



Mike Kozyra

U.S. Coast Guard — World War II
Atlantic — U.S.S. Wakefield

Machinist First Class

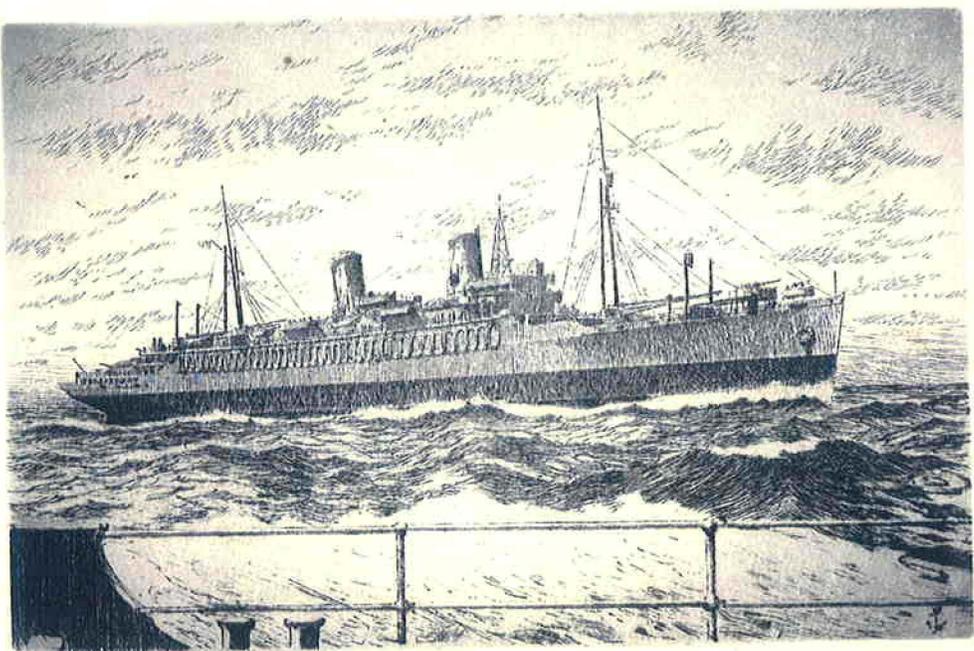
Mike Kozyra

Veterans
History
Project
Transcript

Interview conducted
October 13, 2006

Niles Public Library
Niles Public Library District
Niles, Illinois





U.S.S. Wakefield

J. Wilcox



This goes to show you
how sorry the prisoners
are being captured and
coming to the good old U.S.

The 3 stripes you see
in front of him means
he got the Iron Cross.
I wonder how many ^{Americans}
he killed



The prisoners out for an
airing. What a Raibet.
Show these pictures to Huns
and ask if they look like
Germans.

Here's some more of our
prisoners and our gun
ask Stanley if he built this
one.

Please give these pictures
to my Fatherly Wife



Yanks Back from Europe Welcomed at Boston



[Acme Telephoto]

Gaily decorated tug with band and girls approaches U. S. S. Wakefield which docked at Boston



CHICAGOANS MEET
renewed by two fight
board a Coast Guard
Atlantic. They are
W. S. Pool and M
24 in av.

SEA—An old fri
men from Chicago
transport somewh
Andrew V. Kott (le
Kozyra of the Coa
U.S. Coast Guard photo



Mike Kozyra
Veterans History Project Interview Transcript
13 October 2006
Interviewer Kate Wolicki

001: Introduction

This interview is being conducted on October 13, 2006, at Niles Public Library in Niles, Illinois. My name is Kate Wolicki. I'm speaking with Mike Kozyra. Mr. Kozyra was born August 15, 1921, in Chicago and now lives in Niles, Illinois. No?

I don't live in Niles.

Oh, you live in Chicago.

Yeah.

He still lives in Chicago, Illinois.

He learned of the Veterans History Project, did you learn from another veteran? Is that where you heard about it?

What, this--

Yeah.

No.

Where did you hear about it?

About the Coast Guard?

No, about the Veterans History Project.

Oh, yeah. I saw-- I came here to see that demonstration you have up there now.

Oh, you came to see the photo display.

Yeah.

Mr. DeCecco's photo display.

One of the fellows told me about it, and he said, "Oh, you should see it. They've got ships and everything," you know.

Yeah.

So, I come to see the ships, and there was no ships there.

Yeah, not so much ships.

So many of these people running around.

Well, he's kindly consented to be interviewed for the Project. Here is his story. You go. Speak.

Speak!

011: Overview: October 1942-October 1945

Tell me whatever you want to tell me.

Okay. Well, to begin with, I enlisted as an apprentice seaman on October 27th of 1942 in Chicago, for a three year period, and duration of the war. And I was born on August 15, 1921. You said that. And my rating I held-- as an apprentice seaman, seaman second class, machinist mate second class, and machinist mate first class. Yeah. Service schools, I went to steam machinists, mate training on a ferry boat in Brooklyn, New York, on 5/8/43, and then I was transferred to the captain of the port in Newport, Rhode Island. And then from that point, I went on to an 83-footer boat just, you know, it was a patrol boat. And then I went to the Constitution Pier. And I got on a ship called Wakefield. And I was trained at Manhattan Beach Training Station when I first went in. And the separation center was at # 9 Detroit, Michigan. I had active duty from November 12th, 1942, to the 16th of October 1945. That was two years, eleven months, and twenty days. I had ten days to go, and I could have got a good conduct metal, but I was anxious to get home. And that was it. And, of course, I think I told you that on the phone. Yeah, I got married, and I got an honorable discharge, the button and all the rest that goes with it.

Did you get married before you finished your service or did you--

No. I got married in the Service.

I didn't know people did that.

Well we were engaged, so to speak, and for a couple of years. And then I had to go to the Service.

036: Why the Coast Guard?

And I tried to get into the Air Corps and they refused me on account of my eyes. I went to the Marines. It was the same reason. And I said, "Why are you"-- you know, I had glasses on. They said, "What happens if you lose your glasses? You won't know where you are at, what you are doing, or anything else! You'd be shooting somebody that is," you know, "your own"-- what do you call them, mate, or something. But, anyway. And that's how it ended up that I tried that

Service, and then I tried, all I had left was the Army, or the Air Corps. I think I said the Air Corps, didn't I?

You did.

Yeah, the Army, and I tried the Navy, and the Navy wouldn't accept me either on account of my eyes, so I was almost down to nothing, and knew I'd have to be drafted in the Army. And one of the friends I had told me, he said, "Why don't you try the Coast Guard?" "Coast Guard! What the hell are they doing?" He said, "Well, you know, they guard the coast and everything else." And I thought, well, I'll see what it's like. "Just like a Navy man," they told me then, "just like a Navy man." So, I went down there to get in to enlist, and the doctor that examined me, he said, "Oh, you've got high blood pressure." And I said, "I have?" He didn't say nothing about the eyes. He said high blood pressure. He said, "I'll tell you what, why don't you go out in the hall there and sit out there for about a half hour or so, and I'll call you back when I'm ready for you. And we'll see what your blood pressure is, you know, whether it will come down or not in the meantime." I heard somebody say they needed forty-five men or something like that. And then, of course, I didn't know where it was coming from or who was saying it. And it ended up that the doctor came out, and he called me over, and he checked me over again. And he says, "Fine. You're okay. It went down. How did you get it down?" And I says, "I don't know," you know. "That's it," he says, "You're in." So, okay.

And the next morning—Well, that night, I went home and told my mother and dad I was in it. And then, of course, they didn't even know what the Coast Guard was. I didn't either. But the next morning, I got a call about six o'clock in the morning about coming down to the Army draftees-- where all the draftees were being, you know, had to report. And I was supposed to report that morning. But I'd joined the Coast Guard. So, I told them, I said, well, I said, "I enlisted in the Coast Guard yesterday. They were supposed to let you know." He said, "They didn't let us know, but good luck to you. Have a good, long life." "Well, I'll try."

And it ended up that that's how I got into the Coast Guard, and I got out of the Army. I didn't want to be in the Army, mostly because I'd seen a lot of stuff that happens there, you know, you sleep in the mud and everything else. That's not for me. But, anyway, you can't be-- beggars can't be choosers! They got to take what they get. And that's it.

And then, after that, I ended up there. I just explained to you about being in-- I had to go to boot camp. I went to boot camp. I got to tell you that, yeah. Oh, I told you that, didn't I? Yeah, I think I told you that.

070: Boot Camp

What was it like?

Boot camp?

Yeah.

Well, it's a school, you know, it's like a school. They teach you all about the Navy. And they told us right off, the Navy and the Coast Guard are, you know, the same, except that one's got Coast Guard, and one's got-- we have a little shield over here.

On your sleeve.

On the sleeve, yeah, that shows it was the Coast Guard. And the Army, I mean the Navy just has rings around there. We had rings around there, too, but we still had the little shield on there, sewed on there. And I was in the Coast Guard. There, they teach you how to tie knots. They teach you how to read semaphore, you know, flag stuff. You got to know how to read that. And they don't do that teletype anymore, because it's obsolete, you know. They don't do that anymore. And things like that. So, they said, "We don't know where you're going to go in the Service, but we're sending you out to this training station." You know, well, that's where I was. I was in this training station, Chatham, not Chatham, Manhattan Beach. And then from there, after you spend thirty--forty days, whatever it was, then you got transferred out of there. And I got transferred out and I ended up in Chatham Lifeboat Station in Massachusetts, Cape Cod.

085: Chatham Lifeboat Station "We walked the beach."

So what were you doing there?

Well, we walked the beach. We had to walk the beach. Yeah, really! We had to walk the beach for five miles. And at the end of the five miles, there was a clock-- there was a clock up there. And you had to carry a clock. So, you went over there, and when you got to that thing, you took the key out, put it on, you know, punched the clock, put the key back, and then go back. And that's what you did. And, of course, in the meantime, you'd be looking out in the water to see if there was any boats or anything that you could see that was not, you know, supposed to be there, or whatever. It was-- there was no way you could tell them it. You got to run to the station to tell them, hey, there's somebody out there, or something like that. So, it's kind of a—something, just something to do, I think, walk five miles, really.

Did you have-- How do you walk on the beach for five miles? Don't you get—doesn't it take a long time on the beach, or is it like a rock beach?

