

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Telephone Interview with

Mr. Henry Frank Vojtek

Date of Interview: November 24, 2008

National Museum of the Pacific War

Fredericksburg, Texas

Telephone Interview with Mr. Henry Frank Vojtek

Telephone Interview in progress.

Ed Metzler: This is Ed Metzler; today is the 24th of November, 2008. I am interviewing Mr. Henry Vojtek by telephone. I'm located in Fredericksburg, Texas and he's located at his home in...

Mr. Vojtek: McDade...

Ed Metzler: ...McDade, Texas.

Mr. Vojtek: McDade, Texas.

Ed Metzler: And so, this interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So let start out, Henry, by thanking you for spending the time this morning sharing your experiences with us, and let's get you started by just having us...us tell...having you tell us your full name; when you were born and where and then we'll take it from there.

Mr. Vojtek: Uh, name is Henry Frank Vojtek. I was born in Houston, Texas July the 20...31st, 1927.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Vojtek: Now wait a minute...I...there's going to be a pause...well, that's alright.
That's good enough, I mean I was sixteen year...fifteen years old when I
joined the Navy, but you don't need to know all that.

Ed Metzler: Oh yeah, we'll get into that; don't worry. Now what...what did your...what
did your dad do for a living?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, he was working for the city of Houston.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh; doing what?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh, he was a maintenance man at...golf course in Memorial Park.

Ed Metzler: I'll be darned! And...and your mom, she was...just housewife or...?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, she passed away when I was three years old.

Ed Metzler: My goodness! So you hardly...or almost don't remember your mother, do
you?

Mr. Vojtek: No I don't.

Ed Metzler: Alright, what about brothers and sisters; did you have any?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I had three...two brothers and a half brother.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. Now were they old...they must have been older than you or...?

Mr. Vojtek: No, I'm the oldest.

Ed Metzler: You're the oldest, okay. And so, did you stay in Houston through your
childhood years or...or did you move or...?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, not really. I was in an orphans home for two years...after my mother
died.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: And then I lived with my step mother.

Ed Metzler: And...and where was that?

Mr. Vojtek: In...in Houston.

Ed Metzler: Okay, back in Houston. Okay, and you went...so you went to school there in the Houston area?

Mr. Vojtek: Yes, Stephenson and Washington.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, so where were you when the war started? Let's see, you were how old?

Mr. Vojtek: Uh, when the war started, I was...let's see...I must have been about...fifteen I guess.

Ed Metzler: So you were still in school?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, I was in high...junior high school.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah, and so tell us how you came to be in the military; tell me what happened.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I was...my dad married and I...I was living with him and I couldn't get along with my step mama and I...I needed to get away and then I was fifteen years old and I couldn't...couldn't get a job. So...I told my dad I was going to join the Navy, and he says, "Well, you ain't got guts enough to," so I went and joined the Navy! (Laughter)

Ed Metzler: So he challenged you, and you took him up on it?!

Mr. Vojtek: I took him up on it; I was fifteen years old...lied about my age of being...seventeen.

Ed Metzler: You...now you're telling me you lied about your age?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So how old did you tell them you were?

Mr. Vojtek: Seventeen.

Ed Metzler: I see...and they believed you?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, the Navy at that time...they was taking anybody could see and pull a trigger!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) And...

Mr. Vojtek: That was World War II; they didn't really care. Well, I couldn't go to work at a...a shipyard or any place 'cause I was underage.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: And we were coming out of a Depression; I was just looking for a home, so...

Ed Metzler: You bet!

Mr. Vojtek: ...I joined the Navy for a home; a paycheck.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah, now was...was this after the war started?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so...

Mr. Vojtek: This was in...

Ed Metzler: So why did you join the Navy?

Mr. Vojtek: Huh?

Ed Metzler: Why did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I don't know; it was...they was the first recruiters that I hit...so

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: In fact, they talked me into joining anyway. Well, the Navy at that time, was looking for anything that could pull a trigger and see.

Ed Metzler: Right, right, and so...so where did you actually join? You go down to the recruiting office?

Mr. Vojtek: In Houston...yeah, the recruiting office.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah, and so where did they ship you off to for basic?

Mr. Vojtek: Basic...to...uh, Great Lakes, Illinois Training Station.

Ed Metzler: Ooh! Way up north!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: That must have been an eye opener for a southern boy like you!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, it was in September and so...so it was cold! We was in short sleeves and...and summer clothes, and I like to froze to death when I went up there.

Ed Metzler: Darn! So let's see...this is September '42, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Right.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah. So what kind of training did they put you through up there...just...?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, basic six weeks training there. They give us all our shots and showed us how to march and how to sleep and that was about the...the whole scenario of it.

Ed Metzler: They ever let you lose to go into Chicago?

Mr. Vojtek: No, after we finished basic training, they give me six days leave to come home.

Ed Metzler: Well that's not very long!

Mr. Vojtek: No, well it was bas...what they called basic leave...boot...boot camp leave is what it was.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: So when I come back to Chicago; caught a train and went down to New Orleans.

Ed Metzler: Really?! So you went from Chicago when you completed your basic...back down to Texas and then back up to Chicago and over to New Orleans?

Mr. Vojtek: New Orleans, right.

Ed Metzler: My gosh, that's a lot of travel! So all of this is happening...what...by train?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, it was all going by train.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah, so...

Mr. Vojtek: Well, everybody that was...see, at...at that time, everybody was really going to San Diego from Houston, but this was a bunch that went to...Chicago, Illinois...Great Lakes.

Ed Metzler: Hum! Yeah, so...what hap...what happened you went to New Orleans?

Mr. Vojtek: New Orleans? Well, we were...stayed in there to get assigned to a ship.

Ed Metzler: You didn't know what kind of ship at that time?

Mr. Vojtek: No, they just had us up on a...a list, you know? They just randomly picked so many men to go to certain ships.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So here you are a fifteen year old kid; now what's going through your mind? You're in a strange city and getting ready to go overseas. What...what...?

Mr. Vojtek: I...I figured I was high on a hog 'cause I was getting a pay day every month!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) And they were feeding you, too!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, they were feeding...had all my clothes, so I...I was in pretty good shape I thought!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: See, when you're coming out of the Depression, you didn't have a damned thing!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's right! Everything looks pretty good when you're coming out of the...

Mr. Vojtek: Anything...anybody...anything that I...I was working; I making a living. I wasn't...I wasn't real...just...I was just wanting to get away from home; I had a step mama and I was (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: Right; it wasn't working out.

Mr. Vojtek: No, it wasn't working out.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah. So when they finally chose a ship for you?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we was staying Algiers, New Orleans...there...Navy base...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and I think in Janu...well, it was in January of '40...'45 I marched in the...what do you call it...Matagord...uh, the...what's that...uh, what they had...have there in New Orleans for the...Easter parade?

Ed Metzler: Oh, the Mardi Gras!

Mr. Vojtek: Mardi Gras! We marched in the Mardi Gras and then my name come up on a...on a...what do you call...a list...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...for the [USS] Murray...to...to go to Mar...to New...to go to Orange, Texas to the USS Murray, DD-576...going to put it in commission in...in...April the 20th...(unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: So she was a new ship?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, we...we put it in commission.

Ed Metzler: Okay so they...what...did they build it there in...in Orange?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, it was...it was launched there in...built there in Orange, Texas.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And then they sent us from there to...well, they had enough to accommodate one crew...at a time there at the Navy base there in Orange.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And we had to stay in Algiers till...they had...another ship that went ahead of us; it was the 573.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And when they went aboard ship, well they sent us to Orange, Texas to wait there till that ship was ready to be put into commission.

Ed Metzler: So what did you think when you first rolled up there and looked at your home?

Mr. Vojtek: New home...I just...well, it was bi...place to eat and place to sleep; that's all I can say about it.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: That's all I can say about it; I was happy to be...frankly for a fifteen year old kid that's nice!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's a...that's an adventure, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah it was really.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, what was...so what job did you hold as...in the crew?

Mr. Vojtek: In the crew? Well, I started to...to be a quarter...uh, a Quartermaster.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: I worked...well, I was qual...well, I learned how to be Helmsman, and...learned all the bookkeeping and everything up there. And the only thing I couldn't comprehend was the lights, I mean...you know, Morse code by light? And if you couldn't the lights, well they got...transferred you out of that division into another one.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so you and Morse code didn't get along?

Mr. Vojtek: No, well, I...see we were all training; we went...I was up there for about six months, you know, learn...I was a qualified Helmsman when I...got transferred out of...when I come all...come out of the Quartermaster Division, well, I...I was a qualified Helmsman.

Ed Metzler: Helmsman, uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So...so where...what...what did you end up on on the Murray? Where did you end up?

Mr. Vojtek: I wound up down in number one power room.

Ed Metzler: Okay. So you're down there with the engines, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: No, with the boilers.

Ed Metzler: Oh, with the boilers!

Mr. Vojtek: Boilers...

Ed Metzler: Power room, sure! Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: (Unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: So you're down...what...is that...is that towards the front of the ship?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, it was right by...well, it was right under the galley. (Laughter)

Ed Metzler: Now that's probably a good place to be...or maybe not.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we smelled all the bad bread making down there so...(laughter)...but we was...the...the whole scenario of it, I mean, you picked where you wanted to go and that's what they put you in...was the quart...I just...just randomly picked being a Quartermaster.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, you didn't know from nothing, did you?

Mr. Vojtek: No, I didn't know nothing.

Ed Metzler: Fifteen year old kid!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: I mean, you could hardly spell some of those things probably.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah (laughter), but they trained us up...up there. We...got qualified...well, I worked...we could work the flags... Semaphore...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and all the...you had to be qualified Helmsman; you helm...stood on...when you stood on watch...when you steered the helms, but you know, for an hour and then you was off. But you're on for...we were only on for four hours, so I stood an hour watch on the wheel...Helmsman.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: That's what they broke us in at...is Helmsman, I mean...

Ed Metzler: Right, so...so did you go down on...what...some...some training cruises...shakedown cruises and...?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah, we left...oh, you want...you want to know where the ship went now?

Ed Metzler: Yeah, let's talk about where she went.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we put her in commission in April on the 20th of 1942... no, '43.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And we went down the Sabine River to Galveston. Boy, and that was an adventure in itself and the screws were sucking all the water off...five foot off the banks of the Sabine River and you could see the fish just (unintelligible)...

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: ...that was quite...that was quite an experience in itself!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Then we hit...went to Galveston, and I got seasick when we hit...just before we got to Galveston. And I crawled in my bunk, and they said, "Go to sleep; take a nap." And I took a nap; I was alright then...my equilibrium got alright.

Ed Metzler: Is that right?! That's all it took?

Mr. Vojtek: That's all it took.

Ed Metzler: Well, that's good to have your equilibrium, because when you're on a tin can, it can get pretty rough!

Mr. Vojtek: (Laughter)...Yeah...well, you coming to some rough yet!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) It's going to get rough, is it?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, from there we went to Guantanamo Bay for a shakedown cruise.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And we stayed there, oh I'd say a month on a shakedown cruise. Then we went from there to...uh, when...well, we went up to New Orleans...went up the river to...back up to New Orleans to...what they...what they call a de...decoded...or...what'd they...(unintelligible)...

