

# **WORLD WAR II ORAL HISTORY SERIES**

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**Voris C. Riley**

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World War II Memories of  
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World War II Memories of  
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Introduction Myers	<p>This is JoAnn Myers. Today is the first of November, 2005. I'm interviewing for the first time Mr. Voris C. Riley. This interview is taking place in the home of Voris Riley at 7065 Wood Forest, Kingsland, Texas.</p> <p>Okay, Mr. Riley. I'd like to thank you first for letting me come to your home and interview you. I think you have a very important story to tell and I'm really appreciative of taking your time and letting us come in and interview you. I'd like to start with where you were born and the name of your parents.</p>
Riley	I was born in Schleicher County in a little old town that doesn't exist anymore. On Friday, May 13, 1910
Myers	Okay, and what county was it?
Riley	Schleicher County—El Dorado is the county seat.
Myers	That's in Texas?
Riley	That's in Texas. I'm a fifth generation native Texan.
Myers	And what were the names of your parents?
Riley	My mother's name was Effie Spiros. She was almost half-Cherokee Indian. My father's name was Claude Archie Riley. He was three quarters Comanche.
Myers	Wow! So you are a native American, aren't you?
Riley	Yes, ma'am, I am a native American.
Myers	When and where did you enlist?
Riley	I enlisted in Abilene. I was living in Abilene, Texas, although my place of registration was in Seminole, Texas. That's up in the Panhandle.
Myers	I left out one question—did you have any siblings? Did you have any brothers and sisters?
Riley	I had two sisters. One of them lives here at the present. That's one reason I'm down here. Another one passed away about two years ago. I had no brothers.
Myers	What were your sisters' names?
Riley	The one that passed away name was Hill, Jean Hill. She lived in this area for approximately 40 years. The other one who still lives here, name is Knox, Rene Knox.
Myers	Okay. So she lives close by then?
Riley	Oh yeah, she lives at this rest home that uh, Wind something or other.
Myers	Here in Kingsland?
Riley	Down here—I can't even think of the name of it.
Myers	But it's in Kingsland, you think?

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Riley	Oh yeah.
Myers	Okay. You said you enlisted in Abilene?
Riley ENLISTMENT	I was living in Abilene although my registration was in Seminole.
Myers	And what did you enlist in? The Navy?
Riley	In the Navy, yes.
Myers	What influenced you to join the Navy?
Riley	Hah! A letter from Uncle Sam that says Report.
Myers	To report to the Navy?
Riley	No, you see—
Myers	They wanted you to go into the Army.
025 Riley	I was frozen, or was told that I was frozen, on the Civil Service job in Camp Barkley. I tried and wanted to enlist into the Seabees. They offered me as Chief Petty Officer. They told me that I could not do it. Then after we were shipped out—at one time we got 85,000 soldiers stationed in Abilene at Camp Barkley. After we shipped out a whole big bunch of ‘em, we got down to where my duties, my mainest duties, was with the POWs, the German POWs, and so this letter comes along and I wanted to get away from the Army anyways. I had my choice of the Army or the Navy and I had had enough of the Army.
Myers	(laughter) Okay, and that’s a pretty good reason, isn’t it?
Riley	It surely was.
Myers PEARL HARBOR	Well, where were you on December 7, 1941?
Riley	I was in Bossier City, Louisiana.
Myers	Had you already joined the Navy at that time?
Riley	Nope. That was the day the war broke out.
Myers	And you hadn’t enlisted ---
Riley	Now you’re talking about Pearl Harbor Day. I tell you I was a foreman for a construction outfit out of Bossier City, Louisiana.
Myers	Who were you with? Anybody?
037	I don’t remember the name of the outfit. It was a right small contractor about a mile out in the ocean. I was doing a lot of repair work and so forth down there at that time...

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Riley	
Myers	What was your reaction when you heard the news?
Riley	We're into another one! You see, Mrs. Myers, I still remember Armistice Day, 1918.
Myers	The war to end all wars.
Riley	<p>Yeah, the war to end all wars. I had an uncle in the Rainbow Division at that particular time. He had to come home and done perfectly all right.</p> <p>But--and at that time we didn't have any radios, we didn't have any TVs, we had very few telephones, but we did have Western Union which brought all the news into the home depot. The guns went off, they fired and the guns went off, there was a few horns honking, but there wasn't many horns to honk at that particular time. But everybody really celebrated it.</p> <p>You see what I'm talking about. I can remember that.</p>
Myers	You remember the end, and so now when after Pearl Harbor happened, you thought, well here's another war.
Riley	After Pearl Harbor happened, we were, frankly, most all of us were looking for something to happen, but not particularly that. Who'd have ever thought of that. But anyway—
Myers	So you kinda thought there was going to be a war anyway.
055 Riley CAMP BARKLEY	<p>Anyway, but at that particular time I had already put in an application for a Civil Service job with the War Department and after my little time, I worked as a foreman for conscripts for A. J. Wright.</p> <p>You can check into that between Elgin and Bastrop. And as a matter of fact, I was working down there when I got a letter from the Civil Service to report to Camp Barkley, Abilene, Texas, to start work with the Army Engineers at that particular time.</p>
Myers	Okay, so after you enlisted in the Navy, where did you go for training?
Riley	San Diego, where else?
Myers	How long were you training there? Do you remember?
059 Riley BASIC TRAINING	<p>Yes, ma'am, I do! Six weeks—it was hurry up and wait a while. Six weeks of puredy hell. But we got it. And from there I had my choice of five different schools. I took a test -- a general classification test. I chose the St. Louis [unable to understand] Electrical School. After Electrical School, graduated from Electrical School, I was sent into New York City to the Consolidated Edison East River Plant for on-job training for 31 days. From there I was sent into, I think it was Newport, Rhode Island, for some kind of practical on-job training and in the course of time, I went through the Navy Firefighting School, which is another five or six days of puredy hell.</p>
Myers	What was so hellish about it? What made it like that?
Riley	Woo! Don't ever go! Firefighters, woo, hellish, woo! Well, I don't suppose you have

