

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. George William Croft, Jr.

Date of Interview: May 12, 2010

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Interview in progress.

Dr. Lindley: Hello, one, two, three, four...four, three, two...(phone ringing). Okay, the tape recording is going so let me read the preamble to you and then what we'll do is I'll get you to acknowledge that you have heard what I have said and that...that it's okay with you. Now this is the National Museum of the Pacific War and...operated by the Texas Historical Commission and the Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz Foundation. The purpose of the National Museum of the Pacific War Oral History Project is to collect, preserve and interpret the stories of World War II veterans' home front experiences; the life of Chester W. Nimitz and the old Nimitz Hotel by means of tape recorded and/or videotaped interviews. Audio and video recordings of such interviews become part of the Center for Pacific War Studies, the archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War; the Texas Histor...and the Texas Historical Commission. These recordings will be made available for historical and other academic research by scholars; members of the families of the interviewee and other interested parties. We, the undersigned, have read the above and voluntarily offer the National Museum of the Pacific War full use of the information contained on audio and video recordings and/or written text of these oral history research interviews. In view of the scholarly value

of...this research material, we hereby assign rights, titles and interest pertaining to it to the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Texas Historical Commission. And then if you would indicate your name for us, please.

Mr. Croft: My name is George William Croft.

Dr. Lindley: Okay, and this date is May the 12th, 2010; the interview is taking place at eleven a...a...I mean, 9:00am Pacific Daylight Time. I am Dr. James D. Lindley conducting the interview. Now here's the next part. Tell me your address; I need your address.

Mr. Croft: My address is 15000, 1-5-0-0-0 Meridian Avenue North, Shoreline, Washington; my zip code is 98133.

Dr. Lindley: Hold on just a minute. I'm also having to write that.

Mr. Croft: (Laughter). (Pause), you got it all? (chuckle)

Dr. Lindley: I don't have the zip...if you'll give me the zip.

Mr. Croft: Oh, the zip is 98133-6330 which happens to be the carrier's number (chuckle).

Dr. Lindley: 98...9...

Mr. Croft: 98133...98133-6330.

Dr. Lindley: Got it. And...would you please indicate if you give permission for the "excerpts of my oral history to be used by the Na...the Nimitz Foundation Publication, the Nimitz news, programs, publications and exhibits." If you agree, say yes please.

Mr. Croft: Yes I do.

Dr. Lindley: Okay, very good. Now, if you would...if you will, as we talked about the other day, I would prefer to let you do all the talking; I will listen carefully and if I think a...I can ask a question that will help you to amplify on your story, I will do it. Otherwise, I don't want to interrupt you telling your story. Please, as we start...again, tell us your name; tell us where you were born; maybe a short story about yourself – where you grew up and where you went to high school and then how you came to be in the service of our country and then the story of December the 7th and...and any...the...the continuing story of your experience with the military, and you can go as long as you want; I have plenty of tape...

Mr. Croft: (Laughter).

Dr. Lindley: ...and I...I'll be very...

Mr. Croft: How about your lunchtime? (Laughter) You're...you're eleven o'clock down there (laughter).

Dr. Lindley: Well, that's okay; that's alright. So, if you'd like to go ahead and start...and start off by telling us where you were born, and tell...tell us again your name because this'll be for the people that will transcribe this. In the future we'll get this transcribed and we will send a copy to you. I have to tell you that we are...this is all done by volunteers and it takes awhile for us to get these done...

Mr. Croft: I understand that.

Dr. Lindley: ...a year or so behind at the moment. But go right ahead and...and tell us your name and tell us your story.

Mr. Croft: Okay, I was...my name is George William Croft, actually Jr. My father was...also had the same name. I enlisted in the Navy on the second month, that's February 24th, 1941. What induced me to go into the Navy is my mother and father divorce when I was in my late seventeenth year, and it was either going...living with my father or living with my mother and I decided I would like to take an alternative path and I...asked them to sign me into the Navy. So when I turned eighteen just a few weeks later, in Seattle, Washington where I was born, I was taken down to the Navy receiving station and I signed into the Navy...as I say on the second of...uh, the 24th of February, 1941. I went to boot camp down in San Diego, California. And after I got through with boot camp, we had a...Chief Rad...Radio man...I didn't know what or who a Radio man was at that time. And they had a special room that they put us in, and I didn't realize exactly what this was to be but there was probably about twenty...twenty-five of us went into that room and he explained, "I'm going to sit here and I got a key, and when I push this key along...like a *dah* means is a...is a dash, and a short one...just a *dit* is a...is a...just a dot. And...when I'm going to play this, I want you out there," and he...we all had tablets and uh, pencils, and he said, "I want you to record what I am sending on this key...teleg...Telegraphy key." So he started in...and...and it was just...simple...easy to me, and he would dah, dah, dah, dit, dit, dit, dit, dah, dit, dah (chuckle), and I was just scribbling away. And when we got through we were just dismissed and went back to our receiving quarters, and about two days later I was told I was chosen to go to Aviation Radio School

on North Island out of San Diego. So I went to Radio School there and I was really good at copying code; it just...we learned code and typing at the same time. Dit...dah which is an “A,” and then the little finger went down on “A” and that’s how we learned...to receive. And after the...after school, those that had the highest grades got their first choices. They gave us a list of...of choices for duty stations, and I was about, oh, I’d say in the upper third of the class; straight “A” in the...copying code, but a little bit behind on all the...learning olms law and all the technical parts.

Dr. Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Croft: I was more of an operator, not a technician (chuckle). So, as the choices came, most of the higher picks picked like Pensacola and places in the U.S., and when my turn came, it was Hawaii...*wide open!* so I volunteered to go to the Hawaiian Islands. And being an Aviation Radio School graduate, I was transferred to Commander Patrol Wing Two in Pearl Harbor. And from there I was assigned to the USS McFarland which was an AVD-14...converted old four-stack tin can or destroyer. Because it was a custom at that time...to give twenty-six months sea duty before they assigned them into a squadron. You put your six months at sea and then you went into a squadron. And like I...as I say, the McFarland was under the command of Patrol Wing Two, and what we did was to haul aviation gas to the neighboring islands – Palmyra, Johnson, Wake and the little dots in between...any of them that had patrol...patrol craft is your big...usually PBYS (unintelligible), but did patrol duty. But on the McFarland...before we left port to go on our...first journey,

we had some practice shooting at...the sleeves carried by aircraft, and I had the fifty caliber machine gun aft...was my duty station right up above where the ash cans are...were situated and it was a lot of fun. You go up there; you didn't shoot the plane down...you tried to hit the sleeve, so we did a little bit of that. And then we were issued dog tags which is an interesting story because very, very few people were issued dog tags before...December 7th was...

Dr. Lindley: Why were you issued dog...dog tags then?

Mr. Croft: Because we were going to go to sea and we were going to be gone for quite awhile before we came back, so I think that we were one of the first ones to get dog tags. I'll tell you why later...this is kind of important...further on in my story.

Dr. Lindley: Okay.

Mr. Croft: Anyway, we had the...the dog tags...in fact, I've got a...I sent to the Naval Historical Society and questioned why we had dog tags so early and they sent me a whole sheet back explaining that dog tags were...were not...from the end of World War II to the beginning of World...uh, at the end of World War I...to the beginning of World War II there was no dog tags issued...period! On May the 17th of 1941, the DOD, the Department of Defense, came out and...said all hands would be issued dog tags. So by the time that they had figured out what they wanted to go on and get them out to all the stations...like over to Pearl was probably...late September or...or early October before they were actually coming out and being issued. Mine, all it says on it is, 10/41 which was in

October of 1941...when I got my dog tags. Oh, here it is here...Frequently Asked Questions – Personal Identification Tags or Dog Tags...I'll just read you a little bit of this. "By the onset of World War II, the Navy reinstated use of the tags," and the letter was dated May 17th, 1941 and directed, "that each officer and enlisted man of the Navy and every reserve be issued an I.D. tag." And I have my original I.D. tag still intact...with...with the slash...forty-one. Well anyway, where was I (laughter).