Ed Metzler: Oh, degaussed.

Mr. Vojtek: Degaussed...that...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's where they make you not magnetic...

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, non...yeah, right...

Ed Metzler: ...so you won't attract mines.

Mr. Vojtek: It was to New Orleans for that, and then when we got through with that we went down out of that and went to...uh, Charleston, South Carolina...went into dry dock.

Ed Metzler: Good gracious, all the way over there for dry dock?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well, after our shake...well, we...they did that to all the ships after they went on their shakedown cruise.

Ed Metzler: Why is that?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, they dropped a depth charge on us...six hundred pound depth charge on the backside and split the seam on the...back there behind the steering...you know, back in the back...bottom.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: And then they had...we had to go into...in there so they could paint...well, they were going to paint the bottom anyway, and then they sealed that up there at Charleston, South Carolina. We stayed there at that...in that dry dock. And at that time, they had two British cruisers in there...at that time...

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: ...and we tangled with them. (laughter)

Ed Metzler: Tell...tell me about tangling with them.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we didn't get along too good with the Limeys.

Ed Metzler: Why is that?

Mr. Vojtek: I don't know; it was just a different...different cultures; different places and then they took over; they...they had two cruisers in there. There was more Limeys there than it was civilians in Charleston at that time. (laughter)

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) So, how did you tangle with them?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh well, we just disagreed with...things that they were doing there. But that didn't last long; we left there about a week after we got out of dry dock...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and went up to Boston, Massachusetts. And then from there, we come back down to...Norfolk, and from Norfolk we got, I think they assigned us to the...I'm trying to think...[USS] Birmingham, cruiser.

Ed Metzler: Assigned you to the...the Birmingham as a...as a escort?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, escort, escort.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: We escort...escorted her all the way down through...through, well through the Panama Canal.

Ed Metzler: Oh really?! Was it just you or were there some other destroyers?

Mr. Vojtek: I think we were the only one there at...at that time with the Birmingham.

Ed Metzler: Right, right.

Mr. Vojtek: We were just escort...well, we were submarine escort for the Birmingham, and then we went through the Panama Canal. We went all the way up through...uh, Pearl Harbor.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: And then from there we...we were sent to Guadalcanal.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we went to Espiritu Santos first, and then from Espiritu Santos we carried ammunition for the Marines...I don't know whether it was the Marines or for the Army aboard...topside of our ship...from Espiritu Santos up to Guadalcanal.

Ed Metzler: So, so now...what...what...at what stage was the Guadalcanal Campaign at that time? Was...?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, they were still fighting there. (laughter)

Ed Metzler: Okay, so about...so this...this is in late '43 then that you must have rolled in there.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, and well...

Ed Metzler: And it wasn't totally secure yet?

Mr. Vojtek: No, we had Washer Machine Charlie at night; we had to get all the ammunition off of topside so we could get out of the...get out and get away...get out...out of the harbor there...

Ed Metzler: Right, right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...so we wouldn't be caught there with ammunition topside. And Birmingham was...the first night we were there, the old...they had a big air raid, and the Birmingham got hit; she was sent back to Pearl Harbor.

Ed Metzler: No kidding?!

Mr. Vojtek: And then from there we went to Bougainville; the Invasion of Bougainville.

Ed Metzler: So the Birmingham didn't last long, did she?

Mr. Vojtek: No she didn't. About the second day she was up there, she went back to Pearl for get...well, a plane dropped a bomb on her tail...fantail.

Ed Metzler: My gosh!

Mr. Vojtek: And well, that was when the Japanese were real strong down there.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: We was having air raids every night.

Ed Metzler: So tell me about this Washing Machine Charlie.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, Washing Machine Charlie...he come over at midnight every night and drop one bomb and then went back.

Ed Metzler: Why do you figure they were doing that?

Mr. Vojtek: Just...just to irritate us; get us out of bed.

Ed Metzler: And did a good job of it!

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah...enough time...we had to get up and get...and go...now, I was assigned to a forty millimeter; I was trainer on it for eighteen months...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...on the port side behind number two gun.

Ed Metzler: So that was your combat...station?

Mr. Vojtek: That was my...count...combat..I mean GQ station...GQ station.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And I stayed as a trainer on it for...I guess for about, oh about fourteen months...all that time I was on the Murray.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, and then from there we went to...went and bombard Bougainville.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, tell me about that.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, there was...we went in on the Invasion of Bougainville.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And we got them settled, and got them, you know, got through with them. What we do was escort them in; bombard the beach and then leave.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so you were escorting in...what...landing craft?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, landing craft and everything there at the Invasion of Bougainville.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, now were there other big ships there as well?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, you couldn't see them. I mean...we...we just stayed there long enough to bombard the beach and then left.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: We never did...we did...at that time, they didn't have too many destroyer escorts in the Pacific...at time. We just...

Ed Metzler: Okay, hold the line just a second, Henry. (Recording stopped momentarily).

Mr. Vojtek: Is that better?

Ed Metzler: Yes sir!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I was right at the TV.

Ed Metzler: You're coming in loud and clear, and I...I kept hearing this woman's voice in the background and...

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, that was it...news on there.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) Okay, so...so we're talking about Bougainville, and so you would escort the landing craft in; lob a few shells on the...

Mr. Vojtek: Beach, and then we left.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh. Did you ever see any Japanese aircraft or anything like it?

Mr. Vojtek: No, just that...we had that one air raid that would come in there at Guadal...well, (unintelligible) that we was in.

Ed Metzler: Right, right.

Mr. Vojtek: Now...

Ed Metzler: So, you're on the forty millimeter, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: I was trainer on a forty millimeter...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...port side; behind number two gun.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) You knew exactly where it was!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, I lived there just (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah. Well, did you...did you guys see any action on that forty millimeter?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah, (laughter). Well, it...we're coming to that.

Ed Metzler: Oh okay, okay. So, Bougainville was...was not that rough on you then?

Mr. Vojtek: No, well see, we never...we stayed there long enough to escort them into...to landing; after the landing was secured, well we'd leave.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, right.

Mr. Vojtek: Well see, they just assign us to...now here's where...here's where the good part starts.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Vojtek: We were at...assigned to an aircraft carrier. Two aircraft carriers and about fourteen destroyers went in and...and pulled a raid on Rabaul.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's a famous raid.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well we were in on it. Well, there was eighty-five of our planes went over and bombed Pearl...uh, Rabaul; it was the first aircraft that we did...come off an aircraft that did Rabaul...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And...we went...(unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: So...so which aircraft carriers were these, Henry?

Mr. Vojtek: Huh?

Ed Metzler: Which aircraft carriers?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, Enterprise was one of them, and I don't know who... I don't remember who the other two was.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Vojtek: But...I...either it was...it was two of us or three...it was...I think it was just two aircraft carriers...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...'cause they sent over eighty-five planes. So you can figure out; I...I guess it was just two aircraft carriers.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And they went over and the Japs followed them back to the aircraft carriers. Now this is the only air...what...aircraft...only dog fight I did ever seen.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: This was...they sent over...we sent over eight-five planes and bombed...Rabaul, and the Japanese followed them back to the carrier.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: They sent a hundred and twenty-five planes back...following them to the carrier.

Ed Metzler: Hmm! That sounds like trouble!

Mr. Vojtek: Yes, we did; we was...well, it only lasted fifteen minutes; they...they shot down about eighty of them.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Who shot them down?

Mr. Vojtek: We did!

Ed Metzler: You did?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, the destroyers and the aircraft carriers.

Ed Metzler: So it was anti-aircraft fire?

Mr. Vojtek: Anti-air...well, they had fighters up there, too.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: They, well, they thought that...the Japanese followed them back to the carrier.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, so describe to me (cough) what that...what that dog fight looked like; you're sitting there at your forty millimeter gun; describe to me what you saw.

Mr. Vojtek: What I saw was mostly just...you...it's hard to describe 'cause planes coming in from all over the place and...and we were on the port side and we was on the starboard side of the aircraft carrier, and I couldn't fire my gun 'cause I'd hit...hit the air...carrier.

Ed Metzler: You were that close to the carrier, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah, we was escorting them.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, so how close were you to them?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh, I could see the aircraft carrier. I mean, they pass...we were picketed all the way around the air...that's fourteen destroyers around the aircraft carrier.

Ed Metzler: My gosh!

Mr. Vojtek: But it was...we were assigned to it, but after we...they made the landing...well, they shot down about eighty Japanese planes then.

Ed Metzler: Man!

Mr. Vojtek: I mean it was a dog...it was a dog fight I'll never forget 'cause the Japanese flew in between me...us and the...carrier, and I could see the...the Japanese car...uh, pilot in the plane when he come down that low!

Ed Metzler: They were that close, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah!

Ed Metzler: But you couldn't very well fire at them because you...the carrier was in the line of fire.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we could see the aircraft carrier. Well see, we had the...well anything on the starboard side of us we could fire at them, but I was on the port side and couldn't fire.

Ed Metzler: Right, right. Almost...

Mr. Vojtek: All of our...all of our shooting was done by...radar.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh!

Mr. Vojtek: It was already installed...forty millimeters with radar.

Ed Metzler: So you had radar controlled gun?!

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah!

Ed Metzler: Wow!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, that was the latest thing that they had. Well, everything we had...the five inch, too, they were radar.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: And that's what ruined the Japanese because we had radar. We...we fought them with radar more. Well, they had a guy standing up there on the butt of the bridge that was doing all the firing of our guns...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and well...well, when the power went out on our ship...well what we did was...went to the guns and put everything in automatic.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Wojtek: And when we put it in automatic, the guy up above the bridge that did all the fire control.

Ed Metzler: My goodness!

Mr. Wojtek: But we were cautioned in case we lost ours, well, we could still throw into manual; well, sometimes we fired manual; we'd target practice with manual.

Ed Metzler: So you guys...so basically what you had to...what you...what your crew had to do was just load the gun, huh?

Mr. Wojtek: No, I was trainer; I sat at a seat...if...if you...can you picture what a forty millimeter is? It's got a trainer on one side and a pointer on the other side.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Wojtek: And they got two...two...uh, one man standing behind me loading that forty millimeter.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Wojtek: And the...well, that twin-mount forty millimeter had four, six men that manned it.

Ed Metzler: Well did...let me ask you this. If you're the trainer and the gun is on radar control, what is it that you do?

Mr. Wojtek: Just sit there.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Wojtek: (Laughter).

Ed Metzler: So you're a...you're an observer? And if something goes wrong, you take over?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: I'm with you.

Mr. Vojtek: That's right. I mean, that...that's the way they had it fixed up.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, they had to in case you lost power; I mean you...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...but ninety percent of the time, we'd switch it over to automatic. Well even when we went in and fired on the beach, well the guy up above there did all the fire control.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: See everything's done on this fire control deal; even the five inch.

Ed Metzler: Now, okay so when the Japanese planes followed our planes back from Rabaul...

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ...did they...do any damage to the US ships?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh, they shot them all down before they could any damage.

Ed Metzler: Okay!