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	any conception of what the engine room on a big ship is like.
Myers	No.
071 Riley	It would be probably three or four feet of water in the bilge or hold. They'd throw in a 15 or 20 gallons of gasoline, set it on fire, give you a hose, a nozzle, a spray hose you and your buddy and tell you to put it out. That was it. Our ropes that we were tied together with through our D-rings had a quarter-inch cable in the center of them so if the rope got burned, they could still pull you out. Anyway—
Myers	So you actually went through that in training?
Riley	Oh yeah, yeah.
Myers	Because that's what you were going to go through in actual stuff, I guess.
Riley	That has to do with my experience. Every station we went into we had to take one day of firefighting. If we went through this school at eliminating, we didn't have to. I'd already had two days of stuff and that I didn't like it. So I decided I would take the whole course. I did. Now this-- on firefighting in the Navy, you might be interested in this, there is no rank. So when I went into this firefighting school, they assigned me a buddy. We went through that six days, and he was a good one, well we went through it fine. When we go down for our exercising class, I am a fireman first class and he is a full commander—he wore three stripes.  Now that's firefighting in the Navy. You see, the Navy—the sailors are not afraid of drowning—fire is their main fear. Fire. You see these pictures even on TV right now of ships on fire, you can get a vague idea. Fire is something we had—now on a firefighting on a ship, the chaplains are in charge. It's no rank.
Myers	Everybody's doing their job equally, huh?
Riley	Everybody does the best they can—not only to save their buddy's life but to save their own.
Myers	Yeah. Okay. About how long was your training from beginning to end?
Riley	Oh, altogether? More than I spent aboard the ship, I would say, probably six or seven months, something like that.
Myers	And then finally you got onto the ship that you were going to be assigned to.
Riley	Yea, they finally assigned me to a ship.
Myers	And what ship were you assigned to?
097 Riley  U.S.S. LAKE CHAMPLAIN	The U.S.S. Lake Champlain, CB 39. And you will find in that document, I think I have give you a fairly well description of our shakedown cruise. Which was something else to find out. If there was a loose bolt on that thing we were going to find it.
Myers	Right. And you did?

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Riley	We did—we lost sixteen men.
Myers	Oh no! Wow! And where was that--where were you on the shakedown cruise?
Riley	Mostly in a shakedown cruise is either in the North Atlantic or in Long Island Sound in through that area and in through there.
Myers	Do you remember what happened?
Riley	To some of them—I can remember some of them but you don't know all of them. One of them was a mess cook who went to turn on a machine, set to punch the switch on a button and fell dead. That put us electricians in the mouth of the gun. But they decided -- finally found out he died of a heart attack.
Myers	It wasn't an electrocution, huh?
Riley	Another one on the flight deck laid down in the shade of a plane. We had those F4Us with folding wings. He died in the shade of the plane—I don't know where we were—probably out in the Caribbean somewhere—and each one of those wings had three 50 caliber machine guns in it. When those wings are folded , it's impossible for those machine guns to go off. But one of them did.
Myers	Oh no!
Riley	It shot him exactly through the heart. Those two I remember distinctly. Two of them were lost overboard—we never did know why and so forth.  But remember something—that this particular time we've all got certain duties to perform—we don't have time to look into things that we later on wish we had more details on.  There's something about wartime that gives you a—I don't know—that gives you—“Go ahead! Forget the side issue! —You gotta do the main job!”
Myers	You just have to do your job.
Riley	I remember we had quite a few burials at sea out there which is something that's not pleasant, but you do have them.
Myers	You have to have them. Well, after the shakedown cruise, where did you go on your ship? Did you stay on the same ship?
121 Riley HIROSHIMA	Yeah—after the shakedown cruise, well we were patrolling the North Atlantic for a while. Then we put on ammunition and were fixing to go through the Canal.  By this time, I don't remember the date, you probably will, but the European war was over. We was going over and help take care of Japan.  And I don't remember exactly just where we were but we were coming into Newport News and got the news of the first bomb over Hiroshima, it was. Which at that time we thought it was scuttlebutt -- who could imagine some 70-odd thousand people being killed by one bomb!  But anyway, so don't ever, <u>don't ever</u> underestimate the United States Government. Don't ever underestimate our war, but if you don't underestimate and whatever you do,

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	do not ever underestimate the youth of this country!
Myers	That's right. They're a tough bunch.
135 Riley CCC	Well, I guess so. Did you ever hear of the Civilian Conservation Corps? I was an original.
Myers	You were in it? My dad was in it too.
Riley	Yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. We did not what we wanted to do; we did what needed to be done.
Myers	What had to be done. .
Riley	And it could be done.
Myers	Where did you serve in the CCC?
Riley	Hoo! Ha-ha.
Myers	All over, huh?
Riley	No. Our first camp was at El Povidere (?), about 15 miles out of a mountain at Rio Medinas, out of Las Vegas, New Mexico.  The second camp was at Mayhill which is down below Cloudcroft, New Mexico, on the Penasco River. I was on the overhead. I got discharged in Gurnsey, Wyoming. I had one year and seven days. I could not get back in. I done my best to get—I loved it.
Myers	You did?
Riley	Oh, yeah, Lord I loved it. Outside, plenty to eat, underwear, basic—I loved it. I loved it! Besides that, my folks could eat.
Myers	You sent some money home.
Riley	Oh sure! They got \$25 a month. Back then, in town, with \$25 a month a family of four could live high on the hog!
Myers	It was really a good program, wasn't it?
Riley	Tell me about it. I was there.
Myers	It did a lot of good for the country, too.
Riley	When the CCs were first organized, they estimated that they would be re-elected to regain the cost of the CCs plus 10 percent. Thirty years after—see CCs lasted ten years only. Thirty years afterwards, they run up an estimate and they had already had their profit was over 300 percent.
Myers	Wow!



