

## Louie Sullivan Oral History Interview

LARRY RABALAIS: This is Larry Rabalais. This is September the 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009. I'm interviewing Mr. Louie Sullivan. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas. 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. And with that statement I'll let you go ahead and talk. And I think it picks up pretty well right here. (inaudible) Go ahead, Mr. Sullivan.

LOUIE SULLIVAN: I was born in Belton, South Carolina on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March, 1922. And at the age of five we moved to Texas. That was my father's home grounds and working at a textile mill in McKinney. I went to grade school there and then on into high school.

LR: Did you have brothers and sisters?

LS: Yeah. I was the oldest living of our family. Our sister died at birth. Then I came along and I have a -- had a brother Roy Howard, and then following him was Mary. And following that was Mildred and then along came Bobby. Bobby died at an early age in McKinney.

LR: What kind of work did your father do?

LS: Textile mill. He was what's called a loom fixer.

LR: Near what town was that?

LS: That was in McKinney.

LR: Oh, near McKinney.

LS: Yeah. Mm-hmm. And (clears throat) he had learned his trade in South Carolina and that was when a lot of people were looking for more work in his age group and all and my grandfather had died prior to that. I never did see him and of course --

LR: So you went to school in McKinney?

LS: Yeah. Went to school at South Ward in McKinney, Texas and then into high school. I stayed for going long -- our family's getting a little bigger, I say, I mentioned Mildred, my sister and then Bobby and then after Bobby's death came Dan and Norman and then Barbara.

LR: A large family then.

LS: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

LR: Well, the Depression had an impact on a lot of people your age, you know, at that time and I'm sure it did to y'all. So were you all able to survive okay during that part of the Depression? It's a little tougher, I'm sure.

LS: Yeah. We were like a lot of people. We lived on the Mill Village, there in McKinney. As the old saying go, we lived on the back row, last row of houses and that's where I started school and we grew up there for a while and then as times improved, why we moved around a couple places, you know, still there in town.

LR: Where were you when Pearl Harbor occurred? Were you out of high school yet?

LS: Oh yeah. By the time Pearl Harbor came along I was married. My wife Melba was expecting our son and he was born in the following March. And --

LR: When you heard about Pearl Harbor, what did you think about it? Did it make you angry? Or did you -- a lot of people didn't really understand where Pearl Harbor was. They vaguely knew it was somewhere out in the Pacific. Do you have any feelings or remember anything like that?

LS: Well, at that time and growing up and hearing all the news, of course, we started out with one of the crystal radios, you know and in time we come by the old Crosby radio table top and then we had the local weekly paper in McKinney and so we were up on all the news coming in as you'd expect -- very much aware and going through school about what was happening overseas and waited, I don't

know, I guess I felt like in that early stage that somewhere down the line we were going to war. It just, you know, things were just going from bad to worse.

LR: Well, the draft was put into effect about, a little before that and did you have to register for the draft? And the fact that you were married, did that affect your draft-ability?

LS: Yes it did. In fact, when that draft opened up I was there assigned. (laughs) Getting all listed -- signed up for that and I ended with a, let's see, a first-class, no, I take it back. It was third class. I had an exemption with our son.

LR: A 3-A, I'll bet.

LS: A 3-A, uh-huh. And that, you know, didn't look like it was too far away to see it coming on, but it was a spell.

LR: So you kept working there in that area?

LS: Yes, uh-huh.

LR: In the area? Uh-huh.

LS: Continued working there. And as we went along we kept, you know, moving up the ladder just a little bit and as the war seemed to be getting a little worse. In the meantime I'd gone to work with civil service and (clears throat) in the machine shop, working out at Love Field and

with the (inaudible) ferry in command and that's where a lot of the aircraft going to the west was ferried through there.

LR: Military? Military aircraft?

LS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm. Across the way from us was the -- P-38, construction of the P-38.

LR: Mm-hmm. The twin tail P-38. Mm-hmm.

LS: They had a lot of activity. That was the major airport in north Texas at that time. (clears throat) And here I was going to work as a civilian working for the government and the Air Force was in command and at the same time they -- this was a location for all the dental work for the soldiers that needed it, coming through there you know and they came through in quite a number.

LR: The dental work?

LS: Dental work.

LR: At Love Field?

LS: At Love Field.

LR: That's interesting.

LS: And the other part of that was here I come in every morning, reporting on the job and I'm meeting these guys. We're all the same age, (laughs) you know, and some of them don't have any teeth at all and all this, but they're

there for a while and -- and things keep getting worse, you know. They tested aircraft out there and I'd finished mechanics school down in San Antonio at Kelly Air Force Base down there. And then coming back, went right into the machine shop and -- our foreman in charge was an older man. Of course, he had to be about 50. (laughs) Of age at that time, you know. And he wouldn't give us any work.

And he just called us out right. Said, "All right, you're down 90-day wonders, try this," and he would, he'd bring out a job which was a simple job, okay and we'd been trying on [lathes?] milling machine, drill press, metal saws and that sort of stuff. Well, so we got together, then my buddy got out of school ahead of time -- we finished the head of the class by a week or so and they sent us back to Love Field from San [Antone?], you know.

So we were trying to do the best and I told Joe, I said, "Hey, let's see what we can do with these dividing heads on the mill," that's what interested me more than anything else. We come in, you set up there and you could do 360s or whatever, divide them up, trying or so on and all this

and make different things, you know and so we played around on that and --

LR: So being in the machine shop working for the Air Force in a way, sort of delayed you being drafted probably. Do you think that is true?