Mr. Vojtek: (Unintelligible) didn't do no damage. Now this...they did shoot down a couple of our planes there; we picked up the pilots...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...after it was all...it only lasted ten minutes and it was all over!

Ed Metzler: My gosh! So you all picked up a pilot, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh we...we picked...well, that's one of the...that was one of the jobs of the destroyers was to pick up pick up pilots that fall in the drink.

Ed Metzler: Yep! That's absolutely right! So, what kind of condition were these guys in when you jerked them out...?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, they usually have a life raft or their life...Mae Wests on.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh, so they were okay, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh, they was okay; we'd have to go by and pick them up.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: But the sad part of it is...we...we did that after the battle was over with. I mean this is just all happens after the battle.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And we'd pick up maybe four or five...that was one thing that the Navy did; they took care of their pilots.

Ed Metzler: You bet!

Mr. Vojtek: And any one of them was...well, if they were shot down, we'd pick them up.

Ed Metzler: Well, they were always short on pilots.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we...at that time, yeah, we were; we didn't have any.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Didn't have no planes either! (laughter)

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mr. Vojtek: Just them on the aircraft carriers.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, now when you weren't at your battle stations, you were down in the...in the power room, right?

Mr. Vojtek: No, uh huh, I was sitting on my gun.

Ed Metzler: Okay, but...but...okay, but when you weren't in combat...

Mr. Vojtek: Oh, I was...I stood my watches up in the helm...Helmsman...Quartermaster...

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Vojtek: ...on the bridge.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so you weren't down...you weren't down with the boilers anymore?

Mr. Vojtek: No, I had...that was later on and after I was in for awhile; I mean I
(unintelligible)...

Ed Metzler: Okay, okay. Okay, so you're the...alright (unintelligible).

Mr. Vojtek: I volunteered to go down...

Ed Metzler: You had a lot of different jobs; I'm having a hard time keeping them straight here.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, this...this all...I was still the Quarter...uh, Helmsman.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: That was my watch station; what...what they call your battle...not your battle, well battle station, but you're regular station that you worked at. While we were underway I was a Quartermaster Helmsman.

Ed Metzler: Right. Okay, let me get that down 'cause I got to keep all this straight here. Uh, okay, so after Rabaul what...what happened to the Murray? Where'd she go?

Mr. Vojtek: We was...after we finished the battle we was always getting reassigned to something else, so we got assigned to the task force that was going to Truk, uh, Tarawa.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And we was at the Invasion of Tarawa.

Ed Metzler: So as I remember, Tarawa was...was pretty ugly.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, I watched fifteen hundred Marines get killed.

Ed Metzler: Describe to me the whole thing as, you know, as you went in in support; just tell me what you remember.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we were in support...well, we...uh, protecting the transports; it was about ten transports had Marines and supplies and everything.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we was in the harbor there patrolling the harbor in case of...Japanese navy come in there.

Ed Metzler: Right, like submarine or something, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well they did...a submarine did come up and the...a destroyer rammed it and cut it in half.

Ed Metzler: No kidding?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, right out in the middle...well, he come up right out of the bay there right in amongst the transport.

Ed Metzler: That wasn't very smart!

Mr. Vojtek: No, it wasn't, but Japanese were...weren't very smart either.

Ed Metzler: They made mistakes, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, another destroyer rammed it, and cut it in half.

Ed Metzler: Oh okay, and she...

Mr. Vojtek: And they put rammer bows on them destroyers; we could ram anything and it wouldn't hurt us.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And they cut that submarine right half in two, and I seen it when it went down.

Ed Metzler: Did you really?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: My gosh! So were there any survivors?

Mr. Vojtek: I don't think so; if there was they didn't pick them up. (laughter)

Ed Metzler: Oh, I see! Wow!

Mr. Vojtek: We didn't, but the...that was the 1944...

Ed Metzler: Now as I remember, they had a hard time at Tarawa getting...

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ...on the beach and over...

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, over...well, it was right at fifteen hundred Marines get killed right there on the beach.

Ed Metzler: So how did that happen? Were they just...?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, they...they couldn't get over the reef.

Ed Metzler: *That's* what I remember hearing, yeah!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, they didn't...couldn't over the...they had to wade in water up to their neck and then the Japanese just cut them down.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: Now this was right at Thanksgiving...'40...'44.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And I said, "You...god," ...well, I stood there and watched it. I mean...we were that close to the beach. But they were...and then three days later the Japanese...the Marines were floating out there in the bay; we picked up three of them and buried them there; gave them a sea burial.

Ed Metzler: Sea burial.

Mr. Vojtek: But then they told us not to pick up any more, 'cause there was too many of them.

Ed Metzler: My god!

Mr. Vojtek: We...you just didn't have time to pick them up anymore.

Ed Metzler: Man, that's something.

Mr. Vojtek: But there was three of them floating in the water, and they said they wasn't...they were Japanese, and they couldn't have been Japanese because they had USMC on the back of their pack.

Ed Metzler: Oh.

Mr. Vojtek: But we...we lowered a boat and went and picked up three of them and gave them a sea burial.

Ed Metzler: So, you're...I guess you must be sixteen by this time?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: How...how does that make a sixteen year old feel go through...going through that?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, it...it's...it's an adventure that you'd never forget.

Ed Metzler: I'll bet.

Mr. Vojtek: It's...it's growing up fast.

Ed Metzler: Man!

Mr. Vojtek: If you went through one battle, you...one man says, "Well, once you...once you went through one battle, you're a man then...whether you...whether you were fifteen, fourteen or sixteen; it didn't make much different...you're a man."

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: When you go through all that.

Ed Metzler: So...so after Tarawa, what happened?

Mr. Vojtek: Tarawa...well, we went and invaded another island there with transport and escorted her to...it's another island just south of Tarawa, and went on...they...wasn't nobody on that island at all.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: It wasn't...it was (unintelligible) occupied; the Marines occupied it.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And then after we got through with that, we went down to the...what do they call those...the...Fiji Islands in...south of Tarawa.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. What did...what did you do there; get refitted or what?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we went in...went in to...the destroyers had...the [USS] Cascade, it was a tender, destroyer tender...

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and there was about five of us tied up there, but you..in between there, we didn't get no supplies. We were already down to one meal a day when we went...with that Rabaul...uh, Tarawa.

Ed Metzler: One meal a day?!

Mr. Vojtek: One meal a day. Captain asked for...asked one of them transports for some food. He said, "Well, I'll let you have a half a side of beef and a sack of potatoes," and the Captain says, "Keep it." He says, "We'll...we'll make out."

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I mean...that's not enough to...

Mr. Vojtek: That ain't even enough...teaspoon drop. Well, we...down to one meal a day, and we were even stealing food off the life rafts.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: I mean it got that desperate! But after you...see, we could only carry supplies enough for...right at three months at a time...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and we'd done been at sea for six months.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: That's...you know what I mean after we hit...was at Guadalcanal and Espiritu Santos.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, then they sent us...one time they sent us over to Espiritu Santos for a...recreation; that...that's a story itself.

Ed Metzler: Well, but...let's see...and I want to get to that. Now you went down to...you said the Fiji Islands?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: And you got...and...and you got some supplies there finally?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we got our...finally mail caught up with us.

Ed Metzler: Ah! The mail!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, we caught up with the mail and supplies...supplies...we was out of supplies. Well, we tied up along a tender and got supplies and...and mail; mail was the biggest part of it. They had it all there on the beach; they knew we were coming there because they had it all waiting for us.

Ed Metzler: My gosh! So...so did you get some letters from home or what?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah. We hadn't had no mail in three months!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) So you got your mail; you got supplies and then where did she go?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, then we went to Espiritu Santos, I think, if I'm not mistaken. And we pulled in there and...and they paid us twenty dollars; that's all they'd pay us 'cause they didn't want us to have any money on...

(end of tape 1, side A)

Ed Metzler: ...okay, we're going again now; go ahead.

Mr. Vojtek: When we pulled into Espiritu Santos down there in...well, it...it was supply base, Navy supply base...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...right out of Australia and the Captain sent a...well, we had three sections...four sections; he sent a section of us over to the...didn't...I didn't wasn't in it...sent us over to the beach and they gave us twenty dollars. Well, they shouldn't have give us that twenty dollars.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) Well, I'm going to ask you what you did with your twenty dollars.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, let me...I'm coming to that.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: They give us twenty dollars and then that was to buy, you know, (unintelligible) smokes and candy and stuff with the twenty dollars; that's all they'd let us have.

Ed Metzler: Now this was on Espiritu Santos?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, we was there...well, we tied up there for some recreation...is what they called it.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, okay...R&R.

Mr. Vojtek: R&R.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: They sent us...first quarter...a third of the Marines...of the crew went over there and they...they shouldn't have given them their twenty dollars...and everybody chipped in and it was...the sailors over there were selling us beer a dollar a can.

Ed Metzler: Durn, that was expensive!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, we didn't have no use for it!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's right!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, they give us...one of them...two cans free.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's to get you started.

Mr. Vojtek: That...yeah, they...then you...they wouldn't give you any more, but we could buy it (laughter) from the other guys there for a dollar a can.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: But between the two of us we had forty bucks, so we chipped in...buy us a case of beer.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh, and then what?

Mr. Vojtek: Ah, everybody got drunk; we'd...shore patrol...up...stole...stole a boat and everything...come back to the ship and everybody was drunk. (Laughter)

Ed Metzler: Stole a boat?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah!

Ed Metzler: Well, tell me about that.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, it was...stole a boat...

Ed Metzler: If you can remember it (laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: Oh well, vaguely I remember it. They stole a boat and they stole a shore patrol's car...

Ed Metzler: Uh oh.

Mr. Vojtek: ...shore patrol up and everything else.

Ed Metzler: My gosh, you guys sound like you might have been out of control.

Mr. Vojtek: We were.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: After being at sea for six months, what do you expect?

Ed Metzler: Well, that's right!

Mr. Vojtek: What do you expect?

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: So, they come back...we was having movies on the fantail...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...anchored out there in the bay and...and the Captain over there on the beach said, "Don't send no more of your men over here; they totally wrecked the base down here!"

Ed Metzler: No...

Mr. Vojtek: "I don't want to see any of your men (unintelligible)."

Ed Metzler: No more sailors from the Murray, please!

Mr. Vojtek: No, nobody!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: Come get your supplies and get out of here!

Ed Metzler: Get out of here! (Laughter)

Mr. Vojtek: But what do you expect of a bunch of men that had been at sea for six months?!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, plus you never knew when you were going to meet your Maker...

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ...and so you just didn't worry about it.

Mr. Vojtek: We didn't worry about it, but this...we were back there...seeing...watching the movie when the guys come back aboard...come back from shore leave...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and they started fighting at the movies. Exec told the Captain...he said, "You want us...you want me to stop that fight?" He said, "Hell no, let them blow off steam."

Ed Metzler: No kidding.

Mr. Vojtek: (Laughter) “Let them fight, and if one of them gets knocked out...just take him...put him to bed.”

Ed Metzler: My...

Mr. Vojtek: But this...fight among yourselves...that was...that wasn't nothing unusual.

Ed Metzler: Now did you get into fights?

