

LC Eaton Oral History Interview

BRUCE PETTY: Today is Monday, the 19th of February, the year 2000. I'm in Vallejo, California. I'm interviewing Mr. LC Eaton. The interviewer is Bruce petty.

(break in audio)

BP: First, when you were born, where you were born.

LC EATON: I was born the second day of June, 1917 in Henderson, North Carolina. I lived there in North Carolina then for approximately a year before moving with my family to Greenville, South Carolina. I started grammar school in Greenville. And then my father decided to get his boys off the streets, and we moved to the Reedy River community about eight miles north of Greenville. I finished grammar school in Reedy River.

BP: What did your father do?

LE: My father was a plumber. Then I attended high school in Travelers Rest, South Carolina. After I graduated, I enrolled in Furman University and attended for one year and then ran out of money. Then I went to work for LB Clardy Company, a wholesaler of cigarettes, cigars, candy distributors.

BP: What year was this?

LE: In 1933. The Great Depression, I lost my job and was unable to find another. And my very good friend decided he wanted to join the Navy, but insisted that I go with him. So I enlisted in the Navy in March 1937. I took the examination (inaudible) in the Navy that determined your potential skills, and Hospital Corps showed up in mine. So I was sent by the USS *Nitro*, an ammunition ship, from Norfolk, Virginia, where I finished boot camp, and got to San Diego, California, where I completed Hospital Corps school in 1938. After two years stationed at the Naval Hospital of San Diego, I was transported to the USS *Savannah*, a small cruiser. After a year on the *Savannah*, I was transferred to the USS *Savannah*, small cruiser. After a year on the *Savannah* I transferred to the USS *Boise*. I completed my first enlistment on the *Boise*, and then after I re-enlisted on the East Coast, because the draft wouldn't leave me alone. At that time, three years in the Army was (inaudible) previous military service. But 10 years in the Marine Corps did not count.

BP: You were in the Navy and the Army was looking for you?

LE: The draft board was going to draft me.

BP: Even after you had served in the Navy?

LE: That didn't count as military service. Only three years in the Army counted as military service.

BP: That's changed since then.

LE: That changed within three months after I re-enlisted in the Navy.

BP: You think you would have re-enlisted if it wasn't for the draft?

LE: No. I would have gone back to college. Because I had saved my money during the four years in the Navy, and I had enough now to go to college. Since I was there between semesters, I wasn't able to enroll in college and get a college deferment, so I re-enlisted in the Navy, and was sent to the *USS Republic*. The *Republic* was a converted German torpedo carrier to a troop transport during World War I. It was the Navy's largest troop transport. When we were coming back from Iceland, and we were caught in that greatest storm of all centuries, and blown off course to the extent that we didn't go back to New York, we went into Norfolk. In Norfolk, they loaded us with supplies for the West Coast.

BP: What year was this?

LE: Nineteen forty-one. We came to San Francisco, where we unloaded those supplies, and we reloaded again with supplies for Pearl Harbor for Guam, Wake, Midway, and the Philippines. We had about 300 United States Army Air Force men to reinforce the Air Force on the Philippines. We had

the hull just forward of the Hospital Corps borders. We loaded the warheads for torpedoes for the Cavite Naval Yards in the Philippines. We unloaded the supplies for Pearl Harbor, and on the sixth of December, I went over to the Tin Roof at Pearl Harbor, and I bought a war bond. They called them in those days. They maybe had a different name, but it was a US bond. They accidentally had moved the line dater, and they dated, the war bond was stamped, Pearl Harbor TH December 7, 1941. We moved from Pearl Harbor then over to the Aloha Dock in Honolulu.

BP: Out of Pearl Harbor?

LE: We moved out of Pearl Harbor around to Honolulu.

BP: Now that was what date?

LE: We moved on the sixth of December. On the seventh of December, we were awakened early in the morning for the Army bombing practice. For some reason, the skipper got on the horn, and said "All hands, man your special sea detail single up." If you know Navy lingo, you know that you normally "All hands man the special sea detail," and then after the engines have warmed up, you would hear the command, "Single up."

BP: Single up means what?

LE: Take off the extra lines from the ship to the dock. The safety lines. Then after you've taken off all the safety

lines, when they're ready to actually move away from the dock, then you start casting of all the other lines, starting with the bow or the stern, depending on which way the tide is running. After the command single up, we knew something was wrong, but we didn't know what. Then we got underway and moved away from Honolulu, and as soon as we're out of sea, the captain came back on the loudspeaker, and said, "The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor. We are probably at war. Turn off all radio transmitters. There will be no transmitters operating because they can be triangulated."

BP: Do you remember the name of the captain?

LE: No. We were trying to decide where we were supposed to go. We could turn the radio receivers on because they were safe. We could hear that they had bombed all the places that we were intending to go next. Midway, Wake, Guam, even the Philippines. We sailed around down in the South Pacific until finally we went into the Fiji Islands.