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Riley	<p>In other words, there's campgrounds, there's bridges, there's roads, there's forests—I worked in the forest stand among a lot of other things. All that stuff that they built. For instance, the what they call the Indian Lodge out of Fort Davis, Texas. Have you ever been there? Don't ever miss a chance if you ever get a chance to go—Go. It was built by the CCs, see. The old Sheffield Hill, that road up to Sheffield Hill which runs down into the Pecos Canyon, is about that. They built that road up there. The old—several of the old forts are restored, all the campgrounds and so forth—the rockwork, the ranger stations.</p> <p>I visited my old campground, oh probably ten or twelve years ago -- out of Mayhill, New Mexico. Lord, I would hardly even have, but right now it is a government project—the old ground roads, our barracks and so forth. I visited just out of curiosity. The rock fences and the rock ranger station is still there and looks just like they did when we walked off of there.</p>
Myers	That's wonderful. Well the Longhorn Caverns out here is the same way.
Riley	Oh yeah. We worked the Longhorn Caverns.
Myers	It's a wonderful program.
Riley	There's something over here below Inks Lake Dam they did over there, it might've been that camp, I don't know. They did—the only thing I think that they made the biggest mistake was ever letting the stuff die out in the first place, but the war caused that. See it actually just lasted ten years.
Myers	Well, that kinda gave you a little bit of introduction to what Army life was going to be like, or Navy life.
Riley	<p>I went away when I was 16 years old. I was the oldest side of the family. My dad said, -- he was a wildcatter in the oil field and was gone the biggest part of the time-- he said, "Son, this needs to be done. Son, you do that."</p> <p>Son did it and didn't ask why, when or where. He didn't know that he didn't know that he wasn't supposed to and not supposed to know how. It was that simple.</p>
Myers	Well, uh—
Riley	See, when people depend on you for certain things and you know they depend on you, it is human nature for us to respond at 100 percent of our ability.
Myers	That's right. I believe that. Well, let's go back to your time in the Navy. You had just talked about you heard that the first atomic bomb had been dropped so what happened to you and your Navy duty after that?
187 Riley SECOND ATOMIC BOMB	Well, either the first one or the second one, I don't remember now where we was, but the second one where redeployed into Norfolk to have some work done and they had given us a six-day leave that we could either take—'cause we were fixin' to go through the Canal. We could either take our six days off of the East Coast or off of the West Coast. We didn't fly in that day, we didn't have the airplanes. Well, if I took mine off of the East Coast—if everything was on time, I'd have to leave home 24 hours before I got there to get back
Myers	(Laughter) So you didn't go?

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192 Riley  V-J DAY	<p>So I took it off the West Coast it was three days before I drove up. So I just took –any time in the Armed Forces when you get a chance for a leave, take it. So I run up into Massachusetts to visit some friends and then to do some runnin’ around.</p> <p>Now this may be something else you will find this in your document there, I was on the third floor off of Fifth Avenue in New York City when the word came over from President Truman on that sign on Times Square that the war was over. And, as I said, I saw 10,000 people go absolutely crazy. I needed to get to Penn Station to catch a train to get back into the country to go back to my ship. I had plenty of time, I wasn’t crowded, to get to a subway station; I couldn’t get to a subway station on 59<sup>th</sup> Street for the people.</p>
Myers	There were so many people out!
Riley	So I had to walk down to 33 <sup>rd</sup> Street to get the subway station. So I got the subway and I went on down and caught my train down to Norfolk and I caught the 4 o’clock back into Hampton Roads. And when I had got back in, we had loaded, I had put 5,000—get this—bunks on the hangar deck. So you get an idea how big the hangar deck was.
Myers	Five thousand!
Riley Naples, Italy  Sets speed Record	<p>Five thousand bunks! They was stacked about four or five high. So we headed out to Fort Missingaloe and we picked up 5,000 GIs out of Fort Missingaloe (?). And coming back, see I don’t know where we unloaded them—I think it was Staten Island.</p> <p>We rode it right back into Naples, Italy. And we picked up 5,000 more in Naples, Italy on that thing, and coming back through the Straits of Gibraltar, the captain decided that he would do something like that ship would do—and this is on all record, I’ve got all my papers and everything.</p> <p>So speaking locally, I’d say he put his foot in the gas tank. We cleared the Straits of Gibraltar into Hampton Roads in three days and 26 minutes.</p>
Myers	Wow! That must have been a record, huh?
Riley	It stood for 22 years. The Queen Elizabeth finally broke it.
Myers	Wow! Was he just trying to see how fast he could go?
Riley	I haven’t the faintest idea—he was the boss and who cares. All we wanted to do—the soldiers said it took us three weeks to get over here. I said it’ll you three weeks to get home.
Myers	Three days. I bet they were happy too, weren’t they?
Riley	They pulled back into Hampton Roads. Blam! –Up on the bulletin board-- my name come up for discharge and I didn’t argue with ‘em—I didn’t think it was time -- I got out on the point system. I didn’t think it was time but I did. I didn’t argue with ‘em. I was the fifth man to leave the ship.
Myers	And you had stayed on that same ship the whole time.
Riley.	No, not all the time. I did some training on the cruiser a couple of weeks of training on it, but that’s minor.

