

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

***Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas***

***Interview with Michael Bak, Jr.
Quartermaster, USS Franks
U. S. Navy***

Interview With Michael Bak, Jr.

This is Eddie Graham. I am interviewing Mr. Michael Bak, Jr. It's September eighteenth, 2004. We are in the Fredericksburg High School building in Fredericksburgh, Texas.

Mr. Graham: Mr. Bak, when and where were you born?

Mr. Bak: I was born on March the fourteenth, 1923, in Garfield, New Jersey.

Mr. Graham: And what were the names of your parents?

Mr. Bak: Michael and Anna Bak. My mother's maiden name was Chura.

Mr. Graham: Where did you go to school?

Mr. Bak: I went to the regular schools in the city of Garfield. I went to high school in 1938 in Garfield High School, graduated in June of 1941.

Mr. Graham: Where were you and what were you doing December seventh, 1941?

Mr. Bak: It was a Sunday, about one o'clock in the afternoon. At that time, I was a spectator at a basketball game. We had semipro basketball games on Sunday afternoons in a local building at Passaic, New Jersey. And at that time of Pearl Harbor, they stopped the game right after the announcement was made that the United States declared war on Japan, and that Pearl Harbor was attacked. First of all, they said "Pearl Harbor was attacked, and we are at war with Japan."

Mr. Graham: How did you end up getting into the branch of service that you were in?

Mr. Bak: I enlisted in the United States Navy Reserve in 1942. I was inducted into the Navy on December the tenth, 1942 and was sent to Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Illinois. I was there for a ten month period of boot camp training. Interestingly enough, since you're a sportsman, the boot camp commander that we had was a fellow name of Fred Lindstrom. He was the company commander of our company 1895. We were told he was a professional baseball player who was inducted into the Navy to be a chief petty officer at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center. While he was there, we paid no attention to the fact that he was a baseball player, other than we knew that.

And the first thing that he did as he introduced us to himself, we had about a hundred and twenty five guys in our company, he said, "Anybody who played high school basketball or college step forward." And about seven or eight of us stepped forward. I played high school basketball, and he said, "From now on, I want you guys to go down to the gym, I want you to work out and practice in the gym, I want to have the best company basketball team here." So with that, I never had KP in boot camp. All we'd do was practice basketball in our spare time. So it was kind of good duty for us, you know.

So that was the first thing that happened to me. And then I was there for ten weeks, and then I was invited to attend the quartermaster training, become a quartermaster in the United States Navy. I went to school in Great Lakes, the Quartermaster School. That took four months. Upon graduation I was promoted to petty officer third class, and I became a third class quartermaster. And then from that point on I was asked what type of ship I would like to serve on, and I selected destroyer duty, South Pacific, and they asked me what was that based on. I said it was based on the early successes of destroyers in World War II.

As a result of that, the next I knew I was on a train leaving Great Lakes for Seattle, Washington, where I was assigned to a brand new destroyer just being built. It wasn't completed yet. It was a Fletcher Class destroyer. So I came on board about two weeks before the actual commissioning, and during the time I came on board the commissioning ceremony took place on December the, I'm sorry, on July the thirtieth, 1943. And our ship was commissioned. We had three hundred twenty-six men aboard, sixteen of which were officers. And I came on board not knowing anything about the Navy other than I went to school as a quartermaster third class, and a quartermaster is assistant to the navigator and the officer of the deck on the bridge.

My main duty was to log entries into the log whenever anything happened. Whenever we took off, got under way, the time we got under way, any time the course changed, any time we passed a buoy in the channel. And everything that happened aboard ship for the next thirty-one months, my duty was four hours on and eight hours off as a quartermaster on the bridge. Also during special sea detail, when the ship got under way, they announced special sea detail. A certain group of people that were involved and my job was to be on the bridge as a quartermaster and logging things that happened. Also, my station was there during general quarters. Every time general quarters was sounded, I was the quartermaster of the watch. I could be on duty say for four hours and get off a half an hour later and general quarters would be sounded again, I would be back on the bridge handling the quartermaster watch. It could be for five or six more hours. And I might be on duty for eight, ten hours straight, which happened several time.

Mr. Graham: So you were in the Tin Can Navy.

Mr. Bak: I was in the Tin Can Navy, and we were assigned to a destroyer division called Division Ninety-Four. And there were four ships involved in that. There was the *Franks*, the 554; then there was the *Haggard*, the 555; the *Hailey*, the 556; and the *Johnston*, the 557, that was blown out of the water in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. That was part of our destroyer division. Then we were assigned to Squadron Forty-seven, which was nine destroyers.

Mr. Graham: What was the name of your particular ship?

Mr. Bak: *USS Franks, DD-554.* That's the main designation.

So we had training, basic training, in the waters of the Seattle Area in the Puget Sound. Then we took off for sea, got out into the ocean for the first time, and when you get out into the ocean the salt air hits you. I got sick as a dog. We went down to San Diego for further training and as we got out into the ocean the waves and the rock and the roll of the ship and the salt air really had me sick as a dog for a week. And I was so sick, they wouldn't allow me to stay down in my sack. I had a bucket, a regular metal bucket, I carried with me to throw up into. On the bridge going to my duties, you know. And people were really laughing, because the guys that were in the Navy knew this was going to happen, and most of the guys were sick aboard ship the first week. After that, I was never sickened again in the Navy even as we survived many typhoons. And I survived the typhoon, the greatest typhoon man ever survived, on December the eighteenth and nineteenth of 1944 in the Philippine Sea. We had two seventy degree rolls.

I was never sick again. But that one time coming down from Seattle to San Diego, I wanted to die. Off the coast of Monterey, California for some reason the water gets very, very rough out there. And we got into San Diego and we were there for about, oh, I guess about a month. Each day we were in San Diego we would go out and have practice, different kinds of practices. Shooting guns. They would have planes coming down with sleeves, we'd be shooting forty millimeters, twenty millimeters. They would have planes coming down with some more sleeves or sleds, and we would be shooting five-inch guns. And that was our training then.

Mr. Graham: What about depth charge practices, did you do any of that?

Mr. Bak: We had, we didn't shoot any depth charge at that time. We did shoot torpedoes. We had submarines that were there to assist in training outside of San Diego. In other words, so the men could ping on the submarines. So we had all that training, and the big thing we had, there was an island off San Clemente Island that the Navy used for bombarding. We would get alongside and bombard the island at specific targets. Later on during the war, we were bombarding many different islands in the time we were out there. So we spent a lot of our time shooting five-inch guns into the island, going up and down the island and I would be on the bridge where you had a Polaris Stand, which is a compass, and taking bearings on the right angle of the island and the left angle, so the navigator could make his position report and give the gunnery officer the correct coordinates, and they would fire.

Mr. Graham: After all this training, then where did you go?

Mr. Bak: We went to the city of Honolulu. Honolulu was the advance base for the United States Navy. When we got to Honolulu we saw Diamond Head for the first time. We could see

it from sixty miles away. We got up to Honolulu and we immediately went to a dock and we got refueled with fuel and provisions. And we stayed in Honolulu for about a three or four week period of time. In Honolulu we also had further exercises. We would go out into the ocean and work with aircraft carriers, jeep carriers, who would be—we were acting as a plane guard ship. If a plane went down we would rescue pilots. During the war we rescued twenty-two downed aviators out of the ocean. Our early training was a big factor in rescuing these pilots out of the ocean. We had a certain technique I'll describe later on that we rescued pilots. In fact, Ernie Pyle, the world-famous writer, did a story about our ship's rescue, and I have a copy of his article with me here, as well as an article that I wrote that appeared in the Navy Magazine about Ernie Pyle's article about our ship.

Mr. Graham: Let me ask you this. When you were in Pearl Harbor, as you know, there's Ford Island in the center of Battleship Row during December. Did you anchor at any time around Ford Island, or could anybody?

Mr. Bak: No, not Ford Island. We anchored away from that, they had anchorages away. First we went to a dock. As we came by Ford Island, the ships were still, you, know, in the water. It was a terrible sight. And our captain, as we came in, had everybody at attention as we came by Ford Island, even like ten minutes before. As we came in through the channel or entrance to Pearl Harbor, everybody was in their dungarees, white hats, and dungaree shirts. We stood at attention at our stations and we faced Ford Island, and the captain never said a word, just to make sure we observed the damage that was done to the Battleship Row. And that was, you couldn't describe the reason why we were fighting, better than seeing the battleships turned over and still smoldering in the water.

Mr. Graham: You don't think the captain did this for a purpose, do you?

Mr. Bak: Oh yeah, it was definitely a purpose. Never said a word, never said a word, he just wanted us just purposely to stand there and pay respect to the guys who died, but more important, I think, to make sure that we understood what we were fighting for. And to me it was a great motivator for the sailors aboard ship.

Mr. Graham: I imagine it's a moment, too, that you always remember.

Mr. Bak: Always remember, yeah. One of the things that happened to me in Honolulu, I had a cousin by name of Daniel Serafin who joined the Army about three and a half years before Pearl Harbor, and was stationed at Fort Shafter in Hawaii. When I was in high school I used to write to him, and even before high school, letters, because he was in the military and I would be getting letters back from Hawaii. With stamps from Hawaii. I was very thrilled to negotiate with somebody who was in Hawaii, and my cousin in the Army. So when I got down to the Honolulu, his last known address was the Ionali Palace, which was in downtown Honolulu, and he was stationed there.