Well, here's the story, you know, when the tide is out, you can walk on the sand like a sidewalk. You know what I mean. The tide's going to be out.

Yeah.

104: Machinist's Mate Training

And that's one of the things you had to-- And then if the tide was in, then you had to walk farther up where the sand was hard. And, of course, when it got hot and dry, and everything else, then it was-- but it was never hot, I got there in the wintertime. And from there, I didn't want to stay doing that, so I went to the Naval Station, and I complained over there, that I didn't want to do what I was doing. And they asked me what I wanted to do. And I says, "Well, I wanted to be,

you know, a machinist's mate." And they said, "What do you know about machines?" And I told them I was learning to be a tool and die maker, and so on, and so forth. And then they said, "Well, that's great." You know, they said, "Maybe we can get you a place." And I says, "Okay." You know, "Thank you." Well, about two weeks later, maybe three weeks later, I got a letter from the District, District #1 out there in Boston. And they told me that I should report to New York at the training station at a certain hotel, Sutton Hotel. And I would be going to school there, machinist's mate school. And that's down there. Now, see, I told you about that—it's, what is it?

I don't know what that says. It says odcgo3nd.

Yeah, I don't know what that is either.

And then it says Rexsta, Boston, Mass.

Yeah, that's where I had to go to-- I don't know, a receiving station, that's what that is. That's a receiving station. And then I went to Boston, and then from there, I went to New York. Anyway, I went to New York, and I was on a ferry boat, you know, the ferry boats-- have you been in New York?

No.

Oh. Well, they've got ferry boats that run between Staten Island and the city, Staten Island and Manhattan, and they go back and forth, you know. And some of those have been run out. And they have them on the side like a senior, you know, so they put them on the side there. Nothing to do anymore.

And they teach you all about the steam engines, which was a very good thing there. And you had to work on different things. And they tell you about the water pressures, and they tell you about steam pressures, and they gave us a good training on that little ferry boat, And that was the way it was.

So, then, when I went back to, I had to go back to the receiving station, because I was through with the walk on the beach. So they, and then all of a sudden, this ship came into being, and then they had to have men for that. So that's where I got-- I got put on there.

129: Steam Machinist and Throttleman on the Wakefield

On the Wakefield.

Yeah. On the Wakefield, and I got put on that ship, and as a steam machinist.

So, what were you doing on the ship?

Well, on the ship,

As a steam machinist?

I had to watch the gauges, you know, the steam gauges, because they carried 200 pounds, or 400 pounds, of superheated steel and that. You had to be careful, because if anything went wrong, and that steam could just cut you right in half! You know, that's how powerful it was. And different things about steam engines, and they had, oh, I can't even think of names of some of that stuff. Anyway, that's what I did. And then I was what they called a throttleman. A throttleman is a fellow that goes up to, you know, how they get the wheel turning. I mean, not turning, but for the engine room.

Right.

For the engine room. Of course, then, the engine room, the bridge, would send a signal down to the engine room, and then the engine room would have to answer, and then you'd open this valve accordingly. And when you open that valve, you can't do that [open it wide], you've got to go a little at a time. And you look at your gauges, and they'll tell you how much you want to go, and how slow you want to go, or how fast you want to go. And that was where the job I had, I was a throttleman, and, of course, I was a counter man, too. I forgot how this all works. But, anyway, every time that thing made a revolution, the shaft made a revolution, it would register on the counter. And as it registered on the counter, you'd know how far you went in an hour or whatever, you know, how far you went in the water, in miles, you know, depending on how fast you were going and things like that. But that was figured out by the bridge. I didn't have to do all that stuff, just get the numbers is all I had to do, and that's what I did. And I did that. They called a throttleman, was me and another fellow, one fellow had what they called a port engine, and the other fellow had the starboard engine. They had two engines on the ship, and they had to be run by two people. And, of course, we had a lieutenant that was in charge of the group, and he made sure you were doing what they called for, and that was what happened there.

164: Quick Stop! and Scuttlebutt

And I'm trying to think of what else might have happened, not much, I mean one, during the storm, we had one time, not a storm, a night shift, or something like that. It ended up that there was an emergency call, you know, they wanted a quick stop, because there was something out there. And they didn't want to run into it, and then you have to start closing the valves, but you can't close them too fast, because you had 400 pounds of superheated steam, you know. If you did that, you'd blow up the ship. And that's how that worked out. That was pretty nice.

So did you stop then?

No.

Did it work?

No. No, we didn't stop. They swerved to the side a little bit, because what I heard later on, I don't know how true it is--it was a fishing boat that was in our way. But, then, they said, well, it wasn't a fishing boat, maybe it wasn't a fishing boat, maybe it was the Germans came over and put a boat over there, so our ship would slow down. And if it slowed down, then the submarines

had a good shot at us. So, you see, you hear all kinds of things. It was what they called scuttlebutt. It was-- it was scuttlebutt, you know, it's like you hear-- you hear rumors. The rumors in the Service was scuttlebutt.

Yeah.

Did you ever hear that?

Yeah, I have.

Yeah

175: "We carried troops" England, Portugal, Italy, etc.

So where you going-- where was the Wakefield going, or was it just patrolling?

Oh, we were going to --oh, no. No patrolling on the Wakefield. We carried troops.

Oh, it was a troopship.

Yeah, it was a troopship. Yeah, they used to carry, I don't know, 14, 000 to 16,000 men, or something, soldiers, yeah.

So, where were you taking them? You were taking them from Boston or from--

We were taking them to Italy.

To Italy?

Yeah.

We went to-- I think it was-- we went to England first and left off some troops over there, and then we got back, and then, you know, we had to leave right away, and we headed down towards near Portugal, you know, and Spain, and all that. It was in that area, and whatever happened there, I don't remember what happened other than the fact that you had to answer the bells right away. If you didn't answer the bells right away, they gave you hell. You wouldn't believe how much they gave you, but, anyway, from there, I got on this thing here [the Wakefield], and I spent, oh, it must have been a couple years on this thing, eighteen months. I've got it down here someplace. I can't...it's hell when you can't see, you know, really it's terrible.

I know the feeling.

It's terrible when you can't see. I must-- It was almost 17 or 18 months that I spent on there.

Wow.

It was nice. It was good service, good food.

Yes.

Beds to sleep in, not a hammock, we had springs on the bed there.

So were you separated from the troops that you were moving.

Oh, yes.

Did you eat with them, or did you just--

No, we ate by ourselves, you know, the Army had their own kitchen crew, and we had our own kitchen crew. We had our own meals, and everything else, and whoever made it all, I don't know, that's between the cooks, you know, I didn't have nothing to do with that. And what else?

207: Girls & VD

Did you meet anybody interesting? I mean, you were from Chicago, so that's a pretty diverse place, did you meet people that were a lot different from you?

No, not in a way when I was in the Service. When I went in, I met, because the group I went with was all Chicago, you know, we were all from Chicago, we all went out there. They all went to the boot camp where I went, what they call boot camp. and then after you got through with the boot camp, they say, "Ten go over here, and ten go over there, and twenty go over there." And that's how I ended up at this surf station, you know. I was in a group that got called to go over there. And I spent about three months over there, I think three or four months in the wintertime. And, of course, I complained to a couple of guys that was there. They'd been there for a few years. And I said, "Jeez, this is a hell of a place! Isn't it like a hellhole!" Nothing to do, you know, and you're out on the ocean there, partly like an island. And they tell you, "Listen, just wait until the summer comes! That's when you have a good time out here!" "Is that right?" "Oh," he says, "The beaches are loaded with women." "Oh, yeah." "Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah." "Yeah." So, I told you, in the meantime, I went to find out about going, getting a different position, and then, of course, when springtime came, I was shipped out.

So you missed all the girls!

I did.

Oh.

I did, but what would I do with them? What would I do with them? I couldn't do much with them. But I never tried either, no. They had some movies when you were in boot camp that showed you about being careful going out to town. You know, you get liberty, you go to town, and then they show you a woman that's, well, she's nude, and then she's got the

Riddled with venereal disease.

Yeah, they've got all that stuff going, and then some of them are this, and some of them are that, you know.

You can't trust any of them, can you?

I don't know. Maybe you could. Maybe you could! Excuse me. But this is what happened. I remember them telling us that and, of course, I kind of stayed clear then. And, of course, I was, you know, engaged to my wife, and I didn't want to come home with something that would make her sick, and then she would say, "You played around!"

Yeah.

You know, I didn't want that. We had a couple of guys on the ship that went to England. The first time we went to England, you know, and they got ashore a little bit, and they went back, and, as they were going back, one of them had the clap. Another one supposedly had syphilis. I don't know. But when they come back to the port, Boston, then they wanted to go home. They lived in Boston. So, they couldn't get off the ship, because they had that disease. See, they didn't want to pass that on to their--

Yeah.

Not them, the captain, and all that. They had strict rules. You can't go ashore because—"What am I going to tell my wife?" Say you've been, you were late for the ship or whatever it was. They had different excuses to say. And you're being put on extra duty or something like that. And you can't get off the ship. So, you see, it's-- I mean, they had their reasons for doing those things. And you can't blame them. Of course, a lot of babes on the beach, you've got reasons, too, but, you know, you just kind of—Anyway. And what else can I tell you about this outfit?

253: Tool & Die to Machinist's Mate

Before you enlisted, what were you doing?

I was working as a

You were twenty, right?

I was working as a tool and die maker. I was learning to be a tool and die maker.

So you were like apprenticed?

Apprenticed, yes, apprentice tool and die maker. That's what I told them over here, you know. And they sent me to this machinists school, and I thought I did pretty good in the machinists school. I knew a lot of equipment that they were using, and stuff like that. But being on an old ferry boat, you know, the thing don't move, don't do anything, It just sits there on the water. And

you go to work on the boiler and how to get the tubes out of it, and find out how the boiler is made, you know. It's not—it's not where they throw everything in there, and a big fire. They had a fire in there, but it's got to heat up all these tubes, and the water keeps running back and forth, and, in some of these furnaces, they have to use distilled water. And if they didn't have distilled water, everything would rust out right away, you know.

Like your iron.

Yeah, right, and that was what it is. So, I used to get 114 dollars a month, yeah.

273: Married on Leave

You were wealthy.

Yeah.

\$114 dollars a month.

Yeah, that's right. That's what it was when I was discharged, you know, for being a machinist mate, First Class.

So what did you do with your 114 dollars, did you send it home?