LS: Yeah, see, I still had that 3-A and it began to make me feel a little strange, seeing, meeting guys my own age, you know.

LR: Who were already going?

LS: Oh, yeah.

LR: Well, when did you get drafted then?

LS: I joined the Navy. We were living in a suburb of Dallas at the time and we'd gone to McKinney to be with her folks. My folks had moved off for the time being and we had these little boats coming down and try and find out how far down the line I was. So I told my wife, I said, "I'm going up to the office and check out," and so I asked the girl what my number'd line? How far away? She said, this was in June, I believe it was.

LR: Of '42.

LS: Yeah. Somewhere along there. But anyhow -- and so she told me, "It'll be 30 days or maybe or so," and I said, "Well, can't you get me my orders now?" (laughs) and she

said, "No," the manager was out and I said, "Can't you do things for him?" I said, "Can't you fix this up for me?" because I was looking at basically about 30 days and I was in a position then and knew what I had to do and I said, "Just give me my papers. You make them out," and so I took them home and told the wife I had them and the big thing about it, at this point, on Pearl Harbor Day, in fact on a Saturday before, my brother Roy had been to Dallas and he had volunteered to the Navy and he came home and this, the family didn't know anything about it. He was two and a half years younger and so he came --

LR: He must have been pretty young then.

LS: Yeah.

LR: To join the Navy.

LS: See, he was under 18. Seemed like 18 was the -- I believe that's right. Yeah. And had to get Dad to sign it. And so we walked in and he just said, "Dad, I've joined the Navy," he said, "That's what you want?" he said, "Yep. But I need you to sign," he said, "Well, if that's what you want, I'll sign for it," and then Sunday morning, you know, everything hit the fan. There was Pearl Harbor Day and of course, as a family we were together and Dad said, "Well son, you don't have to go because you haven't turned



any papers in," and said, "You're not bound to go in, unless you just want to," he said, "Dad, I gave my word," and he said, "I want to go," and so that, you know, this was quite a bit of excitement, into boot camp in San Diego and we were getting cards, you know. There was a lot of penny postcards back then, every so often.

And so it goes onto each other's -- [movie story?] he had dinner with when they, Christmas and all this stuff and then he -- in January, long about the middle of January, no communication. Well, we didn't know how to get a hold of him or anything else and it seemed like it just inched on and inched on and the end, about the middle of February, then we get a card and he simply said, "I got off the ship all right," so that meant with what training he had after Pearl Harbor Day until that point he had been put on a troop ship, not a troop ship but a tanker and then torpedoed. And --

LR: It must have been, it was, was that in the Atlantic or Pacific?

LS: In the Pacific. Yeah.

LR: In the Pacific.

LS: Yeah. And it was some time before we really got to do that.

LR: Was that sort of what influenced you joining the Navy? Was the fact that he had joined the Navy?

LS: No. I had made my mind up by the time I went in.

LR: You probably didn't want to be a ground traveler --

LS: (laughs) No. Well, I wanted to be in the Marines. And so my group rode the train down to, let's see. No, I didn't need to. I knew where to go and I went down to, to go to boot camp. I went ahead and was inducted in and all, you know, went through all that. But going through that they said, "What division?" and so I put down Marines. Now I had, there was eight of us put down the Marines. Well, they separated us from the rest of the boys and we're going to stuff over here and they all in the same building, you know and this goes on till later in the afternoon or after lunch and they call us all together. And here's the same crew. And we're lined up there and they hollered, "Attention," and "Step forward, repeat after me," and -- Pledge of Allegiance and all that, you know. And one of the guys (laughs) with me, he says, "Are we in the Marines now?" and he said, "Son, you in the U.S. Navy."

LR: They sort of snookered you all on that.

LS: Yeah. That, that was -- there I come find out each branch had a quota for the day.

LR: Oh, they were filling quotas.

LS: Yeah. And so they filled up real fast. But that's the best thing that happened to me.

LR: It probably saved your life. (laughs)

LS: Yeah. No doubt.

LR: Early in the war the Marines that went in early to war, huge casualties. Well, where did you go for boot camp then?

LS: San Diego.

LR: All right.

LS: California. And we hit there and that's when I learned we'd just crossed from the Marines and by the time we got up and had breakfast, those poor devils are out there running and (laughs) doing their thing, you know.

LR: How long did your boot camp last about? (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

LS: No. Let's see.

LR: No? [Mader Ronnie?] was short but early on --

LS: It seemed like it --

LR: Thirteen --

LS: I want to say 13 weeks, if I'm not --

LR: That's a pretty good time.

LS: Yeah.

LR: Well, did you all train actually with rifles at all, as far as your training?

LS: Oh yeah. We went out on the firing range finally after handling it so many times, you know.

LR: A lot of guys, a lot of Navy people did not ever really have any rifle training so I'm surprised at that.

LS: Well, see at that time they didn't know where each one of us was going to go. And of course, you had the LSTs and all of that, see, and so --

LR: So after boot camp did you get assigned to a special school?

LS: Yeah. I went to basic engineer in Gulfport, Mississippi. And the wife and daughter was able to come down and I could see them on weekends.

LR: Well, that's good.

LS: And sometime during the week, but I mean, I'd get off base on the weekends.

