



Tom Davidson

U.S. Navy

USS Franklin D. Roosevelt

Vietnam War

Veterans History Project Interview

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000: Start

This is Kate Wolicki from the Niles Public Library. I am interviewing Tom Davidson for the Veterans History Project. Tom learned of the Veterans History Project through a poster in the VFW Hall. He is a veteran of the Vietnam War. He was in the Navy. This interview is taking place on June the 3rd, 2005.

So the first thing I usually ask people is what happened when they started out. Were you drafted or did you enlist?

I enlisted in November because I was going to get drafted in December. So I didn't want to go in the Army.

Yeah.

So I could get in the Navy for two years. So I got in the Navy for two years.

So what were you doing before that?

I was a printer before that. I worked for Hall Printing in the city. And I enlisted, went in the Navy, and, when I came back, I went back there to work.

That's good

when I got out.

So how old were you when you--

Nineteen.

When you enlisted. Very young.

At nineteen when I enlisted. They were drafted at about eighteen years, six months, and, like I said, I knew I was going to go in December. I knew I was going to get drafted in December so I got in in November.

So had you finished high school?

Yeah. Finished high school in '64.

And then you were working as a printer.

Right.

014: The Roosevelt

So what -- do you remember what happened when you started out in the Service? Do you remember if you had training, what happened?

Well, I enlisted in Glenview. And, from Glenview, they took me up to Great Lakes. And they did boot camp up in Great Lakes for, I think, it was about eight weeks. And then, right from boot camp, I got sent to the Roosevelt in Mayport, Florida. It was an aircraft carrier.

And I spent the whole two years, well, the whole rest of my time, on that ship. The whole time I was in. We were the first East Coast carrier to go to Vietnam. We sailed all the way around South Africa and back up. It took us about, I think, thirty, thirty-two, days to get over there. And we got there sometime, I think, we left -- we left around the end of June in '65. And we stopped in Cuba for some more training before we went and we got over there, I think, about the end of July of '65. And we left to come back, or, no, not '65, '66, I'm sorry, and we left to come back about early January of '67. And we came back the same way. We came back the same way, sailed all the way around the tip of South Africa, crossed the equator four times-- two times on the way over, two times on the way back. We stopped in Brazil on the way over, and we stopped in Cape Town, South Africa, on the way back.

030: Stopover in South Africa

Was that interesting?

Well, Cape Town, South Africa. We were supposed to get liberty there. And I don't know if you, you probably wouldn't remember, but there used to be a senator from Illinois named Chuck Percy. And he started raising all kinds of hell about South Africa being segregated and, so, we didn't get to leave the ship the whole time we were there. We were there for about three or four days. And we never got to leave the ship the whole time we were there, and most of the guys on the ship were pretty upset with him, even the black guys, because it was segregated, like I said, but the black people, they had buses there at the pier. They were going to take them to the black section of the neighborhood, or the town, and we were going to stay in the white section of the city. And the city had been prepared for us stopping, because we were the first American warship that had stopped there in years. And the local citizens had spent a lot of money out of their own pockets to have parties for us, and all that, and they wouldn't let us off the ship. So there was, they allowed all the people from the town on the ship to visit if they wanted to. We had a lot of visitors. Some guys snuck off and, you know, they snuck off, and they came back on with the visitors the next day. Some got caught, some of them didn't. The guys that didn't had a good time. Even the guys that did, had a good time, you know.

But, then, we came back to the States after that. And then we were in and out of home port for a while. And then we went to the Med. And that's when I got out, when we were in the Med. I got out, and I came home.

047: Jobs & Training

So when you were trained, what were you trained to do?

Well, when I was in, my job was I ran supply for V2 Division, which was the catapults and arresting gear. That's what shoots the planes and catches them.

And at times I worked on the flight deck on the LSO platform, not always, but sometimes. And when I did that, I would stand there with the binoculars and I'd have to spot the planes as they were coming around to land and tell the LSO officer that the pilots had their tailhooks down, their flaps down, and their wheels down. And, then, I was-- they trained us extensively in fire fighting on the flight deck.

Was that something to worry about a lot?