BP: You went from Pearl Harbor south, just to get away.

LE: Yes. We went into Fiji's American Consulate there. So the captain went over and got a message to Washington to ask what to do, and they said take everything to Brisbane, Australia. We had those warheads for torpedoes from Cavite, plus all sorts of supplies.

BP: So you hadn't gotten there yet. You got there, and you were loaded up with supplies in preparation point to Midway, Wake, but you hadn't gone there yet.

LE: Yes.

BP: So you're fully loaded and you headed for Fiji.

LE: Yes.

BP: Without orders?

LE: We didn't know where else to go. Then they got the idea of the American Embassy. That was the closest one we could get to, so that's where they went to find out what to do. We unloaded in Brisbane, and then went to Sidney, where they put some guns on the ship. The *Republic* had no guns. Not even a single gun, so they put some guns on the ship, and then sent us back to San Francisco. Then we became the shuttle between San Francisco and Pearl Harbor. I don't know how long it lasted, because I was transferred off about a year later. Then I had three years shore duty in the States, because I had been at sea for more than three years. I went to the new hospital that they were building in Memphis, Tennessee. I was going to be safe for three years, and I made chief. I got my orders to Foxy 29. I knew that was code name for the Normandy invasion. So we went to Lido Beach, Long Island. At Lido Beach, I ran into the hospital corpsman from lots of other hospitals. All

the chiefs were Acting chief petty officers, and later I reasoned out that was done in order to get younger men.

BP: They wanted to get rid of the older men? Is that it? They were older chief petty officers?

LE: After you're made permanent, then you stuck around for your 20 years. There were some in the Navy that were 40 years old.

BP: (laughs)

LE: I was assigned to *LST 512*, and that was the ship that I was on for the Normandy invasion. In September, after the invasion, a storm in the channel stranded the *LST 512* on one of those Rhino ferries that they built to unload the landing craft on, and knocked a hole in the bottom.

BP: You're talking about those artificial docks? They call them Rhino ferries.

LE: Yes. They were ferry boats at first, to come out to the LST, but they bolted them together to make that dock. When that sunk, I was brought back to the United States to Boston to get orders. They sent me to the USS *Emmons*. The *Emmons* had been a destroyer, and it had been over at Normandy the same time that I was there. They had come back because they said they were one of the group that they had decided to remove the aft turret, and install minesweeping gear. Brand new destroyer built in 1941. I

was assigned to it, and when they completed the conversion to minesweeper, we went through the Panama Canal, up to Honolulu, to Pearl Harbor, after completing all the tests they put those destroyers through very frequently. We completed them satisfactorily, and then we were sent to Ulithi Atoll. At Ulithi Atoll, I was told to order some additional medical supplies, and they gave me the list of things that might be needed. On the way to Ulithi, we got the message that there was a downed aircraft, and we should look for the survivors.

BP: Do you remember what area of the ocean that was in?

LE: It was between Honolulu and Ulithi. After they brought them aboard, I went down and poured each one of the people in (inaudible) a shot of whiskey.

BP: Did you know who they were? What kind of aircraft?

LE: I don't remember.

BP: How many were on board?

LE: Two. It was a fighter plane.

BP: It was off of a carrier?

LE: I didn't know. They were very secretive about the whole thing. I didn't ask any questions. I just took care of their medical needs. After I gave them a shot of whiskey, the captain of the ship, Foss, asked me why I gave them that, and I said, "It's the best tranquilizer you could use



in a situation like this, and most of them like the taste and appreciate it." So he said, "Okay, when we get to Ulithi, order some more, because the chief that was on here before you never did give anybody anything like that, and we had some rough times at Normandy and some other times when we were involved in combat." He said, "I think it's a good idea." So when I got to Ulithi, I ordered 10 more bottles of Old Granddad. They sent me 10 cases.

BP: (laughter) Must have been a party.

LE: They went down with the ship.

BP: Now this is 1945, I think.

LE: Yes. Then from Ulithi, we left a little earlier than most of the ships, for Okinawa.

BP: Were you in Ulithi when the *Randolph* was hit by a kamikaze?