Mr. Vojtek: No, uh uh! I...I was...these were old...old hands; see we had a...we had a...part of our crew was out of the [USS] Ward...and that was sunk at Aleutians...

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: ...survivors; we had some survivors on it and they was about as crazy as we was after we'd been to sea for six months.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, but they were...they were bigger, older and more...

Mr. Vojtek: They were older...well...

Ed Metzler: ...more experienced.

Mr. Vojtek: ...yeah.

Ed Metzler: And tough to fight, I guess.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah. But anyway we...we had...Captain on the base said, “Don't you let no more men come over here other than to pick up supplies!”

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: “No more leaves!”

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: “No more shore leave!”

Ed Metzler: So you guys picked up your supplies and you got out of there, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: We got out of there and then we went back...we were headed for...I think we were headed for Pearl Harbor.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: And then about five destroyers headed for Pearl Harbor and we hit a typhoon.

Ed Metzler: Uh oh!

Mr. Vojtek: We went through a typhoon for...well, one guy got his leg broke; one arm broke and we was doing fifteen knots through that typhoon.

Ed Metzler: How...how did he get his arms and legs broken?

Mr. Vojtek: Fell!

Ed Metzler: Really?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, when you go up...here...let me explain how the sea was. You'd go up over two of them and then go through one of them.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: And we were...continuous...well, I was sleeping up forward and I couldn't go aft to my bunch, so I had to sleep up forward. Everybody was already up forward...stayed up forward and nobody had...and the Captain told nobody...he didn't want no body on topside at all!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, absolutely!

Mr. Vojtek: So it wasn't...you couldn't do nothing anyway...if you did run into the enemy.

Ed Metzler: So you...so you just hang and...

Mr. Vojtek: Hang on!

Ed Metzler: ...and ride it out.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, we was going to Honolulu.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: We hit Honolulu and we didn't have hardly anything; all our handrails and everything were washed off. We had flying fish all over the ship that...where we'd go through...because that was a storm...I said...I've never...hope I never see another storm like that again!

Ed Metzler: Were there any ships in the fleet lost?

Mr. Vojtek: No, it was five destroyers...five of us going back to Pearl.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And we...I was Helmsman and we didn't steer course; we just steered behind the...the destroyer ahead of us.

Ed Metzler: Really?

Mr. Vojtek: Didn't steer a course...no course at all. I mean...and there was five of us (unintelligible) and when we hit Pearl Harbor, man, we didn't have nothing; we had to get completely resupplied of everything on topside.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: Even...resupplied the...well, they knocked bunch of...some of the life rafts off of it; we had six or five life rafts on there that...

Ed Metzler: My gosh!

Mr. Vojtek: ...were washed...washed everything that was washable off the topside!

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: But we hit Pearl and we each one of us got...had two...two days of leave. We...one...one...we split up in four sections...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and each section had a day at...in Honolulu.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: You talk about a bunch of drunk sailors! (Laughter)

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I've heard that Honolulu was so full of servicemen that you almost couldn't move, you know, you couldn't get any...

Mr. Vojtek: Well, if you wanted to go to a cathouse, you had to stand in line to get...get a piece of ass.

Ed Metzler: Oh my gosh!

Mr. Vojtek: (Laughter) But hell, they didn't care; we...we'd done been at sea!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Shoot, we done went through all that crap down there at Guadalcanal and Bougainville...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...Tarawa and then...the best part of my story is still coming up.

Ed Metzler: Well, I'm...so...so you were in Pearl while your ship got basically refitted again?

Mr. Vojtek: Refitted then, and then...

Ed Metzler: And...and then what?

Mr. Vojtek: ...we stayed there about a week...long enough for each one of us...each section...well, there...there was four sections and each one had...each one of us had two liberties, so it was four...it was two weeks we were there.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, did you have any guys that you'd kind of become good buddies with that you kind of hung around with?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah, we...yeah, we...we would pair up...

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: ...that was in our section...we'd pair up. I mean, we'd never run by ourselves because we'd get the hell beat out of us...(unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah!

Ed Metzler: By whom?

Mr. Vojtek: Anybody that wanted to fight! (Laughter)

Ed Metzler: My gosh, you guys were a bunch of fighting sailors!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, you know, you take a bunch of sailors that had been at sea for six months...they don't give a damn about nothing or anything.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: And you go to a cathouse and...and you had to stand in line to wait till your turn.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: Line would wrap around a city block!

Ed Metzler: Good gosh!

Mr. Vojtek: Those whores there in Honolulu got rich off of us sailors.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, they must have. Uhm...

Mr. Vojtek: Well they had...I heard this story, too, that they...they had to quit letting the...the whores buy real estate in their rich part of Honolulu.

Ed Metzler: No kidding?!

Mr. Vojtek: (Laughter) Yeah!

Ed Metzler: My gosh! So...so...you... now you went back out to sea. Were you...?

Mr. Vojtek: We were at...well, we went out to sea escorting some transports...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and we went to the Marshalls.

Ed Metzler: So there was...what...you and four other destroyers?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh, it was about fourteen of us, I think...

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Vojtek: ...escorting these...transports.

Ed Metzler: Okay, and they went to where, the Marshalls?

Mr. Vojtek: The Marshalls; we invaded Guadal...uh, Kwajalein.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum! I've heard of that!

Mr. Vojtek: Huh? You've heard of it?

Ed Metzler: Oh yeah!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I had a friend of mine that...that was in (unintelligible) there where my wife was and he was a Marine on...on Kwajalein, and we was set...you know, you heard about the talk...talk...code talkers?

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, they...we sat a thousand yards off the beach and we were their...artillery.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: And they Marines would say, "Well, we got a pillbox up here we can't do nothing with; how about drop a five-inch shell on it?"

Ed Metzler: Okay and so you did?

Mr. Vojtek: We did; well, we sat there for three days and they were coming up the peninsula at Kwajalein.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And this friend of my wife's...he was a Marine over there on Kwajalein, I told him I was there. He said he'd never believe me; he said, "Hell, you're too young!" I said, "No I wasn't either I was...(laughter)...we was...we were dropping shells on it!" But he never would believe me for about two, three months.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And I said, "Well," I says, "were you there when they dropped the dive...dive bomber dropped on that ammunition dump at Kwajalein?" He looked at me and he said, "Yeah, you was there!"

Ed Metzler: You were there!

Mr. Vojtek: 'Cause I watched them drop it...that dive bomber dropped the bomb when he was coming down and the ammunition dump went up and then went about three thousand feet up...just black smoke!

Ed Metzler: My gosh!

Mr. Vojtek: And I never did see the plane come out of it.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: So, the explosion might have got him; concussion might have got that dive bomber; I don't know.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, it...it's possible.

Mr. Vojtek: But that...

Ed Metzler: Now this...now whose ammunition...ammunition dump was this...Japanese?

Mr. Vojtek: It was Japanese.

Ed Metzler: Okay, yeah, this was before we'd secured the island.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well, we was coming up the island there...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...the Marines was; we was...about...dropping shells in there for them, and he never would believe me that I was there. And he says, "This was never...you never saw this on newsreels where they dropped that bomb on that ammunition dump."

Ed Metzler: Hmm! Now was...was there any Japanese air...air attack...air attacks on your ship?

Mr. Vojtek: What...then? No, they...we didn't have no problem with planes because they'd done...they done wiped everything out.

Ed Metzler: Right, that's what I thought.

Mr. Vojtek: Truk...see at Truk they hit Truk twice and wiped them out there. If we'd of had any...if they'd of had any air support, that's where they would have come from.

Ed Metzler: I see, I see. So how long were...were you there on Kwajalein? That was a pretty...that was pretty tough landing as I...

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we were there about...well we was there three days I know of. Well, we just walked up the...the island there with the Marines because they were taking and doing...call fire for them.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: I mean you don't hear it...you didn't hear none of this, you know, on newsreels that we sat there and did their...we were their artillery for the Marines.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: But when they come out with this...code talkers, well heck, we were...we were doing that...first part of the war, you know, for the Marines.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: They...they really wasn't nothing new.

Ed Metzler: Now the...were the code talkers talking to you guys also?

Mr. Vojtek: No, uh huh.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Vojtek: We were talking directly to shore...ship to shore...to the Marines on the beach.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: I mean we were...we were a thousand yards off the beach; you could...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...you know...had walkie talkies and talk back and forth short wave.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, short wave, yeah. Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: And they'd tell us where they wanted...wanted us to drop a shell; well, we'd drop a shell in there and then they'd just move on up the beach with the Marines. They were just going up the beach wiping the Japanese out.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: (Cough) But we...this stuff I'm telling you never did come in a newsreel.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: But, we sat there and watched them; I mean...we...watching the Marines fight the Japs on there. They were...they were dug in so bad that they just...they did more or less just...what you call that...flamethrower?

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's...

Mr. Vojtek: They wiped them out with the flamethrower; they didn't do much shooting.

Ed Metzler: Now was there...were...were there many mountains on Kwajalein or was it pretty flat?

Mr. Vojtek: No, it was flat; it was flat.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: It was just an island. They weren't trying to get it; they was moving up through the Pacific going up...oh, I didn't put in there...that first...our first engagement was at Guam, uh, Wake Island. We bombarded Wake Island when we was going to the South Pacific.

Ed Metzler: Oh really?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, that was our first engagement.

Ed Metzler: My gosh! You've seen...an awful lot of action!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well I...I rate...I rate myself...well, the men that was on the Murray rate the same battle stars 'cause we were in the battles on...aboard ship; I rate eleven battle stars.

Ed Metzler: Eleven battle stars; man! So after Kwajalein, then where did the Murray go?

Mr. Vojtek: Let me...let me stop and think, I mean, we got switched around so dang much it's hard to keep up where we went. I think we went down to New Guinea.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh, so what did you do down there?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we bombarded the Admiralty Islands while they were invading one place on New Guinea. See, we'd bombard one place and they'd invade somewhere else where they thought they was going to get invaded; well they got invaded in the opposite direction.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And then we come up the, I think it was come up the coast there and we was...went to invasion there at Aitape, New Guinea while they were landing in Hollandia.

Ed Metzler: Now...now where is this?

Mr. Vojtek: New Guinea.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I knew New Guinea, but you...you mentioned a name.

Mr. Vojtek: Aitape.

Ed Metzler: Spell it.

Mr. Vojtek: Hey, I don't remember. Aitape is all I know.

Ed Metzler: A-t-a-p-i maybe?

Mr. Vojtek: Something like that.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, okay. I've never heard that one before.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, it was the same time that they invaded Hollandia, New Guinea.

Ed Metzler: I have heard of Hollandia, yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: They invaded this place the same time that he...that we...we...a cruiser and two destroyers were in there and they had a troop transport in there that was landing there.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And the Japanese come over with a Betty; two Bettys...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...the first night we were there. We had...the cruiser went back out to sea at night to send the big ships back...big heavy ships out to sea.

Ed Metzler: Why is that?

Mr. Vojtek: On a...on account... 'cause they...they'd send that Betty over the top of them mountains and the radar couldn't pick them up.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, they...okay.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I was on...well I...well we were already...had already secured the beach and everything and they sent...Japanese sent two Bettys over there. And I went to bed...one...twelve o'clock; I got relieved off of watch at midnight...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and they sounded GQ at one o'clock...