Oh, fire is your biggest enemy when you are at sea. Because you got to put it out yourself. They always instilled in, all the Navy guys, they instilled in you that fire is your biggest enemy.

058: Our Fire, The Oriskany, and the Forrestall

So, did you ever have a fire you had to put out?

No, we had a fire, but it was in a different section of the ship, so I didn't have to put it out. We were there when the Oriskany caught fire, and they -- we lost seven or eight guys, I think, in our fire, and then the Oriskany caught on fire when we were there. And they lost quite a few people.

And shortly after I got back, the Forrestall blew up. They almost lost that ship. They lost a lot of guys on that ship -- Government's fault, too. They were using old World War II ordnance that they shouldn't have been using. And it was just a chain reaction thing. A lot of guys got killed. They almost lost the ship. They had -- well, I wasn't on it, but I know the fire started on the flight deck. John McCain was on there. He got out of the plane-- matter of fact, his plane, I think, was the plane that was hit first. And he got out just in time before his plane blew up. And, then, all these planes were loaded up on the flight deck with these five hundred pound bombs and they -- the flames-- they just started cooking them off. And these things started exploding. And they had a Repair 8 crew there that was highly trained to fight fires on the flight deck. Well, those guys, I think almost all of them were killed in about the first two minutes when the planes started blowing up. And, then, the secondary firefighters, which is what I would have been had I been on that ship, most of them were killed when the planes started blowing up. And they almost lost that ship, but, like I said, I wasn't on that one, so... I had a couple of friends that were, but they got out. They got out ok.

So that happened after you got back. Had you been -- Were you still paying a lot of attention

Oh sure.

after you got back?

I was still in the Navy when that happened. You know that happened, I think, in about July of '67 and I got out in November of '67 so-- Oh, yeah, you still pay attention.

So did you get to know people that you still keep in touch with?

Well, the one fellow that just walked in, he just now walked in, he and I went to high school together, and we were in the same ship in the Navy.

079: "We went all through 'Nam together.": Local Friends on Board

What school did you go to?

Maine East.

And we were on the same ship in the Navy. We went all through 'Nam together. And there was another fellow that I lost touch with for many, many years. And about three years ago, I found him on the Internet. And we also went to high school together. We went to boot camp together. He was in a different company, but we went to boot camp together, and we were on the same ship. We were on the same ship all through the whole time, we were together the whole time, and I still keep very much in contact with him.

Was that unusual to know other people before?

Yeah. You know, as far as I was concerned, yeah, you know. There were a couple other people that I had met on my ship. There was another guy that I haven't seen in years, every once in a while I hear of him. We grew up together. He was right from this area and he went in about a year before I did. And we were on the same ship together and I'd see him occasionally. I mean, we were friends, but we weren't real, real good friends, but we were friends. And I'd see him occasionally. And he lives out of town now. Once in a while here, I know, every once in a while, I see his real good friend and he tells me how he's doing. And there was another kid I ran into, another guy I ran into, that he was from-- he graduated from Maine East about a year or two before I did. But I knew his younger brother, and that was about it. I mean, you don't, you know, you don't run across the guys that you know. A lot of times you might see guys you know -- they used to have like a buddy system, you could enlist under the buddy system. That meant that you went to boot camp together with your buddies, but, usually after that, you all got busted up and went different ways. But, yeah, it's kind of unusual that you'd run into guys.

096: Life on Board Ship

So what was it like living on the ship? Do you remember anything?

Well. Oh, sure. It was, you know, it wasn't a bad life. It took a little bit getting used to. After you got used to it, it wasn't too bad, you know. You slept in racks. They called them racks. You'd have like six foot ceilings, and the racks were three high, so you'd have three people. And you had just little lockers that you had all your clothes in. But it wasn't really-- you know, we ate good. We had a lot easier-- we had not near as bad as the guys that were on the ground over there getting shot at all the time and, you know, not having half the time a decent meal, and all that. You know, I always had a decent meal. We worked hard at times. But we always had a decent meal, so.... You know, I'm glad I was in the Navy rather than, you know, the Army or the Marines.

So did you have --When you were going, when you were traveling, did you have different duties than when you were-- or were you always traveling?

