxton* was making a hard turn to the starboard -- it would be going this way -- and so the fantail was swinging in; you know, it was swinging around. And the plane came over the aft 40s, and one of the loaders on the 40 hit his head and decapitated him. And then the plane just flipped over in the water alongside of the *Claxton*, and it evidently had a 500-pound bomb on it, and the bomb exploded, and it blew this big hole. And then the water started coming in.

RG: Okay. So you were going down at that point?

EV: Yeah.

RG: What happened?

EV: But our repair party was pretty well trained, too. So the thing is, once you get a hole, you have to plug it up with something. So they got to work, and they took cargo netting and mattresses, and scaffolding, and they got that stuffed in the hole, which slowed the water down. And also, with the ship starting to --

RG: To list?

EV: -- keel over, it was really -- you know, actually, by the time all the fuel and everything was removed from that side, the ship was almost ready to roll over. So that being keeled over, it allowed some of the hull to get lifted out of the water. But they stuffed it with the

cargo net and the mattresses, and stuff like that. One of the officers, his name was [Teeterberg?]. I guess he was in the repair party, and he was a pretty good swimmer, so he got down in the water with some help, and they stuff that hole full of --

RG: Whatever they could find?

EV: -- whatever they could find. And --

RG: How big a hole are we talking here?

EV: Big. I mean like you could drive a semi truck through it.

RG: Okay. So it was a large hole?

EV: A large hole. There is a website on the *Claxton*, and there is pictures showing the hole, or showing us -- we went into Manus -- I believe it was Manus -- and we were put in a floating dry dock with cruiser *Canberra* and another destroyer. So there's three ships in this big dry dock.

RG: That was my next question: where did you go to get repaired?

EV: But all they did there was they cut the area out and they welded a plate in there, because it had done, probably, some damage to the shaft on the... After that, we came back to the States for repair.

RG: Now, while you were in Manus getting repaired, what was your duties onboard the ship in the dry dock, or were you allowed to even go in the ship in dry dock?

EV: No, we were living on the ship. Yeah.

RG: So you didn't get a chance to go off and --

EV: Well, yeah. We had the privilege to going off, but we were sitting in this dry dock -- I mean, it was huge -- and first of all, you had to get off of the ship down onto the bottom of the dry dock. And then you had to go over and go up a ladder --

RG: To get out of the dry dock?

EV: -- to get out of the dry dock. (laughs) So here I go. I get off of the ship, I am down below, and I start up the ladder. And I make one big mistake: I turned around and looked down. I just froze. It's hard to explain, but --

RG: It's a long way down, huh?

EV: -- I was just paralyzed there. I couldn't move. Eventually, I was able to muster up --

RG: Enough gumption?

EV: -- enough gumption to get over the top of that thing, and I...

RG: You just never looked down again, did you?

EV: No. No. I was shaking my way all the way up. I don't remember how I got back on the ship, but I got back on it.

RG: You probably just put that out of your mind.

EV: Yeah, yeah, probably. But a lot of places, they have ladders, and they have the cage around the ladder space.

RG: Sure, so you don't fall.

EV: There was no cage around that ladder.

RG: So if you fell, you just fell all the way down?

EV: Yeah. I --

RG: How long are you in Manus to get repaired?

EV: Oh, God. Long enough for them to weld the plate on over that hole.

RG: I mean, a couple of days, or a couple of weeks?

EV: It might have been a couple of weeks, but...

RG: Okay. They had to make sure it's watertight, yeah.

EV: Yeah. And --

RG: So after you get out of Manus, where did we go from here?

EV: Then we are no longer a [man-of-war?], so they gave us orders to report to California, to Vallejo; the shipyards there in Vallejo, California. So that's where we went.

RG: All right. And how long were you in Vallejo?

EV: We were there long enough; I went home for a couple of weeks.

RG: Oh, okay. So you had a little furlough there?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. And so you got to see your family?

EV: Yeah.

RG: A good reunion there?

EV: Well, I was raised by my dad, so I was able to go back and see some of [my friends?].

RG: Now, your brothers didn't get to do that? They stayed overseas, then?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. So you just got to be there by yourself with your dad?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. And then when you went back out, when you left Vallejo, did you go back over to the war zone?

EV: Yes. First, we became a training ship. We anchored off of Treasure Island in San Francisco.

RG: Oh, okay. So you went from Vallejo up to San Francisco?

EV: Yeah. And then we trained other crews for other tin cans. So that was really good duty. (laughs)

RG: I'll bet, I'll bet. So you got to train other firemen and other --

EV: Yeah, other --

RG: -- projectile handlers, and things like that?

EV: Yeah. And --

RG: So that was their on-the-job training?

EV: Yeah.

RG: You gave them what you got?

EV: Right. (laughs) Actually, we would go down by San Clemente.

RG: Okay. Down right off of southern California?

EV: And the Navy pilots would come down and drop torpedoes on us.

RG: Oh, is that right?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Dummies, I hope?

EV: Dummies, yeah. And so --

RG: So they would use you as a target ship?

EV: Yeah. They'd use us as a target ship.

RG: I'll be darned. That must have been something.

EV: Then we used the island for bombardment. And then they would tow a target that we would shoot at.

RG: Okay. That was your target practice?

EV: Yeah. That was our target practice.

RG: Okay. Now, you were training other gunners on how to use -
-

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- weapons and all that?

EV: Yeah. We were training other --

RG: How long were you involved in this training, now?

EV: Not long enough.

(laughter)

EV: Then --

RG: And so what year was this?

EV: Well, it must have been in '44, because by that experience, we missed out on the initial invasion of Okinawa.

RG: I see. You might be lucky.

EV: Yeah. But we did eventually go to Okinawa.

RG: But this was long after the invasion?