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Myers	Well, when you were on your main ship assignment, what were your duties there?
242 Riley SHIP ASSIGNMENT Electrician	<p>Oh, I was electrician and I was the main control board operator. We had four big generators to generate... Oh, that dang ship took as much as this town does!</p> <p>And I had complete control off of my board of three generators. The fourth one I had to control by telephone because we had to have a man on it. I couldn't control it automatically. No I give you a vague idea. This you may or you may not know. Do you have an electric clock in your home?</p> <p>That electric clock that you've got in your home is absolutely the same kind to the second as any ship that we have at sea right now. Did you know that? Well it is. OK. Everything in the United States is synchronized electrically. So what.</p> <p>So when we pull into a dry dock, we put on-shore electricity.. All right, what I had to do, or what one of us had to do sometimes, was configure phase the electricity on board ship with the electricity on shore line. Then we cut off the electricity on the ship and we used shore electricity while we was in dry dock. Then when we got done out there we let the water out, then have to let the water back in when we got ready to go we had to turn around, we had to synchronize all of our—everything we had—had to be synchronized with shore electricity. Then we cut off the shore electricity, we took the cables out and we was on our own.</p>
Myers	And that was your main job was to make sure all that ran ?
Riley	Oh yeah. Had to make sure it all operated.
Myers	That was pretty neat. Well--
Riley	I had a control board that, oh I don't know, it wasn't no little bitty thing.
Myers	Well, describe your living conditions on the ship.
Riley	Excellent. No, there wasn't a thing in the world wrong with 'em as far as that was concerned.
Myers	How much—
Riley	They always made sure we had plenty to eat. Sometimes, after we left out of port, we could have sweet milk for two or three days. Yeah there were no problems with the living conditions.
Myers	What about space—personal space, like sleeping and—
Riley	It was just about the size of a small cot – stacked about five high. And we'd get into bad weather. That's another story. I've seen some bad weather. Me and my buddy were up on the forward emergency diesel engine room which—we had two of 'em—one forward and one aft in case anything happened and our main electricity went out, these emergency diesel generators came on and generated enough electricity to operate the ship. Okay. So the electricians could get into that, see. So we'd go up—it was right behind the chain, way up forward so we'd go up—up this passageway, went through a waterproof hatch and we strung our hammocks at the--
Myers	In there.

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Riley	Well, so what. You have your telephones, your organized assistance; you knew exactly where everything was. Well okay, that ship is going up and down like this, back and forth, a hammock you could feel going up and down but back and forth don't bother you. And I have seen some waves at sea that we know exceeded 55 feet high.
Myers	Oh my gosh!
Riley	We know it did that because that washed life rafts off.
Myers	And what did that do to your hammock? (Laughter)
Riley	Well now this was sleeping in a hammock! You sleep fine in a hammock. You could feel it going up and down and back and forth; it don't bother you.
Myers	It just puts you to sleep, huh? Rock-a-bye baby, huh?
Riley	Yeah, it just puts you to sleep. As a matter of fact, I might have left my hammock up there when I left the ship, I don't know, I really don't.
293 Myers	Well, describe your clothing and equipment and any weapons. Did you have weapons on board?
WEAPONS	
Riley	Nope.
Myers	You didn't have any personal weapons?
Riley	Nope. We were not that -- we operate -- our weapons were our airplanes. I'm not quite sure but I think we had about 116 F4Us, and Wildcats. The F4Us were our main aircraft. These were our weapons.
Myers	Did you have any ship self-defense weapons besides the airplanes? You didn't have any guns?
Riley	No, we did, I said a while ago,--
Myers	You didn't have any anti-aircraft guns?
Riley	We didn't get within 200 miles where everything was happening.
Myers	So you never saw your planes take off?
Riley	Oh yeah!
Myers	And come back in?
Riley	Oh yes.
Myers	I bet that was quite an experience to see those planes take off.
Riley	Probably—they were shot 'em off with cables. One every 15 seconds. I seen 'em come in, I seen 'em hit the deck and tails missed the cables –

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Myers	Then they go on around the side.
Riley Damaged Planes Overboard	<p>If one was damaged, they pulled the flyboys out and took their deckhands' crane, the deck crane, picked him up and threw him overboard and went on made room for the next one to come in.</p> <p>I've seen 'em come in, getting ready for a landing, seen this happen twice, come in and something would happen and so forth and it's absolutely degenerate—I mean just go into a thousand pieces. I've seen that happen a couple of times.</p> <p>("Wow"! – Myers)</p> <p>Yeah, you know the landing was something else. No, I've seen 'em take off, one goes out to the left and get out of the way of the ship. I saw one one time take off and turn to the left and his propeller came off.</p> <p>("Ooo" Myers)</p> <p>Those things don't float very long.</p>
Myers	So he went into the drink.
Riley	Un-huh. So what. So we had a couple tin cans we called 'em, the last four ships that come along and picked him all up. Lives were not expendable, if possible.
Myers	Right. I know, they did everything they could to rescue somebody.
Riley	They'd kick anything off. It didn't make any difference—to save a life. To get that man out of that ship. If they come in fire, the men in asbestos suits pulled him out of there. We had two what we called cruisers -- we called 'em tin cans. All they did was—anything that we lost they come along and picked it up.
Myers	Describe meal-time.
Riley	Beg pardon?
Myers	Meal-time, describe your meal-time. Mess hall!
Riley	Hoo! Well—
Myers	What kind of food did you have on regular meals?
328 Riley	We had good food. We'd just walk down and they'd loaded our plates for us and we went on and ate.
Myers	I guess you had better food than the Army did.
Riley	No, I won't say we did. But our food was good enough if we could get into port in time to get it re-stocked up. We had good food, we had no trouble and after a time, you learned just when you can hit that chow line and not wait for three or four—you know what I mean—you just learn a routine.
Myers	Do you have any idea how many men were on board on that ship at that time?