Well, when you were in port, naturally, you weren't, you know, you didn't fly planes, of course. And then they used to pull maintenance, you know, they'd do all the maintenance on the catapults and the rest and give what they had to do, so, you know, and, then, I was pretty busy with the supply stuff because they'd need parts, and I'd have to give them the parts. And when you were out at sea, you know, you had, when they were flying, unless they needed a part, I mean, you did different things, but not really all that much, you know, it was pretty much get the parts for them, make sure they're ordered, get what they'd need. They'd tell you. And, then, like I said, I would get bored sometimes, so they'd let me go up on the LSO platform and work, you know, work there.

116: "When you're in a flight deck crew, you don't have any free time."

So what did you do in your free time then?

When you're in a flight deck crew, you don't have any free time.

What were you doing all the time?

When we were in Vietnam, we would fly twelve hours a day, pull maintenance, they'd pull maintenance about six hours a day. And then you'd get about six hours a day to sleep. Every other day -- we had two catapults -- one day, one crew had to sleep right on their station and the other guys got to go to their racks the other day. And, then, you switched, because there was a plane hookup at all times.

So you didn't have a whole lot of free time. It wasn't like you see in the movies where -- some guys did. They got to go to the movies every day because they had a movie on the ship and all that, but the flight deck crews didn't get to do that.

You just worked all the time.

Well, you worked most of the time. You worked pretty hard, you know. The flight deck crews didn't get a chance. I mean, if you speak with this other fellow that came in, Earl, he was a plane captain, and he'll probably tell you the same thing. You didn't have, when you were out to sea,

you didn't have a whole lot of free time. You had some, but you didn't have a whole lot of free time. And then if you did, you know, you'd go visit your buddies and all that, you know, and... you'd go around to different spots in your division and visit your buddies, and all that, you know, so....

So, did you travel or did you stay in one place mostly? Did you travel anyplace in particular on the ship or did you

Well, oh, yeah, I'd go all over the ship.

136: Where the Roosevelt Traveled

Was the ship moving anywhere important? Did you go anywhere around

Oh, sure. I got on the ship on January of 1966 and I got off in end of October of '67. And in that amount of time, I was in Cuba twice. I was in the Virgin Islands. I was in Brazil. I was in Japan. I was in Hong Kong. I was in the Philippines. I was in South Africa. I was in Spain. I was in Italy. I was in Sicily. And that's about all.

[Laughter.] *That's not enough.*

And that was, you know. And Puerto Rico. I was in Puerto Rico, twice, I think. So....

No, we traveled. We didn't sit still. We traveled. And, you know, it was fun. You got to see a lot of places, you know.

Did you feel any-- obviously you enlisted because you didn't want be drafted into the Army.

Right.

148: Feelings about the Military and War: "You just did what you had to do."

Did you have any feelings about the military or war before you went in?

Well,

And did you change your mind at all?

I didn't change my mind much, but, you know, I was no hero, you know. You had to go. Everybody. You know, at that time it was different than it is now. You had to go. I knew I had to go and I was in, you know, I wanted to get the best deal I possibly could. I got -- had they told me that I had to stay in the Navy for four years, I wouldn't have went. I would have went to the Army. I would have waited to get drafted to do only the two years and take my chances. But, like I said, I got lucky. I was able to get in the Navy for two years. So, I took it. And, am I sorry I did? No, because if I didn't do that, I would have had to go-- I had to go anyway. So, I'm not really sorry I did it. I would never have thought of staying in, or maybe I would have thought,

but not for very long, you know, I didn't want to stay in. But, you know, you just did what you had to do, you know. And most of the guys that are my age, we're getting older now, but they'll tell you the same thing, you know. They went because they knew they had a certain amount of time they had to put in. So, you went and you got it over with. Get on with your life, that's what I did. That was my reasoning. Do it. Get it done with. Get on with my life.

So, were you ever afraid?

No.

Nothing to be afraid of or do you just not get afraid?