LE: I didn't hear of it. We went up to sweep off Okinawa, for the invasion. The system for minesweeping is the first ship goes into an absolutely safe area. They put out the paravanes, which are things that look like small airplanes, and they're fastened by a long cable to the ship. They stream out at an angle, so that they will sweep the area on both sides of your ship. The next ship in the line comes within your swept area, and they would sweep another swathe of area clear of mines. Then on the first of April of 1945 was the invasion. We had finished all our sweeping, so we

were now a destroyer. We went in, but we didn't -- yes, I guess we did fire a lot of bombs, or shells, at whatever the targets were. I don't know. Then on the seventh of April, we took on the ammunition from the USS *O'Brien* that had been hit by a kamikaze. They were going to send it back to the States for repair. We took on their ammunition and went up to the Radar Picket Line. If you stayed five days up there without getting sunk, you got relieved. We spent our five days up. We didn't see any planes, and didn't have any problems, and were relieved. We came back and we were assigned to screen for the *Emmons* and the *Rodman*, which were sister ships. We were to screen for some wooden mines. They were sweeping the area between Okinawa and Ie Shima, where Ernie Pyle was killed. We were there then in the nice peaceful area when the Japanese airplanes started coming over. They were a long ways away, and started causing a whole lot of trouble, so I decided to work on my inventory book, my supply book. You were required to inventory your medical supplies quarterly in the ledgers, so I brought all the ledgers down to the chief Mess, and put on a pot of coffee. I heard the five-inch gun going boom occasionally, but not regular enough to bother anything. Then when the 40-millimeters started chattering, I went up topside to see what was going on, and

they shot down a plane. (inaudible), but I think it was the five-inch guns that got it. Then it was quiet. I went back down to the chief Mess, and the coffee was all used up, and nobody put another pot on.

I put on another pot of coffee, and got the books out to work on them, and same thing happened again. This time the 20-millimeters started chattering. I rushed back up topside, and they shot down two more planes. Then it was quiet, and I went back down and the coffee was gone again. I put on another pot of coffee, and I just had put it on when all hell broke loose topside again, so I went up topside and I was about midships. Now I was off watch. The doctor that was on the ship, it was his turn to go on duty, so he was in the Battle Dressing Station in the Ward Room, so I could wander around as I pleased. So I was up topside, and a Japanese airplane dived straight down at the ship, and missed us just by a few feet. He hit the water, and his wings stayed on the water, and the fuselage went down. I hadn't ever been so afraid of anything in my life. I was trembling, and I thought of the song that was popular at the time, "Must be Jelly 'Cause Jam Don't Shake Like That." Then I thought, here I am about midships. The doctor's in there in the Wardroom just about where I am.

If we'd got a hit right there, it would get the whole medical department. I had a Battle Rescue Station back in the after part of the ship. They had removed the turret that was mounted flush on the main deck in the after part of the ship, so that left the turret, just part of that. It was on a housing. Walk inside there, there are doors going from both sides of the ship into that housing. Inside there is where I had my medical supplies for the after middle dressing station. They were in a large chest that was bolted with hooks to the wall, so it could be taken down. I started into there, and I was a few feet from the door, little passageway going into there, when these guys were running off the stern with fear upon their face. They were coming forward, and some of them were white with fear.

I asked, "What's going on?" I just stepped aside and let them go by. The last one was a little roly poly officer who had been at the lead when they started off the stern, but he was now in the rear. Just as he passed me, the plane hit. Now, the turret on the back of the ship, far stern, the one mounted on the deck level, would be able to fire on the trajectory right parallel with the water. But the one above it had a safety, so it could not depress that

load. The Japanese pilot was smart. We were firing proximity shells with the five-inch guns, which exploded when they got anywhere near a plane. But he had reasoned that if it got near a wave, it would do the same thing, and that's what was happening. That turret was firing at that plane, but the shells were exploding prematurely. That pilot knew it. He came right in, just above the water level, so he hit into the stern of the ship, which was actually low in the water at that point. If he had missed it, he would have hit the housing for the turret. But he didn't. He knew what he was doing. He got the screws, the rudder, and put us dead in the water. While we were sitting there, another plane crashed into that housing where I had started to go in, but on the other side of the ship. Of course, I was lying down by that point, and it wouldn't have hit me when the engine came through the ship. It might have if I'd have been standing up. The engine of that plane went right through that housing.

BP: And went over the top of you when it came out?

LE: Yes. Then three more hit the bridge. Five planes hit the ship. It pretty well wiped out the bridge, so we abandoned ship. To abandon ship, we put the life rafts in the water on the lee side of the ship, and they would put those casualties who had a chance of making it on the life raft,

and the ones who were not wounded would get in the water, and hold onto the raft and kick their feet to provide propulsion to get away from the ship, because it was on fire. This part, please X out before you write your book, because it's a part of the story that I'd like to tell you, but not put in the book. The mess attendants, who at that time in the Navy were Negroes. They decided they weren't going to wait for their turn to abandon ship. They launched a life raft on the windward side of the ship, and they got aboard. They couldn't get away from the ship. They'd push away, and the wind would push them right back against it. The plane that hit that side of the ship had knocked a big hole in the hull, and the metal was pointing outwards. As the ship rolled, that was like a cleaver. It would come out of the water and back down. They were on the raft, it worked its way down, and then just as it got to that cleaver, one of the guys grabbed hold of it, and it lifted him out of the water. The raft then went inside the ship, in the hole. So they could hear voices in there. They got lost inside the ship, afraid they were sinking. The chief radioman who was badly burned, jumped in the water, went in and got them out of there, and brought the raft around the stern of the ship, so this could be orderly loaded for abandoning ship. They put all the casualties

who had the chance of living, there were about six of us that weren't too badly wounded.