EV: Well, it was kind of during the invasion. Yeah. It was after our troops were on the shore. But it actually was still going on. They were still sending kamikazes down and...

RG: Now, did you get involved in any kamikaze attacks in Okinawa?

EV: Then we got involved in what they called the "picket duty."

RG: You were a picket boat?

EV: We were a picket boat.

RG: And what was your duty as a picket boat?

EV: That was the scariest part of my whole time on the *Claxton*. What we would do there, they had, I think, 11 or so picket stations close to Japan, and they would be radar detectors. So they would send one or two destroyers -- usually one destroyer and a couple of these landing crafts -- along. We would call them "meat wagons." They would send them along to pick up survivors, because when Japan would

release the kamikazes, they would fly over us, and we would send information to Okinawa, the ships around Okinawa, to alert them that the kamikazes were on their way.

RG: Okay. Now, did you guys have radar on your ship?

EV: Yeah.

RG: So you could see them coming quite a ways out, then?

EV: Yeah. We had the latest radar. When we went into Vallejo, they added a couple of more 40s, so they actually beefed up our antiaircraft system. And we got new barrels on our five-inch guns, because we wore the rifling out of the barrels. The barrels --

RG: Had to be changed?

EV: -- had to be changed, because... So we had new barrels in the five-inch guns. Then we had maybe four extra quad-40s installed. But when you would go out on the picket line, well, those kamikazes would take the pickets out. Several times, we had been out on the picket duty, and then we would come in for relief, and get the fuel and provisions and ammunition, and we would end up going to Kamareta. That was a sanctuary. We would go anchor in Kamareta for a little R&R.

RG: Now, where is Kamareta?

EV: Oh, it's a small island off of Okinawa. But the part that was scary about that, like we would be sitting in Kamareta,

and that we would get orders to go return to our picket station, because the can that took over our position was hit with kamikazes and sank.

RG: Yeah, it must have been kind of spooky.

EV: Yeah. So you had to go right back out on the same duty again, yeah.

RG: Now, when the kamikazes came over the picket lines, how many kamikazes would usually be in a flight? Do you remember? Or were you up there to see that?

EV: Well, I didn't actually see a lot of that, although I did see one kamikaze come in.

RG: Just one plane, or one flight of airplanes?

EV: No, one plane come in. In Okinawa, they were real tricky. They were using suicide boats. So when you were sitting off of Okinawa, you had to be aware of suicide boats. They would use floatplanes that they would skim across the water, and... So this one kamikaze, it was diving on our starboard side, and I was forward by just below the bridge, and it was coming right directly at us. And it changed course. Instead of going for us, there was a cruiser on the other side of us.

RG: He wanted the bigger boat?

EV: And he decided, well, he was going to go for the cruiser. So he lifted above us and dove into the cruiser.

RG: Somebody up there likes you.

EV: Yeah. Today, I can't remember the name of that cruiser, but we were vacationing in Colorado, and we were up in the mountains. There is a castle builder in Colorado that's been building this castle by himself for years, and there's quite a story about him. A museum is what it is, and when we were there visiting that museum, some of the guys that was on that cruiser was up there.

RG: Just visiting?

EV: Yeah. Visiting that museum. And we got to visiting, and I told them, I said that I was on the tin can that was right over there, and that kamikaze just went right over us and slammed into --

RG: Did it actually hit the cruiser?

EV: Yeah.

RG: So it hit the cruiser? Okay.

EV: Yeah.

RG: I'll bet they have got some stories to tell.

EV: Yeah.

RG: Did you ever get hit again by a kamikaze that --

EV: No, just that one time.

RG: Okay. Oh, you were lucky there. Really lucky.

EV: Yeah. One time that I actually saw a kamikaze coming in is we were firing on it, and you could see the tracers going

into the airplane, but it kept coming. And just before it got to us, it exploded. And the pieces flew all over, and [Bucko?], one of the guys that usually comes to our reunions, he has a piece of the cylinder off of that airplane that ended up on the deck.

RG: Well, yeah, I guess --

EV: I told --

RG: -- some of those --

EV: -- him, I said, "What you should do, you should donate that to the museum here."

RG: Unless his family wants it.

EV: No.

RG: Well, I guess that if the plane was close enough and coming at you, all those parts could do just about as much damage as the aircraft itself would.

EV: Yeah. Well, this piece of cylinder was about the size of that guy there.

RG: So it's about seven by eight --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- by about two inches thick? So...

EV: But he --

RG: That would have caused some damage if it had hit the ship.

EV: Yeah. We had one kamikaze reunion, and it was in Washington. It was up in Everett, Washington. And he

brought that with him to that reunion. And that reunion was for all the kamikaze survivors, so it was pretty interesting.

RG: So from all the different ships that had survived --

EV: All the different --

RG: -- kamikaze?

EV: -- ships.

RG: Oh, okay. Interesting. I bet that was a great, great reunion.

EV: Yeah. But when we got hit in Leyte Gulf, we got hit at 9:15 in the morning, and then that afternoon, the kamikazes came back. And the *Abner Read* was assigned to be our security. There were --

RG: What was the *Abner Read*?

EV: *Abner Read*.

RG: Okay. R-E-E-D?

EV: Yeah. And then the kamikazes came back, and one of the kamikazes dove on the *Abner Read* and struck it between the two stacks. And it exploded. The fuel splashed all over, and it set the ammunition popping on the *Read*, and it actually probably got down in the engine room and the fire room. And it sank.

RG: Now, did you see that happen?

EV: Yeah. I was --

RG: You were on deck?

EV: Yeah. I was on deck, and I saw when it slipped underwater.

RG: Oh, you watched it actually sink?

EV: Yeah. The bow was sticking up, and it sank.

RG: So it went down fantail first, then?