LR: This is quite a change in living for you. What did you think of the food and stuff like that? Was it okay to you?

LS: It was okay with me. I never objected to the food and in fact a lot of stuff in the -- most of the outfit that I was with came down from New England area up there and of course, they were eating some things that hadn't (laughter) had before. (laughs)

LR: Well, what about the physical part of boot camp? Now you were a tough old Texas country boy, sort of and so was it physically okay for you?

LS: Yeah. I went through it just fine. The only problem I had and it surprised a lot of people -- I couldn't swim.

LR: Oh-oh. Well, you weren't the only one. There's a lot of Navy guys couldn't swim. Did they make you learn?

LS: Yes. In the barracks we had two different companies working together and information orders and stuff and -- they called both groups together and we setting out in the dark, you know, shooting the breeze and guy's asking questions and first lieutenant (inaudible). So that night they come out and say, "Well boys, tomorrow put your swim trunks on," said, "We're going swimming and there will be a test," they said, "Anyone here that cannot swim, hold you hand up," and when the horse laugh died --

LR: So you're holding your hand up.

LS: (laughs) When the horse laughs died I looked around and I said, "Okay, we'll see you tomorrow," and the next morning both outfits, we're out there down at the pool, inside pool and this guy's standing up a little higher and he said, "All right, come up and all the non-swimmers go down to the shallow end. Swimmers on the other end," so I go. Just happened to be in front. And I turned down and I soon realized that I was hearing the pitter patter of bare feet and I looked back and so help me, anywhere from 20 to 30 guys were following me down to the shallow end.

LR: So at first you thought you would be one of the only ones and as it turned out there were quite a few who weren't comfortable with (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

LS: Yeah. I had my doubts about being the only one and I figured out there somewhere somebody's (laughter) going to have to face up to this, see.

LR: Yeah, (inaudible).

LS: But anyhow, I just stopped. I turned around and I said, "Hey, guys, all swimmers on the other end," and you never heard so many excuses. You know, I hadn't swim in so many years, I said, "Okay," yeah and I went through it and I went the full time and I touched bottom. You had to swim 50 yards and I knew I was in the shallow, but I was just -

- petered out, you know. And of course, what we did there, you know, up on a platform and you shove off, holding your jacket and you go under.

LR: Oh, you wore life jackets?

LS: Not then. That was another experience. But we went feet first, you know. And to the bottom and then you sprang up, angled to the top and started your dog paddle, whatever you're to do. So I come up. Made that all right. And swim across the pool and down to the other end and I was in shallow water and I knew it and I touched bottom and I was the last one in the pool, really. So this lifeguard said, "Hey," I told him, I said, "I'm going to try it one more time," and of course, if I failed that I couldn't go home on liberty. This was the last thing and we just waiting to get that furlough home. And I said, "I want to try again," and he said, "Well, you're going to have to hurry," because the pool was empty then, you know. Got up there and went through the same routine, came around and I was in shallow water and I knew it, but I was still doing my dog paddle, you know. Now he said, "Come on," said, "Just don't touch bottom," and he took me to the end of the pool and had me swim across. He said, "See there?" he said, "You've got to relax," (laughs)

LR: Okay, so you've got to mechanical, basic engineer school down there and where did you get assigned after that? To a ship?

LS: I went to basic engineering and to diesel school, one school into another one. And then we were shipped out to San Diego.

LR: Back to San Diego, going up there.

LS: Yeah. Mm-hmm. And -- let's see. Yeah. We went back to there and then we -- we got our orders, or were sent rather, up to TI, Treasure Island.

LR: Where's that?

LS: In --

LR: Washington?

LS: No, in --

LR: California?

LS: San Francisco.

LR: San Francisco area.

LS: That was the jumping off place for recruits of all kind. And we were going out as replacements. (clears throat) They were pulling guys out for the Seabees and different things and, and of course, they had the Marines up there, too, going through that thing. And we put aboard a ship, a steamer. (clears throat)



LR: A transport?

LS: Transport. I thought I would never forget the name of that ship, but anyhow, and we spent five days, if I recall right, from there to Hawaii. That was a long way around - - (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

LR: How was the weather on the (inaudible)?

LS: Well, we had, we had fair weather and we got --

LR: Now you had never been on a big ship before, this was your first time.

LS: No, no.

LR: Did you get seasick?

LS: Yes, sir. (laughter) I did. I got that way and our quarters was, you couldn't have got any further down.

LR: Oh, way down in the bottom.

LS: Way down in the bottom of that thing. And we had 400 Naval replacements. They were Marine replacements, too, I'm sure on that [bus?]. We had 400 stewards, all black people. We were down below. The stewards were, slept in the bow. And we had 400 WAVES.

LR: Hmm. Popular I'll bet they were.

LS: Uh-huh. On the top. Top level. The Marines were standing guard, mostly around the WAVES. (laughter) At

least that's what they said. Okay. (overlapping) And the Army, the Army was in command of the transport.

LR: Oh, that's interesting.

LS: And that was a mixed up crew. (laughs)

LR: Yeah it was. Well, you didn't eat a whole lot I guess because you didn't feel like eating a whole lot?

LS: Well, I ate and sort of been forewarned, you know, and tried to stay with the vegetables and the fruit and then a good thing happened to me. Somewhere along the line I got duty with the cooks and it didn't make me mad at all.