Dr. Lindley: Well, you were just...just getting ready to...

Mr. Croft: Yeah...

Dr. Lindley: ...I'm sorry I interrupted, but you...

Mr. Croft: No, that's okay. We...we went to sea on...after the...the target practice to...to...our first stop was Palmyra and then down to Johnson and then we came back to...supposedly was going to come back to Palmyra and then head for Wake Island, so we were going to be at sea quite a long time, and I think that is the reason why we were issued dog..dog tags so early...before Christmas and New Year's holidays...which after that time, they would probably issuing them to the battle wagon boys and the...and the cruisers and the aircraft carrier and everything else, and we were probably one of the very first ones to get them. As I say, I'll tell you why I...I believe this later on. We're out at sea...and I had the mid-watch...in the Radio Shack. I was standing full...radio watches at that time. I was soon hit with a...sever stomach pains and the pains just got worse and worse and I couldn't even stand up. So I crawled on my hands and knees to the bridge and they took me

down to sick bay. We had just left...uh, Palmyra; we'd been in Palmyra and we left Palmyra and we were headed for Johnson Island. We were probably about eight hours out of Palmyra, so the Captain immediately swung the...the ship and we went back to Palmyra because we had no doctor aboard whatsoever; we had a First Class Corpsman was all. And upon reaching Pal...Palmyra, I was diagnosed by the Chief Hospital Corpsman that there was no doctor on Palmyra either, that I was having an attack of acute appendicitis. So they packed my lower extremities in ice and flew me back to the naval hospital at Pearl Harbor. And my appendix was removed on November the 25th, 1941. So my recovery complete and I was waiting for the McFarland...McFarland to...to come back because all I had with me was my health records and the suit of white I had on when I was transferred to the hospital...nothing else. Well, I did have a little ditty bag with my toothbrush, toothpaste and shaving gear (chuckle). Uh, so on the morning of December the 7th, I was on the second floor veranda reading the Sunday paper. And real close to eight o'clock...it wasn't quite colors yet...we hadn't...to raise the flag...it was about seven...uh, 7:55 and a large group of planes come over and the fellow next to me said, "Why are they...flying maneuvers on Sunday?" I yelled, "Those are Japanese planes! You can see the rising sun insignias under the wings!" And it started, and dive bombers coming in low with their torpedoes and bombs...(cough) from higher flying aircraft; Ack Ack from the planes that were strafing; they had twenty millimeter cannons and seven-point-seven military...MM machine guns. And the vantage point from the

naval...hospital was that you're right...directly across from the naval air station on Ford Island, and you liter...literally had a view of the entire harbor...out there; it's called Hospital Point. And I saw all the bat...battle wagons, except the [USS] Pennsylvania which was kind of out of my sight, get hit...either torpedoes or bombs; many of the other vessels being bombed and strafed. It's kind of like sitting in front of a TV screen with cameras and the cameras being my eyes...recording everything that was taking place. The worst for me was...(chuckle) still to come. Being Sunday morning, most of your...hospital personnel, your doctors and...higher ranking nurses all lived ashore in...in quarters; they didn't...no one lived aboard the ships, so there were very, very few doctors and nurses available on a...on a Sunday morning. So when the wounded started coming in, people like me that were outpatients were assigned to...to help the doctors and the nurses take care of...of...they were coming in by...literally by the dozens and dozens; not nearly enough people to take care of them. So I was assigned the duty of rubbing a burn salve on the...the patients; the...especially...most of them were burn patients. I saw a lot of them and...lost arms, legs, etcetera, really blown to pieces, and there were so many coming in that...a lot of them were...were dying...when they were...in the...the beds that they were placed in. They were just riddled with shrapnel, etcetera. And...the worst memory I have of that...and one that sometimes still...bring...(pause)...tears to my eyes; there was a young Ensign...he was...he was probably about twenty years old and he lost both his legs and he was out. I was rubbing some burn lotion on a burn he had his

forehead and the side of his face when he...he started stirring and he came to, and he was mumbling. I couldn't understand what he was saying; he was probably...really in...in horrible shock, and he started to raise himself on his...on his elbows, and he looked and he saw that he had no legs (pause).
Excuse me a minute.

Dr. Lindley: That's okay; take your time.

Mr. Croft: It's pretty hard...these memories...

Dr. Lindley: I know.

Mr. Croft: ...come back and haunt you. Well anyway, that's the first time I've heard the expression...but I'd never seen it...that...that...expression of...well, you could see the white of their eyes. He fell back down on the bed and his...literally his...his eyes...went and all you could see was just the whites of his eyes...he was in such deep shock. And I yelled for the doctors and a...a doctor and nurse came, and they started administering...to him, and I found out later that...he didn't survive. (Pause) And things like that, you know. Well anyway, (pause) after that...working practically all day it was getting evening. My next duty was going up to the operation room and taking body parts down to the incinerator which was down in the basement where they would burn the legs and arms and everything that had to be amputated. And I think...it was probably close to midnight before I...I finally got to...lay down, and some of those doctors and nurses probably worked thirty-six to forty-eight hours; they were just so busy. But anyway, in the middle of the night I had to...I had to get up and go to the bathroom, so I went up and...and there was...everything

was pitch black, lights out, and I tripped on something and went flat on my face. And they brought...people that had died...down and laid them out on the cold tile down in the...in the bathroom; that's what I'd tripped over.

Dr. Lindley: Uhm.

Mr. Croft: Well anyway, the next day, they were starting to bring a lot of the bodies into Ieo (sp?) Landing which is...down the harbor from the hospital to identify those that were dead, so I got stuck (unintelligible) what they called the I.D. detail. I don't...there weren't too many of us down there; there was probably about a half a dozen or so, and not any of them, that I remember, had dog tags; they hadn't been issued yet. So the only way we could identify them was taking finger prints off of the...the fingers or...or oil-soaked clothes they had on. If they, say the arm (cough), excuse me, the arms had been blown off to...see where the...the stenciled names were on their skivvies or their...their chambray shirts where everybody usually...on the...if you weren't in dress white or in whites, you...you wore dungarees, and we scrapped off the oil off and we had some kind of chemical that they'd given us...and it'd get rid of the oil...and just like being a ghoul living amongst the dead; the remains were...just literally scattered. And then they were placed in just plain...pine boxes and then stacked on flat-bed trucks and taken out to the burial grounds and buried. Well after about three or four days on that burial detail, that's...my next detail was...escorting the bodies to the cemetery. And when you'd lift the...the caskets, a lot of times, a lot of the fluids inside would come down on you...across your shoulders or...down your front. It...it was really a

nightmare...everything involved with that. And I was waiting for the McFarland to come back, and it never did (chuckle). And all I had was my...health records, and like I say, and one suit of...of white; nothing else. And...so when the...on the 17th of December, they sent me aboard the USS Vega which was a cargo ship, AK-17 was the Vega's number and she'd been in the harbor at Pearl...not in...excuse me, in Honolulu loading cargo and unloading cargo, and she actually was one of the ships that got to fire at the Japanese because...the...the Japanese weren't bombing the city of Honolulu. And the...the records show that...they're quite sure that she hit one of the planes. But when we were still down in the hospital, I had come back for something...oh, I...yeah, it was still...December the 7th; one of the Japanese planes crashed into the experimental hut...had right alongside of the hospital and there were about four of us...the first ones to get there. And when we got there, the plane had...up in the cockpit...the smoke was coming out and one of the guys...probably personnel...that was attached to the hospital...had grabbed a fire extinguisher and he climbed up and...turned the fire extinguisher on and...and put the fire out. And then...he's up on top and he...all of a sudden he said...a few scattered cuss words that I won't (chuckles) I won't put on the tape, "This S of a B has a University of California graduation ring on his finger!" That really startled us. So anyway, I got quite a few pieces off that plane; it could have been...(unintelligible)...certainly one of the very first Japanese planes shot down in World War II; maybe the first one. I don't know, but it's the one that...early on, the first wave, crashed into the...uh,

experimental hut. I often think of the story about the...the Vega...actually hit one of the planes and they saw it wobbling as it went...headed for the harbor; who knows?! Well anyway...