Well, she was getting a subsistence check, because I was in the Service, you know, married, so she was getting a check and I was getting a check.

So when did you get married?

I got married on May 23rd, 1943.

Wow. So very soon after you joined up.

Yeah, right, right. I was home on leave one time, and when I told my wife I got a leave because I told them I was going to go home and get married, she said, "Get married?" She says, "I'm not ready to get married." I says, "Well, what do I do now?," She said, "I don't know." I says, "When I go back, they're going to say, 'You got married'," and I say, 'No.' And they're going to say, 'Into the hoosegow!'"

Yeah.

"Really!" "I guess that's what they do, I don't know." And back and forth, okay. We made wedding plans, and we got married right away, and that was it. So, that's sixty-three years ago. We're married for sixty-three years.

Wow.

Yeah. Yep. And that's how it worked out. And then, of course,

285: Cards & Loaning Money

So what did you do with your check when you got paid? Did you play cards?

Oh, sure, you played cards all the time, yeah, sometimes you'd win and sometimes you'd lose, and sometimes some guy would come over and say, "Borrow me ten bucks. Will you give me twenty bucks? I need twenty bucks right away." "Oh, okay, when will you pay me back? I'll pay you back when I get my check, okay." "Hey, where's my money?" "I had to use it for something. I'll give it to you. Don't worry." I lost more money that way, really.

I would think.

I mean, there's nothing written down.

Uh-huh.

It's all by word. And you say, "You're going to do something for me." And I say, "No" or "yeah." And then you can't believe it. How could you believe it? I mean, that's what it was. This is the separation of the service. I was separated on, oh, this is terrible, Kathy. Anyway, I had ten days to go, they told me, and if I wanted to stay, they would, you know, give me liberty for ten days.

This is the date over here, 10/16/45, maybe.

I don't know. What does it say? 10/16/ 45.

Place of separation from service, Detroit, Michigan, October 16, 1945.

And I enlisted in October of whatever.

November, right, of '42.

Yeah, you can see that better than I could.

308: [digression]

Oh, yes. Yes, all I do is I go to church, and I want to sing a song or something. Oh, my God, where is it? Really. I lost this eye.

Yeah.

I lost it. I only got this eye, one eye, I'm what they call a one-eyed bandit. Let me see if I can get some more stuff here. You want to see some pictures. I think this stuff here is all separation center and stuff. That, oh, here, this is-- State of Illinois gave me a citation, too.

323: Citations & Certificates

For having served patriotically and faithfully in the Armed Forces of the United States during World War II.

Yeah.

That's really neat. I've seen that before. I saw somebody else with one.

Is that right?

Yeah.

Yeah, they--

That's really nice.

I forget. They gave us a hundred dollars or something like that.

Wow.

I can't remember any more.

Not a bad state, I suppose.

There's another one, see.

Ooh, your machinists mate school completion, look at that. 7th of May 1943, with a mark of 3.40.

Is that good?

I don't know. I guess so.

Well, I've got the—I've got the, you know, the thing on my arm.

Yeah.

That's nice.

Sounds good.

Yeah.

So when you were learning stuff, did you have teachers? Did you have-- who was teaching you? Oh, look at that!

Yeah, that's the guy.

Look at you! What a great picture.

Could you go for someone like that?

333: *[digression]*

339: Mike in Pictures

Yeah. You've got a different hat on. Okay, so how come this one has a white hat and that one has a blue hat, or a black hat?

This was taking pictures and showing I was in the Coast Guard, and this one is just an everyday cap.

So where are you in this picture, do you know?

Yeah.

Because you're in front of a backdrop.

I think it's one of the machines that, you know, you sit in the machine, and you put some money in, and press the button, and then--

And you're miraculously at sea here.

Yeah.

But you have your glasses in your pocket. I see them.

That's-- I had those glasses when I was in the Service. I had glasses in the Service.

And you didn't lose them, ever?

No.

Even though they told you, "what if you did?"

Well, that's what they told me, but, no, that's-- I wanted you to see that. Now, I'll show you some pictures of the ship.

Okay.

349: Meeting old friends on board the *Wakefield*

This is one thing we've got to be careful of, is the age of it. They're all pretty old. Now, this picture here shows me and a buddy of mine. He's from Chicago, and I was from Chicago, and he was going overseas. And he'd come on our ship, and we met. We met on the ship, but he was going, he was in the Army, and I was in the Coast Guard.

What's his name, do you know?

Yeah, I, yeah.

Andrew V. Kott.

Kott, that's it, Kott.

This is a W somebody. See if the end of it is back here.

Oh listen. That thing has been beaten around. Everybody wants to see it.

You know, I've got special tape for this, actually.

Oh, have you?

If you want, we can fix it for you. Yeah. I don't know. W something. Maybe bold, Sobold, Skobold.

Some of that is missing too.

Yeah, some of it is missing.

I was listed.

There's you.

In the *Chicago Tribune*.

There's you.

But I can't remember the date.

Well, we'll look it up. I bet I can find it for you.

Could you?

Yeah.

How could you look it up?

We have a database, an online database of the Tribune, back to the beginning of the Tribune.

Is that right?

Yeah.

Well this would have to be in '43, '44, somewhere around there, '44 maybe.

Yeah, I'll look.

Yeah, because I got on the ship after a while, and then, of course, I met him, and we're on the deck by a gun over there, and just, you know, this guy, they've got taking the pictures, he says, point out like you're pointing something out, nothing out there, you know. Do that. So I did.

So you met somebody you knew? Was it-- where did you know him from?

From the neighborhood.

Yeah.

He was in the neighborhood, these guys--

What neighborhood did you grow up in?

What neighborhood?

Yeah.

Hanson Park. You know where Hanson Park is? Do you know where Reese Park is?

No. I'm a suburban girl.

Are you really? Where? Niles?

Berwyn. LaGrange.

Yeah, I know Berwyn pretty well. I have friends out there yet. Yeah, in fact, they were right near that high school. What's the name of the high school out there?

Morton.

Morton. Yeah, she lives out there.

387: Friends, Advice & Favors: "I got along with anybody"

So you met some-- did you make friends when you were in the Coast Guard? Did you make friends with anybody?

Oh, sure, made friends with everybody.

Yeah.

I had no enemies on the ship.

Yeah.

You got to be careful, you know, you got too many enemies, some dark night they'll come over and throw you over the tide. That's it!

Was it a big problem for you to see other people have enemies?

No. No. No. There was no problem at all. I got along with anybody or everybody. As a matter of fact, one trip that we made, there was a lot of fellows from Chicago on that ship, and one of the fellows came up to me, and he says, "Hey, sailor," yeah, he says, "How's this ship out, you know, when you're out in the ocean?" And I says, "Well, it's just, you know, just like any other ship." "Yeah," he says, "But I mean, does it rock and everything else?" "Oh, yeah, it rocks, you know, as soon as the waves come, it rocks." "I'm afraid I'm going to get seasick." "Well," I says, "I'll tell you how to stop from getting seasick. You could stop." And he says, "How?" I said, "Well, don't drink any water, too much water, and don't look down the side of the ship. 'Oh, look how fast we're going,' you know, that's the worst thing you can do! That will make you sick right away." Even if you go out on a boat with your boyfriend.

Yeah.

And you go out later, and you start, "Oh, my God!" Really.

So that works, huh?

Well, it worked for me. And, of course, this guy I told, he came back and thanked me when the trip was over. And he was getting off in Liverpool, England, there. And he says, "Thanks a lot for helping me out," you know. Well, that's good.

And another time, a fellow, came same way, and I asked him, I said, "We're taking you over there," and I says, "Let me ask you a question. Could you do me a favor?" And he says, "Yeah, what?" I says, "We're taking troops there all the time, but we don't know what happens to them. Where do they go?" You know, we can't pile all those troops in England. They have to start moving around. This was after D-Day already. This was after D-Day. So, he said--What did I tell you about that? Oh, yeah. He says, "Okay, I'll let you know." And during the war, they had what they called V-tape, you know, like V-mail.

Mmm hmm.

Yeah.

They had that during the war, I think, and he told me he's going to write me a letter. And I says, "Okay, good luck to you," you know. "Okay," he says. He doesn't even know where he was going. He knew he was going to England. That's about all he knew. So, okay. And he got off the ship, and so we got back, we went back to the States. We came back to the States, and they told me we got mail over there. Oh, and I picked it up, and it was V-mail from this guy. He was shipped to the bottom part of England, and it was D-Day plus two, or something, that he got over the seas over the channel. And he got hit, and he says he ended up, and now he's in the hospital in England. That's how fast they train these guys here. Put them on a boat. Take them over there, shoot, shoot, and if they don't shoot, you get it, and they take you back, so that's what happened there with that guy. He was-- not this guy, but one of the fellows there, so I'll show you some pictures I have, but we've got to be careful with these, because they're older than you are.

I'm sure.

Give it to a woman. She knows how to handle those things.

Well, I'm a librarian. You know how we are.

Yeah.

You know, we can scan this, so you have another copy, too. We shouldn't cover up the microphone.

Yeah.

450: A Blimp and a Plane Greet the Wakefield
450: More Photos

This is the ship I was on. This was that Wakefield that I showed you. There this is. When we were coming in on the morning, or leaving at night, I can't remember now what it was, we were coming back to the States. That was what it was. We had a load of troops, a load of troops on there, you can see how they're loaded on there.

Yeah.

And here. And then, of course, when we were getting close to the States, this comes out and greets you.

The blimp?

Yeah, and a plane there, too.

Really?

Oh, yeah. They come out and they can see the submarines coming up, and if they're coming up from there, they can see them from up there and just drop a bomb on them. That's it.

Oh.

So, they don't come too close. Anyway, that's the pictures that I have. Some of the pictures I have.

Oops, terrible, isn't it, Kate?

I think you've got it folded right, you know. I can use Filmoplast on it to keep it to fix the tears, if you want.

Oh, I don't know.

It's the library. We have a--

Oh, you're too busy already.

Well, that way, we can make--I think you folded it like that.

You can contend with me. Yeah, you still have to contend with me, you know.

Oh, wait. This one's in half. First that way.

There you are.

But I can do that for you if you want. You know that's what they--

Is that right?

That way they won't fall apart quite so fast. And we can make a digital copy of them so you have another copy.

Coming in in the morning. We're coming in in the morning here.

Wow.