So when I got off the ship for the first reunion that we had, I got off the ship and I went to the Ional Palace and they had a sergeant, a United States Army sergeant at the desk. I walked up to the desk and said "Hey, I have a cousin here I used to write to from the States and I wonder if you might know of him or where I could reach him." He said "What's his name?" I said, "Daniel Serafin." He gets on the phone (Mr. Bak makes a dialing sound). He says "Here." Gives me the phone, and I says "Danny?" He says "Yeah, who's this?" "Mike." "Mike who?" I says "Your cousin from Garfield, New Jersey." He says, "Where the hell are you?" I says "Ional Palace." He says "Stay there, I'll be over there in a half an hour."

A half an hour later he came over in a jeep, an Army jeep, he was in the motor pool at Fort Shafter as a corporal. He made his own pass to get out of the gate, had a jeep, came down and picked me up. Now, I'm only in Honolulu about an hour or two and the next thing you know I'm in a jeep riding down King Street with thousands of sailors and my shipmates see me in the jeep, they says "Mike, give us a ride." And all these guys want to get on, we had a two-seater and two seats in the back. I couldn't get anybody, they'd get PO'd at me if I got one or two guys and not the others, so we just kept on going.

So my cousin took me around the island, told me where the hell to stay away from. He drove me by, for example, in Honolulu they had houses of prostitution, where men would line up on the street reading magazines and newspapers and so forth—

Mr. Graham: King and Hotel Street.

Mr. Bak: King and Hotel Street. And then right next door they had a pro station. And my cousin was just showing me these things, these are places you want to stay out of. But you had guys reading magazines, newspapers, inching up. And he took us down and we were driving around town. He took me down to a blowhole, then later on took me up to the northern—the entire Oahu, I had a private tour of Oahu on the government.

Mr. Graham: Did you get to see the famous Waikiki Beach?

Mr. Bak: I saw the famous Waikiki Beach. In fact, the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, the pink hotel, was there. We went swimming—when I wasn't with my cousin I was always at Waikiki Beach. We had a signalman and myself that would go to the beach. We were both swimmers, and we both went to Waikiki Beach. It was the greatest beach in the world.

Mr. Graham: Did he take you over the Pali?

Mr. Bak: The Pali?

Mr. Graham: P-A-L-I. That's where you go way up this mountain, and it's real strong wind a the top.

Mr. Bak: Oh, I didn't go there. I went around the island with my cousin. He took us around the

island. We went to the northern section of the island. What the hell's the name of the place?

Mr. Graham: But you got the big tour, right?

Mr. Bak: I got the big tour, yeah. And on top of that, you could not stay overnight in Honolulu because of the military law. So if you could say you have a place to stay overnight, and an address, you could have overnight liberty. So my cousin had me stay at the Army base in Fort Shafter and I used to sleep at the Army base at Fort Shafter. Now, his buddies were sergeants, staff sergeants and above. They had a separate dining room, so when I was with him, he being a corporal, for a joke they would take me to have lunch in their dining room while my cousin would be in the enlisted men's dining room.

Mr. Graham: If I'm not mistaken, Fort Shafter, if I can remember when I was stationed over there, it's kind of up in the mountains.

Mr. Bak: In the mountains. It's about half an hour away. Beautiful, yeah.

Mr. Graham: Rainbows up there.

Mr. Bak: Yeah. So I had a great time. He had a girl friend, her name was Bobbie Silva. Beautiful girl, and eventually married her and had a couple of kids. And she had a sister, her sister's name was Alva, big tall good looking girl. She worked in the Globe Department Store selling cosmetics. And he wanted me to get romantically involved with her so we could bring both these girls back to the United States. And my folks, I'm a first generation Russian, my folks from Russia, came over from Russia and if we, imagine me coming home with a Kanaka. Anyway.

So we had some good parties. He picks me up from the base with his girl friend. And I have photographs showing, I'm in one of the famous Oahu nightclubs, you know. So my stay in Honolulu was unbelievable. I just got in the Navy, here I am, the Navy's paying me money, they're feeding me, they're clothing me, and I get liberty in Honolulu.

Mr. Graham: Top of the line.

Mr. Bak: Top of the line. And then, all hell broke loose.

Mr. Graham: What happened then?

Mr. Bak: We were in the first invasion in the Gilbert Islands. I think we were attached to the Sixth Fleet, six point two, I think it was. We went down to the Tarawa invasion. I think the Tarawa invasion started around November the twentieth or twenty-first, around

that time. And we were with three aircraft carriers, jeep carriers, five destroyers, and a couple of cruisers. And during the battle of Tarawa the planes would give them support to the landings. And we were coming in and out of Tarawa. At night time the fleet went sixty miles due east to stay away from the Tarawa area. The Jap bombers were coming over at night time and dropping flares on the fleet. The first night we were there after the first night of the invasion, they dropped flares. Then, the second night we went back, the second day, we went back towards Tarawa and the ships are going into the harbor. We went into the beach area inside the Tarawa lagoon. At that time we didn't fire, but we went in and then we came out with the fleet again. Now the Jap bombers were again dropping flares. We saw a light on the horizon, so our ship, the captain reported to the task group commander that there's a light on the horizon, and we were sent out from our position around the carriers to go search what the light, what appeared to be a light. And we got out there we could find nothing.

So on our way back, coming into our position in the screen, a Jap submarine came in and put a torpedo into the *Liscome Bay* aircraft carrier and it went down at five o'clock in the morning. I was on the bridge, I had the quartermaster watch from four to eight in the morning, and we had a dawn general quarters. Every morning when the pilots, the carriers took off and had flight operations, we had dawn general quarters. So I was on the bridge at five o'clock in the morning when the torpedo hit. We were about three miles away and that thing blew up in a ball of fire, and in twenty-three minutes the fire just went out, just distinguished, and they lost around six hundred and seventy men that went down with the ship, including Admiral Mullinnix.

Mr. Graham: That must have been a very sensitive spot that it hit that carrier that it'd blow up and go down that quick.

Mr. Bak: It went, it just hit it right amidships, and it went down fast. In fact, here we were, two thousand nine hundred miles away from Tokyo, and I see the first aircraft carrier sink. And I says, my god, it's going to be a long war! We had all those islands, I look at the map where the Gilbert Islands were, you know, going all the way to Tokyo and all those islands, it was going to be a long war.

So after that happened we went back to Honolulu. And on the way back we crossed the Equator. At that time we had the initiation for crossing the Equator, when I became a Shellback. We had around ten or twelve percent of the men who were in the Navy before and crossed the Equator, and they were the initiators and put us through some gruesome initiation. For example, each sailor was given a summons, a written summons, by one of the guys aboard ship, and the summons, you're supposed to have, there's a preacher, dressed up as a preacher, and he's supposed to read this summons in front of all the Neptunus Rex reign of people. And my summons was failure to back the attack, BAK the attack, thinks the whale boat is a masquerade, things like that. Funny things, you know.

Mr. Graham: Ridiculous charges.

Mr. Bak: Ridiculous charges. And then they would start the initiation. They had a line strewn off the port side of the ship about a foot high across the lines to the bulkhead. We had to crawl underneath the lines. And they had a hose at the other end with a lot of pressure, just washing you down. They claimed it washing your sins away. As you were crawling underneath there, you had these guys on a side of that thing with sheleighlies and hitting you on the fanny. And if they didn't like you, if you had some enemies, well, you got some guys you had PO'd or something, boy they'd let you have it.

Mr. Graham: The sheleighly, that's a paddle, right?

Mr. Bak: It's a paddle. They had wooden paddles, they had—what they would do is get canvas bags, thin ones, put sand in them. And some of the guys had those, the guys who had been around for quite awhile. Other guys used a stick, whatever they could get, handy enough, to hit you over the fanny. Then what they would do, they would go through a series of events. You would have to kiss the baby's knee. They had some seaman dressed as a girl with a bra, usually a blonde, good-looking guy, looks like a girl, with grease on the knee, and you were supposed to kiss the knee and have your head smashed down—not smashed but rubbed down to get your face full of grease. And with that, then they had a hot seat where you had electrical panels. When you sat down in your wet clothes, your wet bathing suit, and you sat down and got an electric shock. It's a wonder we didn't get electrocuted. Because they just had enough power in there just to zing you, and you'd jump your ass up. Man alive, you never knew what was happening. And then what they had, they had a photographer. They had a big camera box with a black robe over it and a little light over here and the guy behind it, and they had this cameraman who was a shellback, and they called the fellows who were in the Navy before shellbacks. They were the initiators. Including, they initiated, if you were an officer aboard the ship, you were also initiated.

Mr. Graham: They go through the same thing the enlisted men did?

Mr. Bak: The same thing. Except the captain. He said, "If you guys cut my hair, you'll have the most miserable ship you've ever had before." In other words, everybody else had their hair cut with clippers. Not clippers, with shears, and I mean just anywhere.

So that was the initiation. And this cameraman would be behind the black cloth and they want you to smile. And if you don't smile, they got a guy with a shelleighly behind to hit you over the fanny. So you gotta smile. And the guy behind you can see through the opening has a grease gun. And he just shoves grease in your mouth, and holy christ, you want to die.

After it was all over I went to the doctor, complaining "I don't feel good, my stomach hurts, I swallowed some of the grease." He said, "No problem, we'll give you some

pills.” And they gave me some pills that were, I didn’t know at the time, when I went to the bathroom I peed green. And they had some kind of coloration, harmless, but it made you, so I went back to the wardroom where the doctor was sitting with a bunch of the officers, and I said “Doctor, I got some big problems.” Because I was on the bridge, I knew these guys pretty well. I knew all the officers pretty well. I said, “I been peeing green,” and they laughed when I told them. They told me it was just a harmless pill. And I got over it.