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: ...in the morning.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: I come up out of...out...go...go to my gun and they had...they had dropped flares in the bay and it lit it up like it was daylight.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: And we come out there, "God dog, I just went to bed and it was dark!"
(laughter)

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) Sunrise came earlier than you thought!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, I said, "Man, that was a short nap!"

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I come up and went topside and went to the...to my battle station, and about the time I got to my battle station, I...I seen that Jap Betty come over us and drop a fish and it went right under us.

Ed Metzler: No kidding?!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, actually saw it.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: And the Captain hollered down to me...he said, "Hit the deck!" I said, "What the heck do I want to hit the deck for? It's going underneath us." We...well, you could watch the torpedo...the wake of the torpedo coming towards us...

Ed Metzler: My gosh, that must have...!

Mr. Vojtek: ...mid ship. Well, they set the fish for a cruiser.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh, and it was too deep for a destroyer.

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah, they just went right under us. Well the next morning I seen the torpedo laying up on the beach.

Ed Metzler: You are...!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well, we were patrolling the bay there for the...case the Japanese navy come in.

Ed Metzler: Man!

Mr. Vojtek: Then me and the Captain and the Quartermaster, all three of us saw that fish go right under us.

Ed Metzler: Boy! So that must have stood the hair up on the back of your neck when...

Mr. Vojtek: Well, there wasn't nothing you could do!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's a helpless...

Mr. Vojtek: (Unintelligible) if it would have hit us, it would've cut us right half in two!

Ed Metzler: Oh absolutely! There wouldn't have been anything left.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, there wouldn't have been nothing left! But they set the torpedoes for the depth of the cruiser instead of a destroyer. Well we didn't draw very...destroyers...did you by any chance happen to see this last week the...military channel about the ten most...powerhouse ships in the Navy?

Ed Metzler: I think...I have seen that show before, yes.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, you know, we were fifth as the most...put up the most fire power...

Ed Metzler: Most, yeah, most important ship, yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well we...you know the destroyer fought the last Navy battle...

Ed Metzler: Well I believe that!

Mr. Vojtek: ...in the Philippines there...Manila where the Japanese come in with the fleet?

Ed Metzler: Oh yeah!

Mr. Vojtek: It had been two destroyers and...destroyer escort and the two baby flat top.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that was the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Vojtek: Leyte Gulf, right.

Ed Metzler: Yes sir! I have...I've definitely...I've talked to some of the guys that were on those destroyers; they've got some eye opening accounts, I'll tell you!

Mr. Vojtek: Well yeah, it...that made me feel pretty good of being a destroyer sailor.

Ed Metzler: Well yeah, Tin Can Sailor. Yeah those...they've written books about you guys! So, no question about it. So, you saw the fish up on the beach the next morning?

Mr. Vojtek: Next morning, right.

Ed Metzler: So...

Mr. Vojtek: So then we...they...well they hit...one fish did hit the...the supply ship and they beached it. Whenever they got hit, they just beached them and unloaded them...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and left them.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Now that was the funniest thing I ever seen in my life when we hit Guadalcanal; I never seen so many fish...ships beached there at that time!

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: Ah...fifteen of them....just the nose sticking up on the beach where the Japanese tried to sup...resupply their men there at Guadalcanal.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, now this was when you first went down the...?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, now I...I didn't mention that to you because so much went on that I...I have to stop and think...I...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...I never...you talk about...I seen that show, too, where they went and looked down in...what they called Iron Bottom Bay there?

Ed Metzler: Yes sir, Iron Bottom Sound! Yeah!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, there...that Japanese battleship was sunk there.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, it...it...they showed a picture of it; it just settled down (laughter). Uh, well that was...see, that was when we come in there with radar.

Ed Metzler: Yep!

Mr. Vojtek: Well we could...we were fighting them at night with spotlights.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: But we...we had radar on our ship and we didn't need no spotlight; we could pick them up with radar!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, spotlights kind of tell everybody where you are! (Laughter)

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well they got a place down there they call the Tin Can Alley, too.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And about ten destroyers sunk there.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: But you know, I never did understand that. They...they'd sink them destroyers and these guys out there in the middle of the Pacific...and then nobody to come pick them up!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Sharks got them!

Ed Metzler: Man!

Mr. Vojtek: So many men that were killed by sharks.

Ed Metzler: I know.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, anyway...where was we at?

Ed Metzler: Well, let's see...I'm...uh, we had...you had been back to New Guinea...

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ...and...and...

Mr. Vojtek: Then we went back up north and the...attached us to the 5th Fleet.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: And we were attached to the 5th Fleet, and we made the landings at...they made the first landing at Saipan.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: And it was so rough that we was re-enforcements for Saipan, but then they sent us to Eniwetok back to the bay and reorganized and then we went and hit Guam.

Ed Metzler: My...!

Mr. Vojtek: So you see, I got battle stars for...

Ed Metzler: Good gracious man, you've been everywhere! Well now, tell me about...Saipan. That...you said it was...you said you were what...reserves there or what?

Mr. Vojtek: Let's see...Saipan...let me stop and think where I'm at in this. With...with Saipan, no uh uh; we were re-enforce...they...they was...we were supposed to hit Guam the same time they hit Saipan.

Ed Metzler: I see.

Mr. Vojtek: It had two invasion fleets.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: But they said, "No, we going to need re-enforcement at Saipan," because they was having so much hell there.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: So, so we went (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: So you went there and...and...

Mr. Vojtek: Went back to Eniwetok to regroup.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And then a month later we hit Guam.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Vojtek: And we sat off the beach there...that peninsula that stuck out at Guam for three days...just bombarding the beach for the...for the Marines; they could only make three thousand yards a day.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, made three thousand yards in three days; yard...a hundred yards a day.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And we'd bombard...we dropped, oh I guess, about twenty five rounds of five-inch shells...twenty-five *hundred* rounds of ammunition.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: And we was anchored...we wasn't anchored; we was just sitting there and we had an ammunition ship about two thousand yards north of us, and they were bringing us ammunition...setting them on the deck...going back and forth!
(laughter)

Ed Metzler: Good gracious! Hmm! I'm glad...

Mr. Vojtek: Well...well they burned...they fired so many shot...rounds of five-inch on that gun that it burned all the paint off the barrel of the guns!

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: And we had to go back in and have them re-rifle...

Ed Metzler: Okay!

Mr. Vojtek: ...after that.

Ed Metzler: Now you...you had...if I remember correctly, two five-inchers on the front and two at the back?

Mr. Vojtek: Three in the back.

Ed Metzler: Three in the back!

Mr. Vojtek: Had five, five-inch on it!

Ed Metzler: Okay, but these were...

Mr. Vojtek: And we had...we had four quads of forty-millimeters.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: Two up...two...two twin-quads of forty millimeters up front and two... no, we had three in the back; we had five really; five quads of forty millimeters. And them were...them were the anti-aircraft guns of the day!

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: (Cough) Well, we had...when I got off, we had already shot down eight Japanese planes...

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: ...that we got credit...we shot down more than that, but that was the ones we got credit for.

Ed Metzler: Now, which engage...which...battles did you shoot the Japanese planes down?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, that was...that one at...when we went to Rabaul.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: I think we got one there and then we got one at...Guadalcanal.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And then we got one at, gosh, I'd say I'd have to stop and think...where did we get all of them, man! You know we was all over the damn (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: Well, you went to so many different places!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: But we had eight...when I got off, we had shot down eight Japanese planes that we got credit for.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Now do any of those particularly stick in your mind?
Those...(cough)...

Mr. Vojtek: No, not really 'cause they were shot down by our fire power, see? If...if you've seen that movie of the...of the fire power that a damned destroyer puts up...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...they never...they never could figure out how a plane ever got through all that (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: And they probably couldn't figure out who actually shot them down either.

Mr. Vojtek: No, they said well they give you...give you credit so you'd have credit that you was even there!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: (Unintelligible) that way...mostly, I think it was what they did. Well like I said, I earned...well, I went to...where...let's see, where...where was I anyway? We...we moving around so damned much in the Pacific that it was pathetic.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, but I guess the last thing you mentioned to me was Guam, so...

Mr. Vojtek: Alright Guam, yeah.

Ed Metzler: ...so after Guam, where did you go?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, when we went back...we were re-assigned back down to New Guinea.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: And we went and bombarded the...the Admiralty Islands while they was invading somewhere else; I don't remember, but we was two battleships and four...fourteen destroyers. We'd get transferred from one battle to another just...just continuously.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: I mean there was no...there was no in between; we were going up the (unintelligible) fast...the...leaving out so many...you know, and just leaving the Japs sitting there on them islands...nothing.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: But we got to...I don't...I was going to ask you, too, would...would they consider the Holomon Hair (sp?) and Moritai (sp?) as part of the southern Philippines?

Ed Metzler: Uhm, I really don't know.

Mr. Vojtek: See, it was the southern...most southern part of the islands in the Philippines, but we were at that invasion after we hit...we was at...we hit...New Guinea...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and at Hollandia.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, so...so now we're starting to get into the last year of the war...give or take.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, give or take.

Ed Metzler: So, what...what was the...so the Murray was with the 5th Fleet, is that what you said?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh heck, we was with the 5th, 6th, (unintelligible) 7th Fleet...we...we was wherever they needed a destroyer...they sent us!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: So you couldn't very well put us...well, the last, I think, we was with the 5th Fleet down in...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...well, it was part of MacArthur's bunch down there.

Ed Metzler: Oh really?!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, see New Guinea and all that...MacArthur was in charge of it.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: And then Nimitz was in charge of all that in the Central Pacific moving west.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: But we'd...we'd never did really get no rest at all; we'd get one battle up and they'd just assign us to another place.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: It was just...back and forth. I mean, it's hard to visualize where we were at half the time.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Some of these places I left out.

Ed Metzler: So, did you...did you stay over there; did the Murray stay there until the war was over?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah!

Ed Metzler: So where you towards the end of the war then?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I was going to come to that. We made the invasion at Moritai and Holomon Hair there. We was at...landed troops there.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And we escorted STP...uh, LSTs in to there, and then we come back to Hollandia, and I got transferred.

Ed Metzler: Oh, you did?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Where to?

Mr. Vojtek: Back to the States – New Construction.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: The Navy said that you'd been over there eighteen months; you was entitled to thirty day leave and seven day traveling time.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And I'd already been over there over eighteen months.

Ed Metzler: Yeah!

Mr. Vojtek: So if you had a replacement you had...you could go home!

Ed Metzler: Well, did you have a replacement?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah. I'd been transferred down in the back (unintelligible), and I was the lowest rated man there and they could replace...anybody could replace me!

(laughter)

Ed Metzler: Okay!

Mr. Vojtek: Now this...this gets good now!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And I went back to...I went on my...on a troop ship...supply ship going back to...San Francisco and I got...now this is what got me...they diagnosed my...I got sick with fever and they said I had cat fever. Well, all they did was give me a bottle of glucose and...and I got over it.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And then when I was on from San Francisco going home on leave, I come down with it, and I was on a troop train. And I borrowed everybody's coat because you get chills and fever, and doctor there on that troop ship...on the troop train said, "You getting off in Flagstaff, Arizona and going into the hospital; you've got malaria, boy!"