And they took pictures. Now, these pictures are photographs

Yeah.

that they—there's another one, see, "Welcome home."

Do you know-- this one's June 17, 1945.

Yeah.

Right. So what about this one? It says "5000 members of the 15th Air Force from Italy and the Mediterranean, first airmen to return from the front on their way to the Pacific."

I don't know what date.

I don't know. But it's nice out. That's what it says, "weather fair tonight".

Oh, is that what it says?

493: Quarters Aboard the *Wakefield*, other Coast Guard guys

That's what it says. So when you were on board ship, you had quarters that were separate from the troops that were--

Oh yeah, yeah.

that were being transported.

Right.

Did you have your own bed that you slept in?

Yeah. They had a post, and on each side of the post, there was one this way, and one this way. And I had one side, and another fellow had the other side.

So who did you live with?

With all these guys.

Yeah. Do you remember any of them?

Oh, not their names anymore. In fact, I went to a ship's reunion, and one of the guys that I wanted to see there, and I saw him, and then I heard a couple of months later, he died.

Oh.

A guy named Slattery, a good Irishman, you know. And he used to sleep above me. And that's what happened, you know. You don't-- I don't know, I mean, I don't remember the names of a lot of guys, one guy we called Frenchie, called him Frenchie, but his name was Bob Bueller. Bob, jeeze, Trudell, Trudell.

So why did you call him that?

Frenchie?

Yeah.

Because he was a Frenchman.

So what did people call you?

Polack.

Yeah?

Yeah. They could call me anything they want, you know. I didn't care. And then they had a guy named Bill Thellum. Bill Thellum. I've got a picture, I think. We're taking too much time now, aren't we?

No.

No.

When the tape runs out, we'll flip it over.

Okay. This is the troops coming in. Maybe we can find the date here someplace.

Probably it is on the other side.

No, I don't think it is. Maybe it is. I don't know. I never look for the dates.

"Homecoming is transport docks here", well, it gives you everybody's address.

See what it says here.

"1200 casualties in group back from Italy area." It's the same one.

Yeah, it's the same trip, I think.

Yeah, looks like it.

They brought back a lot of casualties. These guys are all in sick bay.

It's May 25, 1945.

Oh, you got good eyes. You spot it like that.

The eye doctor there. Tell him.

May 25th, yeah, go ahead.

So you met people who were coming back, who were-- did you have a hospital on the ship? Did you have a--

No. Well, we had a hospital, yeah, sick bay, we called it, sick bay, but--

There. You got to fix that.

Some of them.

This way.

There it is. Boy, oh, boy, what a--

Some of them, what, in sick bay?

Yeah, some of them were in sick bay, but not that many, because we had our own troops. I mean, our own crew that had to go to sick bay. Now there's a picture of that plane again. And I went to the newspaper and they gave me these pictures.

Really.

565: Reunions

Yeah, I asked them for the pictures, and they said okay. So, I had them, and I still got them here. I'll show them to you, right away, yeah.

And they have a ship's reunion every year, but I haven't gone to one for a couple of years now, maybe five, ten years.

I'll fix it.

Okay.

So you did-- you used to go a lot. Has there been a reunion recently?

Yeah, they have one every year, but it costs a lot of money to go to them.

Really. Where do they have them?

They have them in New York now. They used to have them in Massachusetts. Now it's in, yeah, whatever it is, in New York.

That's interesting.

Yeah, they have them, but they don't have the men we used to have. We used to have 1300 or 1400 crew.

Wow.

And then, little by little, they all dropped off.

590: More on the Wakefield

So there were that many of you, there were 1400 people who were crew, and then there were, you were moving 6000 troops at a time?

14, 18,000.

Wow.

Or 16,000, 14 to 16.

So it must have been very large, the ship.

Yeah, it was. It was a, of course, it's not your time to know about these ships and what happened.

Here's a picture.

Look at that. That's amazing!

Yeah. Here's another one. This is the old *SS Manhattan*. They called it Steamship Manhattan that was run by, you know, private property. And when the war came in, then the government took the ship over to move troops, and they changed the name to *USS Wakefield*. Wakefield is where Washington lived, you know, Washington. George.

That guy, you know.

Yeah.

Look at that!

Then it's right along the dock there. You can see there, the dock, and this is all the life rafts. If they had to use them, that's where they would get them.

But you never had to

No, thank God for that! We had a five inch gun here, and a five inch gun in the bow, and we hit a storm like a hurricane or something out there in the Atlantic. I thought for a minute there, the ship was going to go over, you know, almost thirty degree list, you know, over like that. We thought we were going to go right in the water, and we didn't, and it bounced back, and we were

lucky. But the ship goes down in the water, you know, like that on the rough sea, back and forth. One time in, went down, and that gun was hit, the bow hit the bow, that gun in the bow was ripped right off there, ripped right off of the ship.

Oh, gosh.

Yeah, it was something.

So did you have other ships with you, when you were moving troops?

No, we traveled by ourselves.

625: SIDE CHANGE-

So you can see how the deck is, you know, like here's the gun down here, and there's guns in here, where see these round things here.

Yeah.

There's guns in there and there's guns up in here, and here this is a bridge, what they call a bridge deck, and they had to have guns over there, too, so--

Look at that water.

Yeah, when you see this water when you're on the boat, or the ship, you call that thing a ship, not a boat, you've got to call it a ship, if you're sitting back here or up in here somewhere, and you're looking back, that water's churning, you know, the propellers stirring up the water. It's a beautiful sight to see that thing, oh, maybe for ten, fifteen miles back there, you know, it keeps churning, and finally goes back into the ocean, but that's some of the photographs I have.

Wow.

Yeah, they're pretty nice. I thought that's what they had in here when that fellow told me that they--

What's that? What's this in your hand? What is that?

Oh, that's from when you get off the ship, "damage control." Veterans' association, they kind of let you know how you should behave yourself, or how you--

Really.

How you take care of the ship. It's a lot of reading.

Wow, it tells you everything about the ship.

Yeah, it does. It was-- where did I see this?

What are you looking for?

How long it was.

700.

705 feet

Yeah. 705 feet.

Wow.

And the water line was 688-- that's the part that was sticking out over the water. You see this?

Yeah.

That part sticking over out on the water-- this part goes out on the water.

Wow.

This ship made a trip out to Scotland with troops before the war, before D-Day. And when they came back, it caught fire, it went on fire, somehow, and it burned most of the ship. So they didn't know what they were going to do with it, and they decided they were going to rebuild it. And when they rebuilt it, that's when I got on the ship, really, because, before, they had rooms, you know, staterooms people used to travel with, you know.

Yeah.

Well, then all that was taken out, and then they put these boats in there, all these, and that's how they had that many troops on there. The same with the crew, they had the same kind of deal. There was nothing, no special things for them. This was the same thing as everybody else, and of course. What else?

There's communication system.

Yeah.

It gives you the propelling machinery, the horsepower.

Right.

30,000 maximum sustained speed at full load displacement.

Yeah.

31.5 K.

Yeah.

Look at that. Oh, there it is, so what does that make you? This is all the people on board, Coast Guard officers, Navy officers, Coast Guard enlisted men, Marine officers, Marine enlisted men, Army officers, Army enlisted men. Wow!

Yeah, a lot of men in there.

There's a lot of men.

I know.

664: German POWs on board

And then you were moving people, so you had a whole bunch more people, also.

Yeah, that's right, the troops, and then on the way back after D-Day, after D-Day, when we were in Liverpool, England, and then, all of the sudden, we were going to be loaded, and I was sleeping that morning and, all of a sudden, I hear [thump thump] on the deck above, you know, and they're all like cleats on the shoes, hitting the decks, you know, and they made a lot of noise. And those were German soldiers coming on our ship. They were coming to the States. Prisoners. So that was interesting.

That's interesting!

Yeah. Yeah, really. I'll show you pictures of prisoners in there.

So, did you talk to them? Did they keep them separate, the prisoners?

Oh, you could talk to them, but I couldn't talk German. Oh, look, I could talk Polish. But we did have a couple of them that could speak Polish, because they were mixed in with the Germans.

Right.

And they spoke Polish, and they would tell you they were fighting some place or other, and here and there, and just a mess, that's all it was. But what else can you do?

677: Feelings about the Military and Wars

So, how did you feel about the war, given your experience? How did you feel about

Well....

the military and about war?

You know, the only time you have to worry about a war is like we have right now. You know what I mean by that? We got a president that says he wants to have-- he wants to get Iraq. Now, why do we want Iraq? There's no--nothing coming out of Iraq, because, what do they call them, except terrorists. So, now, they want to get in there, and I think, to this day, he wants to get in there on account of the oil.

Yeah.

You know, in other words, if the United States takes it over, then they can gobble up a few oil wells, and they don't have to worry about working.

So, do you think that the-- how did you feel about other wars, since the Second World War that the United States was part of--

I didn't think they were very interesting.

Yeah.

Especially in the Vietnam War where I heard where there was a lot of, I forgot then, what the stuff was that they were bombed with, something or other. That was when they breathed that stuff. It would kill you, almost kill you.

Yeah.

Maim, was that what they called it, maim? In other words, you couldn't breathe that.

Yeah, like Agent Orange.

Yeah.

695: [digression]

Well, it's always interesting to me to hear what people have to say about--

What?

To hear what people who have been involved in a war have to say about war. It's always interesting.

Well, you know, nobody likes war. I don't like wars, because I say to myself, "What did I do that guy? What did he do to me? He didn't do nothing. Why should I shoot him? He wants to live just like I want to live." That used to get me. I couldn't figure out why they always--

I can't get it back together. Oh, well.

So did that bother you when you were in the Service? Did you think about that when you were--

In the Service, yeah, kind of, because I felt like if I had to shoot a gun-- I never fired a gun, I mean, I fired a gun, but not, you know, at anybody. I had to carry a gun when I walked the beach. I had to carry guns in case there was an invasion or something, you know, somebody coming across over the water. You had to worry about that stuff. And, of course, my thoughts are if-- why were you going to war? What did they do to you? You know, it's a matter—it's all politics. Everything's politics. There's no way you can beat that. They do what they want to do. And all those guys and everything else, they vote with what they want to vote.

It's the blue one you were looking in.

Yeah. I'm going to put these in here.

That's a good idea. So did you ever have any entertainment while you were on--

Yeah, I did.

Like what?

Like what?