Dr. Lindley: There were a number of...that...that research facility that was hit...documents that I have read indicate that there were a number of laboratory animals that were in that building.

Mr. Croft: That's right. Did...did...is there anything written about that plane hitting that?

Dr. Lindley: There is; nothing more than that. I...I actually heard a...another interview with a nurse...

Mr. Croft: Oh!

Dr. Lindley: ...who was there and she commented about that very incident.

Mr. Croft: Okay! I've...

Dr. Lindley: And...and there was...

Mr. Croft: ...was hoping that I wasn't just dreaming this because (chuckles)...

Dr. Lindley: No, no, you're...no, the...the...and there was a doctor who was a pathologist who was doing...and I...I don't know what kind of experiments or what was going on, but he was upset because when that happened, a number of the laboratory animals that he had were lost, and all of the...

Mr. Croft: I wouldn't doubt it, yeah.

Dr. Lindley: ...the research that...that they had been...and there was some kind of a research project that'd been going on for quite some time was lost, and he was commenting on that.

Mr. Croft: Well, I got parts of that plane; I gave them to my youngest son to keep for me, and that's why I asked you the other day about artifacts.

Dr. Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Croft: Because I'm sure...I could get them back from Stevie, and if you have like...artifacts...could transport them down there sometime.

Dr. Lindley: What kind of artifacts are they?

Mr. Croft: They're pieces off of the...this Zero-type plane. I don't know just what it was; probably a dive bomber, and I got parts of the parachute with the burn marks on it that the pilot had on. And I got the parts wrapped in this...in the...the parachute.

Dr. Lindley: Uh hum. Is there...on the parts, are there any identifying marks that indicate that it was a Japanese plane; that is...were there any numbers or things that made...were able...that you were able to see that...?

Mr. Croft: I think there is, but I...I gave it...these to Stevie about three or four years ago and I haven't really looked at them that far...I...I gave away quite a few (beep sound) of them, too. People were, you know, I had quite a few of them...the nuts...one guy wanted to make a...a rain (beep sound) out of one of them; it was a pretty good sized one, so I gave him that and...and...but some of them, I'm sure, do have a...scratches of...something scratched in there, not scratched, but...uh...

Dr. Lindley: Right, uh huh.

Mr. Croft: ...in...in blue...

Dr. Lindley: Uh huh.

Mr. Croft: ...'cause it's white or gray aluminum and then there was some blue writing on some of them.

Dr. Lindley: Well, it certainly...I...

Mr. Croft: Probably like numbers.

Dr. Lindley: Right. I will talk with the archivists and ask them about that for you.

Mr. Croft: Okay.

Dr. Lindley: Go ahead with your story; I'm sorry to have interrupted.

Mr. Croft: Well, as I say, I...I forgot to mention that...as far as part of the Pearl Harbor, and...I...had been assigned to the USS Vega. And I went aboard the Vega and they didn't...not have...any records whatsoever. In fact, I never saw the McFarland again and I never saw any of...of my original records, uniforms or anything; all I had was just the clothes I had on my back and my health records. So I told them that I was Aviation Radio School grad and I'd like to get, you know, into aviation, and I was informed they had a full complement but they needed help in the engine room (chuckles), so I was assigned to the engine room. So I was a Seaman Second still, at this time. I went down to the engine room, and believe it or not, there was an African American Chief Petty Officer that was in charge, and I don't remember his last name but he was Sam. He...He'd tell everybody, "Just call me Sam." He was a *big*, big man! He was...literally became my surrogate father. He taught me everything. I was down there five months; taught me how to pack punch, uh, pumps, uh...

(end of tape 1, side A)

Dr. Lindley: I can easily see it and I...

Mr. Croft: (Laughter).

Dr. Lindley: It didn't make the noise that it normally does when it gets to the end for some reason.

Mr. Croft: Okay.

Dr. Lindley: So, if you could back up and tell that little...catch us up to the point where you were...uh, you know, copy...copying the code and so forth.

Mr. Croft: Okay, when do you want me to start, right now?

Dr. Lindley: Yes sir, uh hum; we're rolling.

Mr. Croft: Okay when I was...went down in the engine room...under Chief Sam, who...actually I heard this and I think it's true that he was the first African American that became a Chief Petty Officer out of the cooks and bakers and haircutters...branch of the service. Their...he's...they're more like...second-class persons in...than...than top rate, and he was a Chief Machinist Mate (beep sound). Uh, and he took me under his wing...like...as I say...like...like...he became my surrogate father; he took care of me and taught me (beep sound) and taught me how to make good ole Navy coffee where you cracked an egg in it and put some salt in it...right over the grounds and...boiled it (chuckles). And we used to use the grounds afterwards actually to clean the engine room gratings; it really wiped the oil off real good! So anyway, he taught me how to pack pumps and...go back to the shaft alley and oil the shaft alley which is what...the...the shaft alley is the...where...where the spool comes through from the engine room and turns over to run your ship, and it's called the shaft...just like on our car; you got a...the shaft goes back and turns

your wheels. And you go back there...at least once every single watch to make sure that the different cups were full of oil. And you would put the oil in the cups and to keep the shaft oil...shaft itself from burning out....running dry...just metal on metal...kind of like my hip is now...just bone on bone. Well anyway, uh, one day...Chief Greenwood (sp?) was...who was the Chief Radio man came down and he was talking to my Chief Sam, and I knew they were talking about me because I could see them looking over at me quite often, and then when Greenwood left, Sam came over and said, "Greenwood would like to have you come up into the Radio Shack; I guess your records have finally shown up and they found out you really are a Radio man." And at that time, the radio...the Radio men...there were no such thing as...as Rad...Radar...Radio Techs, etcetera; the Radio man did it all. And the...the Navy was expanding so fast, you know, that they were use...using...these ratings were being developed and they needed Radio men to fill a lot of these positions, so they were taking them off the ships. So anyway, he told me that Greenwood had...had told him that if I could come up there and copy...the Fox schedule which was Radio NPG San Francisco, the main one that we were copying, when we got up into the Aleutians we had our...usually in Seattle, Washington there was another one in Seattle, and of course, the main one is NSS Washington D.C.; that's kind of the boss of the whole network. So anyway, he said, "It's not that I...would like to lose you; I think you're a neat, young kid, and it would...you're really fine, but you can be advanced so much faster up in the radio room than you can down here in the...in the engine

room.” As I say, there’s no such thing as a...as a Third Class Petty Officer. You just go from Fireman Third to Fireman Second to Fireman First just like he went from Seaman First to Coxswain to Second Class Boatswain’s Mate; there was no such thing as a...as a Third Class Boatswain’s Mate. Some of the ratings were just...made that way. So the next day I did; I went up and I...talked to Chief Greenwood and he said, “As soon as you can copy a Fox sched,” he said, “I’ll...I’ll see you get your Third Class crow.” So...I immediately went in and...said, “Okay, let me try it,” and sat down and started copying a Fox sched because that’s what I was doing on the McFarland when I left; I was copying the Fox...standing my watch with all...with the other guys...aboard ship. So actually I went...from Aviation Radio man to General Service Radio man...and being at sea and...on...on a ship, you’re in the...the General Service; you’re not in a special service like Aviation or Subs or...or whatever, so I was a General Service Radio man (beep sound). And to his word, he slapped a Third Class crow alongside of me the next day and said, “Sew this on your arm!” And I loved code (beep sound). I used to...anytime we’d get any place where I could read it, I would run it through my head. The...the faster I...I could read it the better I liked it. I got so that I became the high-speed press operator aboard the Vega. I could take a stencil and put it in the mill and copy the...copy right on a stencil and then take the stencil out and we’d just run right through it and we put out...we put out a ship’s newspaper. Copy...I can’t remember...some of the high-speed stations, and most of them were out of San Francisco going out in the Pacific. Of course, they had them