BP: You were wounded at that time?

LE: Yes.

BP: Can you describe your wounds?

LE: Injuries, multiple extreme. That was my diagnosis.

BP: You were lifted in the raft. You couldn't get in by yourself.

LE: I wasn't put on the raft. We would not have made it on a raft.

BP: They didn't think you could make it, so they left you onboard the ship?

LE: The majority of the people, there were about 10, who refused to leave as long as those casualties were on the ship. One was a young officer named Griffin. They were trying to signal to the wooden minesweepers to come over and take those casualties off. I can remember vividly seeing one of the crewmen with two white hats, using them for semaphore flags. Finally, one of the wooden minesweepers did come alongside, and one of the crewmen said, "Throw me a line." And I remember the Skipper on the wooden minesweeper who's the chief petty officer says, "You're not tying me up to that burning hull. Just jump aboard." And then said, "We could have gone on the life

raft there, but we've got some casualties that we need to bring aboard." And they said, "Okay, we got some crewmen here, and you can hand them over our lifelines and bring them aboard." They brought up stretchers, those wire basket stretchers, and put me in and passed me across to the other ship. They took me down into the mess hall, and I was put in the basket down on the mess table. And it, "What would you like, chief?" "Coffee."

BP: (laughs) Not morphine, but coffee.

LE: I'll back up a bit to after the planes had hit the bridge. Then it was quiet. They weren't bothering us and we weren't bothering them. I looked at my lower body, and I could see I was hit pretty badly, and I thought, I'm going into shock. I had distributed morphine, boxes of some morphine with five syrettes in each one. I'd given each chief petty officer one box to carry in his pocket to use this, and there were morphine syrettes in all the first aid boxes that feel over the ship. We never lost a syrette to theft. They'd been on there for all the time that I was aboard the ship, and we never had one stolen. I started to give myself a shot of morphine. I took out the box, and I started to reach in, and my finger's missing. I looked around, and I found it there lying beside me, so I picked it up and put it in the palm of my hand, and closed my hand



on it. That's my finger. There's enough blood from the end of the severed finger, and the next one is almost severed, to keep it moist, so I stopped trying to give myself the morphine.

I just put the box and syrette down on my chest. A sailor came along and said, "Chief, you're trying to give yourself the shot?" I said, "Yes, that's what I was doing." So he gave me the shot of morphine. But I forgot to tell him to mark an M in blood on my forehead, meaning you've had a shot of morphine. Along came somebody and looked at me, and said, "Boy, you're going into shock," and gave me a shot of morphine. So of course, I actually felt no pain after I was wounded. I saw the injuries, but I didn't feel pain. No, discomfort other than I was lying on my back on the deck with no clothes on, except my shirt. My injuries were primarily from the waist down. I did have some shrapnel in my face and in the skull, but not enough to cause much trouble. My hand was right on the side when It got hit. I finally got aboard that wooden minesweeper, the first thing that pharmacist First Class did was give me a shot of morphine. I still didn't have an M. (laughs) So he marked the M when he gave me a shot of morphine. I went to sleep, and I woke up a little bit when something, I was

being moved again, but I didn't know exactly what it was. I was, where I was going, but I knew I was moved, and I went back to sleep. I woke up aboard the USS *Gosper*, and we were in (inaudible). We stayed there about three weeks, and then we went to Guam. I was unloaded at the hospital in Guam. I stayed there for several months, but I got to the hospital in Guam, and I was visited the next day by the officer in charge of removing patients from Guam to the States that are my classmates in the hospital.

BP: You remember his name?

LE: Blanchard. The next guy that visited me was the chief Warrant officer, who had been with me on the USS *Savannah*. When he was a Hospital Apprentice and I was a pharmacist mate 3rd Class, and now he's a chief Warrant officer, and I'm a chief pharmacist mate. Then I wanted to leave Guam and get back to the States, because the heat. I just was uncomfortable all the time. We didn't have air conditioning in the hospitals in 1945, so when Blanchard came down the next time, I asked him, "Why in the heck can't you get me out of here, buddy buddy?" He said, "I can't as long as you're running a fever." Oh, that's the problem. We can take care of that. After all, I'm chief pharmacist mate. My bunk was situated so that I could see a clock with a second hand on it. When they would bring

the thermometers around to check temperatures, they'd distribute a batch of thermometers, and then come back around and check the temperatures. Every 15 seconds, I would take that thermometer out and see what the temperature was, and when it got up to 98.8, I had the exact number of seconds involved. Now we have everything under control. When they came around to take the TPRs, temperature, pulse, respiration, I would have my arm folded this way, with my hands under the arm pit. I would let them choose whichever arm they wanted to take the pulse. It didn't make any difference to me. I let them choose. I would then keep the opposite hand under the arm, and when they started to take the pulse, I clamped down to shut off that artery, and using this middle finger, and tap out the pulse at 78 or maybe 80, but no more. They were recording normal temperatures and pulse rates, so the nurse came over and said, "You know, I don't understand it, but your temperature and you're not running a fever. With all that infection in your leg, you're not running a fever. Then she checked it. She got the same result. Then the doctor come down, and he checked it. Nobody thought to do that.