(laughs) And I was around all the fruit and stuff and seeing that peeling potatoes, we had a machine do that and handling the food and all and getting it up to them. We wasn't cooking, we just cleaning up and all this and it worked out real good for me.

LR: Well, so in Hawaii, were you trained some more? Or did you get assigned directly to a ship?

LS: We stayed with that ship, pulled out of there and we went more or less directly I guess out to Ulithi Islands and that's where the Japanese had stored their fleets, you know.

LR: This would have been early '43, do you think? Or do you have any idea when that would have been?

LS: No, it would have been in '44.

LR: Oh, '44, okay.

LS: Yeah, I only had 18 months. And that was in '44. So we pulled into there in that narrow passageway is what amazed me, with all that large area out there for ships.

LR: Huge lagoon, but it had a narrow entry.

LS: Yeah.

LR: A lot of ships there?

LS: A lot of ships and scattered out. You didn't see too many of them, but we were (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

LR: Did you get to go ashore there?

LS: No. All you could see, a spot or two you could see ground and palm trees and otherwise they just -- breakwater. Forty mile radius, if I'm correct on that. Then they took us out of there and moved us over to, to the [by far to say?] --

LR: Well, you were in Ulithi, but where did you go from there?

LS: (laughs) Oh, my mind is stuck here for a second.

LR: Guam or?

LS: No, no. Enewetak.

LR: Enewetak, okay.

LS: Went into Enewetak and that's where we begin, we were distributed out from that point.

LR: To whatever ship needed you.

LS: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

LR: And what were you assigned to?

LS: My call came on this destroyer. It took two of us. And -  
- when I went aboard this --

LR: Transport?

LS: Yeah, I say when I went aboard this destroyer -- I was a  
fireman first class. You know, yeah.

LR: What was the name of the destroyer?

LS: Destroyer is the S.S. Franks DD554.

LR: Franks?

LS: Uh-huh, Franks. And so we would go aboard. We were  
striking for, striking for first class what it was. And  
we go into see the chief engineer and he talked to us and  
he said, "Well guys, I've got to tell you," he said, "I  
don't." Now let me get it straight. I was a machinist  
mate striker. Which was down in engineering, the port.  
Which meant run into little small boats, from ship-to-ship  
and all that sort of stuff and engine room duty and all  
that. And he said, "I've got a problem," he said, "I need  
a couple guys down in the fire room," and I said, "That's  
all right with me," and so we went down in the fire room  
and he said, he said, "Now what --" this is the other

kicker in the whole situation was that the ship, the Franks was going back for repairs.

LR: Back to the US?

LS: Yeah. Now we had just got out there. But it had been rammed by the USS *New Jersey* and this had resulted in the death of the skipper.

LR: Oh really, that hard?

LS: Yeah. And -- a few other guys were banged up a little bit. You can imagine, depending on where they were at the time. And -- so he said, "We're going back to the States," well, you know, that was all right with us.

LR: So they must have done some temporary repairs on it?

LS: Oh, yeah. They said what happened, the Franks got orders to cut a certain degree and they were underway and then out of nowhere on this *New Jersey* and rammed it. And --  
(laughs)

LR: It's amazing you didn't sink (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) a very, very large (inaudible) versus --

LS: Yeah and where it hit apparently was in a well-structured part of the ship there, on the port side. And --

LR: Captain happened to be there and it killed him.

LS: The captain was on duty and --

LR: Can you describe the Franks a little bit? What kind of weapons did you all have? A single five-inch on each turret? Or double?

LS: We had single. We had --

LR: Was that Fletcher class or?

LS: Fletcher, yeah.

LR: It was a Fletcher class.

LS: Fletcher class.

LR: Did you have battle stations assigned to you?

LS: Yeah. Of course, everybody was assigned to battle stations. I ended up on port side as a loader.

LR: On the twenties or (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

LS: On the 20, 20 millimeters.

LR: All right. I was just curious. Okay, so now you're all heading back now to the States or?

LS: Well, just in a few days, a couple of days. And they announced it, said, "Hey guys, we're going home," (laughs) and that ship had been out there for 18 months. They had come up all the way from the South Pacific --

LR: Fought in different battles, yeah.

LS: Now another thing, and going to all this stuff, I'll have you all mixed up here, but -- since Roy had gone ahead of me by Thanksgiving 1943, I had moved to Dallas and doing

this work I was telling you about, with Silver Service.

And then a boyhood friend that I hadn't seen in five years was working for Lockheed and the word got around, you know how so and so is here and there and he got my phone number and called up and so we got together for, I don't know, a couple of weeks, something like that off and on.

LR: This is back when you were at Love Field.

LS: Yeah, at Love Field. And then he called up on Thanksgiving and I had some extra time off. He said, "Hey, let's go to San Antone," that's where my folks had ended up, at a textile meet, out on the guy's ranch. And -- so (clears throat) put me in a spot, but I got a hold of people (laughs) and got okayed and he had a '34 Ford and I didn't have any transportation and he was going down in the same general area and -- to see his wife's folks, you know. And so he said, "That would work out fine and we'll take you by and then we'll pick you up coming back," and so we got down there and of course, mine was [two on?] Roy and we were sharing (inaudible) as possible, but you know, that was on my mind all the time and then we sit down for Thanksgiving dinner and we, you know, talked things out, hoping for the best. After that I got, we got

back home and I got a call and Dad said Roy was -- ship was blown up, the Japanese torpedo and --

LR: But he'd gotten off the ship all right.