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Riley	Oh yeah! It took 3200 men to run the damn thing!
Myers	3200.
Riley	Yeah supporting the flyboys and gunners.
Myers	So they were extra—
Riley	It took 3200 to—that was full-time complement. It could be run on less, but World War time called for 3200 men.
Myers	And how long a time did you stay out at sea before you came back to port?
Riley	I don't remember, probably the longest time we was ever out was two or three months maybe, maybe longer, I don't remember..
Myers	But that doesn't seem like a long time to you—because you had so much stuff to do, I guess.
Riley	Doing something all the time. Work was very fast, sea work, as I said, our ship was very fast and we ran quite a bit. Back, as I said, before the European War was over, we didn't have to go over there, but we were getting prepared to go into the Asiatic deal and when they dropped the bomb and that simmered everything down.
Myers	Yeah, that was good for you. Well, did you make some good friends on ship?
Riley	I made some real good buddies on the ship. Some of 'em I've heard from since then, some of them haven't, some have died... two or three real good ones. One in particular was out of Oklahoma and out of Wyoming.
Myers	Do you remember any of the names?
Riley	No, but I could probably go back somewhere and dig 'em up but I don't remember their names.
Myers	But you had some special---
Riley	One of 'em's names was—I do remember one of their names—his name was Charles Higginbotham. I can't remember where Charles was from—I think he was from Oklahoma. And then Burt Jones—now he was from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, and he gettin out. I left just before he did. Yeah, it's something you're glad you got out of and glad at one time you got into – I don't know.
Myers	Do you remember any of your commanding officers or immediate superiors?
Riley	Really I don't. A captain—what the hell was his name? I'm sorry I don't. He weighed 250 pounds  (“Oh my gosh” – Myers)  ... And as far as he was concerned, the highest rank in the United States Navy was an eagle by themselves.  (“Oh, that's nice” – Myers)

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	<p>Well, he had a small carrier shot out from under him out in Puget Sound and he hit the deck, hit the water and there was an able-bodied seaman on one of these other two man life rafts that pulled him out of the water and pulled him up on that.</p> <p>(“Saved his life, huh” – Myers)</p> <p>So as far as the old man was concerned, that was the highest ranking.</p>
Myers	That’s pretty good. Well, did you write letters to anybody while you were out on ship?
377 Riley	<p>Yeah, oh yeah, you write letters to people. Most all of our letters were sent through the disbursal office until after the war was over, which was no big problem.</p> <p>But see I left a wife and two kids at home.</p>
Myers	Oh, you did. So did you get mail very often from her?
Riley	Yeah, quite often.
Myers	How old were your children when you left?
Riley	Oh, let’s see, one of them was about two, the other was about four or five, something like that.
Myers	Do you think the four-year-old understood what was happening?
Riley	That’s the one that got killed in an airplane crash. Yeah he understood because he was the one that was a Green Beret. He was a Master Sergeant in the Green Berets. He was a karate instructor, third degree akita and so forth. If he didn’t understand, he learned later on what was going on.
Myers	What do you think you missed most of all during the time you were on ship? Did you – you missed home, you missed your family?
Riley	Yeah, well sure, sure you missed home, your family, your wife and your kids—sure you did, but it was just one of those things—we had a job to do and it had to be done and so it was just about that simple. We didn’t go into this deal because we wanted to—we went into this deal because we were told to for one thing and also the mainest thing is somebody has got to stand between the evil and your folks, your family, for the good of our country, for the good of our family, the good of our kids. We live in a great country. As a matter of fact, you have no idea how great it is and you won’t have any idea how great it is until you visit some other countries like Italy, even France, England...
Myers	I’ve been there, I’ve been to those countries.
Riley	You know what I’m talking about. Okay. The children, the women especially in this country have more probably than they have the same in Australia and maybe in Canada, but the greatest privileges are any women in the world. Okay so we’d like to keep it that way.
Myers	We have to defend that.
Riley	The men, the American men, spoil their women—and they’re delighted to do it. That’s what we want to do—that’s what we’re trying to do.

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Myers	We want to keep it that way.
Riley	We're going to keep it that way if we possibly can. And if this interview with you will help any of the future younger people to understand what this is all about, it is well worth our time.
480 Myers POWs	I agree, I really do. You told me a little bit earlier that you had some contact with POWs. Do you want to explain just a little bit about that?
Riley	POWs?
Myers	Didn't you say you had some POW –
Riley	Hey, it's all written in that literature that—  [see "Interview with Voris Riley, January 4, 1987, at the end of this interview transcript]
Myers	Well, I'd like you just to tell me just a little bit. You don't have to tell me the whole story, but how did you get involved with the POWs?
Riley	<p>I have to start at the beginning. As I said, labor was hard to get a hold of. So they tried some trustees out of the military stockade. A minor incident that I won't go into put me in pretty good solid with them. Stockade prisoners are a very close-knit group. They knew a lot more than you think they would.</p> <p>Anyway—so then we go into a big project. The government, the Army, wanted me to build three 40 by 100 foot swimming pools in 90 days.</p> <p>(Myers—Oh my gosh!)</p> <p>And I couldn't get labor. Carpenters would build the forms. So they sent me 24 hard cores out of the stockade with the shotgun guards.</p> <p>(Myers—Wow!)</p> <p>Right off of the bat, I made a little few friends with them—I can go into detail on that if you want to. Later on some of them goofed up. So we had to work on Sundays. I goes out there—now I'm in charge of this mess. I goes out on Sunday morning. I lined those guys up. I kept my trucks on standby. The day before we had a trimmin' crew.</p> <p>I said, "I know today's your day for candy, it's your day to write letters, it's your day to visit, your day to play games." I said, "Now remember something. Today is my day to stay home with my wife and kids. Today's my day for Sunday dinner. Today's my day to listen to the radio, go to a movie or maybe take my kids to the park."</p> <p>I said, "Whoever goofed up, you goofed me up same as you did yourselves, and I'm as unhappy as hell about it. But if you will take these forms, clean 'em up, stack 'em, put 'em in order, I'll turn you loose. I'm going up to the NCO and have a leisurely breakfast and I don't want to be bothered."</p>