Ed Metzler: Uh oh!

Mr. Vojtek: I said, "Oh hell, I want to go home; the hell with the malaria!"

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Well I got over it; he give me some Atabrine and I got over it.

Ed Metzler: Really?

Mr. Vojtek: I come home...

Ed Metzler: How do you figure you got malaria? When...where you caught it?

Mr. Vojtek: New Guinea.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Vojtek: South Pacific is where I caught it.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: I know where I caught it.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: But they diagnosed it as...I got it on troop...on this supply ship going back to the States and they said...doctor there diagnosed it as cat fever.

Ed Metzler: Cat fever?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: What's that?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, it's like the flu.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Some people called it cat fever, but it was like the flu.

Ed Metzler: Yeah; it was a lot worse than the flu!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, this...the malaria was, yeah, but after they hung a bottle of glucose and built your resistance back up, you was alright. You was young; you could pull out of it real easy.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: (Cough) And I was on a train going to...from San Francisco to Houston and I come down with it and the doctor on that troop train come back there and give

me some Atabrine and I got over it. He said, "If you ain't no better by in the morning, you're getting off."

Ed Metzler: Oh, they didn't make you get off, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: No, he said if I didn't get no better, I'd have to get off and he was going to put me in a hospital.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's...

Mr. Vojtek: And I didn't want to go to no damned hospital; I wanted to go home!

Ed Metzler: Absolutely, you were on leave!

Mr. Vojtek: I was on leave, right!

Ed Metzler: So you came out of it pretty quick, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah; I got alright after he give me some medicine; Atabrine is what he give me.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: I could...pulled out of it, and went home...thirty day leave, and I come back...my dad was in the Seabees at that time.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: And I come back...back to San Francisco and then I got transferred...to San...San Pedro...

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: ...Los Angeles.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And...so I had to stay there till the ship got ready in Espirt...uh, Oregon...Astoria, Oregon...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...so they launched it and we had to go down there and...and man it.

Ed Metzler: Now what ship?

Mr. Vojtek: It was the USS Colbert, APA-145.

Ed Metzler: Colbert?

Mr. Vojtek: Colbert.

Ed Metzler: Spell it.

Mr. Vojtek: C-o-l-b-e-r [s/b Colbert].

Ed Metzler: And tell...what was the designation number again?

Mr. Vojtek: APA-145.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Vojtek: The USS Colbert. Well, I was assigned to it. Now this is the funny part of it; there was two of us in the black gang. They only had two boilers on that ship...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and they put us on there and there was only two of us out of twelve of us that had been to sea and on sea-going boilers. They had a bunch of rated men that had been on stationary boilers, and our...anyway...in charge of our black gang, his name was Fitzgerald. He says, "You know," he says, "I've got eighteen men, and only two of them that's been to sea before!"

Ed Metzler: Golly!

Mr. Vojtek: And he says, "I want you three men that's been on destroyers..." I was just a...just a fireman...he says, "I'm going to put you in charge of one watch," and

the other three of us...each one of us had a watch...and had us in charge of a watch. He says...I...I says, "I can't tell these First and Second Class Petty officers what to do." He says, "Yes, you will, too, because you're in charge!"
(Laughter)

Ed Metzler: Yeah, you've got the experience!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, we had the experience. He says, "That's the only thing," he says, "I hate about you damned jackass destroyer sailors; you're all crazier than hell!"

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) Now who was it that said that?!

Mr. Vojtek: The...he was the Warrant Officer...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...in charge of the...division...black gang.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: Then it...it gets better! You'll laugh some more after it's all over with. We went down...well, we were there at San Pedro waiting...they sent us to school telling us about this new equipment that they going to have on this ship.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: I said, "Oh, hell, we know all about that." We did everything manual aboard ship anyway. So I went ashore; didn't have no money, and I went in...this...this was comical really, I thought it was. I went into a bar...

(end of tape 1, side B)

Ed Metzler: Okay, keep going.

Mr. Vojtek: He...well, we...I went ashore and I didn't have no money and I said...well, I went in there and I was just going to buy a beer...

Ed Metzler: Now this is down in San Pedro?

Mr. Vojtek: San Pedro; it was Los Angeles.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and he...said...bartender said, "I can't sell you no beer; you ain't twenty-one." Here I done spent two years overseas and he...(laughter)...

Ed Metzler: Getting shot at...

Mr. Vojtek: ...shot at...

Ed Metzler: ...and you couldn't buy a beer!

Mr. Vojtek: ...and I couldn't buy a beer! But this...this is the best part of it, there was a bunch of fly boys in there...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...Air Corps...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...officers in there; he says, "Hey sailor, you can't buy no beer?" I said, "No." He said, "And you got all them medals for us?" I said, "Yeah." And he went over and he said, "I'll buy you a beer." He bought me a beer and I says, "Okay." And he went back told his buddies and you know, I didn't have buy a beer or buy *nothing* that night at all!

Ed Metzler: Isn't that something!

Mr. Vojtek: He says, "Ya'll picked us out of the drink!"

Ed Metzler: You are kidding!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, he says, “Ya’ll picked us up out of the drink when we didn’t even have no...no signs of anybody surviving.” Well, they sent radio messages out, you know, when they was...latitude and everything where they were...went down.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: And they’d send...sent us over to...send us messages and go to them...and pick them up. And the Air Corps said, “You don’t owe us *nothing!*” He said, “We are glad to buy you a...anything you want to eat or anything you want to drink!”

Ed Metzler: Yeah, we owe you!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah!

Ed Metzler: I’ll be darned. Well, at least they appreciated it!

Mr. Vojtek: They...well, that’s one time I felt pretty good about it anyway. (laughter)

Ed Metzler: Yeah, absolutely!

Mr. Vojtek: But the best part of it was is...I was stationed there in San Pedro for a month...the Navy base there.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And the first night I was there...and I went to sleep in the mo...hotel, in the lobby and come in about ten o’clock in...in the morning. Well, see then they made you wear all your ribbons. I didn’t wear none of my rates and I had to wear my ribbons and all my ID card...took...told where I had been and what I had been in...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...they get on your ID. And I went back at ten o'clock; I was two hours late coming back...Marine looking at me and he says, "Hey, you know you're late sailor?" I says, "Yep." He says...put me...I just told him, "Put me in brig; I want to sleep it off!"

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I need the rest. (Laughter)

Mr. Vojtek: He says, "Hell no, sailor! You go on and go to bed!" He says, "We owe...we owe you everything!" I said, "What do you mean you owe me everything?" He says, "We are survivors of Tarawa!"

Ed Metzler: Man! So you ran into a lot of guys that you had helped out?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So that did make you feel good, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah. Well, from then on, heck, I could come and go as I pleased.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Because I mean, on our IDs it showed where he...we had been. He looked at my...back side of my ID and he seen where we had been during...while I was on the Murray.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, and that was a heck of a list, too!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, it was; it filled up the whole ID back side.

Ed Metzler: Absolutely, yeah!

Mr. Vojtek: And he says, "Man," he says, "you was there when...," I says, "Yes sir." But it gets better. I did...this...this story gets better as it goes. Then we went...I went back up to Astoria and picked the trans...troop transport...the...the liberty ships is what they were...we were going on.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: And then we went down to...San Diego...

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: ...to pick up some...some supplies or something; I don't remember what it was, and I decided hell, there ain't no liberty here in San Diego, so I took off for a whole weekend and went to San... Los Angeles...

Ed Metzler: Oh you did?!

Mr. Vojtek: ...and I come back a day late.

Ed Metzler: Ah ha! Now is...that's...

Mr. Vojtek: That...that was bad! I...I just about was left there, and I didn't want to get left there and they were sailing up all lines when I come back aboard ship. They already had my clothes on the dock.

Ed Metzler: You are kidding! Is that right?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah. And...old Warrant Officer...he said, "If you'd have come back yesterday...(unintelligible) Sunday, I had your clothes out there in the garbage can, you could have come ashore...come back aboard and never been...counted missed," and I said, "Well, I just didn't know," 'cause I said...I was young and didn't give a shit!

Ed Metzler: That's right! (laughter)

Mr. Vojtek: When you'd been overseas that long, you just don't...you just didn't give a shit about nothing!

Ed Metzler: I understand.

Mr. Vojtek: I mean, it was just...just the attitude that you had, and it got to the point where the people didn't appreciate you either, so...well we didn't...you know, you just didn't...I just didn't care.

Ed Metzler: Yep, no, I understand; I mean I can understand that now.

Mr. Vojtek: But...

Ed Metzler: But you made it aboard ship?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, I made it back aboard ship.

Ed Metzler: I mean you had to leap on as she was pulling away!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, and I had to go unload my seabag; they had my seabag loaded and everything...I had to put back in my locker, and went back on watch. And then...this is the best part I guess I'd ever heard...I had to go to Captain Mast...going from San Diego up to San Francisco to pick up troops and...and I went to Captain's Mast and it was me...I was just a low cla...First Class Fireman and these other two were Seamen...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...just got out of boot camp. Captain looked at my records and he looked at me; he says, "Son, I know you know where you're going because you done been in hell,"

Ed Metzler: Yeah! (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: ...and died laughing.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: *He* died laughing!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Anyway, I didn't give a damn what he did. He...(unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: Now where does...where does this occur; in his quarters?

Mr. Vojtek: Well...well, he had...he had a court martial.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: The two Seamen and myself that he had got us for being AOL [s/b AWOL?].
We...we were absent without leave.

Ed Metzler: Right, right.

Mr. Vojtek: And...he looked at my records and he looked at me, and he says...he says,
"Son, you already been in hell." And, "Yes sir, and I know where I'm going
back to."

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: And he laughed; he like to died laughing.

Ed Metzler: So what did he do then?

Mr. Vojtek: He says, "I'm giving you ten liberties restriction and we're heading for Pearl
Harbor." And I said (unintelligible), I just laughed in his face, and he looked
at me and laughed. (laughter)

Ed Metzler: So when you say liberty restrictions...what does that mean? You not going to
get...?

Mr. Vojtek: That means that I couldn't go ashore whenever they had liberty on the ship.

Ed Metzler: So...so no liberties for awhile?

Mr. Vojtek: No liberty. This...this gets better. I got to Pearl Harbor and the Seabees were
unloading our ship; I asked one of the Seabees if they knew that...my dad, and
he was a cook for the Seabee Battalion there in Pearl Harbor. I says...he says,

“Yeah, he’s a cook for us at the base.” I said, “Well, tell him that I’m here.”
And I went up to my...the...the Division Officer and I says, “Hey, you know I’ve got ten liberty restrictions and I’m going ashore.” He said, “You can’t do that here; you on restriction!” I says, “Well, I tell you what; my dad’s over there on the beach and I haven’t seen him in two years and I’m going ashore and seeing him.” He says, “Don’t worry about it; you’ll be on the liberty list every day we’re here.”

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: Ten days we were there and I was on the liberty list every day! And I was restricted to the ship!

Ed Metzler: My gosh!