But that was the initiation. We went back to Honolulu and again we started loading up for the next invasion. And we were there for about a week or two, I had a chance to see my cousin again. He would come down and pick me up. He came down, we were dockside some time, at the ship entrance. And then in the morning when I left the Fort Shafer, he’d drop me back and the ship was right alongside the dock. He’d go right through the gate with a forged pass. This cousin of mine was a rascal. He’d been in Hawaii so long in the motor pool, he knew how to get in and out of the thing, how to fake these passes. So anyway, he would drop me off about ten minutes before eight o’clock in the morning when the crew is lined up for muster. Every morning we lined up for muster, make sure everybody is aboard ship. I would get off this jeep, walk up the gangway and get in my station over there, and the guys would said “Holy chipes, this guy is too much.”

When I tell this story, a lot of guys don’t believe me, but I have a lot of photographs that I took of the time in Honolulu.

So then we went out from there, we went out to the Kwajalein campaign. And the Kwajalein campaign wasn’t that problematic at all because it wasn’t, the Kwajalein was an easier invasion than Tarawa. The Tarawa invasion was terrible. And the Kwajalein invasion, we were there, and one of the things that happened, they had two battleships with us. One was the *Washington* and the *Indiana*. There was a collision between the two battleships where the *Indiana* cut off the bow of the *Washington*, about sixty feet of the bow.

Mr. Graham: You’re saying the *Indiana*.

Mr. Bak: Collided with the battleship *Washington*. The *Washington* battleship had a bow missing on it. So we were the ones that actually escorted the *Washington* back, with a bunch of other ships, from the Kwajalein invasion, back to Honolulu. And they got there, I understand eventually they put a new bow on the *Washington* and they repaired it and it went out to sea again.

Mr. Graham: Did they ever determine how these two ships collided?

Mr. Bak: No, I have no idea. See, we were not with them when they collided but we were in the same group unit. They could have been in past unit, point one or point two, we could

have been in point three or point four. So many ships out there. But we did come back with them and I was able to see this big battleship without a bow. So that was our invasion, and that was our trip back to Honolulu. We got to Honolulu for further repairs and washing down the ship and painting the bottom. We went out to sea, we never got back until April, until May first of 1945.

Once we left Honolulu we never saw a woman again for almost fourteen months. We got down to these islands in the South Pacific where we rarely had liberty. The only liberty we did have was usually a remote island, had a beach on it, was so lousy, the beaches, most of the beaches in the South Pacific where we were at had coral below the waterline. And some of our guys got real cut badly. You know, macho running in the water and diving.

Mr. Graham: And get fungus.

Mr. Bak: And get fungus over there. So most of the time we came back from a battle, we went back to an advance base. And all the fleet would come back in, like Eniwetok was the first really big advance supplies. They would load up supplies, ammunition, and then take off for the next invasion. So our ship, the *Franks*, was involved with the first offensive of World War II, which was the Gilbert Islands campaign. And we went through all of the invasions after that.

Mr. Graham: Okay, now let's go back and talk about, especially, what area of the Pacific were you in when the two ships, battleships, collided.

Mr. Bak: We were down in the Kwajalein area in the South Pacific. Now, Kwajalein is not too very far from Tarawa. It's in that chain of atolls, archipelagos I guess it's called. It's in the southeastern part of the Pacific.

Mr. Graham: In what areas of any of these did you see action? You mentioned about seeing the carrier torpedoed, but did you yourself see any action with other Japanese ships or anything?

Mr. Bak: At that point, only the Japanese ships coming, were the flares coming down. They were too far away to shoot. We didn't even shoot at them. At night time, we knew they were there, but they were high and they just dropped flares down. And that flare, the picture of the flare, the fleet was just a silhouette. So that was the time. Now we did, in the island of Bougainville, we sunk a submarine. Eventually we found out after the war was over it was the I-176. We then were sent to an island area called Tulagi where it was an advance base, they had a lot of PT boats, and it was called Treasury Islands. And while we were there we would be patrolling these different islands for barges, Japanese barges coming down to Bougainville.

We were told there was a submarine in the area northeast of Bougainville, off the

island of Buka. So three destroyers, the *Haggard*, the *Haley*, and the *Franks*, of our division. went looking for the submarine at night time. And we couldn't, you know, the first two, we had a ping and the first destroyers dropped ashcans, but nothing happened. They ran out of their ashcans. So we were the third destroyer to go in, and we had a ping on the submarine, and our ashcans were eventually the ones that sank the submarine. Had a great upheaval behind the stern of the ship. After the war was over we found out it was the I-176. Because we knew we got.

Now, what happened when the torpedo, when we sank the submarines, a whale boat was lowered from our destroyer. We had an officer, his name was Lieutenant Crabb, who was in charge of—not Crabb, I'm sorry, no, it's not Crabb. Anyway, we had an officer lead in the whale boat with a **motormak???** and a coxswain and a signalman and going out and picking up debris out of the water. They had like a fish net, and picking up debris out of the water as proof positive of the thing. So we did sink a submarine.

Mr. Graham: Is there anything specifically important about this sub I-176.

Mr. Bak: I-176? Only the fact that the aircraft carrier that was sunk, *Liscome Bay*, was sunk by the I-175, and we understand that the fellow who was the I-175 commander later on took command of the I-176. And supposedly we were the ones who sunk the I-176 that the captain of the I-175 once captained. But that was the time we had around Bougainville. At that time, Tulagi and that area of Treasury Islands was the PT boats based in there. We used to watch these PT boats go out early evening, just before dusk, and take off in the night and then come back in the morning. PT boat operation at that was done at night time. They would just be patrolling for barges coming down the different islands to reinforce Japanese troops.

And all the time I had my duty, four and eight, every time we had flight operations— Oh, in-between this time we rescued pilots out of the water. We rescued twenty-two. And during the battle of Tarawa we rescued a pilot. I wish I had the list of all the pilots we rescued and the ships they came from. I have a list at home. That was one of our major accomplishments during the war, rescuing pilots out of the water.

We had three captains in the time we were aboard the ship. Our first captain used the whale boat technique, dropping a whale boat in the water and going after the pilot. And later on it became a little tough. Sometimes when the pilots went down the water was rough and putting a boat in the water had it's problems, up and down and just banging against the thing. So we had the captain, the second captain devised three swimmers, had three volunteer enlisted men, he didn't want to put an officer diving, because only had sixteen, they were (chuckles)—

Mr. Graham: They were an endangered species.

Mr. Bak: They were an endangered species. So we had these three young fellows who were good swimmers, who would dive over the side when the captain, we would find the pilot in the water. Usually a plane would take off and crash, or it landed, he may have been shot up, he couldn't see too well, he crashed over the side or crashed into the water. Or he might be taking off and had a blowout as the plane was taking off, and go over the side and crash. Now, when that happened, we were usually a mile away behind an aircraft carrier. When flight operations always started, we'd be out in a screen position. Maybe one of ten destroyers, or seven destroyers, in a circle around the fleet. And our job would be to get behind, when flight operations started, get behind an aircraft carrier and stay there while the planes took off, when the flight operations were completed, we went back to the screen. Then when they were landing, before they landed, we'd get back behind the carrier again, and stay behind the carrier to pick up pilots out of the water.

Mr. Graham: Were there many planes that had malfunction to where when they were taking off that they crashed?

Mr. Bak: Well, this one in particular had a blowout, and that was the one that Ernie Pyle wrote the story about. And I have a copy here of Ernie Pyles's copy and tell about the blowout of the tire. When that plane went over the side the tire blew and he went over the side and went into the water. When you hit the water, you hit like cement. And these pilots, when they came up, now we would rescue them sometimes in three and four minutes from the time they were in the water to maybe twelve to fifteen minutes. And day and night. Sometimes you couldn't find them. But when they'd come up and we'd get them onboard the ship, the guys would go out with a Stokes stretcher. They would dive over the side. One guy would be having a Stokes stretcher and trailing it with him, in his stretcher hand, like two five-inch shells, sealed, for buoyancy, and take it with him and put the pilot into the Stokes stretcher and pull him back to the ship. They had the eye behind their back, they had a leather strap with an eye behind the leather strap, that would tie down the line that would pull them back in. Then when they got back to the ship we had a hoist go down and pick up, usually the hoist that we used for the whale boat, pick them out of the water, the davit, pick them up and bring them aboard ship. So that was the rescue operations of our ship.

Now, each one of these operations we would be what the called designated plane guard ship. Each destroyer in the Navy at one time or another picked pilots out of the water. We were not the only ones. And many destroyers, we only had twenty-two, you had some of them may have picked up more out of the water, but we had twenty-two that were officially credited with our ship's activity. And we would log the pilot's name, serial number, ship he was from, when he came on board. Then three days later after he was patched up by our doctor, he'd be sent back to the aircraft carrier in a breeches buoy and bring him right back to the flight deck of the carrier that he came off. That would be three days later. Usually when that happens, the pilots on the aircraft carrier would stand on the flight deck watching their buddy being pushed back to

their ship, which was usually sixty feet away. And looking to see whether sometimes the lines would go in and the guy would be dumped in the water, and if they'd get dumped, they would really "Yeah." And sometimes keeping the ship on a steady keel was very difficult.

And I used to steer the ship in fueling operations where sixty feet away we'd be refueling either from a battleship or an aircraft carrier, or an oil tanker, or a cruiser, and we would be taking on fuel, and the quartermaster, usually the chief quartermaster, that was his main function during the war. The first captain, I never was on the wheel in fueling operations. He didn't trust anybody but the chief quartermaster who was in the Navy for fourteen years as a quartermaster. So this guy was at the wheel every time we had general quarters, we were underway with special sea detail, he was the one on the wheel. In normal watches, they would have either a seaman be on the wheel or a quartermaster or somebody on the wheel on duty, but as soon as anything happened and the watch was set for the bridge, the quartermaster would be taking over. We had three quartermasters aboard our ship besides the chief quartermaster. when I came on board I was third class. We had another third class and a striper, so that was the three guys who had four and eight, and later on I advanced to second class, then I advanced to first class.