BP: Why didn't you want me to include the part about the stewards?

LE: Discrimination.

BP: I've interviewed two African American Navy vets already, who were stewards, and that doesn't sound very damning, what you said so far. They got the men out of the hole in the ship, though, right? And you said one was hanging onto that piece of metal?

LE: Yeah. They pulled him off, too. He cut his hands. That was the only injury that any of the mess attendants had.

BP: Now that Radio Operator that pulled them out, did he get a medal for helping them?

LE: No.

BP: They helped pull them out. Did they take them out of the raft and put the wounded in after that?

LE: Yeah. He brought the raft around to the other side, and took the Negroes aboard the ship, and officer Griffin gave them a bad time. Then they put them in the water like they should have been, and they're screaming, "I can't swim."

BP: And they didn't have life jackets?

LE: Everybody had his life jacket on.

BP: Now you've got your temperature down.

LE: Yeah. So they put me on a plane to go back to, I thought, the States. Now I'm sorry I fooled them. The gas bubbles from the gangrene in my foot expanded when we reached altitude. The planes weren't pressurized, and those gas bubbles when they expanded, they caused a little bit of

pain. When we got to Hawaii, I was sent to the Naval Hospital at Aiea Heights. There, I languished while the meat on my leg rotted away. There were two bones that stuck out, got so uncomfortable when I would turn over. They would rub together, and I finally talked them into cutting those bones off. The doctor did a complete revision and put traction back on it. Now my wife is worried about me. I'd been on the serious list for months, and she prayed that I wouldn't die. She contacted the local congressman, who happened to be my father's cousin, and asked him could he get her permission to fly to Hawaii. Civilian travel at that time was so severely restricted. He didn't answer her immediately, but the next day, the Commanding officer of the hospital came down to my bunk, and he said, "Do you feel capable of flying to the States?" "Captain, I've been begging for this for months." And he told the doctor, "Get him ready to leave tomorrow. If you don't have a plane load of casualties going back, he'll be on one by himself, then. But he's leaving tomorrow." It seems the captain got a letter from the congressman telling him that he should do one of two things. If I was able to, get me sent back to the States immediately. If not, to make preparations to receive his wife, to provide her with housing, food, and transportation if she needed for the

time she was there. He decided the lesser of the two evils was to get me out of there.

BP: Why did they take so long to amputate your leg?

LE: I was injured for a piece of shrapnel going into my groin and nicking both the artery and the vein, which lie side by side. The artery was bleeding directly into the vein, so it was a short circuit of getting no blood to the lower leg. I knew, and the doctors confirmed, an injury there should demarcate, which means turn black up to a point, and then above that, be a pink, live flesh. It should demarcate some place between the knee and the hip, and mine never would demarcate. It just kept rotting away at the base. They amputated my leg first at the ankle. It wasn't injured that badly. It was the injury in the groin.

BP: And they didn't pick up on it right away, is that it?

LE: Oh, yes. They knew what was going on. But they weren't going to do any work until they found out where. It just kept rotting away, so they didn't really re-amputate when he did the revision, and took off the bone from the edge. He just took away a little bit of the dead flesh, and tried to sew the live flesh around the edge of it, but it wouldn't reach, so they put traction on it. When I got to the hospital in Mare Island, the first thing they did was x-ray me. I hadn't been x-rayed previously. They x-rayed

me head to toe. When they x-rayed my knees, they didn't move the arm and put on the (inaudible), and so there was a piece of shrapnel embedded in the plateau of the tibia in my left leg, that they x-rayed. The doctor saw it had R on it, so he assumed it was in the leg that was wounded so badly. He came running in and took the traction off, and said, "Chief, keep that leg relaxed. Because every time you move that lower leg, that piece of shrapnel's going to scratch the tendons and padding, and really mess that up. When the leg is healed, then we'll go in and take the shrapnel out, but just don't do any surgeries as long as you got infection down there." I walked on crutches, and when the leg finally healed, they said, "We'll take an x-ray to make sure the shrapnel hasn't moved at all." It was gone, so they took the x-ray of the other leg, and that's where they operated. They did an osteotomy to remove that piece of shrapnel, so then I was in a wheelchair with both legs (inaudible) for a while. The wheelchairs we used then was a wooden wheelchair. The only small wheelchair was the one the Red Cross provided to double amputees. I was traveling pretty well in those big wooden wheelchairs. The guy in the bunk next to me was a double amputee, but he was sitting in a wooden wheelchair