LS: No. The other one was a tanker, see. I left out part of the story. And off of that, after we finally heard from him, they'd got off the ship, he went to, to Hawaii and trained to be a parachute rigger and they had to pack their own chutes to graduate and jump. And he come in telling that story and if you lost your cord, ripcord you had to buy a case of beer. (laughs) He said, "I kept mine," (laughs) so -- and he got leave home, I saw him leave home and another part of that story is, would be -- I was on the other side opposite from Love Field. I guess that would have been the east side. And had to ride the bus all the way. He had to ride the bus back, he was going back to the ship, so we rode together into the bus station and I had to change buses there and we stood out front and talked a little bit and shook hands and we always called each other "Bud," you know and we looked at each other in the eye and he said, "Bud, I'll never see you again," and I --

LR: He said that or did you say --



LS: He, no, he said that. He said, "I'll never see you again," I said, "Hey, you know, normal thing, don't --" he said, "Believe me, I'll never see you again," and so we went our way and eventually they got him in the Gilbert Islands. That's where it was and --

LR: He was on a tanker or?

LS: No, he --

LR: He was a parachute rigger?

LS: Parachute rigger on the USS *Liscome Bay*.

LR: Oh, *Liscome Bay*, oh yeah. Mm-hmm.

LS: A light aircraft carrier.

LR: Light aircraft carrier.

LS: And so everywhere I go I'm asking experienced people, you know, about this battle and that battle and --

LR: [Somora?] Straits.

LS: Yeah. And so I get aboard this and asking my questions and they said, "Yeah, we were there," I said, "What?" he said, "We were patrolling for the ship, aircraft carriers to *Liscome Bay*, in that area," and they got a call to go out to sea. They had spotted a light further out from the islands. Which is an old Japanese trick, really. And he said, "So we went out there," and said, "About the time we got to that location," he said, "Boom!" and naturally

everybody looked back and he said, I forget, there's three or four torpedoes hit it. She went down in 15 minutes.

LR: Oh, he was sunk by torpedoes?

LS: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

LR: Okay. I didn't realize that. I thought he was part of the Battle of Somora Straits where he was shelled by the Japanese.

LS: Well now, it probably was.

LR: But they also launched torpedoes, too, yes, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

LS: Well, yeah, yeah. Mm-hmm.

LR: All right. They caught our little, our little escort carriers by surprise, if I'm not mistaken.

LS: Well, according to these guys, yeah, this was, turned out to be it was a total surprise. Because they'd been dropping ash cans, you know, off the back of the ship and at any sign of, you know, any signal that came off, they were pretty well dropping a few of them and (clears throat) they said as soon as that happened they started back to their location, see what they could do, pick up survivors or whatever and then after coming down here, I say here, after coming, going to Franklin -- went down to the bookstore to pick up some books and whatever. We were

sitting out there at camp creek and didn't know anybody, you know, and tried to keep our minds busy. And it looked like it just jumped off the wall. *Battle Over the Gilberts*, paperback. And I grabbed that thing first thing and chapter 13 on *Liscome Bay* and the writer had interviewed the captain of that submarine.

LR: Oh, so it was a submarine that had sunk it. Okay. So I was wrong.

LS: Well, that -- and then he tells the whole story of that war business coming on up in *Gilberts* also and --

LR: So your friend was lost on the *Liscome*.

LS: No. My brother.

LR: Oh, your brother was.

LS: My brother Roy. See. I was always asking about the *Liscome Bay* and when I said *Liscome Bay* and the *Gilberts*, why these guys sounded off, "Yeah, we were there," now they'd been out there for 18 months. And some of them longer than that. They'd got in trouble but --

LR: Now this is some of the men that were on the *Franks* were telling you stories.

LS: Yeah, uh-huh.

LR: Okay. So now (clears throat) you're on the Franks now.  
Did you all head back to the U.S.? Or go directly  
somewheres else?

LS: Oh, well, I'm sorry, I messed up.

LR: Getting back to that again.

LS: Okay, let's go back. After getting aboard and then after  
we're going back, back to the States we go. And pulled in  
for repairs and then --

LR: San Francisco? (inaudible) Island or somewhere else?

LS: No, Puget Sound.

LR: Puget Sound? Up in Washington.

LS: Right. And from there we drew our vacation stuff, you  
know and went home and --

LR: Got some leave, you got home.

LS: Yeah. Let's see, I got three weeks, I believe it was.  
And -- so that helped out quite a bit. (laughs)

LR: You got to see your boy, your son or daughter or?

LS: My son, uh-huh.

LR: Son that you had.

LS: That was something else.

LR: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

LS: So we had come back, see, and after returning to the ship -- the chief called us up and he said, "Well, I told you boys, put you down below," maybe I said that a while ago.

LR: Yeah, firemen.

LS: Okay, yeah. And so then we're out, we're going out, see and we got out so far and then they was telling the story around -- the word was we were off Wake Island and I begin to wonder about that. In general I knew where Wake Island was, from (inaudible). And I was wondering about this and they was talking, yeah. So we end up somewhere out here and close to it and then the word come out from General Halsey.

LR: No, Admiral Halsey.

LS: Admiral Halsey, better name, (laughs) okay. On the radio. Now this was [past tour?] said, "The SS *Franks DD554*, where in the hell are you?"

LR: Oh, so they'd lost touch with you guys?

LS: You see, after the skipper was killed --

LR: The exec took over or?