I mean I might have gotten --I shouldn't say I was never afraid. I was never in fear of my life. I mean, if you weren't a little bit afraid on a flight deck you're probably lying because there's a lot of bad things that can happen up there, you know. But as far as being afraid for my life, or an enemy coming after me, never. They didn't attack carriers, you know. It's very dangerous working on a flight deck of an aircraft carrier, but they didn't attack carriers when you were in Vietnam. It just didn't happen, and you knew it didn't happen. That way, you were pretty sure you were safe. So was I ever afraid about my life? No. Never. You know, what can I say. Some of my friends that I talked to, you know, they had it pretty rough. My best friend died from Agent Orange about seven -- eight years ago.

I'm so sorry.

And he was a Niles cop. And he passed away about eight years ago. He was in the Marines and he died from Agent Orange. And my cousin passed away from Agent Orange. He was in the Air Force. And, you know, so yeah, I miss those two guys.

Did you talk when you got home? Did you talk about it to other guys or?

No.

183: Talking about War Experiences

So when did you start talking about it?

Well, I'll talk to a certain extent, but then I stop. I don't, you know. I know this is an old cliché, but unless you were really there it doesn't make much of a sense to talk to you too much about it because you'll never understand. It's something -- It's something, I mean, these World War II fellows, I mean, you can talk to them and they understand. And, I mean, other veterans. I mean, I'm not, you know, other veterans understand. But to sit there, and sit down, and talk to my mother and father about anything like that, you know, no. I never talked, you know. I went in there. I'm back. I'm glad I'm home. I'll see you later, Mom. I'm going out for a beer... you know.

So did you-- when you were in the Service, did you communicate with your family? Did you send letters?

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, I did.

190: Mail

Did you get them on a regular basis?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. I got mail regularly. You know, from my mom and dad. My sister, occasionally. She would write me. My older brother, his wife would write me. My older brother never writes anybody. But his wife would write me. My aunts and uncles. You know, I would get letters. I got, you know, letters quite regular. I used to get the Tribune, I think it was, every day. They sent me the Tribune.

Wow.

I think it was the Tribune.

How long did it take for the mail to get there?

It varied. Sometimes, you'd get it very quick. Sometimes, we didn't get mail for thirty days. Like when we went – [from] when we left, until we got to the Philippines. When we first got to Vietnam, we didn't get any mail for about three weeks because there was no way to get it for us. But then we got a whole bundle. And the same coming back. We didn't get mail for about three weeks. But while we were there, we would get mail every day or two. Every two days or so, we'd get mail. They'd fly it down there, and we had a regular post office on there. So, you know, you could buy money orders and everything, just like a regular post office. We had a regular post office and we got mail regularly. I mean, sometimes, it would take a long time to get there, but we got mail pretty regular, so couldn't complain about that. I don't know how the guys out on the field, how much they got mail. You know, I never really talked to them about that. But we did. I got very regular, you know....

213: "It becomes your home": Buddies

Was it good or was it bad to get mail? Did it make you think too much of home?

Oh, it, you know, it was good to get mail. It's always nice to hear but --and I was always grateful for the mail – but, you know, after you're, when you go off with these guys in your division and you spend twenty-four hours a day with these guys seven days a week, for months at a time, it becomes your home. And these guys are as close to you, some of them are, as close to you as your brothers and your sisters, if not even closer. And after you get back, it takes a while to get used to being actually home again. Not that long. I mean, it didn't take me that long, you know. In a month, month and a half, I was used to it. But, I mean, some of these guys, I mean, some of them I haven't seen or heard in almost, well, it's got to be going on forty years. I was twenty-one when I got out. I wasn't even twenty—I was twenty-one when I got out. I got out in '67, it

had to be. It's thirty-eight years almost since I got out, and I haven't seen or heard from them, but if I saw them or heard from them, I could sit down there and have a perfectly good conversation with them just like I had, you know. I do hear from, every once in a while, I hear from a couple of them, you know. I run across a couple of them on the Internet and I'll keep in touch with them.

Do you ever have -- do you ever go to reunions or

No. I had a chance to go to a reunion once and, you know, my kids were young, and I needed the money so, you know, I didn't go. And in a way, I'm sorry I didn't go.

Would you do it now if you had a chance?