Mr. Graham: You say four and eight, that's four and eight for twenty-four hours a day.

Mr. Bak: Twenty-four hours a day. You could have the midnight watch to four o'clock in the morning, in fact tomorrow I'm going to be talking about the Battle of Leyte Gulf on the twenty-fifth of October. That morning of the battle I had the four and eight watch, I mean, I'm sorry, midnight to four watch. At four o'clock I got off, at four forty-five we had flight operations. I was back on the bridge as the quartermaster of the watch. We were behind the *Savo Island*, to give you an idea, as the plane guard ship. A pilot from *Savo Island* was taking off and crashed into the water. And we rescued him, this is like five-ten in the morning. The Battle of Leyte Gulf didn't start until about seven twenty-four. Before this all happened, we had a pilot go down from the *Savo Island*, we rescued the pilot, we had him onboard ship. And then around seven twenty-four a general alarm came over, "Enemy ships on the horizon, fifteen miles away." And that's when all hell broke loose.

Mr. Graham: Tell us about it.

Mr. Bak: Well, I'll be talking about it. So we secured from flight operations around six-ten in the morning. This is the, when the planes take off, we had the pilot we rescued, we had him aboard ship, and the flight operations ceased. And all of a sudden I'm back down having breakfast in the morning when the captain's voice comes up. We had a captain, Commander Richard D. Steffan, our captain. And he rarely used the loud speaker aboard the ship. Usually the quartermaster watch made all the announcements aboard ship. The officers aboard our ship rarely ever made

announcements. So while I was on duty, I made all the announcements. Make preparations, get underway, man your battle stations, or whatever. But the captain at this time says "General quarters, general quarters," real hurried, "man your battle station, enemy fleet on the horizon fifteen miles away bearing three four zero true." I couldn't believe.

I was down below decks. We rushed to the bridge. I'm going up the starboard side, get onto the bridge and I looked back and I could see, on a very hazy day, the sun at that time in the morning was very hazy. On the horizon I could see masts sticking up out of the horizon. To me it looked like toothpicks, just sticking up. All you could see were the top of the masts on the horizon stretched across. There was about forty degrees of ships heading in the direction of the 340, and that's when the Taffy Three, we were Taffy Two, the Japs came between both Taffys and went after Taffy Three. And that's when all hell broke loose with Taffy Three, when they sank three destroyers. We were Taffy Two, which now we were told immediately to make preparations to repel enemy attack. At that time the wind was going toward, the favorable wind for flight operations was going towards the enemy, and the ships had to take off, their planes had to take off. And when they took off into the wind, we were going closer to the enemy. And then these planes were taking off. And then when that happened, we were going pretty fast, and then we were told, oh, it was about twenty-five minutes after seven twenty-five, to cease enemy attack, torpedo attack, and interspace between the carriers. In other words, the fear of our OTC, Admiral Stump, was that these ships would now be shooting at us.

In the meantime we're seeing gunfire on the horizon and smoke from the other Taffy 2 that was being attacked by the other Japanese ships. At this point the Japs were not firing at us, they were going toward Taffy Three. But we were going over there and the thought was that our effort to go toward them sort of diverted some of their ships away, temporarily, from the Taffy Three. And then the planes started taking off and dropping bombs on the Japanese fleet. So we were told to intersperse between the two ships, so back and forth we went.

This went on until about—the battle from my estimation was two hours and *nine* minutes long. the first seventy-seven minutes of the battle we were going zigzagging back and forth interspersing in-between the carriers and the Japanese fleet, so they would not be getting after them. It was a fear of our carriers, jeep carriers, getting sunk because

(End of Side One of Tape One)

(Side Two of Tape One begins here)

Have no idea. All we know is the Japanese fleet was a lot of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. the *Gambier Bay* was an aircraft carrier in Taffy Three. It got hit by a

torpedo by a plane, but it wasn't sinking. But then we were, like, ten miles away, we got a message on the light. I was an expert on the light, and semaphore, and signal, even though that wasn't my rate, because I was on the bridge. And I knew that before I joined the Navy, signaling in the Boy Scouts. Anyway, so I could read this light from the Gambier Bay saying "Forward engine rooms, flooded, stand by to assist." And this was a message coming to our unit.

Mr. Graham: Flashing light.

Mr. Bak: Flashing light. Now, he was Taffy 3. We were Taffy 2. Our captain reported this to our commander, Stump, and we never responded back. I felt bad, here we are, our own ship, asking to stand by for assistance, and nobody's going there to help them. We just left them there, kept on going. See, in war time, I guess, on a ship like that with the Japs around, we were protecting six jeep carriers.

Mr. Graham: You had your priorities.

Mr. Bak: They had priorities. So it was one of the sad things for me to see, us leaving and not responding back to the carrier by light, you know.

That was the time, things that happened in-between. Then around the time of, on my slides for the presentation tomorrow, I think it started around eight, oh, about eight twenty-five when the Japanese shells still dropping around us. No, could have been a little later than that, I have a chart on the thing. When the Japanese shells started landing around our ship, there were six projectiles land over, they were like fifteen miles, thirteen or fifteen miles away, dropping shells around us, a hundred yards on the starboard beam. And we were zigzagging back and forth. What happens during wartime when you're trying to avoid something like that, the captain would give an order for zero-nine-zero, whatever the course might be. If I'm the quartermaster on the wheel I would go right full rudder ninety degrees, then I would turn left full rudder but bearing on the ninety degrees, back and forth. And the thing would steer.

Mr. Graham: These shells that were coming in from that far, were they evidentially large caliber?

Mr. Bak: They were the battleship, we found out later on, was the *Kongo* and the *Haruna*.

Mr. Graham: Those were maybe fourteen, sixteen inch shells?

Mr. Bak: Fourteen inch shells, dropping around us. Now, each shell dye marker, they had the ones that I visibly saw, was green. And red. Now I only saw, well, I'm going in now logging things, we have a shell dropping, I run into the log in the pilot house and log "enemy shells a hundred yards on starboard. Green dye marker." But I understand the Japs, each Jap ship, reading about it later on, had, each ship had their own color

dye mark. So they could see at a distance somehow, they could tell, how accurate they were, how close they were to the enemy. That was the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

Now, when this was happening, the last shell that dropped around us was a nine thirty-four. I'll never forget as long as I live. And the reason is, I wrote a diary during the war. I got a copy with me right here of the Battle of Leyte Gulf. That particular day, if you want to make a copy you can make a copy later on. I gave Helen a copy of the diary when I first sent in my information.

On the History Channel, you'll hear talks about the Admiral Kincaid who's in charge of the fleet, or Admiral Stump in charge of Taffy Two, would say that a signalman aboard his carrier told him that the fleet turned. We were the last destroyer in the Battle of Leyte Gulf to get fired on. To get fired on right off our ship. When the last shell dropped off our ship, and I have a chart showing the locations of each shell and the time of each shell, and the last shell when that dropped, our signalman, by the name of Sigismund Kateusze, from ?????????? Hawken, Pennsylvania, was a second class signalman. He had a long glass under his arm and he handed over the ship, the deck of the top of the wind shield, every time a shell exploded he would tell the captain, yell out "Enemy fire, so-and-so," and the captain would be zigzagging. And when he saw these ships turn, the battleships *Haruna* and *Kongo* turn, and the other ships turn, he came running to the captain. I was right alongside of him, because it's not very far, the pilot house is very small, and I was a quartermaster, I was usually with the officer of the deck or the captain. He said, "Captain, the bastards are getting away. Let's go after them. So now, our captain gets on the TBS and tells Stump that the enemy is turned and advancing to the east. So we reported that to the commander of the fleet, Stump. But the History Channel says his signalman told them that they turned.

One of the other things that happened during this Battle of Leyte Gulf, with all the ships going back and forth, one of our own planes, an FM-2, came down and started to strafe our ship by mistake. He came down, and I was on the starboard wing of the bridge looking back, I see this plane coming down. It was a Wildcat, FM-2, coming down. You could see the bullets whipping right toward the fantail of the ship, and I dove into the pilot house under the chart table for protection. The chief yeoman, a guy by the name of Ken MacWray, jumped on top of me. He was lying on the wing of the bridge. He was the captain's talker. So we just were underneath the chart table. Wouldn't give us much protection. But the pilot at the last minute veered up and went away. So our captain gets on the ship and tells "Stump, tell your pilots not to shoot at friendly ships," or words to that effect. So the captain says, "Anybody comes down from now on, shoot. Don't care who it is." After that time.

Because the weather, the clouds were changing. Smoke was coming over the horizon from Taffy Three, and it was hazy at time, and the wind, we had wind, we had rain squalls. So you're going back and forth and turning. Meanwhile the carrier planes are

taking off and they're landing in Taffy Two to try to protect the fleet from the enemy by going in and diving down on them with bombs or even sometimes without bombs.

Mr. Graham: Let us go back now to the Japanese fleet turning. What happened then?

Mr. Bak: Well, they left then and they went back towards the, between, where they came in from Leyte Gulf, what's the name of that—they went back to where they came. The whole fleet just took off. I understand, Kurita, later on we found out reading about it, he thought that we were the Task Force 38, and they were going around, he figured they were losing so many ships, didn't have any air cover from the Philippines. See the Japs, if they had air cover, they would have been in good shape. But they had no air cover, they had no communication between different groups. So they took off.

Meanwhile, our commander, which was Stump, was trying to get hold of Kincaid, was getting hold of Halsey, to find out where was Task Force 38. And they were three hundred and fifty miles north chasing the Japanese fleet, and when they found out that we were being attacked, I think Kincaid thought Task Force 34 was protecting the entrance to the Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Graham: Protecting the troops and everything.