LS: Yeah. Down the channel, you know. And we had come back to the States. In the meantime, before we shipped out we got a new skipper. He was a submarine skipper, okay, and we all knew this and every time we come into dock at a

port, working down in that fire room, I'd do this like for instance, (clears throat) if I had (inaudible) in the burners, or had two burners cut in and out, right on 625 degrees pressure or pound pressure, whatever, which it cuts you into if you had a little hole in the deal, you know, it's sorted out so that you cut, simply cut you in two. And you did more to build (inaudible) because skipper get on you. You know, so we pull into the dock and we knew every time that this guy was at the wheel.

He'd come into a dock and turn that silly thing sideways and move up and he'd come back down anchored, right there, tied up, throw the ropes over and all this. Some of them others come in. Oh man, it was about -- (laughs) of course, they come in, cut the power, shutting everything off and then they throw it four-force reverse to come back out and that steam start pulling them down, you didn't want that pressure (inaudible) you're cutting your burners in again.

LR: So you're saying a submarine, the guy that used to submarine skipper was actually pretty snappy, pretty good about (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

LS: He was, man he was a --

LR: Yeah, what would he have been? A lieutenant commander or commander?

LS: Yeah, I think so, uh-huh, yeah.

LR: All right. So I'm getting a little lost as to where you're at now. You're heading back out after you all got repaired and you're heading where?

LS: We're going to --

LR: Wake Island is what you said. So Nimitz says, "Where in the heck are you guys at?"

LS: Yeah. Now first of all we went back to Hawaii and then from there -- in the meantime we go out on an operation with a fleet and so we go south of Hawaii for operations out there and --

LR: Way over here.

LS: Yeah. So go south and by this time I've adjusted to what the routine is, you know. So that's no problem. And we get out there and at that time we have to -- some swells, you know, these monsters, we'd been out there, just see, and then front end would come up, you know. And we had a lot of wind that day and long about dusk the ship just jumped forth (inaudible) -- we're doing about 10 knots, 10 knots, something like that, with these group we was with.

LR: Then all of the sudden they speeded up.

LS: Yeah, I mean they went full speed ahead and I happened to be off duty, sitting on the fantail back there and -- and the seas were so rough. What's happening? And by word of mouth it finally got to us. Out there somewhere is an LST. They have a man with appendicitis. They don't have a doctor, but we have one onboard.

LR: Oh, you all did have a doctor on board.

LS: Yeah. And I'm thinking, well, that's all right, but we run into the deep swells now and climbing on up, you know, and all this and then all the rough, as it got smaller waves but still rough and we're shooting across there and it gets dark.

LR: It's just you guys or were you with another (inaudible) or another (inaudible) (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

LS: Just our ship. We was --

LR: Now was this the one that you all were near Wake?

LS: No. We're still down here. This is port -- yeah, this is before we take off from there. So -- like I say, I'm wondering how in the world we're going to do something, whatever with this guy, you know. And believe me, we got out there somewhere around midnight and about 20 minutes, 15, 20 minutes before we got there, that big ocean in that area just --



LR: It was that calm.

LS: Flat (inaudible) -- you never saw a pond any calmer.

Clouds overhead, begin to break up and the moon, able to get to and just you know, how you bounce off the --

LR: So you all were able to transfer this --

LS: We pulled up in there and -- captain same way, you know, just pull up alongside that LST. He was in a whale boat and they got him aboard and the minute that got him aboard it was, [SFX] and we were gone. That would have been the ideal pick off of two ships by a submarine.

LR: If there had been a Jap sub around.

LS: Mm-hmm.

LR: Okay, but I'm interested in this order from Admiral --

LS: Halsey?

LR: Halsey, as to (inaudible) lost touch as to where you guys were.

LS: Evidently there was a foul up in communications. The word aboard ship was that our skipper knew where in the hell he was. (laughs)

LR: What were you all doing in the area of Wake Island?

LS: We don't know. We never did find out.

LR: Find out, okay, but so --

LS: But we knew we had orders to go, yeah, to Japan. That was the general destination.

LR: Towards Japan.

LS: Yeah. Because we was moving in on VJ Day. See?

LR: So this would have been in 1945 this is happening.

LS: Yeah. Mm-hmm. This is prior to --

LR: All right. So from Wake Island area, where did you all go from there?

LS: Well, that's where we went. We headed for Japan proper. You know. Yeah.

LR: Or towards Japan.

LS: Yeah, towards. We had to get with the fleet out there and get in the deal.

LR: Well, it was, VJ had already happened?

LS: No. Uh-uh. Everything was still in process at this time and so we come in and take our place and we do, put on patrol, of blowing up --

LR: Mines?

LS: Mines, yeah. And the problems they had to (inaudible) mine that floated, you know. And then they had the sensitive mines that were so many feet below surface. And -- which was hard to determine. And (clears throat) so basically we toured around the islands, I'm sure in a

specific ratio or route and blowing up mines all day long. And (clears throat) the guy, by the way, after going to the (clears throat) -- getting back to the States and refurbishing the ship, we originally had a single, I believe the single 20 millimeters and Quad 40s, I mean twin 40s. Then we went to twin 20s and Quad 40s.

LR: Oh boy, increase your aircraft protection a lot.

LS: You're right, uh-huh.

LR: That's what they were after, right, because that was the big danger at that point it was no longer ships, but it was Kamikazes.