EV: Yeah. And I have a book that's available on all the World War II destroyers that were hit with kamikazes, and it shows the picture of the *Abner Read*.

RG: Do you know the name of the book?

EV: No.

RG: Okay. Not a problem.

EV: I've had the book for several years, and the *Claxton* is listed. It shows all the destroyers that were sunk or damaged during World War II.

RG: By kamikazes?

EV: Well, not --

RG: Or by any means?

EV: By any means, yeah. But it shows pictures, and it shows quite a few pictures, and so --

RG: Now, did your ship pick up survivors --

EV: We did.

RG: -- during that -- okay. You helped with the rescue?

EV: Yeah. And the thing was, when the *Abner Read* was burning and blowing up, and stuff like that, well, we went up pretty close.

RG: So you paralleled --

EV: Paralleled, yeah. The guys could almost jump over, we were that close. And then it really started exploding, the *Read*, and so it was too dangerous to stay that close, so we pulled away.

RG: You had to, yeah.

EV: And then they dropped the whaleboat down, and they were picking up survivors, and some of the guys they brought onboard were burned so bad.

RG: About as black as a machiner?

EV: And their skins, they were just black. The looked --

RG: And crisp?

EV: -- like Negros.

RG: That's too bad.

EV: Yeah.

RG: And did you ever get a chance to talk to any of those people at all while they were onboard your ship, or did you just get rid of them pretty quick? Get them off --

EV: Well --

RG: -- to a hospital ship?

EV: -- I didn't talk to any of them. I think when he was reading that story about the *Claxton*, he said 200 and some; that we took on 200-some. I don't remember quite that many, but I know that the guys were swimming around in the water, and they were picking them up. There was [Bill Didario?]. He was the coxswain on the whaleboat, and he was out in there, and he is the one that got burned. And he was --

RG: Was that from one of the explosions on the ship?

EV: Yeah, evidently. I am not sure how he got burned, but he was on 100 percent disability because of the burns. And his daughter is here. Her name is [Millie?]. She married somebody, so --

RG: What was his name?

EV: Didario.

RG: "Didario?"

EV: Yeah.

RG: You don't know how to spell that, do you?

EV: Bill Didario.

RG: Bill Didario.

EV: D-I-D-A-R-I-O, or something like that. But...

RG: So did you lose anybody? Any friends of yours, when that kamikaze hit? Did anybody die onboard on the *Claxton* when you got hit with that one kamikaze?

EV: Well, he wasn't a direct friend of mine, but there is a guy by the name of Bob [Logan?]. His real close buddy was a guy that got the decapitated... And his nephew used to come to our reunions, but I am not sure if he is here at this reunion. But the reason he started coming: he wanted to find out how his uncle was killed. And I remember going after we were partially secured, and they had got everything stuffed in there, and we pumped all the oil over. And the ship was difficult to walk on because it was [keeled?] over so far, and you had to grab onto something to walk. The main head was in the back, where the hole was. So I had been drinking coffee through all this mess, because I was down in the fire room. And so I went back aft, and they had I think there was nine guys that was laid out on -- dead, nine bodies laid out -- and he was the one without the head.

RG: Okay. So about nine people got killed on that --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- that crash?

EV: About nine, yeah.

RG: That's too bad. Well, that's what happens in war.

EV: Yeah. Yeah.

RG: And you didn't happen to know any of those guys real well, or...?

EV: No.

RG: You said the scariest time was when you were on the pickets?

EV: Yeah. Yeah, the pickets, because of the kamikaze.

RG: So you just never knew?

EV: No, you never knew. You knew one thing: when the kamikaze is coming in, if you didn't get it, it's going to get to you.

RG: Yeah. Did you ever worry about submarines? Ever have any problem with submarines out there at that time? I mean, you are a destroyer, so that's probably one of your main duties as a destroyer is --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- protection and elimination.

EV: Yeah. We never really worried about submarines, although we were moving somewhere, and I don't know exactly where, but we came across this submarine. And I was down in the fire room, and all of a sudden, we had this [annunciator?], and it goes over and says, "Stop." And then I went up topside, and there was a submarine out there, on the surface.

RG: A Japanese submarine?

EV: I don't know. See, that's the thing about the subs: recognition is the key. So we put the lights on it and

opened fire. So I could see the projectiles bouncing off of it. And --

RG: Did it sink?

EV: -- then it was gone. Yeah.

RG: Oh, okay. So you don't know if you sunk it or if it just -
-

EV: I'm not sure. I think we got credit for sinking it.

RG: Okay. So it went straight down, or did it move off into --

EV: I'm not sure. But I could see the projectiles --

RG: Hitting the water?

EV: -- bouncing off of it, so we were hitting it.

RG: Okay. That probably sunk it, then.

EV: Yeah.

RG: But that was the only submarine you encountered that you remember?

EV: Yeah. Yeah, directly. Although we encountered a whale one time. We dropped some of those depth charges.

RG: On submarines or --

EV: On submarines. You had to slow down to drop a depth charge.

RG: I didn't know that.

EV: And when they roll off of the stern, boy, when they blow up, you don't want to be right on top of where they explode. But you encounter quite a bit of the pressure,

because it would jar the stern of the ship so much that it would unscrew the light bulbs.

RG: Oh, you are kidding! Now, you were down in the fire room at this time, when these were doing this?

EV: Not then. I was up above. I was on --

RG: You were watching it?

EV: Yeah. Watching it. So I got to see some of the action.

RG: Feel the concussions, and all that sort of --

EV: Yeah.

RG: It must have been an experience. Did it rack the boat pretty good? I mean, did people have to hang onto things -
-

EV: Oh, yeah.

RG: -- to keep from --

EV: Yeah.