Mr. Bak: Protecting the troops and everything, see. But there was no battleships. And now the whole fleet was wondering, here we are, I'm on a ship. I said, just a couple of days ago, I saw a couple hundred twenty ships out there, all over the horizon. Battleships, aircraft carriers. And now we're by ourselves protecting jeep carriers that had no protection. They're like paper. They only had one five-inch gun. We had five-inch guns, but we could not reach for seven miles. They were shooting at us from ten, fifteen, miles away, and dropping shells all around us. So we had harassing fire. So Taffy Two didn't get any damage whatsoever. The other Taffy of our squadron of three destroyers, six aircraft carriers, and four DEs, was the one that took the brunt of the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Graham: You use this term "Taffy." What does it actually stand for?

Mr. Bak: Taffy is a code name for a group of ships. Taffy One, Two, and Three, was the code name in the battle. When we landed in Leyte, we had three groups of jeep carriers stationed about sixty miles out of Leyte Gulf. And these planes, their job was to fly over and protect the beach head from any damaging the beach head. So each Taffy was given a code name. Now Taffy Three had three destroyers, had six aircraft carriers, and four DEs. They were thirty miles northwest of us. We were thirty miles southwest, or southeast, of them, and we had the same number of ships: three destroyers, six aircraft carriers, and four DEs. Now, sixty miles south of that was Taffy 1, and that's where the *St. Lo* aircraft carrier was stationed, sixty miles south. And their airplanes

were taking off and helping Taffy Three at the Japanese ships. All these three Taffys had airplanes in the sky trying to divert these Japanese ships.

Mr. Graham: But the word "Taffy" itself.

Mr. Bak: It means nothing.

Mr. Graham: It's like Sympac, Compac, an acronym.

Mr. Bak: It's an acronym, that's all it is. See, each ship in the, every operation we had, we had a different code name. Our ship for example, we were now, in that time, I forget the code name we had, but at one time we were Parlor. The next time we were Gimlet. And the commander could be Werewolf, could be Halsey's name. So when you were talking over TBS, it was a code name. So Taffy was just a code description of the Seventh Fleet, of Kincaid's Seventh Fleet. It's an easier way to remember.

Mr. Graham: Plus it didn't give anything away to the enemy. They didn't know what it was.

Mr. Bak: They didn't have any idea of the code names. Because they changed. Every operation we had, the code names changed. And also, every ship's code name changed. So when I got on the bridge, any time before a battle, a day or two after we left the beach, they would have us book, not a book, it's an operations instructions, listing who's there, commander in chief, task group commander. Might be thirty-eight, then thirty-eight point one, point two, point three, each commander down the line. And each ship under that. And each ship would have a code name. So if you were talking from one area to another, you would have a code name that you could identify.

During the Battle of Leyte Gulf there was a big problem with transmission between ships. Everybody wanted to get on the thing, you know. If I understand it correctly, during that battle they only had three channels of communications, VHS. At that time VHS was just starting off. The admiral was saying "Keep off the channels," and you had to go, on our ship to make it a message to somebody, it had to be a really urgent, urgent, urgent kind of thing. Otherwise he *didn't* want you on the TBS because there was so much chatter, and the radius wasn't that far away, and all these ships and every time we'd hear a code name, I'd run to a chart and so would the officer of the deck, and the captain would want to know who's ship was saying, who's talking to who. To make sure that his unit is not affected.

So the TBS, during that time of war, it was in the beginning, there was a lot of noise going on, a lot of conversation between planes, between ships, between task units, and so forth.

Mr. Graham: Couldn't the enemy also pinpoint your position by picking up some of these radio messages?

- Mr. Bak:** They could have. They knew where we were at, because they just came behind us without even knowing about. What happened was, they came through the Straits of the Philippines. They came through here. Taffy Three was over here, we were 2, over here, and 1 was over here. We were sixty miles due east of Leyte Gulf. When the Japs came in, they came in around, in my opinion, they came in around this way here. When I saw them on the horizon, they were going towards Taffy One, and here we are, and we could see these sticks sticking out of the horizon, just the tops of the masts. To me it looked like toothpicks. And then they went after them. In other words, the chart they show up there, on the chart, the thing we signed, it shows they came out here, they immediately hit Taffy Three. To me, they came around the back and in-between—
- Mr. Graham:** They blind sided you.
- Mr. Bak:** On the blind side. And that's because the planes were looking over here at that time of the morning and they were not going that far out. So I looked at that wall chart over there that we were signing the other day, and I just said that the—
- Mr. Graham:** Planes were all looking in the wrong spot.
- Mr. Bak:** In my opinion. I mentioned this to historians because a lot of fellows say, well, they attacked Taffy Three, which is over here. And it's true, they attacked them over there, but they were in-between. they could have gone either way. They were fifteen miles from us when we first saw them on the horizon. We first knew they were there. And that's why I'm of the opinion, I mentioned this to quite a few historians, that they Japanese came from behind and started attacking.
- Mr. Graham:** Now this Battle of Leyte Gulf, approximately how long did it last?
- Mr. Bak:** It lasted two hours and nine minutes. The first seventy-seven minutes that we were involved in, no shots were fired. The next fifty-six minutes of the battle is the time when the Japanese first started shooting at us and putting shells around us. So it lasted two hours and nine minutes. It lasted from seven twenty-four to nine thirty-four, from my records. And I have a diary.
- Mr. Graham:** After the Battle of Leyte Gulf, what happened then?
- Mr. Bak:** Then we were assigned to the Fifth Fleet, Halsey's Fifth Fleet. At that time we were with Kincaid. We got back to Ulithi after the war was over. Then we went out to the fleet again, in December. And we were with Halsey's fleet when we ran into the storm, the world's worst cyclonic storm that man had ever survived. When three of our destroyers turned over and sank. So we were in the middle of that, and our ship survived. How, I don't really know. I think we had somebody looking over after us, because everybody was praying like heck. We had two rolls of seventy degree rolls, swells where the ship rolled to the right and when the ship was on its side the propeller was out, and the

propeller made a tremendous noise, just shook like hell. And then it rolled back the other side, the second time, and the other propeller came out and shook the ship.

Now, we had a ladder going over the top of the bridge, the pilot house, we had the pilot director, where the fire controlmen have their gear. I climbed the ladder of the bulkhead of this director and I was in a sling standing flat on top of the bulkhead, which is the side of the pilot director, and then slowly you'd see the water from like there to that wall away, and turn over the other way. I was ready to go over side. I thought we'd had it. I saw two guys in the water, I only saw them once. We had waves over a hundred feet high, and our mast at times, you could see the top of the mast, and the wave above the mast would be thirty or forty feet beyond that, the top of the wave, didn't even come down. At one time it was so difficult steering the ship, the captain trying to go to port, to move, I'm sorry, to starboard, had the port engines to head full, starboard engines back full, right full rudder, and hanging on, we never moved, just locked in irons over there.

Mr. Graham: What was the date of this, again?

Mr. Bak: This was December the eighteenth. The height of the storm was December the eighteenth, 1944.

So this is when we left. Now, following that, during that storm, Halsey was relying on the, the meteorologist that he had, was relying on the ??????????'s report from Honolulu, which was three thousand miles away. Here we're going into a storm, without exaggeration a hundred and eighty degrees, Halsey took us right smack into the middle of the storm. It was black as pitch. We went right through middle of the typhoon, and we couldn't figure out why the hell we didn't go the opposite way, away from the storm. Took us right smack in the middle of it. We lost three of our destroyers.

Mr. Graham: As I recall, Halsey, didn't he get into some serious trouble about that?

Mr. Bak: Yeah, he did. He did.

Mr. Graham: He got out of it.

Mr. Bak: He got out of it.

Mr. Graham: There was also another problem that one admiral, I think Halsey was under the command of Nimitz and Kincaid was under MacArthur—

Mr. Bak: MacArthur. That was MacArthur's Navy, you see, that was in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Halsey and Kincaid were separate fleets. Halsey was Task Force Thirty-eight, and we were Task Force Seventy-seven. We were point four point two, which was Taffy Two.

Mr. Graham: Was it Thirty-eight or Thirty-four?

Mr. Bak: Thirty-eight. Thirty-four was the fleet that was supposedly going to be guarding the Strait, that was Thirty-four. They talked about it, about forming the fleet, then Halsey got involved but never told anybody, and I think Kincaid's, one of his men, picked up some conversation about the formation of Thirty-four but it was never actually completed, and he erroneously thought they were there. So we were being attacked, he thought the battleships would be coming up any minute over the horizon.

Mr. Graham: This was the famous message from President Roosevelt?

Mr. Bak: "Where is, the whole world is looking." The whole world wonders. We were now, again, they were three hundred and fifty miles away and here we're getting shelled, and here we were getting shelled, and we knew. And in my mind, my flashback came into the Battle of Tarawa when the *Liscome Bay* went down. When I'm on the bridge and watching these ships put shells around us, I said "Oh, Jesus, our carriers are going to be mincemeat." Because when that ship went down, it went down in just twenty-three minutes, because those flat tops were just combustible. I mean, they were just, if they got hit once, they were just, they had a three-quarter inch thickness. We had five-inches thickness on our destroyer.

Mr. Graham: They had a lot of aviation gas.