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	<p>I did. I got up there and here come three of ‘em to meet me. “Well, we got it done.” “You couldn’t possibly.” “We did.” They had those forms cleaned up and stacked up—that place was policed, it looked nice, there wasn’t a thing wrong with it—it looked beautiful—okay.</p> <p>“You get on these trucks and you go back to that stockade, you keep your damn mouth shut! And anybody says anything to you, you send ‘em to me. I’m going home.”</p> <p>I’ll tell you what—I had 24 men that was for me right then.</p>
Myers	I bet!
Riley	We went ahead—we built two more deep swimming pools that summer.
Myers	That sounds pretty good.
Riley	<p>The provost marshal in charge –he happened to be a friend of mine and he’d like to get these guys out. We sort of talked down that.</p> <p>The Army rules say they can have water twice a day and meals at 10 o’clock in the morning, 3 o’clock in the afternoon and I said, “No. We’re going to be working down there in that hole and get 100 to 160 degrees and I ain’t gonna have these guys falling out. They’re gonna have cool water to drink or else they’ll go home.”</p> <p>Well, he said, “I just want to see it when I come down.” and I said, “That’s okay. I don’t give a damn—they’re going to have water!”</p> <p>The first morning I got ‘em down there, I told ‘em, I said, “Look. We are going to have water.”</p> <p>There was a 15-gallon water tank that had ice in it.</p> <p>“One man at a time and only one man at a time goes and gets a drink. No loitering, you get a drink and get the hell away from there and that’s it. You don’t and we’re going back to Army rules. Right now you’re working under Riley rules.”</p>
Myers	(Laughter.) And it worked huh?
Riley	Three months time that rule was never violated.
Myers	Wow! That’s pretty good!
Riley	No—I’d take their water away from ‘em.
Myers	They knew a good thing, didn’t they?
Riley	Yeah—they appreciated it. You know, that’s the reason I’m talkin’, as a I told you earlier, for some unknown reason, I was able at that time to handle a crew of men. And I guess I did a pretty good job. But anyway, they weren’t going to let me go. Okay, now what else would you like to know?
Myers	Well, we’re almost at the end. You talked about when you heard the war was over and that you heard about the atomic bomb and you didn’t know—you really didn’t believe it—

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Riley	Okay. You will find in that document that I've got on these German prisoners. I'm going over this again—we're wasting time, but whatever.
Myers	We're not wasting time at all. Whatever you want to say.
Riley	<p>One of these prisoners said, "Mr. Riley, how bad a shape is Detroit?"</p> <p>Huh?</p> <p>"Well, they told us that Detroit had been bombed, that your, your machine, your machine shops had been bombed beyond recognition. Well all right, what kind of shape is New York Harbor in?"</p> <p>I said, "Where'd you get the idea that New York Harbor had been bombed?"</p> <p>"Well," he said. "They shipped us into Galveston, didn't they? Texas, down here?" Propaganda had told them that Detroit had been bombed beyond recognition. New York Harbor was out of commission—that's propaganda. You'll find it all in there. That's what I am talking about.</p>
530 Myers	Well, I think propaganda can win a war—I really think it can. (Riley—Yeah) [unable to understand]
Riley  Propaganda in Wartime	<p>Yeah. They thought so, too, but it didn't. Japan thought so too, but it didn't. They pulled a sneak attack on us at Pearl Harbor and they paid for it dearly. I'm sorry to say but that's the way it was. Have you ever been to the ship Arizona in Pearl Harbor?</p> <p>(Myers—Uh-huh)</p> <p>So have I. Propaganda probably does a lot of things. Now we have as much propaganda—we have more propaganda over here in peacetime, I think, than we do in wartime.</p> <p>(Myers—Right now we do.)</p> <p>There's certain things in wartime that has to be shut up because we don't know who we're talking—for instance, in the development of the atomic bomb in New Mexico, there was complete secret deal and uranium 235 had come out right after the war had come out on the newspaper page I was in Shreveport, Louisiana, and I was really enthused about it to see more next week, but I never heard another word about it. Now that is propaganda, but we have to have it.</p>
Myers	I agree.
Riley	<p>You have to have a certain amount of secrecy. We have to on certain things. As I said, I don't know really how to explain this but it's just one of those things. But the propaganda was fed these German prisoners and you will find a lot more in the document I gave you.</p> <p>There's something else that will come out in that too we'll find out they told these boys that if they learn English, that after the United States was conquered that they would be given a certain territory, state, county or something with at least as many as 10,000 people that they would be governor.</p> <p>(Myers—Wow! That would-)</p>