RG: So it --

EV: It jarred the --

RG: -- would actually jar the boat that good?

EV: We had fiberglass insulation. It would shake the insulation off of the overhead into your bunk. If you had the top bunk, it was like sleeping in glass.

RG: That's not --

EV: It was awful.

RG: Oh, I'll bet. I'll bet. How was the food onboard the ship? They feed you pretty good?

EV: Yeah. The food was good, except the lamb. The lamb could be really strong.

RG: But that was the only bad part, was the lamb?

EV: Well, yeah. And weevils in the bread.

RG: Even out at sea?

EV: Yeah, the weevils. When they would have raisin bread or something like that, or wheat bread, where you couldn't see the weevils, it was okay.

(laughter)

RG: The [motive?] was more protein.

EV: Yeah. But we had beans.

RG: A lot of beans?

EV: Lots of beans. I have always loved beans, so I would like beans. But...

RG: Now, did they have a pretty good collection of things to drink? Did they have sodas and milk, and coffee and tea, and --

EV: No. We had plenty of coffee. We had coffee brewing all the time in the fire room, and they had in the carpenter shop, and in the galley. But the way we made our coffee, we had a can, and a copper pipe came right off of one of

the steam lines, and we put that in this can, and put coffee grounds in it, and turned the --

RG: Turned the valve on?

EV: -- turned this valve on, and we made coffee with the steam from the boilers. And --

RG: So it was instantly hot?

EV: Yeah. And the thing was, they put boiler compound in the boiler water, so here we are drinking this damn coffee being made with boiler steam.

RG: And it had all of this other --

EV: Of course, they used steam for cooking a lot of the food. But that water contained boiler compound.

RG: And what was this? A liquid?

EV: The boiler compound, I think it was a powder.

RG: A powder? Okay. And the purpose of that was to keep the boilers clean?

EV: Yeah, to help keep the --

RG: The scale down?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. All right. So when did you finish up your tour? Did you get to see the signing of the surrender document, or hear about the atomic bomb? Were you there at that point?

EV: I was there. We were, I think, off Okinawa when they dropped the bomb. But --

RG: So your ship stayed at Okinawa from the time you first got there until this was all over with?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. What was your duties after the invasion of Okinawa? You just kind of would watch for kamikazes and submarines, and --

EV: Well, we were doing the picket duty, mainly. What we would do is there was a lot of ships there in Okinawa, around the island, and when the pickets would say, "There is the kamikazes, they are coming" -- and so what we would do, we would make smoke.

RG: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

EV: Standby to make smoke to cover all the ships in the harbor. So we would put in the smoke barrels, and steamed around through the ships that were anchored in there and make smoke to cover all the ships.

RG: Okay. So that the pilots couldn't see the ships down below?

EV: Yeah, so the pilots couldn't see the ships.

RG: Did you do that quite a bit?

EV: A couple of times at least, yeah.

RG: While you were on your duty station, you would just hear the claxon go off and say, "Make smoke"?

EV: Yeah.

RG: So you would know --

EV: They would give us --

RG: -- that there were --

EV: -- orders to make smoke, and the --

RG: Was that part of your job, too?

EV: That was part of the fire room, because we are the guys that know how to make the smoke.

RG: All right. How would you do that?

EV: Well, you would put in a smoke barrel. Like I was telling you, these atomizers on the barrels, you put in a large opening atomizer, which sprayed a real thick fog of oil into the boiler, and you would reduce the amount of air feeding the fire in the boiler, and the smoke would come out --

RG: Just thick?

EV: -- thick and black. If you were up on deck and you inhaled a little bit of it, it was just like licking a piece of charcoal or something. It was awful.

RG: Pretty bad smell to the smoke, or --

EV: That was [cruel?], yeah.

RG: Really? Okay.

EV: That was [cruel?].

RG: Okay. How did you actually hear about the bomb going off?
The bomb being dropped?

EV: Well, we were kept informed about certain things, and so that's how we found out about it. Then when they signed the armistice, a lot of the crew on these other ships, they kind of went berserk, and they were --

RG: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

EV: -- celebrating with real ammunition. So we just took cover. We weren't ready to fire any live ammunition, but they did, yeah. And so we took cover.

RG: So everybody was real happy the war was over?

EV: Oh, yeah.

RG: I'll bet. So how long did you wait there until you went back to the states?

EV: Things moved pretty fast. They discharged everybody by points, and the way you got the points was overseas duty. And since I was in Panama for eight months before the *Claxton* got out to sea, I had more points than most of my shipmates. And Fred Allen, he was my boss. He was my lead, because I was his assistant. And he was married, and so I was single, and the war is over; [there is not all that scare?] about getting killed. And so I told him, I said, "If you want to take my place, it's okay with me, and

I'll take the ship back." Because you had to have an oil king. The oil king on a ship is like a cardiologist, and there was only two guys that knew the oil system on the ship, and that was him and myself. And he was really a hell of a nice guy, yeah, and so I told him, "Talk to the old man, and" --

RG: "See if you can go home first?"

EV: -- "see if you can go home in my place, and I will stay here and" --

RG: That was nice of you.

EV: -- "take the ship back."

RG: So you weren't married at this time?

EV: No.

RG: Didn't have a girlfriend back home or anything?

EV: No.

RG: Okay. So a bachelor at heart?

EV: Yeah, a bachelor at heart.

RG: So when did you actually get back to the States?

EV: Okay. Then we came back; we headed back to the States. So we were going to Washington, D.C., because we were going to get the Presidential Unit Citation.

RG: Were you coming back through the Panama Canal?

EV: Yeah. So we did the long way around. We would go back through the Panama Canal. I got discharged in December --

the 27th, I think it was -- the 27th, 1945. So we went around. The Little Beavers all steamed up into the Chesapeake Bay and up the Potomac River, I guess, to Washington, D.C. And we were all docked in there, and that's when we received the Presidential Unit Citation.