Yeah.

You had to look-- wait a minute. I'll show you a picture here. Whoops!

You've got it. Look at that! Those lifeboats have little holes on the bottom of them.

Yeah.

What for?

If you didn't, they'd probably tip over.

Oh. That makes sense.

Yeah, that's got holes in it, so that, you know, you get down there, and you're not wholly sitting in the water. You're just a little bit below the water-- above the water.

No, I didn't know that.

You didn't?

Well, now I do.

Yeah, right. Now, this is prisoners on our ship taking out for an airing. They got to take them out for an airing.

727: The Orchestra

Is there a band?

No, no band there.

There's a band in the middle! There's people with saxophones.

Where?

There's—here, give me this—there's a drummer back here, and there's saxophones up there.

Well, maybe it's the orchestra then.

You had an orchestra?

Yeah. We had an orchestra.

Now, you need to tell me about that! There was an orchestra?

Yeah, well, if guys wanted to play something, they got together, and they—maybe, it's not the troops. I mean, the prisoners.

So, wait, so was it-- did you do anything on board the ship? Were you in an orchestra?

No.

Did you play softball?

All I did was eat and sleep.

All you did was eat and sleep. I see.

Here are some pictures from Liverpool, England.

Wow. Look at that!

That's Liverpool, England, and more of Liverpool.

So, did you get to visit when the ship stopped? Did you visit Liverpool? Did you visit--

We were able to get off of-- not the first three or four trips that we went to England. We made thirteen trips to England, I think.

Wow.

And how would I say it? That's more of England there.

Yeah. Chester, it says.

I think this is the prisoners here. Yeah, I'm pretty sure these are the ones.

Yeah. They look like prisoners.

Yeah. They're prisoners.

So where did you get these pictures?

I don't know.

Did you take them or did you--

No. I couldn't take them. I had no camera. Somebody had them, and I guess they said, "Well, you want some pictures? I'll give you some pictures."

They're looking pretty skinny.

Yeah. I think this one here is when the German died, and they had to bury him at sea.

Really?

Yeah. I've got a picture of that, too, in the book. I'll show it to you. Do you know who that is?

No. I don't know who that is.

748: Jack Dempsey

This is a chief that was on the ship, you know, he was boatswain, boatswain mate. This is Jack Dempsey.

Really?

Yeah, he was going over to cheer up the troops, and everything else, so he came on our ship and was going there.

How neat!

752: "Where's the convoy?" Wakefield travels alone

Yeah, he was one of those – asked, “Where’s the convoy?” “What kind of convoy!”

He had two little guns. That’s all he got.

Well, he had more than that. But I just got scared, myself, when I went out to sea with them. And “Where in the hell, where’s the convoy?” And one of the guys that was on the ship previous to me, he said, “Oh, we don’t-- we’re not no convoy! We travel by ourselves.” “Well, how come?” “Well, if you’re going 35 to 38 knots on a ship, there’s no way they can keep up with you.” That’s pretty fast, you know. It’s like going 60 miles an hour in a 40 mile zone, you know what I’m trying to say?

Yeah.

So, if they felt that a submarine was going to hit them, they would have to be pretty close and then, you know, but the way this ship traveled, it was like a snake. It went around in a circle like a snake, and they had sound equipment on their ship that they could sound out if there was anything below them, like metal, you know. They will sound that out, and say if there was something down there they got to find out what it is, you know. Of course, they’d call for help, call the Air Force, or whoever it is, that’s close by. I mean, maybe, what, twenty miles around, or fifty miles, or maybe two hundred miles out in the ocean. And they got where they had to call-- you know, some of those planes couldn’t go all the way out there. Anyway, that’s what they did, and that’s how we spent the time out there.

770: Patrol Boat

Now, this thing here, that’s the patrol boat. That’s the one that I got on, that I was sick for six months. I couldn’t get off. I couldn’t get sick. I mean, stay well!

You know what the dock is-- the dock and you take the rope off the dock?

Yeah.

I was sick. So, that’s how I ended up on this ship, because my-- the skipper here says that he can’t stand it anymore, you know, for me getting sick every time we left the dock.

Yeah. I would imagine.

Yeah. And this is the boat that I was on. This is the patrol boat that used to patrol between Long Island or, no, Block Island. Block Island right near New York, right near Long Island and Martha’s Vineyard. That’s right near Cape Cod.

So, you didn’t tell me about this part, though. So was that-- when did that happen when were you on that boat?

I told you. I told you.

Was that while you were still-- while you were patrolling the beach?

No, no.

Was it after that or

It was after that.

Or in between?

So, it was between-- After I patrolled the beach, yeah. After that, yeah, this is when I told you I got transported to Newport, Rhode Island. I got transported to Newport, Rhode Island. I didn't want to be, you know, playing around in there, so I told them, asked them, if I could get on a ship. So, they said, "Sure." So, I got on the ship, and I got sick. I was sick. I couldn't take it. I couldn't, and then when I got on the big one, you know, in here, when you went on a ship, you hit the waves, and you go--

Yeah. You bounce up and down.

Yeah, right, or like that, but with this ship, the big one, you can go like this, and that made me--

Much more slowly.

I got a little sick on there, too, but, then, finally, I caught on, and I got my sea legs.

How long do you think it took?

That's kind of hard. I don't know. Maybe a year or ten months.

Wow.

You know, for the-- then I finally got my legs, sea, what they called sea legs, you know. You could go on the water, go out on a boat, come back, walk on land, and, when you got sick, you walk on land-- it was the land was moving while you were walking. Yeah, that was something, and these pictures that you see here was taken by me.

801: Taking Pictures from a Buoy

Wow, they're beautiful pictures.

The skipper here-- he got, I don't know what's he got there, right there. I think he had a camera, and he wanted to take some pictures of the ship, so he says, "I want to--," you know, a way-- there's no way you can take a picture without being, without the boat being on the water like that. So, they put me on a buoy. You know what a buoy is, yeah? Well, they pull right up to the buoy, made sure I got on the buoy, and then I had the camera. Then they backed off, and then I was taking pictures. That's how they take pictures, yeah.

Really nice pictures.

808: More photos of the Wakefield

Right. Yeah, that's-- and this was when we were tied up to the dock, loading troops. See, we had an SP over there. We wanted to make sure nobody runs away from there.

What does he have on his feet?

Hmm?

What's on his feet there?

Yeah, those are spats, you know, they're like leggings, leggings, that's what it is.

Yeah, what for? Or is it just part of the uniform?

Part of the uniform for them. So that's SP's, you know, they had to wear those things. I don't know. Don't ask me why!

That's weird.

I never was an SP, so I never ran into that.

What did SP stand for?

Shore Patrol.

Shore Patrol.

Yeah. Now here's a picture of a couple of guys on that 83-footer. And this is Christmas cards they gave us one year to send out to your friends.

Look at that!

Isn't that nice?

Yeah.

See how that water is.

Yeah, that's choppy water.

That would make you sick.

Yeah. I would think so.

Made me sick!

819: Coast Guard Uniform, more Patrol Boat

So what did your uniform look like, besides the Coast Guard on the sleeve? What were you wearing?

Same as the Navy wears.

What did it look like?

They were blue.

Yeah?

Dark blue, you know, and you had a neckerchief or you wore a peacoat. You know what a peacoat is? And then you had either a skullcap that you put on your head, or a white cap, the white cap or the, yeah, whatever it was. You had a choice of three of them. I only wore a skullcap and a white cap. I never wore anything else. And that was it. So, again, this is some more of the ship and the dock, yeah.

And that thing was even a bigger one.

Yeah, that's a bigger one. There's the skipper right there. He's the guy that said, "I feel sorry for you. I can't take it any more!" But I couldn't blame him. Everybody's got to do their job.

Yeah.

And I couldn't do my job, because I was sick. You know, you look at something, and if you look at the water, that was it. You'd-- they were all shook up. Other than that, that's about all I have on those things, and I'll show you the book here.

Okay.

And you can look at it yourself. If you want a lot of things here, too.

838: Wakefield history book

So when did they publish this about Wakefield?

Well, this came after the war, after the war.

It doesn't have a date on it.

848: Watch Party after the war ended

What happened is by being on a troop transport, we used to carry a lot of supplies like cigarettes, and candies, and whatever, you know, the stuff was. And they made a profit on it, yeah, made a good profit, too, because after the war was over, they had what they called a port and a starboard watch party, you know. You eat, if you were on port watch, you went then, and starboard watch, you went then. It was two days, and they'd serve lobsters, and I didn't like lobster. I couldn't eat lobster. So, one of the guys says, "I'll tell you what. I'll give you my bottle of champagne for the lobster." He ate the lobster. I got the champagne. So, I drank the champagne, and I got a little stiff, yeah. And I behaved myself!

Good job!

Yeah. Anyway, you can look at this as much as you want there, and I'll try to point it out as you're going along. Now, this is a Coast Guard flag. See how that little end there--

Yeah. Why does it say "man, William, dog, George?"

Let's see. Flags.

Oh, these flags.

Yeah.

That's what they were.

Why were they named like that?

I guess they got a reason for that. I don't know. I don't remember. I had nothing to do with flags.

And that's the same as--

Yeah. Right. That's the same one. And, of course, it will tell you, if you read this, it will tell you that's the USS Manhattan.

Yeah.

Does it say that over there?

Yeah, it says "The Life of the SS Manhattan." That's it, "Life of the SS Manhattan. History of the USS Wakefield."

There you go.

There's Admiral Russell Randolph--

Yeah. Waesche.

Waesche.

He was the admiral. He had nothing to do with the ship, you know, except that he was, you know, superior of the

Except he was the Admiral of the Coast Guard there.

See how this little shield is over here. And here's the cuff, you know, on your arm, the cuff, and this is the shield that you would wear on top, only on the left arm, what they call it, not on the forearm, you know, just one arm. That would be on there. And, then, that's how you would determine the difference between a sailor-- I mean, a Navy man and a Coast Guardsman.

So, that's what you would refer to yourself as, as a Coast Guardsman?

Yeah, a Coast Guardsman, yeah.

I always want to know.

Yeah, well. Another one of those admirals--

Admirals everywhere!

Yeah. There's another one.

Well, it says Captain Harold Gardner Bradbury.

I think he was the first captain of the ship before it burnt, you know. And when it burnt, he was taken off of that, so--

Now, did you just tell me why it burnt?