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	I got this straight from them.
Myers	That really was big propaganda, wasn't it?
Riley	That's not guesswork.
Myers	Was that their incentive to keep fighting?
Riley	They really thought they were so full of it. Also now on propaganda there's very few of these prisoners that I had that knew a thing in the world about the Jewish holocaust. They knew nothing about that—they knew—so see—
Myers	They didn't know it was happening.
Riley	They knew a little bit, but they didn't know very much.
Myers	Well, the American people at the time didn't know anything about it either, did they?
Riley	<p>They knew that there was something happening because before the war there was a lot of the German Jews that immigrated to the United States. As a matter of fact, Hitler lost some of his greatest brains right there. He didn't know where his intelligence was. For instance the Zeiss optical outfit -- they moved completely to the United States—he lost all the wealth, see. And this Oppenheimer that helped develop the atomic bomb.</p> <p>(Myers—and Werner von Braun)</p> <p>See what I'm talking about?</p> <p>(Myers—Einstein)</p> <p>Yeah and then we got into --now there's another thing that not many people know. He had also developed the jet engine for airplanes used at that time but they hadn't developed it enough to be able to use it, see. So really, Hitler was ahead of the United States in a lot of things.</p>
Riley	There's two things people underestimate their enemies because we are all inclined to judge the rest of the world by ourselves. If you're honest, you think I'm honest, you think they are. If you're a crook, you think I'm one. Don't ask me why, it's human nature the good Lord endowed us that's the way we are.
Myers	Well, what do you think about the current situation? Are we trusting--
Riley	You ask what do I think about I? I think that some of it is mistakes and some of it is not mistakes. Some of it is necessary and some of it is not necessary. I have to leave it up—and you do too—to people that are smarter and know more about it than I do on this thing. I don't understand why we had to go into Afghanistan to get rid of the terrorists. Now I farmed here, we don't need terrorists here; we raised our own.
Myers	(Laughter.) Yeah, we've had a lot of them.
Riley	But. Okay, the 9/11 terrorists attacks could have easily been avoided had our federal employees or FBI had really been on the --they can look back now and see their mistakes where they did. So if you don't do anything, you don't make mistakes. If you do something, you do make mistakes. So we can't blame them as far as that's concerned, but we can look at ourselves --look at the mistakes we make where if we had

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	known we wouldn't have done it, see.
Myers	Well, there's people who say that Pearl Harbor could have been avoided if we'd been –
Riley	Well, it's a known fact that it could have! They spotted those planes coming in. That is a known fact. It was just something that is a matter of judging the rest of the world by yourselves! Oh well, we wouldn't have attacked Tokyo on a Sunday morning when everybody was playing golf and having breakfast, so why—now, oh yeah, Pearl Harbor could have been avoided as far as that's concerned. But also remember the Bible says, "There will be wars and rumors of wars." The Lord himself says that my people are a beleaguered people. There are rebellious people and maybe he was talking about the Hebrews, we don't know.
Myers	Or people in general, huh.
Riley	The thing of it is we'll get off this war business for a minute, if you don't mind.
UFOs	The thing of it is we do not know whether we're here to triumph or trial, for punishment, or because we're proprietors. We don't know.  Now, have you ever seen a UFO?  (Myers—No)  Then you don't believe in 'em, do you?
Myers	Yeah—or I don't know if I believe in them. I believe there's something people have seen, but I don't know because I haven't seen them.
Riley	I have.
Myers	You have seen one?
Riley	I have. Now where it come from, I don't know. Where they were goin to, I don't know. But they're there.
Myers	Where were you when you saw it?
Riley Witnessed UFO	I was sitting out in the back yard in Odessa. It was in the afternoon lookin' up through that thing. There was some telephone lines up there so you could tell it was movin' rather slow, by them telephone lines. Big 'un.  It looked to me like it was about five or six miles high, about the shape of a silver dollar. Then, here come a couple of dimes coming in. I sat there watchin' 'em. They's three of us—three grown people and a 14-year-old boy.
Myers	And they all saw the same thing?
Riley	Oh yeah. Well, the dimes disappeared, just like "Piff!" – 45-degree angle just like that! And it was out of sight before you could stand still.  Well, how come it to disappear? There's consoles back over there--a B-52. He's probably 25 or 30 miles back over there and he's flying about 35 - 40,000 feet up there. And come across 'em and goes just exactly across where that UFO was playing around up there. Don't ask me, I don't know.

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	<p>(Myers—That’s amazing.)</p> <p>Now that one is positive. I thought maybe I had seen a couple more, but that one I know. And if you want to know something, people that have never seen one may not believe but anybody’s ever seen one, they believe on them.</p>
Myers	I bet that stayed with you for a while, didn’t it?
Riley	Ummm, well no, it was something, it was something I didn’t understand. I don’t know what it was—there’s a lot of things I don’t understand—there’s a lot of things about this world that I don’t understand.
Myers	Did it scare you?
Riley	The older I get, the less I understand.
Myers	Well I don’t know if I want to see one or not because I think I’d be afraid.
Riley	Nah—don’t be afraid. It ain’t gonna hurt you. They’d done hurt you if they wanted to. It ain’t gonna hurt you. There was a lot of propaganda in New Mexico—we don’t know what that was, but that’s all right. It’s made the little town of Roswell Famous.
Myers	Hadn’t it though? It made them famous.
Riley	Well sure—so what. Maybe it was a weather balloon, or maybe it wasn’t. I’ve seen weather balloons when they fall. When the weather balloons come down—they’re black. The ones I saw were black and the bottom of them they have a canister on the bottom and it says to turn this in to the nearest Post Office. That’s what we do.
Myers	That’s okay. I like to hear about all kinds of things. The last thing on the list for the wartime was to describe your return home. How long did it take you to get home once you were discharged?
693	Hoo-hoo-ho! That’s funny. You got a funny question!
Riley	Well, they turned us loose in Norfolk and we could do just about any dumb thing we wanted to. We were what you call the Ruptured Duck, and therefore big heroes.
Coming Home	Anyway they finally put five of us on a train that shipped us into Camp Wallace, Texas. You know Camp Wallace – where NASA is now? Okay. I don’t remember how long we were on that train, -- too damn long. Well, we got in there about 10 o’clock at night. This old boy he pulls out a pad and starts to call out names and blah, blah, blah.
Camp Wallace	
Paperwork Mix-up	He said, “Wait a minute. Whose name is this?” Oh hell, nobody’s name. So we had the wrong papers. In between times, the others were sent out to Treasure Island in California. Well one of these boys stopped over in Chicago and decided and he’d like to have a beer so we went down to the nearest joint to get a beer and the Shore Patrol picked him up. They go back out that way and wants to see the papers. Nothing matches. So they throw the whole damn bunch in jail.
	(Myers—Oh my gosh!)
	They went on into Norfolk and got frustrated so they had to come back. We’re still on