on the east coast going...to Europe, you know, the writers...and...and the different...German and...Russian...and...different presses. Now the...the Japanese had their own code; they had what they called a kamikami (sp?) code which is something else, and later on when Yamamoto was shot down, when they...the intercept operators on that were talking...uh, the Japanese version...now like in the Rus...the German codes they had from...the umlauts; Spanish for the tildes to distinguish a...a different idiosyncrasies in their languages, and you...high-speed press, you...you learn them all. Well anyway, the radio room was probably the most popular place on the whole ship because we had hot coffee at all times and right across the passageway from the...the ship's galley. And the cooks also liked us because when they would get up early in the morning to light up their ovens and stoves to fix breakfast, everything was cold iron and they had to wait for things to heat up before they could start doing their cooking and everything, so they could come over into the Radio Shack and they always brought goodies – donuts or...maybe left-over pies or...etcetera, etcetera, Danish, so we usually had some good sweets in the Radio Shack also...plus the hot coffee. So we had one Aerographer (sp?) named, we just called Breeze; his last name was Arno; he was the brother of Peter Arno who was a...a cartoonist for the...Esquire magazine, quite famous in his day. I used to...when I'd read...the Esquire; I think also for the New Yorker; he did...he did all kinds of cartooning...drawing pic...pictures. So Breeze Arno turned down a pretty high rating, or excuse me, rank to be just a First Class to see how the other half lived. You know he

was...he was one of the editors on the Los Angeles Times, and he was well known on...in his line of work also, and he was quite a guy; he was really a neat guy; got himself in trouble a couple of times, but (chuckles) that's something else again. Uh, also we had a doctor, Doctor...I can't remember...something like Collins (sp?), but he was a Full Commander...gynecologist, and he really had some stories he could tell, too. They used to like...loved to come up into the Radio Shack; drink our nice hot coffee and have a donut or something and...then they would...and sometimes even the Executive Officer would come and sit and have a cup of coffee before he went up to...onto the bridge. And Breeze...actually...was...and...and also my...my Chief, Chief Greenwood, both in cahoots with the...the Captain of the Vega who..was...probably the best officer I ever served under in all my...my Navy career. He was a former Skipper in the...the Alaska Steamship Company, so he was more of a...like a...a civilian and...than...than he was pure Navy although he was a Lieutenant Commander. That's...that's the...the Captain on our ship was a Lieu...a Lieutenant Commander and he was really quite a guy; he had a...a beer belly on him, and when he...when we went down the Pac...into the Pacific, he would roll his shorts up like a bikini; put on a pith helmet and that's all he'd have...it would be a pair of sandals; a pair of shorts (chuckles) and his...pith helmet...and stand up there at the helm...leading our ship. And something else that...would never have said before but happen to know, his last name was Andersen (sp?); he was an old Norwegian, and these Norwegians are *a little different from the rest of us, I tell you!* (spoken in an

accent). (Chuckle). Well anyway, he...would order and get pure alcohol, a hundred and eighty proof; I don't know which...just how high up proof it is and at the end of the day, uh, after...most of your...your workload was done, he would see that anybody on the ship could go into...or a dining area and...get a shot of...pure alchy with any kind of juice; we had tomato juice; pineapple juice, orange juice; grape juice; you name it, and in fact, the old English navy...when they all...everybody got some grog or got some rum...that's...that's the United States naval ship (chuckle), and we got our...got our alchy, uh, those that were...that were drinkers. A lot of them would...would try to trade you and give you a five or ten bucks for your shot...some...some of us younger ones that didn't...weren't...really into heavy drinking...some of the old salts, especially some of those old Asiatic sailors that...put years in the...in Asia...the Yangtze and some of those rivers over there in China...we had a few of those aboard, too, but anyway that...that was...our ship's Captain, Captain Andersen. And, what we were doing...the first two trips on the Vega we...we loaded pineapple; oh god I...even today, I have pineapple...almost makes me sick because we had sliced pineapple...pineapple, diced pineapple; pineapple squares; pineapple juice and it was kept in the evaporators so it'd be nice and cold, and I was down in the engine room during this time. This was before I went up to the Radio Shack, and we would...we had access to it (chuckle)...a treat at the time, and nice and cold. Well anyway, we...we were taking civilian (unintelligible) and...lots of Dole's pineapple...bananas and stuff like that and hauling it back to San

Francisco...more like a commercial...line...or a cargo ship than...than a naval cargo ship, but some way they had to get back to the...to the States. And one trip we took back out to Hawaii, we pulled a great, big, huge barge...and we had just one Signalmen aboard, that was all, and they'd stack that thing full of different food and put a hot plate on there for him, and he'd signal us if he thought the tow was too tight or too loose or wanted to extend it, etcetera, etcetera. And we...also had a Spreckles...from the Spreckles ,uh, I think it was Mr. Spreckles himself was aboard his huge, huge yacht, and sailed alongside of us, and we had one really bad storm. And the yacht went on our lee-side but sometimes that yacht would actually...disappear out of sight; the...when the waves would take you up and then they'd...down you'd come and then the waves would go up and you could see the yacht and back and forth, but it managed...it was a pretty good sized...it must have been a hundred and fifty feet or bigger; it was a pretty good size yacht. When you're Spreckles, I guess you could afford stuff like that.

Dr. Lindley: Hum.

Mr. Croft: Well anyway, we got his yacht back to...to Hawaii, and we got a huge, big tow that we were...we were towing. And then we got back to...Frisco and we were transferred to...Seattle. Let me see, I've got some notes on the...on the Vega somewhere here. We...and we were assigned to the Aleutian Campaign, and when we went up to the Aleutians, usually we took a...a group of Seabees because we (cough) we would go all the way out to the end of the islands;

we'd go all the way out to Attu. (Cough), excuse me a minute (cough). My throat gets clogged up (cough).

Dr. Lindley: Take your time.

Mr. Croft: And the Seabees were...Construction Battalion, of course, then they...we were putting our anti-submarine nets across a lot of the harbors at...at...on the islands...like Attu, Adak and Sitka. And then later on we started carrying landing strip material, and we'd have a bunch of Seabees aboard and put them off...say...like on Adak and they would build the landing strips so that our...our planes could fly in and out. And one of the trips...I think we were out at, uh, yeah, we were at...Adak and we were waiting to unload our cargo. A lot of times you...you loaded them off onto lighters and they...we didn't have enough...just maybe one dock there; if one ship was already in there unloading at the dock, you had to unload...unload onto a lighter which was light a big raft and you...and they would take it and unload it onshore and then bring it back, and that's how you got rid of your cargo. At zero nine hundred...every single morning...two Zeros would come over from...Kiska; the Japanese had Kiska under their control and they would drop four bombs. They would carry one bomb under each wing, probably a hundred bombs so they were carrying about two hundred pounds was all, and they'd be pretty high. You know, we had a lot of fun; we'd shoot at them (chuckle), and they...probably had a lot of fun; they dropped their bombs on us and we went, at least, a week of this. Every day you could...you could set your clock for nine o'clock and then look up and here'd they come! And one day our...our

fun ended. Here come a couple of P-38s out of nowhere and shot them down; just *bang, bang*...down they went; they'd take them by surprise. So that was the end of our fun for shooting at the Japanese that were coming over.