I don't know why. I don't know why it burnt. You could maybe read the history on it. But this is the captain that we had.

881: Captain Rainey

Captain Roy Livingston Rainey.

Rainey, yeah, he was really a good guy.

Better write it down.

Really a good guy. Heard that he died down in Florida.

Yeah.

But he was really a squareshooter, you know. In other words, you had problems, you told him. He listened to you.

So did you ever do that? Did you ever have a problem that you--

No. Nothing.

Sent up the line towards him?

No.

No?

No, I didn't have any problem like that. I--

So how did you know that he was a--

Well, because of all the things that he published, you know, you're going to do this, with his name on it, you're going to do that, whatever it was. And he was always gentle. He was a gentle type of a man.

Yeah.

But he was a good man, Roy Rainey, right.

It says about the George Washington birthplace, Wakefield--

Yeah that's where the name came from, the Wakefield.

So this is the--

That's where, after it burnt, that's the way it looked, see.

Wow! Look at that!

That's the way it looked in peacetime. And Manhattan--

Look at the big smokestacks!

Yeah. Those things shot up a lot of smoke. Here's the history of the Wakefield. I know you haven't got time to read that.

It says, "On June 15th, 1941, the U.S. Navy turned it over to the Coast Guard. It docked in Singapore in August 17th, 1941, and it was bombed.

In Singapore.

In Singapore.

Yeah, but that's not where the fire came from. It came from--

Oh, here.

Scotland coming back from, Scotland after dropping off troops and everything.

Huh. Wait, it must say that here somewhere.

Yeah, must be--

Left New York, sailed by Halifax, landed in the British Isles, a fire of unknown origin. There you are.

There it is.

Unknown--

Yeah.

So they towed it to the Boston Navy Yard, so--

That's when I got on it, after they rebuilt it.

As soon as they rebuilt it, you were on it?

Yeah. Well, they got to commission it. When they commissioned it, that was the day I was on there.

Wow!

Yeah, from that day on, I was getting sea pay.

Really?

Yeah. The twenty percent more.

Bet that made your wife happy.

Oh, yeah.

And the people who were borrowing money off of you, too.

No. I got kind of smart. I didn't borrow that money anymore.

Not anymore.

Oh, no. That was especially when...

these are all the officers. One of them over there was mine. I don't know. One of those guys.

Who was your officer, do you remember?

Yeah. One of them was Dobro, and the other one was Rainey. No, not Rainey. What the hell was his name? Dobra. Yeah, Lieutenant Dobra, that's what his name was.

So, were they also from Chicago or were they from someplace else, do you remember?

I don't really know. I never found out where they came from.

So you didn't talk to them a lot?

Oh, no. I stayed clear of them. I stayed clear of all of those guys. That's the kind that say, "Hey, do this. Hey, do that!"

If you avoid them, you don't get told what to do, huh?

Now, that's right. Right, yeah. Now, this is the troops loading up on the ship.

For D-Day, it says.

For D-day.

Yeah, It says, "American troops board the Wakefield to be transported to Europe in readiness for D-Day."

Yeah, well, we used to take them over there to Liverpool, England. And, see, there's a picture, too, that you saw with the--

Yeah.

943: Loading the Troops

And let me tell you about this here.

Yeah.

When they were loading these troops, and this was a train, you know, a train, where they came off of the train.

Okay.

And on each end of that train, there was two or three soldiers with machine guns in case these guys wanted to run off.

Really?

Oh, yeah, listen, you know, they played-- they had a band there playing, and, then, as the band was playing, they were playing "Sentimental Journey", you know, "going to take a sentimental journey." and the soldiers were, "What the hell kind of sentimental journey is this!"

Yeah.

Nothing sentimental about it, you know. They'd let you know right away. They were pretty rough guys when they, you know, you got to be careful with these soldiers when their back was against the wall, you know. They'd really let you have it! Of course, nothing with me. But, anyway, what's this?

It says, "The ship's gun crew make ready their guns for immediate action."

There you are. These are 43-millimeter guns, in case of an accident.

It says there was a storm.

Yeah.

960: Floating Dock in Liverpool

And this is Liverpool, England, I think, isn't it?

Yeah, that's what it says.

Yeah, see, now, this is a floating dock here.

Really?

You always hear that the tide, when it comes in here in Liverpool, England, can rise as high as 20 feet. That means that if you're sitting here, you can go up 20 feet. That's pretty high.

Yeah.

And, of course, these docks, I mean, these things there, they roll with the water as soon as the boat goes down, this thing goes up. And, you know, real nice. It worked real nice. It worked pretty nice. But anyway.

So how long did it take you to cross?

It took anywhere from six to seven days.

That doesn't seem very long.

Well it's--

972: 21 Trips Across the Atlantic

You must have gone back and forth a lot.

Well, I made, I think, twenty-one trips across the Atlantic. That's forty-two times across the ocean, so I've seen the water when it was like this floor here. And I've seen it when—so, I got, and that was quite an experience. It was interesting, you know, interesting to know the good Lord protected me all that time. And I was man enough to do the job that was asked of me to do. In other words, to be on the ship as a sailor, and that's it. That's the way it works.

982: Church aboard ship

So, did you go to church, while you were on board ship, did you have a chaplain?

Yeah, we had a chaplain on there.

Yeah, did you go?

Oh, yeah. I went to for a chaplain. Some of them, you know, the priests, they tell you that you don't have to worry about whether you ate something, or, you know, this and that, and go to communion, and that's it. So, that's what I did. I went to communion.

So, did they have different chaplains

Priests, yeah.

for different dominations?

They had Jewish ones, and they had Protestants, yeah, and they had different places where they, you know, where they had their group to come together.

[digression]

999: Rough Sea

This is a picture, I think, at the--

Look at that!

We hit that sea. I told you about the rough sea, and this is what happened, and they took it from the bridge out, because if you were on this side-- on the other side there, of the bridge, that water would wash you right over. Oh, that water was tremendously powerful! And, at that same time, we lost about two thousand rivets off the bottom of the ship and off the bottom.

Oh, my gosh!

When the ship went up, you know, and hit the water like that, hit the water like that, and when this bow went down, then the fantail, what they call the fantail in the back, the propeller, went, you know, real fast, because--

There's no water.

There's no water, yeah. Went real fast and then, all of a sudden, when it came down, the whole ship would shake.

Oh, my gosh! It must have been terrifying.

Yeah. Right by the what they call the bulkhead, at the walls, you can feel that thing shaking like that, "Oh, oh. Getting ready to break off!"

Oh, oh!

Scary! Very scary. But, again, when you're talking about it now, you may say, "Oh, I am glad I was able to witness all of this stuff." Some of the guys that didn't go in the Service, they were calling them draft dodgers, things like that, you know. But they had something they had to do, whatever it was. But I still thank the good Lord. I go to church every morning, you know, and I thank the good Lord for sparing me through the war. And this being a troop transport, they were looking more for these things.

Yeah.

Then they were the transport, where they transported guns, and everything else, that didn't mean nothing.

People.

And they had to shoot them, and they were worried about it, but one of the bulkheads, one of the compartments, I got to say, where they lost the rivets had water coming in like that!

Wow! Look at that!

Yeah.

That's amazing.

Really something.

See that. There's a ship sinking there.

A sinking ship, yeah.

Yeah. You've got to read that, because there might be a--

It says, "We're going to Scotland," said the troops, when two crew members appeared with their bagpipes to entertain them. They were wrong. It was Liverpool again."

Yeah.

1036: Where you're headed: Scuttlebutt

So did you know where you were going each time you left the U.S.?

No.

So you didn't know until you got there?

Well, either that, or through scuttlebutt. You say-- scuttlebutt would say we're going to Hawaii, all kinds of stuff, but the only way we could get to Hawaii was to go through the Panama Canal. And we would be in the Pacific Ocean. See, then, we would know that.

Yeah.

But nobody ever said that.

So you went to-- so you went back and forth to Liverpool, and then did you say, you went to look at all those people out on the deck?

Yeah, that's the way it is.

They all need sunscreen there.

Yeah. A lot of them like this guy here, you know, probably covered himself up. But there's nobody covered, because there's all men on the ship. What's that say? There it is.

"The Germans were positive a Nazi submarine would sink the ship before it reached America."

See and that's--

Look at all the people.

They had about seven or eight thousand of those on the ship coming back to the States.

1054: Work aboard ship

So where did you spend most of your time? Were you in the engine room most of the time?

Yeah, that was my job-- the engine room.

So, did you work on a shift or did you--

Yeah. We worked on the ship when we got into dock. We couldn't work on the ship out on the ocean.

No, I mean, did you, I'm sorry, on a shift, did you--

Oh, shift.

Did you have like eight hour shifts, or?

Yeah, we had eight hour, four hour shifts. It was four hours on, eight hours off. And then, when a lot of the guys got sick, and they, you know, really got sick, then we were running short, because they were in sick bay. So, then, we were having four on and four off.

So, did people get sick from just the flu or from being--

Yeah, the flu, or whatever it was. It was four on and four off is what it amounted to, you know.

Oh.

That's rough.

It must have been exhausting!

Oh, that's rough.

Yeah.

068: German prisoner dies at sea

Rough duty. Now there's the Germans carrying a prisoner that died. See it.

Yeah.

And he was put on that thing there, and you can see-- see him flying there. And these were all German prisoners, and they were singing the German national anthem. But we were not allowed to go over there. None of the crew was allowed to go over there except the Marines. We had Marines around there, so that they wouldn't rebel or anything. Yeah, that's really-- see what it said.

It said, "The Germans paid tribute to a departed comrade, singing hymns." That's a lot of prisoners.

Yeah, it is. It is.

A lot.

Oh here it is, the thing [coffin] going down. See it.

Yeah.

So did you ever have anybody else you knew on the ship die?

No.

Just the--

No. I heard they took a couple of guys off, and then they got sick in the hospital.

Yeah.

There's the laying on their deck. You would have enjoyed that.

A bunch of guys laying around, huh?

So, here you are in Naples.

Yeah, this is Naples. Naples, Italy. This is where we got off the ship. We were able to get off the ship, and the chaplain arranged a tour. And, so, we had to take a train. And we got in this train, and he took us off to the ruins of Pompeii. They were nice. Whatever you see there is naughty, let me put it that way. But really. I don't know.

And this is Capri. It says, "The beautiful island of Capri."