Mr. Bak: Aviation gas. During the storm we were with the *Langley* aircraft carrier. Now the *Langley* aircraft carrier had a fifty-eight degree roll. On a TBS, the *Langley* aircraft carrier, one of the light carriers, was saying they had fires aboard ship. We found out later on that the planes in the hangar deck were breaking away from their moorings and crashing each other, causing fires. Now those poor bastards were rolling and we were rolling, but we weren't burning. I felt sorry for the guys. At least we weren't burning as a ship. And to my knowledge, reading about this later on, the aircraft carrier, the captain had the men, when the ship was rolling one way, all run to the port side or the starboard, back and forth, so they could sort of balance the weight a little bit. But our ship was so narrow you couldn't do it, it wouldn't have any effect at all.

Mr. Graham: After this finished up, then where did you head?

Mr. Bak: From that point on, in December we had Christmas in Mog-Mog Island, which an island of Ulithi, and we went with Halsey's fast carriers again. He had several task units, I think we had three, thirty-one point eight, I mean thirty-eight point one, point two, point three. We went through the Straits of Formosa between the Philippines and Formosa. And that's the only way to get into the South China Sea. We got to the South China Sea and the fleet bombed Hong Kong and Indochina. They bombed Indochina and Hong Kong.

On the way through these straits, the Japanese planes kept coming up and started really attacking the fleet. This is the first large air assault that I'd seen and witnessed in the Navy. When we first went through the Straits of Formosa, going to the South China Sea, the Japanese planes came up, there was a couple hundred of them, attacking the fleet. At that time, the fleet being attacked, the planes coming down always after the aircraft carriers and battleships. They left the destroyers alone around a circle. So we weren't the primary target at that time. They were just coming in dropping shells. There were black pockmarks all over the sky from the shooting that was going on.

Then we went through the straits, we went to Indochina. We were there for several days. And on the way back, the Japs were waiting for us. Again with more planes. They were coming in from all angles. And one of the things I remember besides the black pockmarks with everybody firing, this is the time our ship got two or three planes. We had four total that we shot down during the war. When they were coming back, one of the Japanese planes caught fire, and two guys bailed out. Right in the middle of the fleet. Right smack over the fleet, black pockmarks all around, these two parachutes floating by, and somebody in our fleet opened up on these two Japanese guys with their thing coming down. I mean, they were just—and then other ships took aim at the same thing. Probably might almost shoot your ships down when it gets down.

Mr. Graham: That's close range.

Mr. Bak: Close range. I thought that was kind of , you know, but wartime is wartime.

Mr. Graham: Did they hit them?

Mr. Bak: I'm sure they did. Cripes, they must have been full of—

Mr. Graham: Well, the anger at that time, like you say, you don't think—

Mr. Bak: Especially those pilots who were beheaded in the islands. They were just, um.

So that was the most action I'd seen in actual kamikazes coming in. And again, when I was there, they were coming at the big ships. Later on in Okinawa, after the invasion of Okinawa and our troops on Okinawa, we were Halsey's fleet and now we're going towards Tokyo, leaving Okinawa alone. To protect Okinawa they had a ring of destroyers around Okinawa, maybe twenty-five miles apart, and they had their station to, they had a point they had to be encircling that area, and looking to hear from planes coming over to attack Okinawa. And that was their function. That's when our destroyers got really beat up very bad. Being by themselves out there, and these Jap planes coming in, these suicide guys were coming in, hell, that was the only ships out there.

Halsey's fleet, we were now going toward Japan and we were now Task Force Fifty-eight. Because Halsey was back in Honolulu. I understand he had some kind of shingles, or something or other. And then we had Spruance take over. And we went towards Japan, and starting in March they started bombing Tokyo and all the Japanese cities. And that's when the fire bombing started. It started around March the tenth. When they started bombing Tokyo and those fires started. There were more people killed in the fire bombing of Tokyo than both the atomic bombs.

Mr. Graham: These kamikazes, did any of them attack your ship directly?

Mr. Bak: Yes. Directly we had one that I really recall vividly is the one coming horizon high. Just off the horizon. Coming straight at us a couple hundred yards. And where it came from it we didn't even know, because they came from all angles. You look over here, you look over there, I'm on the bridge over here looking around here, holy crapes! And this plane was coming in right for the bridge. We had two forty millimeter guns on either side of the bridge. One is the captain, gun one and gun two. The guy on the captain, or gun one, a guy by the of Tom Wyle, had his forty millimeters going into the ship, the Japanese ship. You could see the tracers going in. And finally the plane exploded, went into the water, just before it got to us. We didn't get any debris out of the water, but if we were just a couple of yards closer, I'm sure we'd of had debris. But that thing wen right down in water, we ran right through, and that was the one that I remember the most.

Now, the other three that we hit, I personally didn't see, but others—when you're on the bridge, you're going here and there, and people all around, you didn't know where the hell they're coming from. That was the one I definitely remember. Otherwise I wouldn't be here today. They were going for bridges on a ship.

Mr. Graham: So then after this Okinawa thing, what happened to you then? Where did you go?

Mr. Bak: We again with the Task Force Fifty-eight. Task Force Fifty-eight was composed of four units. Fifty-eight point one, two, and three. And we went towards Japan and we were plane guard ship when the pilots were taking off, we were always behind an aircraft carrier. Because every morning and every night we had general quarters flight operations. And we were behind carriers and picking up pilots out of the water. We didn't always pick up pilots, but we had three swimmers dive over the side and bring these guys back in. So we were mostly going towards Japan, Kyushu, Honshu, and we were sixty miles off Tokyo the closest when the planes were attacking.

We started around March the tenth going out toward Japan. We left Okinawa. Well, Okinawa was, I'm sorry, April the first. And the firebombing of Tokyo started around March the tenth. We didn't invade Okinawa yet. Okinawa invasion started April the first. We were with the fast carrier force. They were bombing the southwest portion of Okinawa before the invasion. The heavy ships were coming in and bombarding. Then

we left them. On April the first the landing started on Okinawa, and I understand they didn't have much opposition when they landed in the first go-round on Okinawa like they did on some other islands.

And then we were heading toward Tokyo. The whole fleet was going that way to prevent any ships or planes coming down from Tokyo to disrupt the Okinawa operation. Now, this is where our ship was behind the carrier *Yorktown* for flight operations one night at nine-fifteen. Flight operations. And when flight operations were over, our ship was now behind the carrier, had to go back to the screen where we normally would be. We could have been anywhere around the screen of thirteen destroyers, but we had to get back of that carrier. Other destroyers were behind other carriers, but we were behind *Yorktown*. When flight operations cease, what happens is, the entire fleet is going into the wind. They don't stay into the wind, they change their course.

Mr. Graham: Did they go into the wind for the planes to take off?

Mr. Bak: Yes. Every time the planes take off into the wind. But they were on a regular course, so we were back to our regular course. Our job was to get out of there and go back to our initial screen. We're making a ninety degree right turn. If we were stationed over here, now we're going to be stationed over there on a circle. On what they call a seven mile circle, because you got a circle in the middle and seven miles on either side is this circle where the destroyers would be.

Then we collided with the battleship *New Jersey*. At night time. I happened to be off duty because I was on most of the time. I was down below decks when I heard this tremendous crash. It sounded like paper crinkling up, like metal crinkling up. And the ship went up and all the lights went out. I'm down below decks, I thought we hit a torpedo or hit a mine in the water. And what happened was, I got up as fast as I could, I was the first guy from down below decks out the hatch. I had that thing just, knew exactly how many steps to get out of the hatch just in case. Because I didn't want everyone to get trapped down below. And I was out of there, the first guy up the starboard side. And now our ship, somebody turned the engines off on the bridge. I was going up to the bridge, we were just rolling back and forth. I got to the bridge and I found out that the ship collided with the battleship *New Jersey* and cut the port side of the bridge off.

Mr. Graham: Who collided into who?

Mr. Bak: We, the *Jersey* was coming one way and there was conversation with TBS like on a collision course, and they turned and the captain thought he could make it, and the last minutes he changed his mind. If he'd probably stayed he could have made it, maybe, or we could have be cut in half. But he chose to turn full port and we collided head to head. The anchor of the *Jersey* cut the bridge off. It left about three inches of the bridge. The captain was on the bridge with the officer of the deck. The junior officer

of the deck and the lookouts were on the starboard side. So the captain got everybody away from that side of the bridge.

Mr. Graham: So nobody was killed on the bridge.

Mr. Bak: Not yet. But the captain was fatally injured. He was smashed and went down below on the main deck and he died two days later. He had a rib punctured into his lung. One of our radiomen by the name of Bill Herrick, he was a radioman first class, he was the first one down to the bridge, I mean, to see the captain on the deck below the whale boat. The whale boat was smashed against the galley, the whale boat caught fire, they had some stuff inside the whale boat that caught fire. They were able to distinguish that. And this fellow got to the captain first and he had the captain's head in his arms and the captain said to him, "Is the ship afloat?" He said "Yes, captain, the ship is afloat. We're safe." And with that he was unconscious.

He died two days later on an oil tanker. He was sent over to, I think it was called the *Tappahannick*, oil tanker, AO I can't remember one or two. We sent him over there for a more stable condition. See, our ship was always rolling back and forth, and with the broken ribs, we put him on this oil tanker. Then when he died the next day, they had a burial service on the oil tanker, and we like about, oh, a hundred yards away. A whale boat was lowered from our ship and about four of us, I was the quartermaster and signalman on the thing, and one of our officers came over with myself and two other enlisted men, over to the ceremony. And we watched the ceremony and the eulogy, and we watched as our captain was just lifted up on a platform, body draped in a canvas bag and slid over the side into the water.

So he died, and the other lieutenant we had aboard, Lieutenant Numbers, he was looking very bad when we saw him. He was all blue and yellow. We thought he was going to die also, but he survived in a Philadelphia hospital. They brought him back to Philadelphia eventually.

Mr. Graham: What happened to your ship, that's all banged up, what happened then?