Another time when we were...now this, I...I really don't...know what it was, but I'll you what happened. We were out on Attu, way, way out; that's the furthest island out there, and they say...*dah, dah, dah* which is the highest priority there is in communications in...in naval comm....communications. I had just worked San Francisco, NPG, so I knew I had access to NPG; this ship was calling and trying to reach...NPG with the highest priority message there was. So I listened for a few minutes and finally I...I knew it was...we send code or call signs, and I broke...and we...we, the Radio men, you could break the code...you knew what ship you were talking to, and it was a cruiser. I can't remember which cruiser for sure...was...seemed to me it was either the Saint Louis or the San Francisco...was trying to reach NPG and I told them...they..., "Can I relay for you?" I had just worked NPG so they were sending the message to me and I, in turn, I...I called...NPG and got them up; told them I had urgent messages and was relaying the messages to...NPG Frisco and the Chief came in, thank heavens, so all I had to do was copy the messages and hand them to the Chief and the Chief was...took over key and he was sending the messages to Frisco. Now the...the story that I got...that...was that they...there was a...a task force and there were no battle wagons or no aircraft carriers in the American side; all they had...the highest were...were three or four cruisers in a flotilla of...of tin cans, and they run across a

Japanese task force that had...not only had a battle wagon, a couple of battle wagons, but they had...three or four cruisers compared to our two, I think, and this...this was a battle that was ensuing...out...I think, near the Kuril Islands off the...Japan there...somewhere out...out at sea and it was a running battle. Well anyway, I told a friend about this and asked if he could look up and see if he could find it...what battle that was and he found...found all kinds of things about the Kuril...Kuril...I...K-u-r-i-l-e [s/b Kuril], I think it...they...it's spelled...islands. Uh, but nothing about...a...a battle being there; maybe it was further south; I don't know for sure, but anyway that's...that's the scuttlebutt that we got...that's where this was taking place. But anyway, we managed to...to break free and...and no American ship was sunk. And I think they...they say they got one of the battle wagons; it was quite a battle, and that was another real experience. Another experience is...we were coming back from Adak; we was running down along the Aleutian chain to Kodiak and then enter...I think it's Queen...(laughter), the Queen Charlotte Island ...far north and we'd run down through the...the...right off the coast of...are...are you still there?

Dr. Lindley: Yes I am, uh hum.

Mr. Croft: I hear this boop and beeps; did you hear that?

Dr. Lindley: No, I didn't hear that; that must have been on your end.

Mr. Croft: Oh.

Dr. Lindley: I didn't hear anything.

Mr. Croft: It...probably on my side. Well anyway...

Dr. Lindley: We're still running tape, so we're okay.

Mr. Croft: Yeah, we'd go down the inland passage, but this time we happened to have...there was about four of us ships, so we had an escort. Usually we ran this all by ourself; we...no escort whatsoever. And we had the destroyer [USS] Blue, and...all of a sudden...the old man started to...we started swinging the ship and...and a Japanese submarine...it actually surfaced! And lucky for us, it had not spotted the Blue, so they...shot two...twin torpedoes...this was a bigger sub and they were coming...kind of right at our ship. So we'd already started to swing, and we had just...we had been degaussed before we came up to the...through the Aleutian Islands. Degaussing is taking over magnetic forces on the hull of our ship, so these mag...magnetic torpedoes didn't have a really...a good shot at us. So anyway, those two torpedoes went aft of us about...oh, forty feet (chuckle); they were pretty close, and then the Blue came...came on them and...something that I learned later when I...I taught report writing...the famous quote; I can't remember which Admiral said...put it out, "Sighted ship; sank same." Well, they said, "Sighted sub; sank same." They came and they dropped their ash cans and the...the sub started diving when they spotted them anyway. Then...then the Blue came right over the top of them, and we found out later that...a huge oil slick; they knew that they'd got that sub; that was kind of exciting. But there was an old, I can't remember what kind of ship you'd call it; it looked kind of like...a miniature cruiser, but it was smaller; it escorted us sometimes...until...we would come up the inland passage. When we'd break out, she'd be...she'd probably was stationed

in...Kodiak and they'd meet us and take us out...along the island, but a lot of times, we'd do it all on our own. Anyway, the...the Aleutian Campaigns was really...really something. Uh, actually one of the loads we...we...took was to Dutch Harbor, and probably two days after we'd delivered the...the load there, the Japanese task force came in and literally obliterated the...the harbor there in Dutch...Dutch Harbor; just missed us. So there were some very interesting experiences. So that's...that was my first battle star, I guess, you'd say...was the Aleutian Cam...our campaign star was the Aleutian Campaigns. And then we got orders...come back to...when we got back to San Francisco was to haul...cargo...probably to the Gilberts; we were on all those islands out there – the Gilberts; the Marianas; you name them, and that's where the old man would be in his shorts and (laughter) with his pith helmet on...reading his...on our back...we used to call it, the Vega, the...the Galloping Ghost of the Aleutian Coast (chuckles).

Dr. Lindley: (Chuckle).

Mr. Croft: The Vega also had a...sister ship called the [USS] Sirius; they're all named after star constellations – the Vega; the Sirius and the [USS] Capella were the three hog islanders; they were built in 1917...really old ships, but they had a top speed of about seventeen knots. Well anyway, we go...going down to the...probably the Gilbert Islands..or Tarawa, one of those places down there, and our Navigator got a little mixed up, and we thought we were going into the is...first island that we were going to unload cargo, and we'd get about...within cannon range and all of a sudden that island started shooting at

us! (Laughter) Found out it was a Japanese island called Wotje, W-o-t-j-e, I think is how you spell it. It's not listed...they...it is listed on some really big maps of the Pacific, but most maps you won't find Wotje on it; it's just one of those little atolls out there. So we were far enough out, thank heavens, that we twisted and got out of there! If they had...they...they were kind of dumb. If they had...just waited another half hour, we'd have been right there trying to come into their harbor and they could have really...blown us up! But anyway, we got out of that scrape. And...let me see, I'd say...probably for the next year and a half, we just made trip after trip out into the Pacific...some of the islands. Uh, let me...let me check; I got...a thing here that tells when I left the Vega. I was transferred off the Vega...let's see (pause), uhm, 12-18-41, uh, December 18th...no, that's when I went aboard, excuse me. I was transferred off of it...8-24-44, so I was on it almost three full years...on the Vega.

Dr. Lindley: Alright.

Mr. Croft: And from the Vega...I was transferred to the USS Boulder Victory which is...was another AK, AK-227, and the Boulder Victory was an ammunition ship, brand new, just brand spanking new! We were...we actually took the initial testing on it before we...we took over as...and kept the ship into the Navy; I was on that crew, and we were designated...it was built to carry ammo. Okay, I'm trying to find my notes I got on the...on the Boulder Victory, but we were...the very first ship...if you know anything at all about the...the story of Port Chicago when Port Chicago got blown up...

Dr. Lindley: Yes.

Mr. Croft: ...and they made a movie out of it actually. And those...the African Americans that were working on that were really dishonored; it was actually more or less the fault of...you...you really study that...yeah, I got an article that came out of the Seattle Times about four pages...four pages long. It's entitled, "Isn't it time to right the wrong?"

Dr. Lindley: Right.

Mr. Croft: But we were...very first ship into Port Chicago after it was rebuilt...to load ammo, and we...our first trip was out to...Ulithi, the Palau Islands...for the invasion of...Okinawa and...Iwo Jima. And on the way across, we got word that the [USS] Mount Hood which was a true ammunition ship blew up in Manus and we were probably about...four hundred miles north of Manus when...when we heard this, so that really shook us up. And then some shell casings broke loose and was rolling around down in one of the holds and...that shook us up, so we were kind of walking on egg...egg shells (chuckles) being on this...this ammunition ship. And any...an ammunition ship always carries what they called a Baker Flag; that's a red flag that shows that your...that your ammo ship or carrying...either loading ammunition; unloading ammunition or have anything to do with ammo, you fly the Baker Flag. Uh, so when we got out to...Ulithi...I need to...I got it written right down here (pause). Our...our...it was another Lieutenant Commander, Commander Church, was our Captain (pause)...uh here, the...yeah, we were just getting underway because there was an...an Australian cruiser swinging a hook on one side of us

and an American cruiser swinging a hook on the other side, and we're flying the Baker Flag, and we were torpedoed. And I think the reason that we were selected...they figured if they got us, we might take both those cruisers with us...