Mr. Vojtek: He says,...the best part of it was he says...he says, “I’m going to give you liberty anyway ‘cause,” he says, “I know you’re going to go ashore whether I give you liberty or not!”

Ed Metzler: Oh gosh!

Mr. Vojtek: I went...he says...that’s when I...when he told me, he says, “You damned Tin Can Sailors! If I don’t let you go ashore, you’re going ashore anyway,” and he says, “You’re crazy as hell anyway,” he says, “I might just as well let you go!” (laughter)

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: And he...he was a Warrant Officer.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: He...he says, “I got three Tin Can Sailors on here and they’re all crazy!”

Ed Metzler: So did you see your dad?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah! I seen him every...for...for ten days straight!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: I never...I never pulled a liberty after that he...you know, he put on my record...that ten liberties restriction.

Ed Metzler: Hum!

Mr. Vojtek: And we loaded up and went to Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Ooh!

Mr. Vojtek: And I come down with malaria and I was with malaria the whole time we was at the Invasion of Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: So you...okay, so you were in sick bay, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah. They...the nurse there...we had nurses aboard there; they were taking wounded on there and each nurse said, "We had to change your bunk every two hours." I says, "What for?" She says, "You'd sweat it up and you...you'd get the mattress and everything soaking wet; we just had to move you."

Ed Metzler: My gosh!

Mr. Vojtek: Kept replacing the...but that's when I...I did something...I...I didn't...well, this is later on in the story anyway...well anyway, after I had caught the malaria and I was in sick bay and we come back to Pearl Harbor and my dad had done...was sent home for discharge...

Ed Metzler: Is that right?

Mr. Vojtek: ...I didn't see him no more until I got out of the Navy.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: But...

Ed Metzler: So, the whole Okinawa thing happened while you were down in sick bay?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So did you see wounded coming in?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, they was...dying right next to me there.

Ed Metzler: Oh my gosh.

Mr. Vojtek: I didn't know they were there; I'd been in sick bay for five days...out...like it...you...it knocks you out; you're out for awhile.

Ed Metzler: Really?

Mr. Vojtek: And...well, it killed a lot of a lot of Marines there in New Guinea...the malaria did because they didn't have no...no medicine for it.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: They had a preventive medicine, but we didn't have no medicine for it after you got it.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: But...let's where...now where am I now?

Ed Metzler: Now you're in Okinawa in sick bay.

Mr. Vojtek: In sick bay. Well, I got out of sick bay and I went back to Pearl, and I...I told that Division officer I wanted off that damned tub...anytime he got a transfer off, I want off. He says, "Well, I'll make a deal with you Henry," he says, "you train these other men how to operate these boilers," and he says, "and I'll get you off of here." And I come back to Pearl Harbor and he says, "Henry, I

got a transfer for you,” and he says, “on a smaller ship.” I says, “Anything other than this tub.”

Ed Metzler: Why..what...what was the problem with the ATA; you didn't like it?

Mr. Vojtek: I didn't; it was too big! I just got tired of eating breakfast and dinner with these danged troops puking in the kitchen...in the dining hall and, you know, you just...and I wasn't used to a big ship anyway. I mean it's...when you're a Tin Can Sailor; you're a Tin Can Sailor. You...you can put you on a battleship and you're still a Tin Can Sailor!

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: I mean...there's a distinction. See, we were called...what they called a Dungaree Navy.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: That's all we wore – dungarees.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And...and I still wear the same thing now...my...what...blue T-shirt and blue dungarees; that's all I wear now.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) You're still a Tin Can Sailor!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well that's what...what that Division officer said, “You're a damned...you're a Tin Can Sailor and you'll be a Tin Can Sailor when you die!”

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, after you serve eighteen months on one of them, you *are* one!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: Period!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, it's in your blood.

Mr. Vojtek: It's in your blood. But anyway I got...I come back and he...he...I got assigned to a...a...LLCIG-456.

Ed Metzler: Alright, now let me write this down. Tell me again what it is.

Mr. Vojtek: LCIG...

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Mr. Vojtek: ...456. We didn't have no name; that was just...we just had a number.

Ed Metzler: So what does that stand for? Landing craft...

Mr. Vojtek: Landing Craft Infantry.

Ed Metzler: ...Infantry?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, we went on the beach; fired four hundred rounds of ammunition rockets on the beach when we went in to unload the troops.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: Carried about sixty-five troops. And then we pulled out of Honolulu...Pearl Harbor and went to...uh, oh, to...Guam.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And that's when I stood on the...on that ship there. There were six of us...we were training...training with the Marines to go ashore at...in the southern part of Japan; we were already training for that...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...in the training...process of training...'cause they told us...they entered...they'd give us a rifle; box of C-rations and then said, "When we hit Japan, you are expendable; the ship is expendable!"

Ed Metzler: Yep!

Mr. Vojtek: I said, "Good god, what kind of damned war is this?!"

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that doesn't make you feel good, does it?

Mr. Vojtek: No, but anyway we were there at Guam and...and I seen that one air...one...the Enola Gay come over the top of us and it was going to Japan; it was just one...one plane.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And we thought that was kind of odd 'cause they'd would have been going five and ten...planes at a time...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...everyday...going back and forth to Japan.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum...in and out of Tinian, I guess.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, Tinian, but I thought it was kind of odd, too, and then well that...that night we heard that night that they dropped the A bomb on...Japan...

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: ...and I...we never did hear about the second one. We...the next we heard about...the war was over with and then the...then the shit hit the fan.

Ed Metzler: Right. So you'd figured...you figured you saw the Enola Gay, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah...

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: ...when she went over Guam, but I never did see the second plane that went over and dropped the second bomb.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: But...when the...we were on...I was at New Guinea at Guam when the war ended. And they...we went...we were es...assigned to a...to a minesweeper and we went to Peleliu Island cleaning out the mines there in Peleliu in the harbors there.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And I...we just come in there right after that [USS] Indianapolis had been sunk...the survivors come in there.

Ed Metzler: Tell me about that.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well...it really wasn't much to it; it was just the bad ones that were still in the...well, I...I have to tell you, I got in the hospital myself. I ate a can of canned turkey...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: Got off of white and...I got up one morning; we was fixing to go follow that minesweeper blow...we was blowing the mines up as they were cutting them lose.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: And I got all my clothes on except one shoe...and I started up the ladder to go up to (unintelligible) and passed out.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mr. Vojtek: And they took me from there to the hospital there in Peleliu and they said they pumped my stomach out twice...said I'd had ptomaine poison.

Ed Metzler: I'll be darned!

Mr. Vojtek: I had ate a can of...got off of watch at midnight and I was hungry and needed something; I had a can of...canned turkey. And I ate a canned...canned turkey and that's when it hit me the next morning when I got up.

Ed Metzler: Must have been bad!

Mr. Vojtek: It was...it...I got...I had ptomaine poison.

Ed Metzler: Man!

Mr. Vojtek: And I was in the hospital for about five days, and the doctor said, "Well, we pumped your stomach out three times."

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: He said, "You had a *bad* case of ptomaine poison."

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: But from...when I come back to the ship, the Captain...I liked ten points of having enough points to go home to get discharged and the Captain said, "Hey, Henry, your clothes are down there on the danged dock; wait till the ship comes in here to take you back to the States. You're going home to be discharged."

Ed Metzler: Yeah, now this was what...about the end of '45?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, November; I was supposed to have been home in November to get discharged. I...see, when the war ended, I had what they called...if I'd of been married, I'd have had another ten points to get out on.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: But I wasn't married, so I...had to wait till the point system got to twenty nine points. I got out on the point system – twenty-nine points.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: And I hit Camp Wallace...in...'46; I got out in January of '46. And the doctor...when I got to the end of the line...see, they give you a physical when we're coming out, and the doctor asked me he says, "Anything wrong with you Henry?" I says, "Yeah, I had malaria." He looked down my rectum and he says, "I guess you have," and he says, "You'll be getting a pension at the end of the month."

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: I got thirty-five percent disabilities. But now that's one thing I did do when I got out of the service; I didn't do it...they did it...they give me the pension...for having malaria.

Ed Metzler: I'll be darned!

Mr. Vojtek: And it...they tried to cut it off after they...well, in 1957 they did cut it off...dropped it down to ten percent and was going to...and cut my pension off so...

Ed Metzler: Why?

Mr. Vojtek: It just...just...said I didn't have malaria no more, but I said...I asked the doctor, I said, "What did I do...give it somebody?!"

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: You know once you have malaria...

Ed Metzler: You don't ever get rid of it.

Mr. Vojtek: No, I can't give you blood; I can't give nobody blood 'cause I...it's in my system.

Ed Metzler: That's right.

Mr. Vojtek: But they had to...had...had it in my system and...well, the doctors already told me that I could never give nobody blood, so it...don't even worry about it. I tried to get blood to...you know...they was giving twenty-four hour passes...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...when I was in San Diego and...and they found out I had malaria and they wouldn't even give me a pass. I said, "Well the least you could do is give me a pass; I even had malaria!"

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: But anyway, I'm just kind of hitting the highlights of the...

Ed Metzler: Well, hit the high lights; hit the low lights!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, it...it was a long trip. Let's see, it's...

Ed Metzler: Boy, you *really* did get around, didn't you?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yes we did! I...I mean...I was on that destroyer for eighteen months and trainer on it, and then I was on that LCI and we'd blown up mines after the war was over with.

Ed Metzler: Well now, tell me what, you know, think back over that whole war period and tell me what was the most...the darkest day for you in the...in that whole period? What sticks in your mind as the worst that you experienced?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, the battle part of it is...

Ed Metzler: Well, yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...when I was sick or what?

Ed Metzler: Well...either.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I think the worst was when I come down...with malaria at Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: I was sleeping; I'd got off of watch and went...resting in the bed and I...the fever hit me...and I had eight of us in a...tier of bunks and I was shaking all eight of us in that tier of bunks...shaking from the...the...

Ed Metzler: The chills.

Mr. Vojtek: ...chills from the fever...and the fever.

Ed Metzler: Man!

Mr. Vojtek: I laid there for five days with chills and fever. But during...you know, that was one thing the Navy should have done? The Armed Forces should have give them guys...us that had malaria...that didn't get bad as somebody that got a bullet in them...they got a credit for it...the Purple Heart, but I think we should have had a Purple Heart for having malaria now.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, it was worse than wound in some cases.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well you never get over it anyway.

Ed Metzler: That's right.

Mr. Vojtek: You know the wound...you don't...I never will get over it. But what I was going to tell you, too, that I applied for...they told me that I come down with polio in August after I got out in '46...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and I could apply for...Service-Connected. And do you know, they wouldn't even give me Service-Connected out of it?

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: I'd only been out of the Navy about seven months, but they told me that I could get Service-Connected and I filed for it and they wouldn't give it to me 'cause I was afraid...they was afraid they was going to have to open my pension again (laughter); I think that's the whole thing in a nutshell!

Ed Metzler: Darn!

Mr. Vojtek: And all I get is letters from them saying, "Well, we are looking at your records," and that's as about as far as we get with it.