LS: Right. Mm-hmm.

LR: Now you all never did encounter any Kamikazes.

LS: Didn't, never, uh-uh.

LR: Not a one. Did you all ever see any Japanese planes at any point?

LS: No, not at this point we didn't.

LR: Did you all ever see any ships that were damaged, looked like they were damaged by air Kamikazes?

LS: Yeah, we saw some in -- at the States in dock.

LR: That were being repaired?

LS: Yeah. Uh-huh. We saw some of that. So we -- I don't know what time we spent there blowing up mines, but to me

the odd thing was that come daylight, the minute (laughs) it broke daylight, those boys on the quads and five inch were laying out (inaudible) and these your fire all and then you'd hear a reaction down below. You know. You'd hear that. And the Quad 40s, man, I'll tell you, I was glad that everything was at the end of the war because there was a bad -- my gun position, it was Quad 40 overhead and it could have been further, probably about like this ceiling here. And we was on the 20s down here. But when those Quad 40s cut loose, man, they made more noise than the five-inch guns to me, you know. Because five-inch was more staggered, different (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

LR: Slower to the fire whereas the 40s boom, boom, boom, like that and when you've got four of them going, well then that's quite a racket I would think.

LS: Oh yeah, yeah.

LR: Uh-huh. Well, we have, we have several examples of the 40s here at the museum. As a matter of fact, I have replicated a lot of the shells. If you'll notice at the PT boat, when you do the combat tours on them, we have a PT boat over there, one of the few remaining real PT boats. It's in a setting like it's in the South Pacific

and it has a 40 on the stern with some clips of 40 millimeter shells that -- now I was interested in -- you probably saw the shells that you were feeding in those clips to the 40s. Did they have colors on the ends of them?

LS: I really don't know because I wasn't around them that much.

LR: Okay, so you were more on the 20. Twenty was a round case. What did you feed it with?

LS: We fed with belts.

LR: Oh, belts, okay, uh-huh. Okay. Well anyway, so I deviate a little bit. Now where were you when the war ended? Were you onboard ship there?

LS: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

LR: Did you all get an announcement? That the --

LS: Well, see by this time we were in the final operation of the thing. We were doing all this stuff out here and then there was a spell as they settled down and started hashing everything out and we pulled in and docked --

LR: In Japan?

LS: In Japan, around in someplace there and I can't recall that name.

LR: Was it Yokohama or?

LS: No, it wasn't a major.

LR: Oh, it wasn't a major (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

LS: It round to one side and, and I remember pulling into that thing, it's cliffs, I mean recent whaling up there and openings and didn't see anybody. (laughs)

LR: Did you all go ashore?

LS: Yeah. I went ashore later. But for a few days we were out there while they were finalizing everything, see. And then when the time came that it was sealed up, then we moved out that particular place. And then, I forget where, we tied up in another place, or we dropped anchor, rather. But while we were setting at that place, like I said, we never saw a soul. We knew there was people up there. But that's -- (laughs) it was just a strange situation, you know, be sitting out there and nobody firing on you or anything else and you knew darn well that all those caves were full of people up there. (laughs)

But anyhow, we get out there and they call for a liberty party and about 20 of us and they said, "Guys, this is the deal. You will not carry a knife or any weapon. You will stay in a group. You will have shore patrol, our own shore patrol with you and don't, you know, don't break

away at any time," (clears throat) number one, they said, and I told them, said, "You're going ashore, Ed, you know, you're gonna see some stuff," but said, "If something should happen, that you get in a confrontation with a Japanese," they said, "Don't hit him, whatever you do," they said, "You slap him because," he said, "There will be other people there probably and if you slap him, this is a dishonor to him," but said, "If you lay one on him, just remember he's as much a man as you are," and so we went aboard with that, shore patrol and into Nagasaki and --

LR: Now Nagasaki had been hit by the second atomic bomb. Was there evidence of that that you saw?

LS: Yeah, yeah.

LR: It was pretty bad looking?

LS: It was bad and stuff, flattened out, and we had a pretty good tour, tour around and -- but so help me, every time -- we'd see a Japanese woman, girl, they stayed back more than anything else. But some of them would come to the front, want to see these Yankees. (laughs) And all that. They were, they were polite. They were courteous and all that, but you look out here and just block after block were laid flat and just some of the better buildings, I

guess, or the way it was hit, and they were living in that situation there.

LR: Did you see people with burns or anything?

LS: No, didn't see any of that. And what I started to say though, some of the guys upfront would run up and holler, "Geisha, geisha," looking for a woman. (laughs) It's just natural. But we didn't get in any trouble. The time we was there, never heard any trouble out of anybody, any way.

LR: Didn't see any Japanese soldiers? While you were walking around.

LS: No. I think they had pretty well put them back into place, back out of the way. So a lot of their own raiders or whatever they called them at that time, you know, and that was tough looking (inaudible). And (clears throat) - - but anyhow, then Nagasaki and then Hiroshima, we did the same thing.

LR: So you saw that. You saw the (inaudible) at Hiroshima.

LS: Mm-hmm.

LR: Did the Navy mention to you guys that you might be in a contaminated area or nuclear or anything like that? You actually were, but that didn't realize how bad that was, to do that.



LS: That's right. That's true. Yeah.

LR: So you did get some exposure to radiation at that time.

LS: Yeah. I'm sure I must have.