RG: I bet that was a pretty impressive sight.

EV: Yeah.

RG: And you call them "Little Beavers." Where did that name come from?

EV: Okay. When we were out still being "Click with the *Claxton*," there was an artist, and he used to do the comics -- I think it was in the *Denver Post* -- *Red Ryder and the Little Beaver*. So he was the artist on the *Claxton*, and he painted that Little Beaver -- I think it was on one of the torpedo mounts on the *Claxton*. And Burke came over on a visit, and he spotted that Little Beaver, with the bow and arrow stuff, and he says, "That's what I want to name my squadron."

RG: "The Little Beavers?"

EV: "The Little Beavers."

RG: Okay, so that's where it came from.

EV: So "Red Ryder" was the cruisers," and the "Little Beavers" were the --

RG: Destroyers?

EV: -- destroyers. Red Ryder and the Little Beavers.

RG: I used to read comic books about Little Beaver and Red Ryder, and that sort of thing.

EV: Yeah. So he was the artist. The real history about him, it's in the history of the *Claxton*.

RG: Okay. Well, I will make sure I put that in there: that it's in a book. You don't know the name of -- it's just a history of the *Claxton*?

EV: Yeah, it's in there. [Gene?] has the history of the *Claxton*. He was reading from it. And also, there is a web site on the internet, the USS *Claxton*, and on a place called "Domes Island."

RG: Can you spell that?

EV: D-O-M-E-S Island, dot-com. And that'll bring up destroyer history, and it's really good. I mean, this guy has put a lot of time in there, and there is quite a bit about the Little Beavers. Or just go on the internet and go in Google and type in "Little Beavers."

RG: It'll come up?

EV: And it'll bring up the Little Beavers squad. Be sure to put "squad," because otherwise, it might get you down in Nevada, in the...

(laughter)

RG: [Don't want to do that?].

EV: So you don't want to get there.

RG: Okay. Anything else you want to tell us about during your service time there, or --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- any memorable experiences?

EV: We had some stuff that happened on the *Claxton*. One time, we were setting at condition ready, and, of course, we spent so much time at GQ, you could almost fall asleep with a five-inch projectile in your hands. One of the guys in mount five was dozing, and the five-inch gun, when it elevates, the butt of the gun swings into a swell. And there was one of the gun crew up there that was dozing, and his lower body was in that well. So the guns were set on automatic control; they were being controlled from the director. And so they picked up a bogey, and they went into action -- a "bogey" would be an airplane -- so it would be in the air. So the barrel lifted; the butt of the gun came down and crushed him to death.

RG: Oh, he died?

EV: Oh, yeah. It killed him.

RG: It killed him? Ouch.

EV: So that was one thing that I remember. One time when we were in the Philippines -- I think it was in the Lingayen Gulf -- we were providing shore power, and we kept moving:

bring the stern around and put the stern in first, and used for fire. We got hung up on the bottom. Then the guys on the shore could shoot us with rifles.

RG: Oh, you were that close?

EV: Yeah. We were really close. And so in order to get it off of the bottom, the whole crew went forward on the bow and started lifting up and down --

RG: Oh, jumping up and down on the bow?

EV: -- jumping up and down thing. And it lifted the stern up enough to --

RG: Oh, is that right?

EV: -- break her loose -- yeah. We got off of that.

RG: Now, was that also part of your training, how do that?

EV: (laughs) No. No. Somebody had --

RG: Had to think of that?

EV: -- had to think about it. They had some pretty smart guys on...

RG: As long as it worked, that's fine.

EV: Yeah. That happened again in the Philippines, off Corregidor. There was a beach; they call it "Black Beach." The only beach that you could get onto Corregidor, and we were trying to secure that beach. We were backing in on it, and we got stuck there for a while.

RG: Now, didn't they have any way to check for the depth back there, to see how close they were getting to the sand, or...? They just kind of kept going until they hit something, then they would --

EV: Yeah. Like the chief quartermaster, "Well," he said, "I told them that that was too shallow to go back there." I was kind of hoping that he was going to come to this reunion. He lives in San Diego now. He was going to try to get one of his girlfriends to drive him out here, but I guess that he didn't --

RG: It didn't --

EV: -- make it.

RG: -- work, huh?

EV: It didn't work. But he told me, he says, "I kept telling the officer of the day, I said, 'That's too shallow back there for us, and'... But"...

RG: They just kept going?

EV: Kept going, yeah. A little more, a little more. You have got to get it a little closer.

RG: Did that cause any damage to the props?

EV: Well, yeah. We had to have the prop replaced eventually.

RG: I bet, yeah.

EV: Yeah. But then the other thing while we were there at Corregidor, they had a rock they called "Battleship Rock."

They were having some trouble with the radio on the rock, our people -- not the *Claxton* people, but the crew on the rock. The Americans had taken over the rock, and they were having trouble with their radios. And so [Mountfort?], our chief that normally puts together our reunions, he was the chief radioman, so they took him and some of the officers -- I think [Nelson?] went -- over to the rock to fix the radio. So they went over and they fixed the radio, and they came back. But Corregidor, essentially the only place you could get onto Corregidor was through that one beach.

RG: The Black Beach?

EV: Black Beach. So they decided they are going to assault it from the air. So to get onto Corregidor, they had to do a low-altitude jump, parachute jump. We were right out there, and we watched the parachute jump. A lot of the guys, when they jumped, they got hung up on the
(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

RG: The trees or whatever?

EV: Yeah.

RG: So did you actually do any support fire for that?

EV: Yeah.

RG: You were fire --

EV: We sat off of Corregidor, and Corregidor was like a chunk of cheese. They had gun mounts all over that rock.