No. He had one leg amputated and the other was in a cast, so he was in a wooden wheelchair because he had a leg sticking out. He got word that they had new bomber jackets down at the Ship Service Store on Mare Island. When I'd been in Mare Island on the *Savannah* and the *Boise*, I knew where the Ship Service Store was. It was right up close to the hospital. The jacket was one building away from the hospital. He said, "They got bomber jackets down there. Let's go get a couple. They're \$20 each. Those are leather jackets." We got in the wheelchairs and went up and asked the nurse could we go to the Ship Service Store, and she said, "Only on one condition," and I said, "What's that?" She said, "You buy me a pen. The ones we got here in the Navy don't work. I need a fountain pen." I guess there was fountain pens in those days. So [Brooks?] and I got in our wheelchairs, and we went out of the ward out of the hospital, and went down to the Ship Service Store, and the building was a school now. We saw somebody down there, and said, "Where's the Ship Service Store?" "This street that you're on. Just go right on down it, and you'll see it on the right-hand side." He didn't tell us that was a mile down there. Then it started sprinkling rain, so there was nobody out on the streets to ask anymore, so we kept paddling. We kept pushing the wheelchairs, and finally we



got down to the Ship Service Store, and stairs. There were about eight stairs up to there. There was no way either one of us could get out of the wheelchair and drag them up there behind us that far. They came in, and they were going to have lunch in there, rather than aboard ship, because it's right after payday.

I had a chief petty officer's uniform on, so I ordered the four of them to pick me up in the wheelchair, and get four more to pick him up, take us up the stairs at the main deck of the Ship Service Store. We went in and we got our jackets and had some lunch, and came back out and got some guys to lift us down the stairs, and then we started pushing back to the hospital. We were on the sidewalk. Sidewalks weren't handicapped accessible in those days, so we had these little problem getting down in to the street each time to cross the street, because there were a lot of cross streets between where we were. We got to one, and there was mud. We both got stuck in the mud, so we figured out it was one wheelchair pushing as hard as you could, and then turn it and reach back and pull the other one, and the two of us could bring him up, and push past the other one, and zig zag that way. We got all the way across the street, but when we got to the ward, it was nine o'clock at

night. We had left late that morning, and they didn't seem to see anything wrong with that. I stayed on around until I was healed enough to get prostheses. Bill Kyne, who owned the Bay Meadows Racing Track, had provided all the money to the brace shop in Mare Island. They made artificial limbs and braces, and he was paying the salary of all the civilians that were working there.

That brace shop, they manufactured your leg. When they got a satisfactory fit, then you would come each day over to the brace shop and go into the school, where you learned to use your prosthesis. After you were at a certain point of proficiency, then you could take the prosthesis with you back to the ward, and then you kept there until the Navy decided to release you from the hospital. You normally were surveyed, medical survey into civilian life, and the Veterans Administration picked up your compensation. I was a pharmacist mate. My only trade was nursing, and I'm no longer able to physically do that. I wanted to stay in the Navy, because I had a wife and a child. Going out with no salary, I just couldn't risk it if I could help it. So I told Dr. Thomas Canty I wanted to stay in the Navy. He said, "Okay, chief, we'll see what we can do." At inspection next time, he told the captain that I wanted to

stay in the Navy. The captain says, "No, there's no way." Dr. Canty says, "We'll still try." Then we had a big inspection with the Admiral from the 12th Naval District. He's a Medical officer, but he's an Admiral. When they inspected the brace shop, I had been working for Dr. Canty, helping him straighten his records out. They were in a mess in that brace shop, so I was refiling his records. The inspection, Dr. Canty told the Admiral that I plan to stay in the Navy, and the Admiral says, "Too bad. Can't do it." So when they brought me up to the Board of Medical Survey for discharge, they found me ready for discharge, so Dr. Canty said, "Okay, now's when we do our little bit."

We wrote a letter from me to the chief of the Bureau of Medicine Surgery requesting that I be allowed to stay in the Navy. Dr. Canty signed it and approved it. The captain signed it disapproved, but forwarded it. The Admiral signed it disapproved, but forwarded it. Then they got a telegram, and Polly probably remembers this. It was short and sweet. It said, "The records in the Bureau show Eaton's enlistment expired during the war, and he's been kept on active duty by Presidential Order. If Eaton wishes to re-enlist in the Navy, use this telegram as authority to waive all disabilities. If that is not what he wants,

please wire the Bureau his wishes." I said, "Well, that's it. That's what I wanted." So I re-enlisted in the Navy. When I re-enlisted, they asked, "Where do you want to go?" I said, "Stay as close to this brace shop as I can. That's where my leg was made." So they transferred me to the Naval Ship Yard, and I was stationed at the Ship Yard Dispensary. After a few months there, they called me in the office, and they asked, "Would you like to be transferred?" I said, "Not particularly. Why?" They said, "There's an opening at the Naval Reserve Training Center over across the river in Vallejo." "No, problem." I was glad I did, because they had no messing or berthing facilities in their Reserve Training Center, so you were able to draw subs in quarters.