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<p>Hitchhiking Home</p>	<p>the train when that happened. So then they sent their papers down to Camp Wallace they sent our papers down there to Treasure Island. They kept him in jail til they found out what the deal was and then the Shore Patrol turned him loose. Well, we were down there without any papers for a three-day leave.</p> <p>And I had a sister who lived in Austin. I don't know. Well after I get back down there, the boys are all going through discharge and I'm the last one down there. I got in that line real quick and got my discharge. I kept my ID card; I still got it</p> <p>Well, one of these ole boys lived in Luling. He had his car on base. There was 5 of us out there. One of them, the first damn thing he did, he stopped and bought a bottle of whiskey. Well, by the time we got into Houston, he couldn't even _____. (Laughter). Well, here he is with a hundred dollar check, government check, on him, so damn drunk he didn't know what it was. So we took him to the Western Union office. At the Western Union office, they didn't care, as long as his hand could hold a pencil, he can endorse a check. So I held his hand while he signed. We wired a hundred dollars – Western Union didn't even charge us anything. We wired it to his home address in Arlington. We took him to the bus station. (Laughter)</p> <p>We had some landlubbers in the Shore Patrol. We take him up there, got his ticket, clipped it on his uniform and tried to notify the Shore Patrol. Said, "If you let him miss his buss, we're goin' to come back and kill ya."</p>
<p>Myers</p>	<p>Oh my gosh!</p>
<p>Riley</p>	<p>We got into Luling –there were some for Austin and some for Luling-- and it was three o'clock in the morning. The highway splits there out of Luling and we had to hitchhike from then on. I said to a buddy, "Well, I'm going into Austin." I said, "Come on and go with me and we'll go see Austin" and he said, "I'm going on to San Antonio so come go with me." I said, I'll tell you what. The first car that comes along, wherever it's going is what we'll take."</p>
<p>Myers</p>	<p>And that's where you're going, huh?</p>
<p>Riley</p>	<p>We end up on a truckload of hay at some hotel in town.</p> <p>(Much laughter by both)</p> <p>We walked into that lobby of the hotel and it had a sign up "No vacancies". I said to him, I said, "Look, we need a room."</p> <p>The manager said, "You're going to stay the night—I got one for you boys if you want a room. Well, I keep one just for that purpose."</p> <p>So I stayed all night. My buddy was a shoe salesman. He gets up the next morning bright and early and goes down and comes back telling me he was going to get his job back. Well, bless his heart, he didn't know, but according to law, they HAD to give him his job back. Woo!</p> <p>I messed around and finally got some breakfast and finally hit the highway out of San Antonio to Austin and stayed a couple of days with my sister before I went on home. There's a lot behind us to that story; that's why I did that but that's neither here nor there.</p> <p>So, we won't go into that.</p>

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Myers	Okay. Well, where was your wife waiting for you?
Riley	She wasn't. That's why I said...
Myers	Oh! That's the story you don't want to tell! Okay.
Riley	I wound up the next day to Hobbs, New Mexico. The Army they don't want me anymore; they don't want one-armed men; the draft board told them what they wanted to know. I wound up in a truck at a beer joint in Hobbs, New Mexico. I didn't even know where my sister lived. Cops found me and said I don't know where they live. In a little bit I was able to make a telephone call and my brother-in-law said he'd be down to get me in a little bit. I was sittin' there drinkin' beer and he came down and got me. In other words, I'm one of the guys who got a "Dear John" letter.
Myers	I'm very sorry to hear that. That's really tough.
Riley	It was the very best thing that happened to me and not to her. Now, when we get these damn things off I'll tell you some more stories.
Myers	Okay. Well, was it hard for you to find a job whenever you got out?
Riley	Honey, I'm one of the best damn workmen that ever walked. It's never been hard for me to find a job.
Myers	Good, well good, so you didn't have any problems?
Riley	I retired as a construction superintendent. I can handle men. I 'm an educated electrician—I know a little bit about a lot. Look at this stuff in here. (Gestured around his workshop.) This was a hobby shop and it's a mess—I don't know why I moved it down here, but yes, I do too, because  (Myers—"because you have fun")  Yes, I get out here and play.
Myers	Let me just close by telling you again that I want to thank you for letting me interview you and I've enjoyed every single story you told.
Riley	Well, thank you very much.
Myers	And if you can help me out any way, I'd be appreciative—I've really enjoyed talking to you.
Riley	You just holler!
Myers	Okay. Well thank you very much.
	End of interview.