Yeah. Yeah, I think my wife would make me go this time. You know, she would. The biggest-- one of the biggest regrets I had, I can't remember the year, but they had a big welcome home parade for all the Vietnam veterans downtown. It lasted for about two or three weeks, or for about two or three days, rather. I can't remember when it was, it was in the eighties, and I owned my own company then. And I didn't take the day off and go to it. And I really regret it. I wish I would have went. I really, really wish I would have went.

Having been in Vietnam, you know, the guys who I talked to were in World War II, they talk about coming home and feeling, you know, people didn't know what they'd been through, but they appreciated them. Did you feel, did you feel like it was different because you were in Vietnam? Did you feel like people

Well

246: Home Attitudes Towards Vietnam Vets

treated you differently because you'd been in the Navy?

No, but I didn't see any of the prejudices from it. But there were. I mean, a lot of people-- I can tell you, friends of mine, you know, they'd come back from Vietnam. They would -- these guys would get on a plane and come back. They'd be in a war zone and then twelve hours later, they're getting off the plane in San Francisco, getting discharged, and riding out on a bus, and there were people out there calling them baby killers and all that stuff like that. Now, you know, that some of them didn't exactly appreciate it, you know, which I don't blame them. I wasn't subjected to that. But I know there was, like in a lot of your veterans,' some of your veterans' organizations, there was prejudice against the Vietnam guys. They didn't want them. "You guys lost a war," and all that, which wasn't really true. But there was a lot of prejudice against them, and that's one of the reasons that there is not a real, real whole lot of Vietnam guys that joined like VFW and American Legion, because they felt that prejudice. They didn't-- you know, now, of course, it's all gone. It's but, now, you know, the Vietnam guys are the old guys, you know. We're getting older. Like I said, I wasn't even twenty-one when I got back from Vietnam. My kids can't even fathom this when I tell them about that. And my son, I've got a twenty-three year old son. I told him, when I was your age, I'd been in the Navy, been in the War, and been back

for two years. By the time I was twenty-three, I was out for two years and you-- he can't even fathom that, you know, but what can I say?

Was there anything particularly memorable? Anything --any stories that you'd really like to tell? Anything you

260: Going across the equator

I don't know. Going across the equator was an experience because they had a big initiation, you know, thing. That was a good experience. That was fun. It broke the monotony.

What did you do?

Oh, they send you through this whole thing. Everybody got-- they've got pollywog and shellback. If you're, until you go over the equator the first time, you're a pollywog. And then you go-- they've got this initiation where everybody has to wear their clothes backwards, and they crawl through a bunch of garbage, and they hit you with hoses, and they've got a big guy with a big belly with graphite grease, and he rubs your head in it, and they hose it down.

Gee, it sounds like so much fun.

It was, you know. It broke the monotony. It was kind of fun. It really was. And other than that and other than making some, you know, really good friends, you know, like I said, even though I haven't seen them or kept up with them doesn't mean that they still wouldn't be-- that I wouldn't do almost anything for them if they called, you know. But that was, you know, that was about it. You know, like I said. I'd like to tell you I went to all those places. My mother said, "Didn't you go sightseeing? Didn't you take pictures?" "No, Mom, I got off the ship. We went to the bar. We sat there and we drank. And when liberty was up, we went back home." And that's what we did, you know. No, I did go to Tokyo when I was in Japan, though. I got to say that I did make it to Tokyo and I did a little sightseeing in Hong Kong. But the rest of it, no, I didn't.

267: Sightseeing In Tokyo & Hong Kong

So what did you see?

In Tokyo?

Yeah.

Well, I went down to Ginza. That's the main street like downtown Tokyo. It's like State Street and it was very modern because, Tokyo, that had all been bombed out during World War II. And while I was there, it was only like twenty years later, so that was very, very modern, you know. And when I went to Hong Kong, we saw these Tiger Bomb Gardens. They were like, I took a tour. They took us all over, and they took us to a floating restaurant where we had dinner and then we went to these Tiger Bomb Gardens, which was a torture chamber -- a torture garden for

the old Chinese, you know, years, centuries ago, and stuff like that. And other than that, that was about it.