Dr. Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Croft: ...because we were loaded with ammunition! Well, actually we had seven thousand tons of modern war's most deadly...

(end of tape 1, side B)

Mr. Croft: Okay.

Dr. Lindley: This is Dr. Lindley continuing the oral history on Mr. George William Croft, Jr. Go ahead; you were just...when you said the...the...that you were torpedoed is when it stopped.

Mr. Croft: Okay. Uh, suddenly there was a tor...I'm reading this...what I got out of the Office of the Naval Records and History, the ship's his...histories section, and I'll read you my own words (chuckle).

Dr. Lindley: Yes.

Mr. Croft: But anyway, "Suddenly there was a terrific explosion and the ship seemed to be lifted from the water and slammed against an invisible stone wall. All hands froze in their tracks waiting for the second explosion which seemed so inevitable and which would have literally blown the ship into a billion pieces. Seconds passed, long seconds; it seemed like hours, with a deafening roar and blinding flash would have meant oblivion. It never came! And when the torpedo or mine exploded, the ship was loaded to capacity with seven

thousand tons of modern war's most deadly explosives – fourteen inch shells; five inch shells; shell charges; AA projectiles; rockets; fragmentation bombs; fuses; enough explosives, death could blow this ship and her men to oblivion. The blasted number three hold was packed full, and the underwater explosion not only tore into the hold but also blasted into the stowed ammunition, but the ship did not explode. It was my guardian angel with me that day! Four men were actually at work in number three hold when it happened.” So this is as far as I'm going to read here. Let me...find my little bit on the...then I come to the part about...(pause)...oh, where in the heck did I put that darned...well anyway, I went...uh, here we go, I found it. Sitting in (unintelligible), the Palu...Palau islands; this is what I wrote. “Early on December 20th, 1944, the Boulder Victory was getting underway exiting Kossal,” that's Ko-s-s-a-l Passage, “here are a huge armada...armada of U.S., British and Aussie ships. We were bound for the invasion of Okinawa and Iwo Jima. We were swinging between a U.S. cruiser and an American cruiser, and all of a sudden *boom!*...a horrific explosion! I was at my sea station in the Radio Shack; a picture of my wife, Dodie, was taped to the transmitter. I looked up; blew her a kiss and yelled, ‘I love you!’” We had seven thousand tons which...is fourteen thousand pounds of...high explosives aboard. I sat there for a few seconds and nothing happened. I jumped up and ran forward to a posi...position overlooking the...the forward holds and the bow. I could see the bow slowly going down. I ran back to the Radio Shack to await ...for abandon ship. Well, the bow went down to a couple of feet above sea level

and held; both forwards holds filled with water. The hole that the torpedo put into us was thirty-two feet long and eighteen feet high; that's quite a blast. It actually missed going into our engine room by about two feet; two feet more and then we really would have gone down." Anyway, we...we were just getting underway so we dropped...dropped anchor and then we had...started accessing our damage and we had a...a repair ship with a huge armada that was getting ready for the invasion and they sent...they came over alongside of us and really had some experts go down and help us put temporary patches and huge suction pumps to suck the...to suction all the waters out of the holds to get us underway again. It's, I say, the hold stopped about eighteen inches from the...from the engine room. So from then on, the plan of the day read, "Reveille at 0600; Breakfast 0630; Diving Operations commence...(chuckle) 0700." Had to dive down to unload that...ammunition. But anyway, almost all that ammunition was saved and transported to other ships. And after we were...had the temporary patch, we went down to Manus. That's where they had a floating dry dock and we...probably only made about three knots, so it was quite a trip going down there. We got down to Manus and being a cargo ship, most of our cargo...taken off...all...we got rid of almost all the ammo. Every time that we were scheduled, I say like, "Okay Friday you guys are (unintelligible); you're going to come in and we're going...we're going to repair you." Well, Thursday evening would come in a crippled cruiser or a crippled tin can, uh...a ship in the line, you might say, and they would have higher priority, so we sat there and sat there. And Manus is only one degree

south of the equator, so (chuckle) it was...really hot! But one of the...the things that we would do...in the evening, we would go on in ashore and...and watch movies. And every now and then they would actually...catch a couple of Japanese that would come in to watch the American movies that still had not been captured on Manus; this really happened. They never put up a fight or anything, (chuckle) but...but they'd be sitting there watching the movie. And another thing that really kind of was...kind of exciting...during the day to kill time (beep sound), we'd go swimming. And right down below the ladder there was a...a small raft where the...the Captain's boat could tie up whenever we had to...anybody had to go ashore for this, that or whatever; we used that...that boat to...to go ashore. I understand a boat is something that can be lifted and tied onto a ship (chuckle); that's the different between a boat and a ship. Well anyway, this particular day I had the shark watch because that...that is really shark water! And there are probably about twenty swimming, splashing, having a heck of a good time, and I...had a pair of...uh, binoculars and I spotted three big white sharks headed right for all that splash-splash...taking a bath! And so I yelled out, "Sharks, sharks," and you ought to have seen the guys head for the...for the ladder to get back up aboard ship. And the faster they were coming on and waiting for the others...they'd run up the ladder ahead of them and some of them still had their feet and things...hang...hanging out...over the...over the raft. The...the sharks were getting closer and closer and my heart came up into my throat; I was sure that one of those guys...the sharks was going to grab one of those guys, but they all

made it; got aboard and they stood up there and watched the...the big sharks circle down below us, and there went our...there went our meal for the day (chuckles).

Dr. Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Croft: But that was kind of exciting. Well anyway, just sitting there...doing nothing...I got transferred again! Might as well use the crew to better advantages, so I was...transferred back to...to San Francisco, and still most of the crew stayed aboard, but they needed Radio men really bad during World War...War II. So I...I came back...uh, to Frisco and then I was transferred to the USS Hermitage. Now the Hermitage was...we took it over at the beginning of World War II; it was the Italian liner...SS Conte Biancamano...camanao; that's S-S C-o-n-t-e B-i-a-n-c-a-m-a-n-o. It was one of the largest luxury liners that the Italians had, and it was taken...acquired in the...the Panama Canal...coming through the Panama Canal, and of course, the Navy got it 'cause we were also at war with Italy and we converted it to a troop transport and they named it the USS Hermitage. And we could carry over six thousand troops, so you know that was a biggie. And the guys that originally went aboard it said in the...the fancier staterooms there was a tap...you'd turn the tap on and you got pure champagne.

Dr. Lindley: Hmm!