Mr. Bak: It's all banged up. We had a twenty degree roll and we were rolling back and forth and the aircraft carrier *Yorktown* that we were behind was going through the formation and missed us by about fifty feet. I couldn't believe, from the hatch down below. I looked at the port side and there's this great big ship next to us. I thought I was dreaming, I thought I was in Honolulu at a dock looking at an aircraft carrier, because you saw some lights on a hangar deck on the inside. Some lights. And they just rolled right past us. I got to the bridge and it was cold as can be, because we were about latitude forty-two degrees, and one of the officers loaned me a parka, a fur-lined parka. At that time it was getting cold. In April around Tokyo it was like New York time, weather wise.

And that's when we found out our captain was down below, and we had a signalman was hurt also. The port wing of the bridge was gone, the signal bag was gone, the guy lines from the mast on the starboard side were gone. Our stacks were canted. The forty millimeter guns along the way were smashed, but fortunately all of the damage we had was above the waterline, and we didn't sink. Had we hit below the waterline I wouldn't be here today. I might be, but I'd be swimming.

Mr. Graham: Where did they send your ship for repair?

Mr. Bak: We went back to Ulithi. It took us quite a while to get back to Ulithi, several days to get back to Ulithi. We went back with an oil tanker. We got to Ulithi and they were supposed to repair us. So we're sitting there, I said "Oh shit, the ship looks like hell," excuse my expression, "looks like hell." And we thought we might go back to the States. And we waited and waited, and finally we were told the ship was beyond repair, we're going back to the States. And now we head back toward the states.

Mr. Graham: What ship were you on when you went back?

Mr. Bak: With our ship.

Mr. Graham: Oh, your ship went back then.

Mr. Bak: See, previous to this collision, we had an officer that was second in command, Lieutenant Commander Crabb. He was the executive officer and the navigator. And I worked with him taking star sights every morning at four thirty as the quartermaster of the watch. And this one morning he was having a problem with the captain. He was a Mustang and our captain was Naval Academy. They were both about six feet five. And both hated each other, in my opinion. So now, I went down to wake him up one morning, he's laying fully clothed in his stateroom, the lieutenant commander, with a forty-five on his chest. So I told the captain, I said "Captain, Lieutenant Commander Crabb is sleeting with a forty-five on his chest." He said, "Leave him alone and take star sights, get a signalman to take time for you." So we did, and next morning I went down to wake him up at four-thirty, he was no longer there. I went back, reported to the captain, "I can't find him." So he asked this fellow Herrick and myself, the first class radioman, to go around the ship and see if we could find him. We reported back we couldn't find him at all. Then the captain told me, "Make an announcement, Lieutenant Commander Crabb, report to the bridge."

I got on the microphone, said "Lieutenant Commander Crabb, report to the bridge." No message whatsoever, he was gone. An hour later the *Norman Scott* destroyer, we were in the forward part of the formation and the destroyer *Norman Scott* was the last ship in the formation, heard cries from the water, they rescued our Lieutenant Commander Crabb from the water. When he left our ship, he went through the entire fleet,

cruisers, battleships, aircraft carriers, and the last destroyer—we had thirteen destroyers in the circle—we were up here, the last guy picked him up.

Mr. Graham: Did he jump overboard or something?

Mr. Bak: Well, in my opinion, he wanted to commit suicide. The previous lieutenant commander we had was released from command and went back home because, I think, because of the strain of war. So we had this new guy come on. He wasn't on too long with our ship. And our captain that we had, although I liked him very much, a lot of our guys hated his guts. Some of the guys wanted to shoot him.

Mr. Graham: Think the captain contributed to a lot of that stress of his executive officers?

Mr. Bak: It could be. He was one to criticize openly people, no matter who they were, in front of everybody. Especially, the enlisted men seeing the captain chewing an officer's ass out, it just was comedy. There were some weird things happening. That was one of them. Now, I gave a talk to a historical society in Abington, Pennsylvania, around March the 19, well, a year ago, March two thousand and three. We had about ninety-five people in the room. I was invited to speak about my days in the Navy. And I gave, I have a slide presentation I made, I've given it many times to many people. In fact, I gave Helen a copy, I made a copy of each one of the slides. I put them in a disc form and I sent them to Helen, she's got it now.

So anyway, I was giving this presentation in Pennsylvania. I'm telling this story, one of the many stories that happened aboard our ship about Lieutenant Commander Crabb, guy in the back of the room, sixty years old, he says "Mike, I was the officer of the deck of the *Norman Scott* that rescued your man from the ocean." And the guy who's a friend of mine was with me in the audience sitting next to him, and later on the three of us were talking. this friend of mine is a funny guy. He said, "I can't effing believe you're telling a story from sixty years ago, and this guy here is saying he was there." He didn't believe it.

Mr. Graham: Small world.

Mr. Bak: Yeah. So this guy was saying "Yeah, I was there." And he told the story from his standpoint. He wrote me a letter describing the events that he remembered. So that was another incident we had. We had another incident with an officer who hated the Navy, it was Ensign Thorsen. He wanted to get out of the Navy in the worst way. He hated the Navy. Did things to screw up, to purposely get back to the States. But the officers knew that, and they finally got rid of him.

First of all, we went back to the States to get repaired. On the way back, President Roosevelt died around April the eighteenth or something like that, and then Ernie Pyle, it was announced that he died also on the island of Iashima, so we were kind of

sad. The President died, and Ernie Pyle died. We never knew at the time that Ernie Pyle wrote about our ship. We didn't know this until forty-five years later. And I have a copy of the article here.

Anyway, so we went back to Honolulu. I was able to see my cousin again. He was trying to get me to be romantically inclined with his wife's sister, which was a very good looking girl, I tell you. She was a beauty. But me, I didn't want no part of that, I'm a kid with no money of any kind, here I'm in a war, but getting married and going home with a bride, you know.

Mr. Graham: But you're back in the States now, to get your ship—

Mr. Bak: I'm back in the States.

Mr. Graham: Where at?

Mr. Bak: We went back to Bremerton, Washington. We got to Bremerton, they immediately started repairing our ship, so we had a thirty day leave. May thirty-first I was sent home on leave. And the second part of the ship was gone from June the first to June the thirtieth. In a two month period of time our ship was completely ready to go back to sea, which we did. During the time that I was home, V-E Day on May fourth was announced. So we were very happy. A lot of my buddies from school that I played ball with were home on leave and we were just having a ball. Drinking a beer here, drinking a beer there, going to New York City and Times Square, happy.

Mr. Graham: So the war was over for you.

Mr. Bak: Not yet. Because we were going back out again. So we got in our destroyer , went to Honolulu again, now we're back near Eniwetok when the end of the war was officially announced. Now our job was to join Halsey's fleet so we left Eniwetok and got to Japan. When the Peace Treaty was signed, we were Halsey' fast carrier group. We were sixty miles due east of Tokyo. And I remember vividly that Halsey was telling the fleet, the planes—See, whenever he spoke many times he would have every ship in the formation turn on the loudspeaker. And he would give reports. there was one time I wrote in my diary that he gave a report to his

(End of Tape One)

(Tape Two begins)

Mr. Bak: This is the day of the announcing the actual signing of the Peace Treaty. He says, "Shoot them down in a friendly fashion." That was his comment to the pilots. Now, we were sixty miles away going back and forth with the fleet. The planes were in the sky, all over Tokyo to prevent anything from happening. It was my understanding that Tojo heard about some enemy pilots that were going to want to crash into the *Missouri*,

so went and had every plane in the area take the propellers off so these Jap pilots wouldn't get up and disrupt the (a break in the recording)

So when they signed the Peace Treaty, we were not one of the first ships to go into Tokyo Bay. We got into Tokyo Bay about a week later, into Tokyo Bay, where we anchored with the rest of the fleet. There was hundreds and hundreds of ship. We were allowed to have liberty in Japan. We were in a base called Yokosuka, some call it **Upiska ?????**, but we call it Yokosuka, in those days a Japanese naval base. We had liberty and I was there this one day with one of my shipmates who was a seaman. He was a professional wrestler from Kansas City by name of Gentleman Gene Reardon. He was a seaman aboard our ship, a great big guy. Across his chest he had a great big tattoo, American Flag was his tattoo.

So he and I had liberty together, we're going to Yokosuka, but we wanted to see Tokyo, Yokohama. We were quite a ways away. We saw an Army truck coming by with a tarpaulin in the back, a flat bed. We were hitchhiking. Now, the truck stopped and we says "We want to go to Tokyo." The guy says "We're going to west Tokyo," he says, "jump on the back." So we sat in the back of the tarpaulin. All the way into west Tokyo on this truck. When the G.I.s got there they pulled back the tarpaulin and they were selling black market canned goods to the Japanese. While they were doing that we were helping them because we got a free ride. Because now we had to get back home, and they said they weren't going back but they took us now to a train station in Tokyo that was going to go back to Yokosuka. They told us "Make sure you get off at the third stop, that's your base." Because nobody spoke English.

And here we are, two white guys, one guy is about six three and me skinny one-forty, we're in Japan walking down the street, not a white person in sight, and they were very nice to us. Nobody said anything. We walked on the sidewalk, they just parted, and we'd brought our own sandwiches, cheese sandwiches, and canteens of water. We wouldn't drink anything or eat anything. We were prepared. We spent the whole day, in the afternoon we got back to our base, got down to the train stop. The train was so crowded, man, it was just bumper-to-bumper people on the thing. Because the Japanese trains in those days were very old, and they would just crowd them in, just push people in like animals. We got back to the base, but nobody bothered us in Japan at all. So Gene and I got back to the ship and we had one more trip visit to Japan after that.