So had you ever been anyplace? before you went, had you ever been anyplace

No, I was too young.

outside of Illinois?

Oh, yeah. You know, I went with my parents. I was in California, in Arizona, you know and

Have you ever been to a foreign country?

No, no.

290: People in other countries

So, was it different? Did you expect the countries to look the way they did?

Well, most of the people, most of the people, a lot of them live in a lot of poverty. Like in the Philippines, they don't have it near as well as you have it here.

So, was that shocking to you?

Maybe the first time I saw it, a little bit. After that, I mean, you get immune to a lot of things really quick, you know, so. Maybe, you know, maybe the first couple times I saw it, you know, gee, after that you know, hey, that's the way they live, you know. What can you do? So it wasn't a horrible shock to me after maybe the first couple of times, and, even the first couple of times, it wasn't like that big of a shock. I mean, it was different. You knew it was different. I felt sorry for the people but it wasn't, you know--

Did you ever do anything? Did you ever buy people food or give people clothing?

No, because most of them were beggars, anyway, you know. I can't remember. Probably I did, but you know I was no big philanthropist, handing out twenties, you know, but probably gave them something but, you know, I don't remember.

So, when you were on the ship, did you meet people from other parts of the country?

Oh, sure. All over the country.

307: Guys in the Navy: "You'd have a full range of people."

Anybody interesting? Anything you remember?

Well, I mean, you had a lot of -- you had different personalities, you know, guys from the South that, the first time, I swear, the first time they ever had a pair of shoes on was when they came to the Navy, you know. And they were good. They could make moonshine so we'd have a little something to drink, you know, every now and then. And, then, you'd have a full range of people. You'd have very, very intelligent people, and you'd have some guys that were dumb as a box of rocks, you know. But you all -- everybody got along, you know, pretty much, and, you know, you met a lot of interesting people. Nice people, too. A lot of idiots, but a lot of, for the most part, you know, as you get older, you tend to forget the bad memories, and you tend to remember the good. And it was, you know, ninety percent good, you know. I remember the good, not the bad. I mean, there were bad times. But there were a lot of good times, too. You get homesick every once in a while, you know. It was pretty good. It wasn't too bad. But I'm glad I'm out, so.

So did you ever join the Reserves or anything?

No. No, I went to the Reserves one time. I could go to meetings if I wanted to. I went one time and it was not like being in the fleet, Navy, and I just couldn't put up with it. And I just never went again. So, no, I didn't join.

331: Uniforms

So I know this sounds--very plebian question, but what did you wear?

When I was in the Service?

Yeah.

Well, you wear your uniform.

Yeah, but was it a good uniform? Was it a bad uniform? Was it scratchy? Was it--

No. It was wool. I hate wool. And the blues, the winter uniforms, were wool. The summer uniforms weren't bad. They were all white cotton, you know. And when you are on the ship, you wear dungarees. Those are just jeans, you know, and like a blue work shirt, you know. And that wasn't bad. But when you had to go in your dress blues, those were all wool. I didn't like wool. Never liked wool in my life, but the whites were -- they were ok. They were mostly cotton and my ship was home port in Florida so luckily, you know, most of the time, I wore the whites. Because when we were in `Nam, it was always hot, so most of the time you wore the whites.

So how did you do laundry?

They had a laundry right on the ship. So you or, you know, like a lot of times for your dress uniform because they would only do the laundry and then if you-- you had to iron it yourself. So a lot of times, they always had laundry trucks out there on the piers. And you'd take your stuff out there and you'd pay them and then bring them back. And they'd be all starched and pressed and everything like that.

So you got back your own?

Oh, yeah. Everything you have has your name on it. Everything you've got got's your name and your serial number on it on there. Everything is on there. So you always get back all your own stuff. But then, like I said, they had a full laundry on the ship too, so.