LR: Yeah, you're bound to have. That soon after that happened. Hiroshima was, was flattened even more so than Nagasaki, so that was pretty well like --

LS: Yes, it sure was.

LR: Well, you all went back aboard ship and when did you all head back to the States then?

LS: Well, it was some time because we made, I forget -- three or four liberties in Tokyo.

LR: Oh, you went to Tokyo -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

LS: Oh yeah, yeah. Went into Tokyo and on the way into, the first trip on the way in --

LR: Was that by train?

LS: No, this is by -- by LSTs or anything that would haul you, you see. Major -- we had to anchor way out. Went aboard the LST and with this crew that I left the States with, as we departed we picked up what ship they were going to and all this and so we had to go to the end of the line into the harbor there and able to get on shore and all at once traffic just slows down. There's a line of ships behind us as well as in front of us. Guys going on liberty. And

it gets so slow -- what in the world is going on? And LST has this big landing -- what do they call it? A (inaudible) I don't know what they call that thing, but anyhow, (inaudible) but I got up where I could see and there's this smaller LCIG, I believe they called it, that my friend from Georgia that I'd met in the meantime, he lived in the same town that I had an uncle living in at that time, you know. And so I hollered to him first thing getting off. And we go in and the guys with us.

But then they take the guards back and so you're able to walk and go where you want to. (clears throat) So there, my buddy and I, we're walking down and you see white caps all over and my height, I can look over the Japanese mostly, most of them, you know, and I can see these white caps and that gave them a little confidence, too and we were, you know, walking side-by-side and Japanese all around, going both ways. And we were walking along there and we saw, it was like a flea market and -- the Japanese sitting down there and had their trinkets to sell, you know, souvenirs. We stopped and deal with them and one of us talking (inaudible) -- he had some little trinket stuff (inaudible) and I said, "How much?" Five yen. Okay.

Five yen. Five yen. I said, "Okay," and we got our yen before we left ship, you know. And so I gave him a 20 spot.

He said (inaudible) he starts just talking and I said, "Okay, okay," put them back. Five yen? I gave him a 20, he gave me 15. (laughs) Each one. Each one. Buy them one at a time. And so I get up from there and I'm amused by this, you know, and we were walking a little further down, we were going down where the big, for the war ship and all that stuff. I didn't get that far but that direction. And I saw someone touch my arm, you know. And I look around. (clears throat) (inaudible) "Would you like to buy some souvenirs?" (laughs)

LR: In English.

LS: In English. Good. Good English. And I said, "Okay. What college was you going to?" and he laughed he said, "LA."

LR: UCLA, yeah.

LS: UCLA. And so we shot the breeze there a little bit and I bought some stuff off him and -- but this whole thing, you know. (laughs)

LR: You ought to see that. Well, so when you -- did you go back to the Franks, to the States? Or did you get skipped on a different ship?

LS: No, we take the ship back. See, we had it refurbished and all this and we take it back to the States. We go into San Pedro, California. This is for decommissioning, prepping for the moth ball, see.

LR: This would have been early '46?

LS: Yeah, yeah. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Get my dates, yeah. Mm-hmm.

LR: Just approximately, yeah.

LS: Yeah, uh-huh.

LR: And then so were you discharged or released from that port? Or did you (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) somewhere else?

LS: I took a -- I took this missile, or discharge at that. I asked for it. Because you were riding a bus back and forth, across country mostly, or the train and I figured it up, I could make a little money by taking discharge there. I had to -- meantime I picked up a job in -- an unfinished furniture shop, you know. And four or five of us got involved in that, to kill time and make a little money. So I decided, I just asked for a discharge there. And so they paid me cash and I bought my own ticket.

LR: What rank were you when you were discharged?

LS: I was still a fireman first.

LR: Fireman first, okay. All right. So then eventually you made it back to Texas there?

LS: Yeah, I just -- I headed home as soon as I got that check (inaudible) -- (laughs)

LR: You got your check in your pocket, okay, all right. Were you glad to see the family? Were you ready to come home?

LS: Oh man, yeah, you know I was.

LR: Yeah, I'll bet you were.

LS: It was a good reunion.

LR: So all in all, you had a pretty, a pretty reasonable experience without too much danger, other than seasick --

LS: A real [fort?].

LR: A real [fort?] of seasickness and stuff like that.

LS: Yeah, I lived over that all right. But you know, they was -- on that ship with so many guys and down in the hole, I've heard pro and con about it. Further down you can get, the better off you were.

LR: Well, it does rock and roll as such. Yeah.

LS: But on the other hand, you're down there and this thing is loaded up, barracks style. You know, bunk. And guys getting sick. Trashcans here and there and we all filled

them up pretty good. I went for a long time and I got with a headache and you know and then I cut loose pretty good. But then going up to [flax?] to top on every landing, where you turned, there was an ashcan right there. (laughs) And some of them were worse than I was.

LR: Well, Louie, I can't tell you how much the museum appreciates you taking the time and effort to summarize your experiences during World War II. We thank you for sharing that, especially the small details and that's what the, that's what we're looking for. Everybody knows what the big story is. Everybody knows about the big battle, but it's the little details of what guys went through on regular ships, you know, day in and day out, the little things that they saw, like you talked about in Tokyo and all, that's the kind of experiences that the little details that we're looking for. And again, on behalf of the National Museum of the Pacific War, I would like to thank you, Louie Sullivan, for sharing this experience with us. Appreciate it.

END OF AUDIO FILE