RG: The Japanese did?

EV: Yeah, the Japanese did. So whenever we would spot something, then we would fire on it. And then the other thing: we encountered a lot of mines in the water there at Corregidor. Evidently, our minesweepers probably went in and --

RG: Cleaned them out?

EV: -- taken out a lot of the mines. One morning, at daybreak, we were surrounded by mines. So what do you do? They went to the armory and broke out rifles, and they were shooting the sensors on the mines to try to explode --

RG: Set them off?

EV: -- the mines. Set them off.

RG: That must have been scary. Were mines a problem during the war for you guys at any of the other invasions?

EV: Not really. They were there, but the *Claxton* had that degaussing system, and... But they were there, but...

RG: So these mines are magnetic? When the ship would get close, the mine would come in, and the degausser would take away the magnetism?

EV: No. The degausser would prevent the magnetism, so it would...

RG: They thought of everything.

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. Anything else you can think about?

EV: Well, there is probably something.

RG: There always is.

EV: Oh, yeah. Okay. On the humorous side, after we went to Vallejo and got the new fantail -- see, the *Fletchers* were built in sections. So --

RG: The *Fletcher*-class destroyers?

EV: Yeah. We went there, and they just had a new stern for us.

RG: Okay. They just cut off one section, put on a new one?

EV: Yeah. They just put a new stern on. But they also put new barrels on, new barrels that had the rifling, because... And so the boozers, we had a few of those on the *Claxton*. So they thought, well, we have got to take some booze with us. So the mount five barrel has a cap on it, but it's just the right size for a fifth of whiskey. One of the guys had the idea -- and I wasn't, because I was not much of a boozer -- but they put whiskey in the barrels of a couple of the five inch, and probably mount five, because it was --

RG: It was always low (inaudible)?

EV: Always low. So after we left port and we were out to sea for a few days, there was a few inebriated guys running around.

RG: Now, was that pretty much verboten on the ships? You couldn't drink on the ship, or you couldn't --

EV: Well --

RG: -- get drunk on the boat?

EV: Yeah, yeah. It was outlawed. You couldn't drink on the ship. You couldn't bring alcohol on the boat.

RG: So if somebody was caught, they would be court martialed or have them --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- do a commander's watch, or something like --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- that? Okay.

EV: And the other thing was morphine. They really had to watch that, because... I don't know if we had anybody stealing the morphine. But we did have beer, because we would have R&R over -- I think it was Tulagi or somewhere. But we would go ashore and play softball, and they would issue a couple of cans of beer per --

RG: Just two, huh?

EV: Yeah. I think it was two. And if you didn't drink it, you could sell it to somebody else, but --

RG: Make a little extra money there?

EV: Yeah.

RG: How often did you have R&R?

EV: Not too often, but I know we had it a couple times.

(laughs)

RG: Yeah, I bet. If you had it all to do over again, would you do the same thing?

EV: Probably, yeah.

RG: So did you enjoy your service time? Did you enjoy it quite a bit? Or were you real glad to get home?

EV: Well, yeah, I was glad when it was all over. But I had a real close friend, and his name was [Abe Wersinger?].

RG: "Wersinger?"

EV: Wersinger. The engineers or the black gang on the *Claxton*, they are the ones that started the reunions. But they would have the reunions back east somewhere. Living in Colorado, I could care less, so I never, ever went. And then after I left Colorado and went to Washington, I got married. And I would get this *DAV Magazine*, and they would advertise the reunions in the magazine, and I saw the *Claxton*. And they were having a reunion in Anaheim, California.

RG: That's closer.

EV: So I wrote a letter to the president of the group, and he added me to the list. So Vera and I and my two sons, we went to -- the first reunion was 1985. And unfortunately, Abe Wersinger died that year.

RG: That's too bad. I'm sorry.

EV: So I never got a chance to really meet up with him. But he did have a son, and I tried to encourage his son to come to our reunion in Saint Paul, because he was from Saint Paul; Minneapolis-Saint Paul. But he didn't attend.

RG: That's too bad.

EV: Yeah. He wrote me a letter, though. He did answer my letter. And --

RG: Well, sometimes if you don't live through those situations, it just --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- doesn't quite hit you as hard.

EV: Yeah. So his dad evidently died from cancer, and he said that his mother had died from cancer, too.

RG: Both of them? That's too bad.

EV: Yeah. So what I was thinking about doing is when I get home, I'll get a good picture of maybe the wall where the plaque is, and send him a copy of it.

RG: That would be nice.

EV: Because one thing about Abe, you get into situations -- life or death situations -- and you have got a buddy there, you help each other survive.

RG: You bet, you bet.

EV: When we got hit with that medium shell, Abe and I were both together in the magazine area on mount five. And we got ourselves together, and we got out there. We got out of the compartment. We didn't get injured, really. But --

RG: When was this? When did you get hit with a medium shell? Was that when the kamikaze hit?

EV: No, that was before.

RG: Oh, okay. Tell me about that one. We missed that.

EV: It's on the history thing, but we were shelling this air base on Kolomban...

RG: Kolombangara?

EV: Yeah. And we were shelling. There was a river there. I guess we got too close to the shore, and they evidently fired some mortars off the beach. And it hit our fantail, and penetrated the aftward area, and blew the doors out, and into mount five magazine area. That's where Abe and I was.

RG: Now, is that when you got the hearings aids? Is that when your hearing went bad?

EV: Well, that was one of the times. But that's when I got the back injury. I got blown up against the ammunition rack. And --

RG: And that was that time?

EV: Well, and the hearing was part of that then, but when I really got the hearing damage was I was up on deck, up under Mount Four, and a bogey came in. The mounts were on directory, and they swung the barrel around and started shooting automatically at the bogey, and I was almost right at the end of the barrel. And that's when I got most of my hearing damage.