After that, we went home and every ship in the fleet at that time—most ships were sent back to some port in the United States to go back for Navy Day, in the United States. Our ship was sent to Astoria, Oregon, where we had a submarine cruiser, I think it was the *Pittsburgh*, and ourselves, in a pier in Astoria, Oregon. While we were day for the Navy Day celebration, they had a football game. Oregon State was playing football. Anybody wanted to go to the football game, they would have a bus take us there. It was quite a ride, about sixty or seventy miles away. It happened to be the weekend, on a

Saturday, so when we got to the stadium, those of us who went, they announced that the crew of the *USS Frank* is here. They made an announcement of the thing. Now other guys in our ship would be parading in town, but we chose to go to the football game, being a football fan from way back.

In fact, our high school in 1939 was national champion. We played Miami High School on Christmas Day in 1939 and beat Miami High School sixteen to thirteen. They were the number one team in the United States. This was for President Roosevelt's Infantile Paralysis Fund. We played in the Orange Bowl. I didn't play football, only basketball and baseball. But we had a good team. We were State Group Four champs in New Jersey, and Miami was looking for somebody to play, and somebody chose our high school, and our high school went down and beat them down there.

Anyway, we got back to the States and we were met by Red Cross. And they had coffee and donuts at the dock as we came in, in the United States. That was our entry. No band or anything, but just coffee and donuts on the dock, and they allowed people from town to come aboard our ship and visit. The crew wanted to show them around, about the ship. And then from that point on we were there and we left for San Diego and we went down to San Diego and eventually I was discharged from the Navy on January the tenth, 1946, and left for my discharge in Long Island, New York. I was able to fly back.

By the way, we had our ship repaired. By the time I got to Seattle to go back home, all our arrangements for flight were already taken care of. As soon as I got off the ship, the next day I was on an airplane leaving Seattle, made thirteen stops on DC-3s across the United States to get home. That was 1945, May first, 1945. So we were able to spend a lot of time at home because they had the flights, everything was arranged for us aboard our ship. By the supply officer.

Mr. Graham: You've told us quite a bit, so let me ask you this question. Of all your experiences during this time, are there any one or two of them that you still think about more than the rest?

Mr. Bak: I think about several things. One of the biggest is the battleship collision with the battleship *New Jersey*. That was the most fearful time we had. And the other most fearful time I had was the storm, when I thought we were going down. And the other time, watching that plane coming in, and thought we'd had it. And one of our gunners got him down. So those are the three times that I really felt. And I think the other one was the *Liscome Bay* when we'd just left Honolulu, swimming in the beaches of Waikiki Beach, having a wonderful time. And all of a sudden we're in a war, two weeks later, we see our first aircraft carrier go down. Those are the things I think about the most after the war was over.

Mr. Graham: Are there any particular people that you still think about, that impressed you more than any?

Mr. Bak: I have some good shipmates I think about. I think about our captain. I think about a couple of officers that we had aboard ship that I really admired. One was Ensign Numbers, who was the communications officer. He was like Mr. Roberts to us aboard the ship. He was the one guy that held things together, and he was the one guy the captain of our ship admired more than probably every other officer aboard ship. And he was a fair guy and he was injured very badly and eventually survived. And we had a ship's reunion years later in San Diego that he ran, and he was back in shape again, in health. And it was good to see him alive. And when I first saw him, I didn't know what happened to him after that. We met, he says "Mike Bak," because we knew each other real well, being on the bridge for the entire way. I said, "I thought you were dead." But that's what happened with him.

And a couple of buddies of mine aboard the ship that I see, signalman second class, we visit quite often. Another young fellow, a sonar man. We hung around with the bridge gang together. All the guys on the bridge palled around together. And the bridge was kind of a sacred place aboard a destroyer. Very few people were up on top of the bridge. I was surprised at a reunion many years later, one of the guys was aboard ship for thirty months and never once was he aboard the bridge. He said, "Well, we thought we had to get three ladders to get to the top of the bridge." And he thought that was a private place.

Mr. Graham: Officers' land.

Mr. Bak: Yeah. You had no duty to be there, so as a signalman, a quartermaster, I knew signals. I could read every light come across as fast as it could be, I could still read light to this day. I still know my Morse Code. I was involved with semaphore Boy Scout merit badges, signaling. So when I got to the Navy, I was able to be involved with all the things I loved. Signaling, being on the bridge of a destroyer. So to me it was just a great time, period of my life, of being in the Navy. I was very proud of the fact that I spent thirty-eight months in the Navy as a reservist. When I got home, I got home, the war was over, we forgot about it. Nothing every happened until about 1984 when Paul Stillwell, who's going to be here today, wrote me a letter and said "I understand you were on a destroyer that collided with the battleship *New Jersey*," and I said "Yes." He said "Can I interview you regarding the collision?" Which he did. Since then I've been a friend of Paul Stillwell since 1984. He's a great guy.

Mr. Graham: You've told us quite a bit. I don't know any other questions to ask you, so I'm going to leave it up to you. Is there anything else you would like to add to what you've already told us?

Mr. Bak: Well, let me look back. My training. The thing I want to add is, our chief petty officer in

boot camp, I think I mentioned before, was Fred Lindstrom. He became, he was inducted into Hall of Fame in 1976. I knew his name because I have a photograph of him in my album. When I was looking at the results of the Hall of Fame in 1976, I looked back and I saw Fred Lindstrom. And he was the guy who was our chief petty officer in boot camp who got to be elected to the Hall of Fame. He played for the New York Giants, I think Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and Chicago. He was the youngest ball player at that time to ever, ever, play in a World Series at eighteen years old. He spent sixteen years in the major leagues, he started with Toledo, Ohio. And that first year he jumped to the majors, played in the World Series, and that was to me the highlight of knowing somebody that was close by.

And I also met Henry Fonda one day when we were in Seattle, when our ship was being ready for commissioning, ready to go out. We used to have destroyers come alongside our group every once in awhile, tie up, because there wasn't room for them to tie up. We could have maybe three destroyers in a nest. We would go over from one to another and visit back and forth. Especially to see the bridge and the quartermaster gang, because that's the things that we did. One day we went over, the chief quartermaster and myself, and the guy next to us was Henry Fonda. He was a third class quartermaster and he was on the destroyer named *The Satterlee*. As a quartermaster third class, same rating that I had. He graduated from the San Diego Quartermaster School previously before he became quartermaster third. I graduated from Great Lakes as quartermaster third. In those days, quartermaster was kind of the rate to be as an enlisted man, because you were on the bridge of a destroyer. So I met him briefly, only shook his hand, and then later on he became an officer. And I also watched him in the Broadway play, "Mr. Roberts." So when I was there, I just shook his hand.

Mr. Graham: So he saw action, Henry Fonda did?

Mr. Bak: He was on *The Satterlee*. He went to the Atlantic from that point on. Yes, yes, they did see action, but I don't recall what it is.

The other think I want to mention is, we had a chief quartermaster. When I joined the ship, he was aboard as the chief quartermaster. When I got on board as a brand new rookie, didn't know my, you know, from a hole in the ground, he took me under his wing and taught me the duties of a quartermaster. The things you do. When he was aboard the ship, every time the ship took off, the captain had him on the wheel. And he was in charge of steering the ship away from port, into port, until we got underway, until we were at sea, and then he was relieved. While he was doing that he was guiding myself and the other quartermasters through the duty. Make sure you log this, make sure you do that. Make sure you put the running light on, the battle lights on, make sure you wind the clocks. I used to wind the clocks every seven days. It was an extra duty of mine. So I had a chance to visit every part of the destroyer that had a ship's clock. They must have had ten or fifteen locations. You had to wind them every seven days.

And one of the nice spots was going down to the engine rooms, and the fire rooms, and wind the clocks. So you got to know the guys aboard the ship, they know you're a quartermaster. And they always wanted to know what's going on. "Hey, what's going on? What the eff's going on?" And that was the favorite word in the Navy in those days. And I had to be very careful not to say anything, and I was very careful not to repeat stories aboard the ship, to be passing on information. I just kept my mouth shut. I didn't want to be accused—once you were on the bridge, if they found that you were telling tales, you'd had it. They'd make it miserable for you. I was proud of the fact. The chief helped me out an awful lot. Because I was never on a ship before, and here you are, he was on a China station.

So, anyway, those are the things that I remember. Coming back home, and euphoria. My brother was in the Marine Corps. He was two years older. And I had a kid brother, younger brother, that became a communications officer aboard the destroyer *Remy*, after the war was over. What job he had. When he was on the *Remy* destroyer, one of his main jobs was to take photographs of their trip around the world, and put them in a yearbook when they were all finished. What duty. So I used to kid him. I said, "Did you ever get shot at?" No.

And one of the things I want to close with is this: One of my favorite epilogues is from the United States Naval Institute, Rear Admiral E. M. Eller. In 1959, he said, and I want to quote his words, it stuck in my mind when I first read that in 1955, and it goes like this.

"Men of the Navy, yet they live in ships on the far spaces of the sea, they become knit together. Crew and ship forge into a single powerful unit to serve the United States in peace and war. The ship is their home, their weapon, their faith and their pride. Men who have fought in the ship are always interested in her. And they, in turn, are interested in him." I think the last line was wrong.

Mr. Graham: It's a very profound statement.

Mr. Bak: A very profound statement. When I think of that, the faith, the pride, of the ship itself. So that's what I stop my different, when I give a talk to different groups, I usually repeat Eller's remarks, and that's why it's just so *meaningful for me*.

Mr. Graham: Well, Mr. Bak, let me say on behalf of the Nimitz Museum, we really appreciate your sharing your story, and we thank you very much for being here with us.

Mr. Bak: Thank you. I enjoyed being here.

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