349: Chow Hall

You said you ate well? Did you all eat together? Did you all eat in one place or did people--

Oh, yeah. There were domestic. You all ate in one place but not necessarily all at the same time because there were quite a few guys in there. I mean, the chow hall was open, oh, man, I can't even remember. From, when we were in `Nam, it was open almost all the time. Almost twenty-four hours a day. But when we weren't, it was like, I think, four to six, they had dinner. And then they had from like six thirty to seven thirty, I think, six to seven thirty was breakfast. And lunch was like from eleven to one. So, everybody ate in that time frame. But not all, you know. But you always went to eat with one of your buddies or something, you know. And then if you didn't want to eat, you didn't eat, of course. A lot of guys—a lot of times I'd get Care packages from home --and I ain't waiting in that line! I'll eat what my ma sent me.

What she'd send you?

Well, she'd send canned meats, you know. And everybody had

And everybody was waiting for the Spam.

Yeah. And everybody had their, you know, a lot of places they had their own little refrigerators, you know. So you had stuff in there. You could. If you didn't feel like going down there, you didn't go down there. You didn't have — they didn't force you to eat, you know. If you didn't want to eat, you didn't eat. Very rarely ate breakfast. But usually ate lunch and ate dinner.

Did you not eat breakfast because you weren't hungry or because you weren't awake?

Usually because I--you could sleep in. If you didn't eat breakfast, you got to sleep in, you know. When you could sleep. Like when you're in port, you had to make muster at eight o'clock, so you could sleep a lot later if you didn't go for breakfast. So I always used to sleep in, you know. I used to be very skinny. When I got back from Vietnam, I weighed only 118 pounds, and I was the same height I am now.

You must have been a stick.

Yeah.

How come you didn't get blown off the ship?

They called me Twig.

They called you Twig!

Yeah, and I almost got blown over once, but I didn't.

374: Twig

Wait. But you didn't?. That's a whole story!

You know, I was up there, and it was real windy, and I opened my jacket, and the jacket inflated. And, you know, I forced the air out with my arms because it was carrying me. But I was very skinny. And I ate like a horse, too. I ate a tremendous amount and I was just, like I said, 118 pounds when I got back from Vietnam. And, at the time I got out, I was about 140 pounds. And then just never stopped. No. It stopped. No, it-- You know.

That's about my experience in the Service.

So you got home. You did the same job. Was it any different?

No, not really. It was all the same job. All the guys were still there that were there when I went in.

Did you ever go to school? Did you ever

No. I hate school, you know. I hated school, so I never bothered. I never went after I got out. I wouldn't go back now, either. No, I never liked school.

393: Religion on Board

Well, you know, I always ask this question. Some people answer it and some people don't. But did you have a chaplain? Did you have like

We had a chaplain.

Did you have, like, services on board?

Yeah. We had a chaplain. We had.

Did you go?

No, I went. We had a Catholic chaplain and they had a Protestant chaplain. I was Catholic. Yeah, I went. I was lucky in my job. I was always able to get away and go to services on Sunday. Some of the guys that were in my division, they were flying when the services were and couldn't. But I always – I always managed to be able to go in my specific job, you know.

So where did they hold them?

All over. They had, you know, different spots in the ship that they would hold them, you know. Usually the fo'c'sle. That's up forward on the ship where the anchors are, you know. That's where they usually held the Masses. I used to go. I went religiously. I went all the time, you know. My dad-- My father was a very strict Catholic and we were always brought up to go to church and I did. I really did. When I was in the Navy a lot of people say—Oh, yes, I really did. I went, I bet you, the two years I was in, you could count on one hand the amount of times I missed. So, I went. I was good about it.

It's very interesting to see how different people answer that question, so I always ask.

Oh, some people won't, yeah. No, I went. I was in there with a couple of Jewish guys and they used to go because they'd get to drink wine so--

So they went to the Catholic Mass? Or they went to the Protestant?

No. They went to the Jewish. Oh, they had a Jewish chaplain too, I think.

Oh, how great.

Because they had Jewish services on there. I don't know if the Protestant guy handled the Jewish services or what, but they used to go at certain times because they'd get to drink wine. So they would go. And Helfer and Kahn, those were their names. Rick Helfer and Gary Kahn. And they used to go to the Jewish services but, like I said, that's about it. I don't know much more to say.

You don't have anything else left.

Nope.

I think I asked everything.

Okay doke. I'll go back to work then.

Go back and start working.

Ok. Thank you.

Thank you!

424: End