Ed Metzler: Hmm! Well, let's go back now and you had...you know, your officers; your commanding officers and your warrant officers and all those guys that you reported to; what did you think about them? Were they good guys; were they tough on you?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, they...they wouldn't...after they found out that I done been overseas, they were...what you'd call sympathetic with me...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...because I was going back overseas.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: Like that Captain says, he says, “Hell, you know where you going, Son, don’t you?!”

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And I was just a little old seventeen year old boy, and he says...he looked at my records and he says...like he said, he said, “You’ve been through hell already.”

Ed Metzler: Yeah. I mean, you liked the officers that you reported to, did you?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, the officers were...well, the Navy officers were sympathy...more or less sympathetic with you ‘cause...even after I come back...the...well, it’s just like those guards, Marine guards, on them Navy base there at San Pedro...after they’d found out I’d been overseas, they were...sympathetic towards me and I could come and go as I pleased.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: I mean...they didn’t give a damn ‘cause they knew I didn’t give a damned...’cause they was...they was some of the guys that was wounded there at Tarawa.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: And, I mean, it...it was just a...well, what I’m trying to tell you...after they found out that you’d done been overseas...hey, it’s alright!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: We feel for you.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: But we were going back, and you know what I mean...it was just like that Warrant Officer told me, he says, "Hell," he says, "I got three of you guys that's been on Tin Cans and ya'll all crazy!"

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Vojtek: "Crazy as hell," is the way he put it! (Laughter)

Ed Metzler: What do you think about the Japanese after all these years?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I guess I thought just about like the Marines did – a good Japanese was a dead one!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, well that of course is the way you felt during the war, but how...

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, well it...it don't leave you!

Ed Metzler: It...it doesn't leave you, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: No, I mean...I mean...oh, you get along with them and you, I mean, you know you...I mean they're Japanese that they're raising...everything, I mean what...how would you put it...you...you socialize with them...well, you don't hold it against them, but...in a word.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: But I...I've seen so much...so much shit that went on; let's put it that way.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: That...you...I...I never did understand they way...they didn't believe the way we did and we didn't believe the way they did; that's just about the way I'm...they had one religion and we had another religion.

Ed Metzler: They were really different, weren't they?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, the guys that would come over there from Europe to Okinawa...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: (Unintelligible)...these people ain't civilized! I said, "You just now finding that out?!"

Ed Metzler: Yep.

Mr. Vojtek: But what...what I'm trying to tell you is that...the Tin Can Sailor never got no credit at all.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Mr. Vojtek: 'Cause we were...switched around so much with the battleships; aircraft carriers; the cruisers...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...we escorted them. Whenever they had a battle fixing to come up, well, they'd detach us and put us with a carrier.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: When they get through with us, they'd detach us to somewhere else.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. You know I've heard...let me ask you something, Henry. I've heard from...I...I was talking to a guy that was on a battleship...

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ...the other day, and he said, "You know, those...those destroyers," he said, "you know, they delivered mail, you know, they...you know, the delivered flyer...pilots that they'd picked up to us, so we could put them in the hospital on...onboard," he says, "those...those destroyers did everything," but he says, "you know what?" He says, "They always asked for payment." And I said,

“What do you mean payment?” And he said, “Well, they would always want things like ice cream and...,”...

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ..., “and stuff like that, so we would give them ice cream.” Did...did you guys ever...(laughter)?

Mr. Vojtek: No, we...see, we didn’t have no frigeration; we had enough frigeration to...to carry meats or...our own immediate supplies and that’s it. We had a small frigerator on there but...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, so did any of the...any of the big capital ships ever give you guys any ice cream?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah, when we’d pick up a flyer and we’d...they automatically give us five gallons of ice cream.

Ed Metzler: Five gallons per flyer.

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: That’s not much ice cream!

Mr. Vojtek: No, well, that was a lot to us; I mean, we didn’t have nothing like that.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: I mean...that’s what...that the carriers, I mean...whenever you carry...picked up a carrier pilot and...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and you...you shipped him back to the carrier...well, in a Boatswain’s chair...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Vojtek: ...at sea...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and then they'd send us five gallons of ice cream.

Ed Metzler: The ice cream would come back huh? (Laughter)

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah. Well, I...I don't...well that's what they...that was the going price of a flyer...a pilot...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...was a five gallon...

Ed Metzler: What was the...what was the food like onboard a Tin Can?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, as long as where we could get to where we could get supplies it was alright, but when you'd run six months...and your three month supply was done gone!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, then it got kind of thin, didn't it?

Mr. Vojtek: It got thin; real thin. Well, like I was going to tell you, we tied up alongside the [USS] Cascade, a destroyer tender, and we could go over there and eat all the ice cream you wanted. And I bought a quart of ice cream and took two bites of it and shoved it away; I couldn't eat no more!

Ed Metzler: To...it was just too rich for you?

Mr. Vojtek: No, our stomach had shrunk; the whole crew was that way. We had to gradually get back to the point where we could eat three meals a days.

Ed Metzler: Right, right.

Mr. Vojtek: We were only eating one meal a day.

Ed Metzler: Well, you must have lost a lot of weight.

Mr. Vojtek: Yes, we did. I mean...but it didn't take us long to get it back; I mean...we wasn't completely without anything. Now something else: we...if...if you wasn't a good thief you couldn't go on a store party with them. You know when you ashore to...to get our supplies...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...and if you wasn't a good thief, they wouldn't let you go.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) Oh, is that right?! So you guys had been known to steal stuff?

Mr. Vojtek: We stole more stuff than we got issued to us!

Ed Metzler: Is that right?! Shame on you boys!

Mr. Vojtek: Shoot! They had some frozen ice, uh milk in five gallon cans.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: We stole ten cans...ten five gallon cans of it and we had to give it to everybody aboard ship because after it thawed out, it wasn't no good!
(laughter)

Ed Metzler: Oh my gosh!

Mr. Vojtek: I mean...and food, we had enough. Well, like I said, if you wasn't a good thief they wouldn't let you go in the store party...

Ed Metzler: My gosh!

Mr. Vojtek: ...and ten guys over there to get the supplies...stores...and they'd just...it was no matter who...what...well, each division sent in two men out of the division. The...our black gang, the mechan...the machinists; the deck gang; electronics and...

Ed Metzler: Well whatever happened to the Murray, do you know?

Mr. Vojtek: She was de...decommissioned in 1965.

Ed Metzler: So she survived the...the rest of the war...after you got off of it?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, they had her deco...well, it was a DDE after the war.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Vojtek: Made a missile ship out of it...

Ed Metzler: That's right! You were telling me that the other day!

Mr. Vojtek: ...missile ship out of it.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: That's what the "E" is for.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: DEDE [s/b DDE]. But we had...well, I was on it for eighteen months, so...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...but the Tin Can Sailor has got a *bad* reputation in the Navy.

Ed Metzler: Well did the...did the Murray ever have any ship reunions after the war?

Mr. Vojtek: Oh yeah!

Ed Metzler: Did you go to them?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, this...this disc that I'm sending you is the reunion we had there in Washington D.C. Our ship is in the Navy Museum there.

Ed Metzler: Oh that's right!

Mr. Vojtek: Didn't I tell you that? I thought...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, you did, you did; I'm remembering it.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, that's...that's why I'm going to send this disc...

Ed Metzler: That's right!

Mr. Vojtek: ...mail it up there and...it's about the Murray.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: There's a big picture of me with my big gut in there! (laughter)

Ed Metzler: Your big gut?!

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, there's only eight of us left...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...out of three hundred. I think I told you that.

Ed Metzler: You did, you did!

Mr. Vojtek: And that's...that's why I say this Warrant Officer...he'd done been in the Navy for twenty years. He had gold stripes; he had four gold stripes, and he said, "I've...never have seen such...I know Tin Can Sailors; they're crazy as hell!" He says that's about the best way he could put it!

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) Well, what if...

Mr. Vojtek: But you know...

Ed Metzler: Go ahead.

Mr. Vojtek: ...there you learned to...how to approach an officer and how to get away at...get...get by...and by cussing them out. He said, "If you say sir behind it, there isn't a damned thing he can do about it!" (Laughter)

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: And...but there was a lot of things that happened that...the officers got to the point where they were just part of the crew, I mean they...

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Vojtek: ...hey, you know, they...they had to be!

Ed Metzler: Yeah and you...

Mr. Vojtek: Three hundred men and you got about ten officers, and they could swamp them real quick!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: But like I said, we...the...the Tin Can Sailor never got no recognitions out of the none of the Navy other than...than the one you saw where they had...they were the fifth...most...that won the war in World War II.

Ed Metzler: Right, right. Well, what else can we talk about, Henry, while I've got you live here?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, we...

Ed Metzler: Have we pretty well covered it?

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I...I don't...I don't under...I...I've pretty well covered that but what I don't understand about the VA now. See, they can't take me off the...they can't deny me privileges going to the hospital; I got Service-Connected...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: ...ten percent Service-Connected; I can go to any hospital; they have to take me...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's cor...

Mr. Vojtek: ...and they have to come pick me up.

Ed Metzler: Well, that's good!

Mr. Vojtek: I said, "Well I...I thank God I got that, so I don't have to worry about insurance!"

Ed Metzler: Right, absolutely!

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I met people here...that was Battle of the Bulge; friends of mine that was in the Battle of the Bulge and he got his feet frozen...and I was worried about my insurance and he told me, he says, "Henry, don't worry about your insurance; you're covered by the VA."

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Vojtek: He says they'll even come out and bury you.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, well I tell you what, that's the least we can do for you guys for what you did for us! So maybe I'll just take this opportunity and thank you for what you did; I don't think we do that enough. So we just...I just...the younger generations of us, we do appreciate it!

Mr. Vojtek: Well it...I...I was in HEB the other day and a guy come over there and he shook my hand; I says, "What's this for?" He says, "Thank you for what you did."

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's the way we all feel; we just don't say it enough...that's all.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, it's such few of us left.

Ed Metzler: That's right!

Mr. Vojtek: Sixteen hundred of us die every day.

Ed Metzler: That's right!

Mr. Vojtek: We're in our eighties.

Ed Metzler: Uh yeah!

Mr. Vojtek: And that...that pretty well tells a story, too, about a...well, we got our picture of the Murray in the Navy Museum there now.

Ed Metzler: Well, I'm anxious to see that disc; you be sure and send it to me.

Mr. Vojtek: Well, I'm going...I'm going to send it tomorrow; I'm going to go to...

Ed Metzler: Okay, I...that's right; I gave you my address, right?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah, I'm going to send it right to the...to the...

Ed Metzler: You'll send it to the Museum?

Mr. Vojtek: Yeah. I want them to have it so they can show it on...in their movie there.

Ed Metzler: Well, I...I...you just...need to get it here, so you're going to send that, huh?

Mr. Vojtek: I'm going to send it, but I wanted to have it there because it...my son made it.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Vojtek: For four days...my son, I didn't have nothing to do with him for...he was fifty-one years old when we went to...to Washington D.C. in 2007, but he...

(end of tape 2, side A)

(end of interview)

FINAL copy
CD – #OH02458a,b – Mr. Henry Frank Vojtek
Transcribed by: K. Matras
Houston, TX
December 2, 2016