Capri, yeah.

That's very interesting.

And this-- ruins of Pompeii, they're-- there was no, for being where the pope lives! No shame, or nothing. They showed these pictures on the wall, and--

Really?

That's really something.

It must have been very different.

Well, it was-- it was not something you see anyplace else, you know, but it was their way of living at that time, and that was what they showed.

112: Stolen Watch In Italy, other Italy stories

So, did you see, when you were in Italy, did you meet people like when you were in England? Did you meet regular people, or did you just--

No, you couldn't talk to them. It was in Italian. I'll tell you what happened, though.

Yeah.

We were going into town, me and two other guys, and this guy, one guy says, "Hey, maybe we can find some babes," you know, and he says to a little kid, he says, "Hey, where are the women?" "Oh come. I tell you, my sister. My sister. You know, my sister." And he goes like this, see.

He grabbed you.

No, he grabbed him and, you know, he was taking him by the hand into this building and, you know, going up the stairs, and, of course, this guy had his watch on like that. And this kid maneuvered it out, and, when he got the watch off, he turned around, and he ran down the stairs. And this guy, where do we go now! He said, "He stole my watch!"

He stole my watch!

Yeah, that was something, that was something. I mean, it was unusual to see that, but they had nothing over there. When we tied up to the docks in Italy, we could see all the kids running when we took the garbage cans out, taking the food out of the garbage cans. It was terrible. It was terrible. They got nothing to eat. They got a lot of wine there, but that was about all.

140: LeHavre, France destruction

What's this? "LSTs and Italian boats ferry American soldiers from the shores of Toronto, Mussolini's powerful submarine base to the Wakefield in the harbor."

Now at one time we went to Cherbourg, France, and then to Le Havre, France. And in Le Havre, France, maybe the first two or three miles in the bay, there was all leveled off, you know, the GIs getting in there, shooting, and the English, and all that. Everything was leveled off, so they

couldn't get the troops off the ship. So, they had to bring these LSTs in there, and they, you know, come alongside the ship, and then they go down a ramp, and get on the ship, and then they carve into the over there.

Yeah, that was quite a thing there.

This says, "to Marseilles, France; Turin, Africa; Toronto, Italy; the Hague; and Cherbourg, northern France." So, were they picking up troops in all those places, or were they dropping them off?

No, no, they were dropping them off, yeah, and, of course, one time we went to, I think, it was, where was it, in Naples, or someplace in France. In France, Marseilles, France.

Yeah. Marseilles, France.

And they had-- Did you ever hear of the Count of Monte Cristo?

Yeah.

Did you ever see that picture that they have, and they had that hole in the wall? He dug it out with his hands, and he escaped through there. Did you hear about that?

Yeah.

We got onto that island, and we got to see that hole. The hole is still there. How the hell could he get through that? It was small. But, then again, I don't know how he did it.

I guess we have to read our Dumas.

What?

We have to read Alexandre Dumas, right.

Yeah, right, right.

And see what he says.

And it was pretty nice.

Yeah.

So we did get a chance a couple of times to get off the ship to go visit, you know, wherever it was. But before D-Day, we couldn't get off the ship. You had to be ready in case there was an attack on the ship. You had to be ready to pull that ship right off the bay. Otherwise, they would blow the heck out of it, you know, and that's what happened there. What is this?

It says "Boston," going near Boston harbor.

Oh, United States ships. Is that Captain Rainey?

Yep. That's what it says.

Yep.

1188: Loading Wounded Veterans

Look at this.

Yeah, we took a lot of wounded veterans. We had a group and loaded them up with the, you know, we couldn't carry them up. We had to take a thing like that rope, swing them up like they were, yeah, swing them up over the top, and they get on a bed over there, and they push them into the hospital part of it.

What's that orchestra again? There's those saxophonists. Oh, some trombones, too.

Rough seas.

Rough seas. Look at that! Ooh, look, there's space for you to put stuff in.

That's all gone now.

So, this is-- this tells you where the ship was, right?

I don't know if that was where it was. It's been around quite a long time. In fact, at the beginning, it went up to--

There it is.

Yeah. Read all about that there. And this is where I got on-- where the heck is it? Liverpool.

'40. No, I lost the year. This is '42.

That was--

Here's the fire, September 3rd, 1942, and then this is 19, February 11th, 1944.

Yeah.

So, that's when you got on?

Oh, yeah, here it is. All those Liverpools.

235: Transporting Nurses

Look at that. All those Liverpools and then around-- look at that!

And, of course, we had one stop in France, or something, and we had a couple of stops in Italy. We had a stop in Africa one time, you know, the northern part of Africa, because we were carrying fifty nurses, and they were going overseas, too. But, by golly, they had to keep them.

It must have been popular, yeah.

They had to keep everybody out of there where they were. We weren't allowed to go anywhere near them. They had the Marines guarding it, because you can't-- you can't get over it. You can't go in.

I'm sure they had the Marines "guarding" it. Sure. Sure.

Well, we, what can I tell you, Kathy? I don't know for sure. I'm not going to lie to you. I wouldn't pay any dividends that way.

So when you got out, you came back to Chicago?

Yes, I did.

What did you do then?

Then I went back to the job that I had. And when they told me that I would be getting the same pay as when I left--

1252: TAPE CHANGE

[digression]

It's a Polish name. It's really funny.

Yeah, I get calls, or not calls, but somebody will be asking like you, they say, "Are you Irish?" They'll ask me if I'm Irish.

Really?

Yeah.

Yeah.

I said, "No, I'm not Irish." And they say, "What are you?" I say, "I'm Polish." "You don't look like a Polack."

Oh, well, then, who knew!

Yeah, right.

[digression]

1264: Family History

But are you from that part of Poland that is sometimes Ukraine, that sometimes Poland part of Poland?

Yeah.

That's where my grandparents--

My parents came from that area, my mother was a child without a mother, for I don't know how many years, and my dad, not my dad, her husband, my grandfather--

Yeah.

He died and, so did this one, died, and that was it, grandmother, you know, and my mother had to go to live with an aunt or something. When it came time, why, she saved enough money. So how she got it, I don't know. She saved enough money to come to the United States.

Wow.

She was a little girl, and the sea, did I tell you about the sea, you know, they went through rough seas, too, because they didn't have the ships at those times like they got today.

Yeah.

Today, you know, six days, and they're over-- in fact, I think the Queen Mary can make it in four days.

Wow.

That's fast, you know, it's cutting a lot of water. It's got to be water like that, these big waves, you know, everybody gets sick. Can't have that either.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So, you were telling me about after you got back, after you got out of the Service?

Yeah.

1277: Out of the Service: Finding Work

You were telling me about it, that you went back to your old job, but they wanted to pay you what they were paying you before?

Yeah, right, and I couldn't afford that. I told them I had to make more money. And they said, "We can't give you any more money." And, so, I went to another place, and I was there for a week, maybe, and they didn't like the way I was working. So, okay. Well, you come back from Service, they all want to help the servicemen. But you got to be a ace. You know what I'm saying. You can't be somebody that is still learning. I was still learning the trade.

Yeah.

They had no trade in the Service. In fact, my-- one of my lieutenant chiefs at the ship asked me what I was going to do when I got out, and I said, "Gee, I don't know. Might go back." He said, "You know what you should do? Go down to the city hall, and ask for a job for stationary engineer. You know everything about the engineering of the ship, and that's no different than the buildings that you're going to work in." "Oh, okay." So, I went down to the city hall after I got home. And the guy says, "Can I help you?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm looking for a job." "Oh, what kind of a job?" "Well, I want to be a stationary engineer." The guy said, "Oh, we got a lot of those. We got a waiting list on that." That's a lot of BS. I didn't know, but being young, I didn't pay much attention to that. I figured, well, if they can't hire me, you can't hire me. That's all. So, little by little, I found another job, got back into the tool and die business, and it was a pretty good job. I worked there for two or three years. After I got through with that, then I went to work at Kraft foods. You know where Kraft foods was? Down there by the Navy Pier.

Mmm hmm.

Yeah, they were over there, and I worked there for about a year, and one of the fellows was asking me to work part-time in his shop. And I worked part-time, because I needed the money. And it ended up that when I got all through with all that stuff, they hired me, and asked me to come in full-time. So, I quit Kraft foods and went there full-time. And I went to another shop, and another shop, and I spent thirty years in one shop, and then, of course, they sold out. And when they sold out, that was it, you know. I'm the old guy, out. Young guy, in, you know. They wanted them nice and young.

Yeah.

Yeah, that's the way that works. Of course, I already had my training. I had all the things that I wanted to do in the business, and that's what I did.

1306: Service Lessons

So, do you think that you used anything you learned while you were in the Service in your later life? Did you learn anything in the Service?

Oh, yes, cooperation. I learned to cooperate and, you know, don't get mad at somebody that-- because they don't want to do something for you or whatever it is. You may not like it, but you try to control yourself. And you don't want to be starting any wars, you just went through one. And that's about it. I would say that it gave me a very good training as far as cooperation with a bunch of men in trying times. And it was all trying times, you know. Everybody was scared, especially these young guys like me, when they got on the ship, and it was going out going to sail. "Where was the convoy?"

Yeah.

No convoy! No convoy!?! You know, and I was scared. I was really scared, so a couple of the guys on the ship that had been on the ship before they said, "No, we never travel with a convoy. We're too fast for the convoy." He says, "When you're in a convoy, you're a sitting duck."

Yeah, very slow.

Well, I thought that line, you know, that makes sense. So, all of the sudden, you go up, see the sunrise, go up there and see the sunsets, and go out and go look around in the galley, and play cards, you know. There were a lot of card games going on. No movies. There's movies on there, but not the kind that interest you. And it was nice. I got a good education out of it. I really feel I did. And then I saw part of the world I would never have seen. I told my wife, "You want to go see Europe?" before. "Oh, okay."

So you never went back?

No. I never went back.

There's still time.

Myself?

Yeah.

You want to go with me?

Sure.

We could have a good time.

That's right.

Yeah, I just kind of miss that kind of a life, and then, like I say--

[digression]

1345: The USO

Tell me about the USO.

Oh, yeah, the USO. We used to go there quite often, you know, to the USO, because that's where we got free tickets and got free cokes.

When you were in Boston or when you were in--

Yeah, in Boston, in Boston, and when I was on the Cape and things like that. Anyway, we go out, and go in there, and they'd say, let's sing a song, you know, try to make you feel relaxed.