BP: Subs?

LE: Subsistence in quarters allowance. It's extra money. I was living at home and eating my meals at home anyhow, so that was gravy. I spent the rest of my naval career as the chief pharmacist mate at the Naval Reserve Training Center in Vallejo.

BP: Retiring when?

LE: I got a letter from the Bureau to me: you will report to the Physical Evaluation Board at the Naval Hospital in Oakland on October the 1st, 1958. And you will be retired

on October the 30th. I go over to the Physical Evaluation Board, and they say, "Chief, we don't have much leeway here. It says for us to examine you and then discharge you." So I was retired, medical retirement, on the 30th of October, 1958.

BP: Did you work at anything after you retired?

LE: When I got the letter, and said that I would be retired, I could see the handwriting, so I went over and enrolled in Vallejo Junior College. That was in September. When I retired, when I got the letter, I just attended school full time. I didn't do any work at the Training Center. Then when I retired, I just stayed right where I was, as a student at this junior college. After completing two years of the junior college, I transferred to San Francisco State University, and completed my work for a bachelor's degree in social welfare. I had started college to be an electronic engineer, because I was a ham radio operator. I built most of my own equipment, so I thought I was really set for a career in engineering. But I found that I didn't have the math for it. Calculus took me more time studying than all the other subjects that I had. I could barely pull a C in calculus, and the other subjects that I didn't even bother with, I made As. In my second year at Vallejo Junior College, I decided that maybe I could take a

correspondence course from that international, and build myself some equipment.

I wrote a letter to the VA to see if they'd approve it. They called me over and ran me through their battery of tests. When they got over that, they asked, "Who approved your education under the VA?" And I said, "I guess you did. You've been sending me money." He said, "How'd you get in there?" I said, "Well, when I went over to enroll, it said veterans one way, and non-veterans the other, and I was a veteran so I went that way, and they gave me a bunch of papers to sign. I signed them." He said, "We're supposed to do this testing before, and then approve you for whatever educational benefits we think you should have." I stayed over there one night and had two days of testing, and then he gave me a little test. He said, "You listen to this phone call." And he called some company down in Silicon Valley. They had just started down there. He said, "I've got a young fellow here that'll be graduating in a few months in electrical engineering. Would you be interested in him? He's aged 50." "Oh, I see. If he's ever down this way, he could put in an application, but we're not hiring at this time." Before, they were coming down the telephone line to get me. Then

he called over to the Department of Social Welfare in San Francisco, and said, "I've got a badly disabled man, age 55, who's thinking about taking social welfare in college. What is his employment opportunities?" "Well, could we help him? Because we'd have a job for him when he completed his education." So I switched majors. When I graduated, and I took the state personnel board examination for everything that they gave. Took the federal examination for everything, and forgot to report back one exam that I took that covered five different employment opportunities: The Department of Employment, the Department of Education, Department of Corrections, and Union Right of Way Agent. On the oral examination, they were graded separately. It was a requirement of employment, it seemed that there were about 4,000 people who passed the examination, and the orals weeded out a lot. Then they made a list of 500, and my number was one.

BP: You went to work for the State of California?

LE: For the Department of Employment in the State of California. When I went over to be interviewed in San Francisco, the man that interviewed me said, "You're number one on the list. You get your choice, and I know you would like Vallejo. Actually, Richmond is not too far from Vallejo. They have a full-functioning office that is good

in training. We have a man who lives in Fairfield. He's number five on the list, and he would like to be as close to home as he could go. If you would agree, I'd like to send you to Richmond and him to Vallejo. But you're number one. It's your choice." I said, "You know, you people have been good enough to put me in number one on the list. I'll take your advice and I'll work in Richmond." Good choice. Only problem was, to get a raise in pay with the state employment, you have to advance. Just like the Navy, the more you learned about nursing, the further you got from the patients as you advanced. In the department of employment, the further you get from placing people in jobs. I enjoyed my first year there, working placement of putting people in jobs, finding men for the company would call me and say, "Doc, I need somebody to run this machine. Find me somebody. I'm hurting. Find me the right man for it. Have him called me back. Boy, am I glad I called you." I enjoyed that work, but then to advance, I took the examination for Employment Security officer Grade 2, and I was the Veterans Employment Representative. All I did was advise veterans. Then asked the Placement officer to find them a job.