Mr. Croft: And there were two huge swimming pools, and one forward and one aft, and they converted these...swimming pools to...of course, to cots stacked four...four high. And our Captain aboard that was a...a full four-star...uh, a

four...striped Captain, Captain Alexander Douglas, from Captain...Patterson. Well, when I went aboard it, and we loaded the...troops in Frisco and we trans...we transported them to Noumea in New Guinea, and...let's see, on December 12th...everything seemed to happen in December; that's why I missed so many Christmases, I guess (chuckle) at home. The Hermitage...uh, came into Frisco and I think that's about when I went aboard it. And...the first trip was to Nagoya, Japan and then we picked up...took...you know, troops over and brought back dependents and...or took dependents over. And actually I got a...a picture of that...the...the Hermitage here that was taken of the San Francisco...one of the San Francisco papers. It says here that, "The USS Hermitage once an Italian lux...luxury liner arrives with six thousand five hundred servicemen," and it just pulled into port there...into Frisco. Well, let me see here (pause as he is looking through his data). Oh, we also...went into...Peleliu. Well anyway, what our...our main duty was...and then...when the war ended, we stated...they called it the "Magic Carpet;" we're the ones that brought...started bringing all...all the boys back home, and we'd go into Japan, Okinawa, and Naha...Okinawa...different places and load up and bring all back to the States. And boy, you should have seen some of the gambling that went on that ship (chuckles)! The...all of the soldiers that got paid off and they were rolling new Buicks...alright...new...Cadillacs; shooting dice; playing card games, and our cooks made a small fortune. The cooks aboard this...this ship, the Hermitage, would make up...we called it "horse cock sandwiches," with cheese and take it down like...one, two a.m. and the guys would be down

there below ship's...rolling the dice and playing cards, and...we charged, I think, like a...a buck for a half of a sandwich, big, thick ham sandwich and a cup of coffee and they were just rolling...they were making more money than...most...most the gamblers. Some of those gamblers...one Texan, by the way, we just called him Blackie, had been a professional gambler; I don't know how many thousands of dollars he walked off that ship with (chuckles), but he'd win all the time! He was, oh, about six, three; he was a tall...lean, Texan and he was really quite a gambler. I mean every (unintelligible); just called him Blackie. But we had a Marine detachment aboard ship because we carried so many women. We were taking...like wives over to Japan...those...those that were permanent...going to be stationed there for awhile; this is after the war had ended, and we called it...as I say, the Magic Carpet, and then we would bring troops...troops back. But to make sure that there was no fiddle-faddle on...on the ship, we had a Marine detachment aboard that stood guard duty, and most of them would love to come into the Radio Shack especially if they had the midnight...mid-watch because like...on any ship the...the Radio Shack always had hot coffee, and usually some...some type of Danish to pass out. And one night two Marines came in; I had the watch again, as usual, when the excitement happens, and it was probably about one, two a.m. and they were tired of standing there watching and wanted to come in and get warm; we were going through another storm...windy, cold outside; you took the great circle route when you're going over to Japan; you got up pretty far north, and it would be cold. Well anyway,

they were practicing quick draw; they'd face each other and see which one could draw the fastest.

Dr. Lindley: Uhm.

Mr. Croft: Well, you know how accidents happen; one of them shot the other one right in the middle of the stomach...with his forty-five.

Dr. Lindley: Uhm!

Mr. Croft: I tell you when that blast went off, I was...copying code at the time...about...I about went up through the ceiling on that one. But anyway, the guy that shot, the Marine that got shot, soon as we got...hit Japan, we had a Full Commander, a doctor aboard this ship, too. Lucky, a big ship like that you needed a...so...a really good medical staff, and they took him and I guess he...into a hospital and they said that that wound was...hardly anything when it entered him, but when it came out it tore a...a hole in...in his back; it did not hit the spine, thank heavens!...big enough that you could put your whole fist into the hole, and it...you being a doctor maybe knows this...that we have a wound this deep, it has to heal from the inside out, so he had to lay on his stomach for a long time and little by little let...things heal. And the...both of them were...court-martialed, but I think he got off pretty...pretty easy for playing around, you know, aboard ship like that, you know, with live ammunition in the forty-five automatics. It was purely an accident; I know it wasn't done...they were really good friends, and the other kid...cried like...well as hard as he could for what he had done to his buddy. But that's how, you know, how it hap...accidents happen especially sky larking,

young...these...both of these were probably close to my age. I was probably close to twenty at that time, and they were probably eighteen, nineteen, but that was...about the only really exciting thing that happened aboard the...the Hermitage except for the fact of all the gambling. I was never a gambler, even to this day myself, but I could go down there and watch them a lot of time...come off watch. And one time I went down there, was...one of my buddy's was rolling dice, and he spotted me and he said, "How about rolling these one more time?" This was for the fourth pass; he'd made three passes already; he had a stack of cash; I don't know how much he had laying there (chuckles), so I picked them up and rolled them across the table for him; hit a seven; he won. He said, "I'm through," and he gave me two hundred dollars; just handed it to me and he says, "Thanks for throwing the die." Yeah, I made two hundred dollars just watching the game, but...that was kind of exciting. But...it was...it was really fun being aboard that ship. We had an emergency generator room that was...big as the kitchen here in our home; it was really big. We had...in case the main power went out, and we could sit back there especially when we hit some...a little warmer water...when...either coming or going, and, you know, act with a lot of the...the passengers because we'd leave the door open; we'd be in there working on some of the equipment. It was...it was enjoyable! And from there, I got back and I was a...assigned to...as a Flag Radio man to...well, let me see, what have I have got here? Uh, yeah, to the USS Vicksburg...Commander...to the Commander of the Third Fleet, the Admiral. He was...and...the command showed it out on the...on the

Vicksburg. Now this was in 10/4/46; this was after the war now. I was a...a Flag Radio man, and actually where we...the flag was...was...oh, south of...we were not in San Francisco Harbor; we were further south in one of the...the ports down there...I know...closer...closer to...oh, I can't really...to Vallejo, California anyway. The Flag ended up there in Vallejo. Of course, you go...from Vallejo you go up past Valencia and all those small towns up that...along the San Francisco peninsula. And what...that Flag was aboard the...the Vicksburg. Then on...here we go to twelve again...12/14/46 we went aboard the...the John W. Thompson [s/b John W. Thomason?]; that was the Flag...was...came down the...to the...to the...John W. Thomason which was a destroyer, and the destroyer number 760. And then...something...kind of strange happened; at the end of the war, I know I...I was in Vallejo and almost all my duties then was...after the Flag finally...I don't know what happened to the Flag, but I was stationed there in Vallejo, and on shore duty, or uh, shore patrol, we would be...we'd go down into San Francisco and that was really interesting; went down...the Tender Line Districts...especially there in Frisco where almost all the bars and...the ladies of the night strolled the streets to keep the boys out of trouble. And then when...my...I was on a...a six-year cruise in 1947...from '41 to '47...I was discharged. Now when I was discharged...I had to fill out some kind of a questionnaire, and I was having horrible, horrible night sweats. I'd wake up in the morning and I would...I never had any dreams, but my bunk would be sopping wet...just like I'd...jumped in...into the bucket of water or something, and I...I put that down.

So I was transferred...before I was released, I was transferred to Oak Knoll Naval Hospital...and...into the psychiatric unit there (chuckles). Uh, where did I write this down? And what I...I know you...I'm sure you know what Rorschach tests are?

Dr. Lindley: Oh yes.

Mr. Croft: The ink blot tests?

Dr. Lindley: Right.