Yeah.

So they'd come up and they'd say, let's sing the Army song, you know. "Here comes the caissons on, the caissons go rolling on," or something. And then they'd come up with the Air Force, or the Marines', the Navy song, and when they came to the Coast Guard song, you know, they used to sing that, and they'd sing "Semper Paratis is our guide". I don't know if you ever heard our song? "Is our guide" and all that stuff and, of course, at the end, it says at the Air Corps and nothing can stop the Army Air Corps. And this guy used to sing, "Except the Coast Guard."

Ooh!

Yes. Some of those guys wanted to be Coast Guard, you know. What are you trying to do?

With this?

Yeah.

Trying to find the end of the Filmoplast, but I think she ran out, and she doesn't know. I can not find the end of the tape. Sorry about that. Here it is. Sorry. So you went and sang. Did you dance?

Oh, sure, we danced. Yeah, I got offers.

Yeah?

Yeah.

Like what?

Well, like a dance.

And did you dance-- did you tell your wife when you danced with other girls?

Of course not.

You didn't tell her.

No.

Not the total truth?

No

1370: Letters

Did you write letters to her while you were on the ship?

Oh, sure, I wrote letters to her all the time.

And did she write back?

She wrote back.

That's nice.

Yeah.

Did you have to censor what you were saying?

Censor?

You know, did you have to watch what you were saying because you weren't allowed to-- were there things you weren't allowed to say?

No, I didn't have to censor anything.

No, they didn't care where you were, or where you were going to?

Well, what can you say about the ship? You can't mail it until you get off, and so on, and so forth. You don't know where you were going.

Yeah

1376: Hyannisport USO: Libertyhead Coins

Yeah. So, anyway, that was the scoop. And that's what happened with the USO. First one of the USOs I used to go to was at in Hyannisport on the Cape. Cape Cod. It was Hyannis-- that's right close to where the Kennedys used to live.

Yeah.

The Kennedy, you know, family.

Yeah.

Yeah. So, I used to go there when I had liberty, because there was no place else to go. You couldn't get around anywhere too easy in town. That was a little town there. And it had this USO. And we went in there, and I used to ask the ladies over there, she gave me change or something or other, and then I looked, and I saw Liberty Head quarters, nickels.

Yeah.

And dimes. And I says, "Do you get many of these?" And she says, "Oh, yeah, we get quite a few," you know, and so on and so forth. And I says, "Would you save these for me? I'm saving them." "Oh, I'd be glad to." So, next time I went in there, I got forty-five, fifty cents, maybe, seventy-five cents of coins.

Wow.

So I put them in an envelope and sent them home to my wife. She got them, you know. She sent me a letter and said, I got your coins, seventy-five, or whatever, cents in them.

Yeah.

That's when we had honest people working in the post office. Today you send anything in the post office--

Think you can't do that now?

Oh, they open up envelopes and everything.

Really?

Yeah, I don't trust them at all.

Mmm.

And if you want to send anything, you got to insure it.

Yeah, that's troubling.

Yeah.

A miracle. Filmoplast, it's nonacidic, so it won't wreck your paper. It's magical.

Is it really?

It's magical. I love Filmoplast. We use it to fix old books and--

You're taking such good care of me. I'm getting worried.

Yeah. You shouldn't be worried. That's how librarians are.

Okay.

We're going--

Are you fixing this up for me, fixing that up for me?

Yeah, you know. We're like that here.

I had all these pictures in a drawer and every time somebody'd come over and want to see something or other, I had to go to a drawer and get them out. And that's what it amounted to. It was getting to the point where I saw that thing upstairs, you know, about showing pictures and whatever.

Yeah.

I thought this would be a good chance to get rid of my pictures, you know. I don't want to get rid of them. I want to keep them but--

To show them off.

Yeah, to show them off, and, if you do it--

Do you want us to put them on display? We can put them on display.

Well, you can put them on display and say-- you can put a little notation on there on them someplace, if you were a serviceman and traveled across the ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, with a ship, let us know.

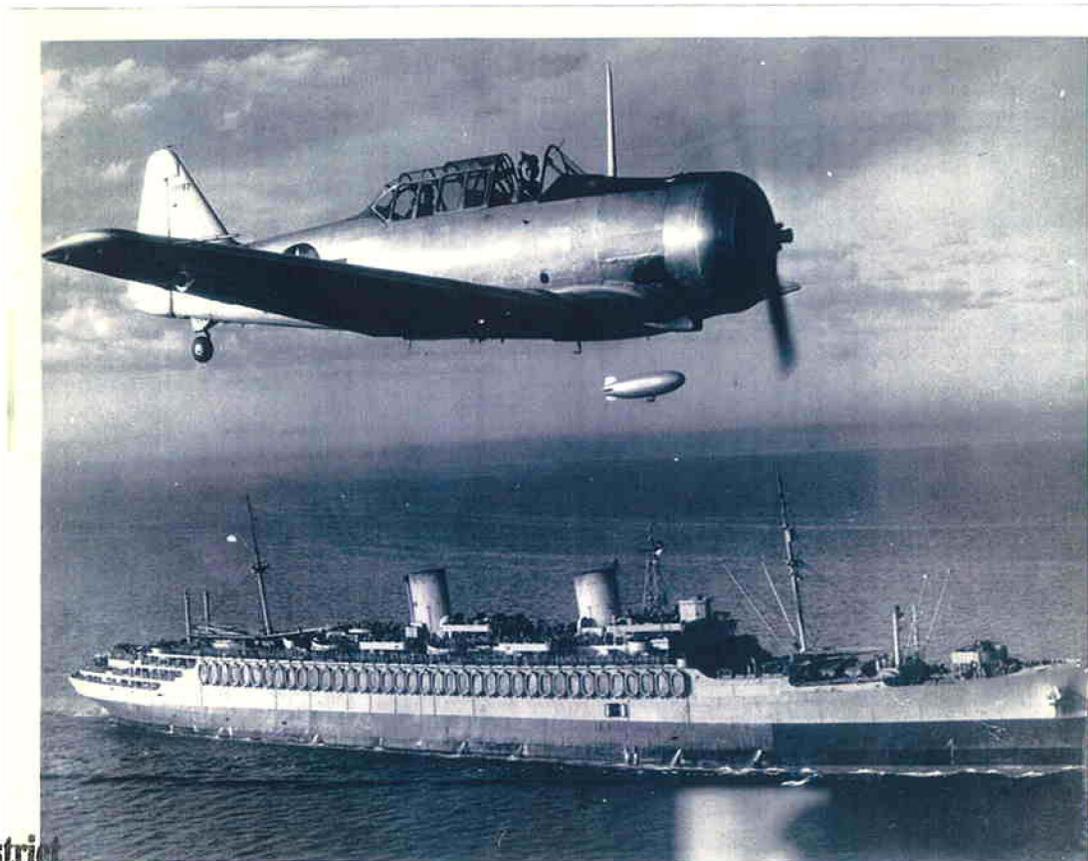
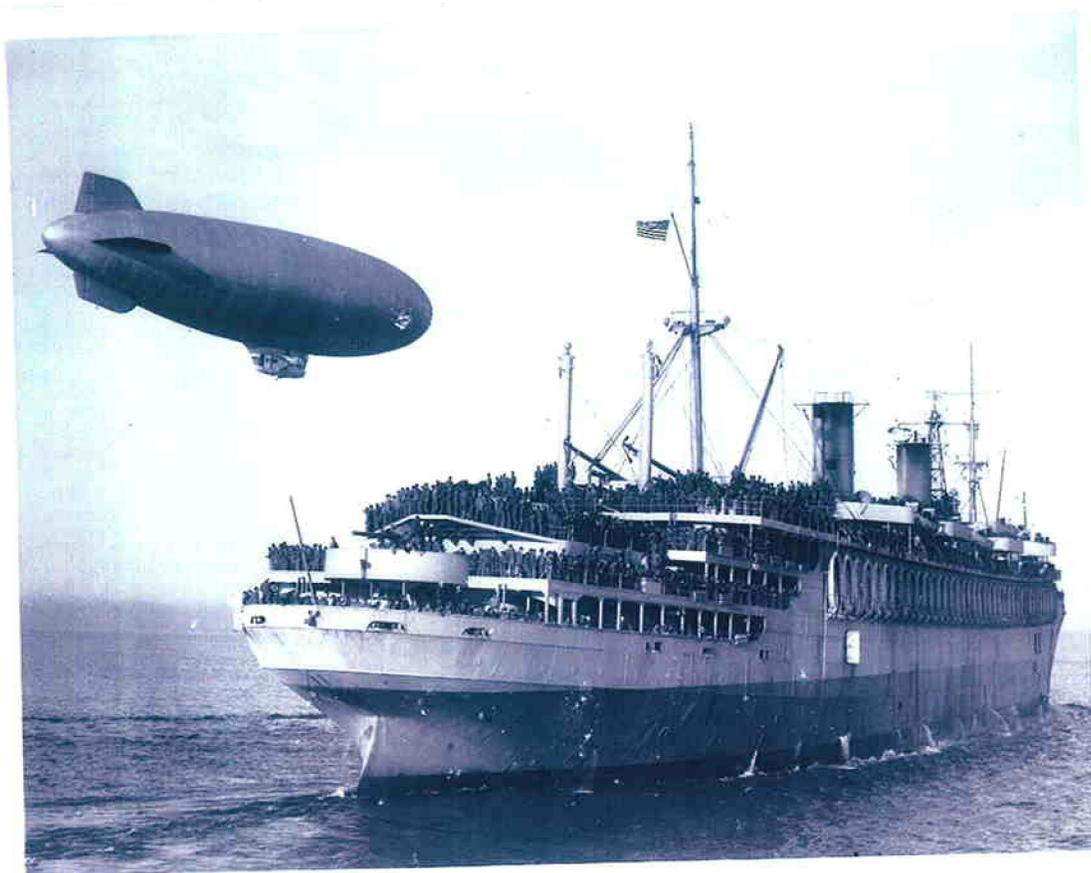
Yeah.

Take their name and all that. And I'd like to talk to them and see how they enjoyed the trip, and go back fifty years ago, and have a good memory.

Yeah.

Of course, there are not many left anymore.

1413: END



**Niles
Public Library District**

DEC 14 2006

Niles, Illinois 60714