The next advancement, I took the examination for Grade 3, and I was high on the list every time. I test high. There wasn't an opening in Vallejo. They wanted me to take the officer Manager in Hollister, and that's hot down there so I refused that one. Then there was an opening in Oakland, and I was just about to accept that when I got a call from a guy in Sacramento. He said, "I understand that you had a training in the new Dictionary of Occupational Titles." I said, "That's true." He said, "We've got a job. We need you. We'd like to interview you." They came down, and they talked me into taking the job in Sacramento. I lived in Vallejo, and I'm going to commute 55 miles a day. Each way. I went to Sacramento then, and I converted their job inventory. The Department of Labor requires each state to provide them with an inventory of job openings. That's for jobs that are hard to fill.

BP: I wonder if we could stop here, because I want to keep it focused on your time in the Navy. I'll put this in a very condensed form in your biographical introduction.

(break in audio)

BP: ... You quit. When was that?

LE: When Reagan was reelected.

BP: You didn't like Reagan or something?

LE: I had advanced up to Grade 5, and the feds had a new program that they just instituted, and they wanted each state to run an on-the-job training program. I was writing it up, and then sent it over for approval to the head of the department. They took it into the government to sign off on it. He said, "No, no. I want that program to be for only adult males who are on social welfare."

BP: Abbreviate even more. When did you quit? What year?

LE: Seventy-one.

BP: Can I go back and ask you some -- so you had more than one operation on your leg? I wasn't too clear. They amputated a bit at a time, is that it?

LE: They amputated at the ankle. Then it rotted off up to about four inches from the knee. Then they chopped it off there. Then after they made my first prosthesis, the leg hadn't really healed, so the bone stuck through the skin right away, so Dr. Canty did a good operation on it, and he corrected it all.

BP: So you had a total of three?

LE: There was three amputations, yes.

BP: It's still below the knee, though.

LE: Yes. I have two inches below the knee.

BP: Is there anybody, like when you were on the *Emmons*, did you have any special friends or personalities that stood out, that you remember?

LE: That chief radioman. I can't remember the name. I'm sorry, but he was a special friend. I liked him a lot.

BP: What happened to him?

LE: He was burned, but I lost track of him when we got to the hospital in Guam, because I was in one ward and they were in a different one.

BP: He survived, though.

LE: Yes.

BP: Was he the one who gave you the first morphine shot, or was that somebody else?

LE: No. Somebody else. I don't know who.

BP: And you've never made attempt at contacting him after that. How about when you were at Mare Island Hospital? I was talking to Miss Robinson, and she mentioned a civilian woman. I think she mentioned she was married to a military person. She lost her leg in an accident, and she stayed on at the hospital after she got her prosthesis, and helped some of the other amputees.

LE: I think that was after I had been discharged.

BP: You don't remember her.

LE: No. She was not there when I was there.

BP: Were there any other medical personnel or patients that stand out in your memory... How about people who had lost part of their facial features? Were they here or were they sent someplace else?

LE: The ward I was in was amputees only.

BP: So you don't know anything about people who lost noses, ears, or anything.

LE: There was one man who was brought in. He was not strictly an amputee, but both of his legs were badly wounded, and one hand blown off. Both of his hands were off, and he was blind.

BP: How did they take care of him? The reason I ask is because when I was in Saigon, I had a friend who, him and his wife moved back to Albuquerque, and when they were house hunting --

(break in audio)

LE: -- badly wounded, lost both hands, and was blind. When he was discharged, he went to work for the city of Sacramento as a police dispatcher. He worked there, never cashed his VA compensation for 10 years. Lived on his salary, the money that he earned himself. He had a wife and family, and he was able to support them.

BP: Do you remember his name?

LE: No, I don't. But you should be able to find out, because he was considered the best dispatcher that Sacramento ever had.

BP: Is there anything else you can think of right off hand? That I've left out?

LE: There's stories in the war and that sort of thing.

BP: I remember one of the questions. It was very difficult for you to get permission to re-enlist as an amputee? Were you the first? Did this set a precedent?

LE: I understood there were three of us that were allowed to remain on active duty. One was a young Marine Pilot who lost both legs. After about three or four months, he decided he didn't want to do it, and asked to be out again. The other was a naval officer who was the Commanding officer of a carrier at Korea.

BP: I thought that the (inaudible) Princeton, he lost his leg and he stayed in.

LE: That might have been who it was. He stayed on active duty, and they allowed him to stay on. They later made a movie about him, so I wrote down to the Hollywood when they decided to make it, and told them that I was an amputee, and I was Navy, and I wanted to play that part. They said it was much easier to train an actor to act like he had a leg off than it was to train an amputee to act.

BP: I was in New York during the Vietnam War, and our Flight Deck officer was an amputee. He was a mean son of a bitch. Boy, if you didn't move when he said move...

LE: I was a good chief. I wasn't a mean son of a bitch. I was a good chief.

END OF AUDIO FILE