RG: So the concussion from the firing --

EV: Yeah.

RG: -- is what gave you that? I'm sorry that happened.

EV: And then on top of that, being in the fire room, there is a lot of noise because of the blowers. The high-speed blowers that provide air for the boilers, that's hard on your hearing. So it's just a multitude of --

RG: Did they give you any --

EV: -- [different things?].

RG: -- hearing protection or anything? Or (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

EV: Well, when they were firing the guns, I would stick cotton in my ears.

RG: Okay. But that was it?

EV: Yeah. But some of the gun captains would have phones in their helmets, so they had for --

RG: For protection?

EV: -- ear protection. But --

RG: You regular peons --

EV: -- regular peons had none. If they fired a salvo of five-inch shells, boy, there is a lot of noise.

RG: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) loud? Yeah.

EV: Loud, yeah.

RG: So is that part of your disability? Or just --

EV: No.

RG: -- the back?

EV: No, the hearing is --

RG: The hearing is --

EV: -- mainly -- yeah. I keep hassling with the VA, and they keep --

RG: Keep putting you off?

EV: -- "You can walk." (laughs) "You can walk. You can lift your leg and" --

RG: I know nowadays, there is such an influx of people from the Iraq and Iran that they are trying to get all that taken care of.

EV: Yeah. Yeah. The VA is actually getting better at processing their veterans. But the thing is, you have to have proof, and I was on a hospital ship. After that injury there on the *Claxton*, I was send to a hospital ship, and they took x-rays of my back, and nothing -- x-rays

didn't show anything. So they just said, "You're cleared for duty, Vernon." And...

RG: That was from your back injury?

EV: Yeah. And...

RG: And do you remember the name of that hospital ship?

EV: There was a couple of hospital ships there, but... I have the name of it in my records at home. But there is no record. There is no record on the hospital ship. And when I was in the hospital in Panama, there is no record of me being in the hospital.

RG: Really?

EV: No.

RG: I thought they kept pretty good records on that stuff. Well, who knows?

EV: Sort of like when I got hurt on that sub chaser. It was probably a blessing, because if I had stayed on the sub chaser, I would have probably finished my Navy duty on that sub chaser. So I got off the sub chaser, I was sent to the hospital, and when I got out of the hospital, the sub chaser was gone. It was out down along Colombia, looking for submarines coming in. There were submarines coming into Colombia and fueling at nighttime. So the sub chaser was sent down there to --

RG: Patrol for submarines?

EV: Yeah. To patrol for the submarines.

RG: And these were German submarines?

EV: German subs. They had something going with the Colombians.

RG: Interesting.

EV: Yeah. But anyhow, I got put in the pool, and fate had it.
It put me on the *Claxton*.

RG: And here you are.

EV: And here I am.

RG: Okay. Anything else you want to tell us about that you can remember?

EV: Well, I can remember the typhoons.

RG: Were they pretty bad? How many were you involved in?

EV: Pretty bad, yeah.

RG: How many were you involved in?

EV: Well, at least one. You ever see a 300-and-some-foot ship standing on its tail, like that?

RG: I have seen pictures of -- in storms, yeah.

EV: Yeah. Did you ever see that movie called *The Perfect Storm*?

RG: Yes.

EV: Okay.

RG: And that ship was going up that wall of that wave?

EV: Yeah.

RG: Yeah. Was that pretty hairy?

EV: Yeah, it was scary. Yeah. It didn't really bother me that much, but --

RG: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

EV: I liked it when the sea was rough, but the typhoons, the nose would go under the water, and it would be green, and the wave would come all the way over the whole ship. And the ship that would be right alongside, it would disappear.

RG: Yeah. The waves were so high it --

EV: The waves were --

RG: -- would [go in?] the trough --

EV: -- so high, it would go down and (inaudible).

RG: So you never got seasick any of those times?

EV: No. Never got seasick on the *Claxton*.

RG: Well, that's a good thing for a sailor.

EV: The first time I got seasick, I had done a lot of sailing, and I sailed on this -- I was a crew on this K40, which is a nice sloop. In the state of Washington, they have a race they call the Swiftsure. They race out the San Juan de Fuca straits, and around Swiftsure Bank, and come back in. That's an annual race that they have. And so one of the Swiftsure races, I got sick because the cook cooked stroganoff, and stroganoff was too rich for me, and it made me sick. But I did a lot of sailing. I have my own sailboat, and I raced it. I like to race it.

RG: So you love the sea, then?

EV: Yeah. I --

RG: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) for you.

EV: -- love the water. Yeah.

RG: Well, good. Okay. Are we about done with your story about the *Claxton* and what you did there?

EV: Yeah. Yeah, I can't think of... I'll probably think about some other stuff, but that's about it.

RG: Okay. Well, I want to thank you for your time; I want to thank you for your service. I know you spent a lot of time down in the belly of a ship, which, that couldn't have been much fun, but we really thank you for what you did.

EV: Yeah. That's the scariest part. Like one time, we were on general quarters, and the guys up in the bridge called down and said, "Hey, we don't want to set you guys on fire or anything, but..." And there was a torpedo that just went under our ship, and it was set too deep, and it didn't get us, and it kept going.

RG: Oh, lucky.

EV: Yeah. So we had some...

RG: Had some close calls?

EV: And then another time, we were in this battle, and when the *Foote* took the torpedo in the stern -- this was a sea

battle -- and we were steaming right alongside of this Japanese destroyer. I mean, I could see it right there.

RG: Was this at night, or in daytime?

EV: At night. We were having a night battle.

RG: Okay. Where was this?

EV: And --

RG: Do you remember?

EV: No, I don't. I could find the date on it, but --

RG: That's okay.

EV: -- we were that close. I mean, I could see it. It was right there. And the problem we were having is the recognition thing.

RG: They didn't know you were American; you didn't know they were Japanese?

EV: Right.

RG: Lucky.

EV: We were lucky. And then when we found out, then all hell broke loose. We had to take them out when we found out. And this was during that battle of -- I think it was when we chased the -- it was -- they called it the "Tokiwa" or "Tokyo" --

RG: "Tokyo Express?"

EV: Yeah.

RG: That was down around New Guinea?

EV: No, this was up in the Slot.

RG: The Slot? Okay.

EV: Yeah. We went through the Slot. And that was --

RG: So you came out on top of that one, huh?

EV: Yeah. We came out on top of that one. But it got confused. There was some confusion there.

RG: I can imagine.

EV: Yeah. And --

RG: So you were on deck at that time? You were off duty from your fireman's job?

EV: Yeah. No, I wasn't down in the magazine at that time. It just happens that -- one of those times.

RG: So what would happen in a case like that? Did someone all of a sudden call general quarters, and you just run to your battle stations? Or did you just see it --

EV: Well, we almost ran into them, we were that close. There was almost a collision.

RG: Wow. That had to be spooky.

EV: Yeah.

RG: That had to be spooky. How did you find out that it was a Japanese destroyer? Did someone call general quarters, and then you go to your battle stations? Or did somebody just open up --

EV: Yeah. I think we were at GQ when it happened. And somehow, I got up, I walked up; I got up on deck for some reason, but...

RG: So was that pretty scary to be that close, and --

EV: Oh, yeah.

RG: -- when the guns went off?

EV: Yeah. Of course, that was --

RG: Did they fire back at you?

EV: No.

RG: Oh. So you just sunk them right there?

EV: Yeah. That's when we encountered that Tokyo Express. Gene talked about those pilots, the air crew that bailed out, that we --

RG: I wasn't here. I didn't hear that.

EV: Oh, okay. They were not going to make it back to the airport because they were shot up pretty bad, so they bailed out and said, "Well, would guys pick us up if we jump out?" "Sure." So they bailed out, and we spent all day trying to find them. And --

RG: Well, they weren't that close to you, then?

EV: No. Of course, a person in the water --

RG: You can't see them?

EV: You can't see them. It's like a coconut, like that. But they had their parachutes, and they have this dye and stuff

I think they put in the water. But we picked up all of them except one, and I think he was dead anyhow. But when we brought them onboard, one of the pilots wrote a book about this episode, and I don't remember his name offhand. And so his statement was he couldn't wait to get off. We weren't going back to port.

RG: You were out --

EV: We're out there in combat yet. And so they were still on the *Claxton* when we were in combat, and so they couldn't wait. In his book, he says he couldn't wait to get off of that ship.

RG: Well, yeah. They have fast getaways on a ship; you don't.

EV: Yeah. So anyhow, he had this information in his book. There is nowhere to go on a ship. You can't dig a foxhole.

RG: Huh-uh. You are just there.

EV: Yeah.

RG: Yeah. All the world can see you, because you can't hide anywhere, except maybe in the clouds, or in smoke or in fog.

EV: (laughs) Yeah.

RG: If you don't have that, you are lost. Yeah.

EV: Yeah.

RG: Okay. Well, is that it?

EV: Yeah. I think that's probably it. And I haven't drank any water. But...

RG: Okay. Well, like I say, I thank you for your service, and I thank you for your time today, and we'll go ahead and get this transcribed up. And we're going to send a copy of this to you, a copy of the CD. So you can pop it in your computer and listen to it, and share it with your family and your friends, and your sons.

EV: Okay.

RG: Okay? So we should get that to you hopefully in the next month, and then it'll take a little longer to get the transcribing done, but we'll get that to you.

EV: Yeah. We had a storekeeper. His name was Pat Holland.

RG: Okay. "Holland" like the country?

EV: Yeah, like the country. Yeah. He was a first-class storekeeper, and he was on the port 40-millimeter. We were under attack, air attack, and he fired the 40-millimeter until it was up against the [stop?]. And then he jumped overboard, because that plane was -- that might have been -
- I'm not sure. But anyhow, he jumped overboard.

RG: To save himself?

EV: Yeah, to save himself.

RG: How did they find him? How did you get him back?

EV: He was storekeeper. He had a flag hook on his belt, and
all the --

(break in audio)

EV: The storekeeper --

RG: Let me start this again.

M1: Okay. I'll tell her it'll be a while.

RG: Okay.

EV: The storekeeper has all the keys to the food lockers. And
so he had these keys dangling in the water, so he gets
picked up on the sonar gear of another ship. One of the
other ships. I don't know which one it is, but they picked
up his keys clinking in the water.

RG: He had a lot of keys.

EV: Yeah, he had a lot of keys.

RG: So that --

EV: So he --

RG: -- saved his life, basically, then?

EV: Yeah. But my understanding that he was never returned to
the *Claxton*. He got court martialed for deserting his
battle station. I think that's what happened. I mean,
stories, you know?

RG: Yeah. That's kind of strange.

EV: It is, yeah. But then eventually, I think it was reduced,
but...

RG: Well, let's hope so.

EV: Yeah. So...

RG: Okay. Are we about finished, then?

EV: Yeah. Yeah. Let's --

M1: She just left. She is going to go back to the motel.

EV: Oh, okay.

M1: So you are on your own. So you just keep going.

EV: Oh, okay. Oh, thank you. I think I can find my way back.

RG: Okay. Well, let's just go ahead and end this, then. Your wife's waiting for you, so... Well, I want to say, again, thank you for your time, and thank you for your service.

END OF AUDIO FILE