Mr. Croft: I was given a lot of those at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital; a lot of word association tests. They would say a word and I would have to immediately, in my mind, associate it with...with something that I would think of, and also picture tests. They'd flash pictures, and every time I would see a picture, I would...I was supposed to translate it in...into my thought of what the picture represented, and I spent a week there. And then they finally told me I was okay and they discharged me and sent me home. Well when I...was discharged I went into the naval reserve, so...in 19...late June of 19...'50 is when the Korean War broke out, and then...when I got back to Seattle, my hometown, I...went over to Sand Point Naval Air Station and became a weekend warrior. And I was put in an SB-2C, that's a Hellcat, a...a Curtiss airplane, Curtiss Hellcat Squadron; I'm back into aviation again! So I went from...General Service to Aviation...back to General Service...now I...into the...the black gangs, the snipes, and now I'm back into aviation again flying out of Sand Point Naval Air Station. And we had a lot of young Ensigns and JGs that were typical, slap-happy, young guys, and I would be the rear...rear-gunner,

radio operator. It was just a two-seater...a dive bomber, the SB-2C and we'd go fly off the Oregon/Washington coast. And if you've ever been off the Oregon/Washington coastline, there's a lot of huge rocks...that...that come up, and these pilots would head right for a rock and...*zip!* right over the top; back down; probably ten feet off the water...*zip!* over another rock and boy, I tell you my...my heart kept jumping up into my throat! They were just having fun, you know, just like...these young kids they stick in tanks; they think that's really...really fun to have a big tank...eighteen, nineteen year old...they go rolling across the desert! Well anyway, then we'd...sometimes we'd go up off of Whidbey Island which is one of the largest islands in the United...I think it's second only to Long Island in New York. Well anyway, we had several naval air stations on...on Whidbey, and they had a diving range there and we would practice...diving; we'd come straight down. I don't know how many Gs we'd hit, and then *reeaal* (sound) right straight back up again like we were...practicing what the...the Hellcats were...were built for, dive bombers. And then I got a strange call from a Commander Nadeau, N-a-d-e-a-u, he said, "I'd like to talk to you." So I...I made an appointment and went over to Sand Point Naval Air...Air Station, and he said, "We've got a program going where we will install twin-receivers in your home; put a long line antennae on your roof; give you a...what they call a Western Union typewriter which is all capital letters, and give you a set of frequencies...say like from eight thousand to ten thousand kilocycles." Everything was kilocycles in my days.

Dr. Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Croft: “And then maybe the...the following week, we’d like to have you go from twelve to fourteen thousand KCs and the next week from fourteen to six...other words, uh, eventually go through the whole spectrum and just copy every single...signal you hear no matter what it is; don’t try to identify them...just copy a few lines...especially if they’re sending any messages, see if you can get the...the message headings and...,” so I said, “Hey, that sounds like fun!” So they came and I...where we were living here in Seattle; we had a huge glassed-in back porch and that’s where they put the gear and I had that place all to myself. Well, that was so much and I love...back into...really taking code again; I didn’t get to take code aboard the SB2Cs; mostly acting as a rear-gunner, that I started...we’d do this...just two hours a week. And usually they...they would give you a day...like one day would Monday; next day Tuesday; next day...uh, next week Wednesday, but I got so...man, I’d sit down there and I’d copy three or four hours. And then we would register them at the end of the week, and send them back to...uh, Washington D.C....registered mail, and that was it! And then I got so...sometimes like on a Saturday...I had nothing else to do...I’d copy almost all day long, and I’d pack...send it all back to them. So when the war broke out in Korea, guess who was one of the very first ones called back on to active duty?!

Dr. Lindley: Yeah.

Mr. Croft: Actually what I was doing was working for the Na...the Naval Security Group, but I...I’d never even heard of the Naval Security Group. So I...I was called back on to active duty, and sent to Guam. Now here’s another sad story; I

hope I don't break down again...but I had a flight to...to Guam (pause). We, uh...flew out of...I can't remember the name of the air... big air base out of Frisco there, but there were a bunch of young nurses that...were headed for Korea. So our first leg was from...uh, I'll just say Frisco; I can't remember the name of the...the airfield right now. You get my age, eighty-seven years old and your memory goes kind of bad. Well anyway, we...we flew to...to Hawaii and were supposed to deplane there and take another plane and then go on down to Kwajalein. From Kwajalein to Guam...that's where...where my orders read...was to go to Guam, and then from Guam to...to Korea. And uh, I had such a high priority that when we...when we were there in...uh, Hawaii, I was transferred to an Admiral's plane. The Admiral had already gone ahead and he was over in Japan...for something, and this was a *beautiful* plane! We had...blue...velvet seats in the interior; oh man, it was a pretty plane, and we were flying straight from Hawaii to Guam, so I got pulled off of the plane that was going to go on down to Kwaj (pause)...(tears). Anyway, (pause)...

Dr. Lindley: Take your time.

Mr. Croft: ...(sigh)...anyway, that plane crashed...coming into...(pause)...into Kwajalein and all of those nurses...

(end of tape 2, side A)

Dr. Lindley: ...the continuation of the oral history for Mr. George William Croft. This is May the 12th, 2010. So then you were off to Korea...or to Guam.

Mr. Croft: To Guam, yeah.

Dr. Lindley: Yeah.

Mr. Croft: Anyway, the plane crashed out near Kwajalein; I got word of this later. And they were young; most of them were...probably just, you know, out of...nurses college; carefree; real excited about going to Korea and taking care of the boys there. And then, like I say, my plane flew on to Guam and I was finally introduced to the Naval Security Group; I had never even knew it existed. And I was assigned to a Watt (sp?) section, and I told the Chief, "Chief (unintelligible), I've done that at home, but I...I don't know...quite know what's going on. I have...I've had no schooling or anything." So he...he understood, and he said, "Well, you're going to sit a circuit and we have...it was probably about...fifty positions...I mean, fifty different set-ups with...with twin receivers because...so you could copy the low or high freq and two mills; one for each...you swing back and forth in your seat...whether you're...you're working the control station or one of the satellite stations, and we were copying the Koreans, or North Koreans and the Chinese. And...because the Chinese were...very involved in that war, too, as you know.

Dr. Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Croft: Well anyway, I...I was just like a duck takes to water; that was...man, that was fun! I...I had a Korean station, or...that I was copying, and then I was assigned to a Chinese...I think it was...the first one had...had to with the...the radar stations, a bunch of radar stations along the Chinese coast; I was monitoring those. And then we were also monitoring the Russians; we were monitoring the Russians...from Vladivostok. I used to know every single town all the way down the coast of Vladi...Vladivostok, and...and on the

Russian side because...they were very interested in (chuckles) in this war, too. So we were copying the Russians and Chinese and the North Koreans...intercept. And I became a Search Operator which is kind of like what I was doing...out of my home; I was...just getting...in...trying to find new stations; in fact, I did find a few. I found a KGB Russian station that we...we were assigned to...as one of our entities to...to monitor. And I found a real interesting one. There was two Chinese...or control station working one of the...one of his satellite stations, and they were actually talking...in...kind of Pidgin English.

Dr. Lindley: Huh!

Mr. Croft: So I could understand every word they were saying, and they were talking about some of their experiences and some of the officers they worked on...worked under and where had they been transferred to and...and gee, I got the whole...kid...skedaddle of...the...where all the intercept stations were. "Well whose stationed at such and such town," and then it..., "Oh yeah, that...so and so; he's Chung King Chung," or whatever it was, and sent that back to D.C. and I got a commendation for that one.

Dr. Lindley: Hmm.

Mr. Croft: That was really interesting work. And then...probably, yeah it was...six months after I got there, I took the...the test for Chief and I was advanced to Chief Petty Officer. So here I am a Chief now and I had my own Section Boss; I had...by then we'd worked up to...we probably had about...sixty, seventy operators per watch, so you figure that times four...

Dr. Lindley: Right.

Mr. Croft: ...four watch section, we had quite a few intercept operators there.

Dr. Lindley: What receiver were you...receivers were you using, do you recall?

Mr. Croft: No, I don't recall; I know that they were high and low frequency. They were kind of like the same (unintelligible)...they were...a lot of them were put out by...

Dr. Lindley: Were any of them Collins receivers?

Mr. Croft: Oh...Collins, there you go! Well, we had Collins receivers and we had...oh, another one...the...

Dr. Lindley: Another one...the...

Mr. Croft: Pardon me?

Dr. Lindley: ...SB...Hamerlin (sp?) SB600JX?

Mr. Croft: No, we didn't have any Hamerlins; I think it was mostly Ham...

Dr. Lindley: Do they...

Mr. Croft: ...the Hams that have the...

Dr. Lindley: ...right, they were used...they were...there was a...they did...Hamerlin did build a number that were used in the military. They were very high end receivers.

Mr. Croft: Well, the biggest one right now is on a New York Stock Exchange and it was one of the stocks listed to buy; they're still real...uh, they...they...I can't think of their name, darn it! Uh, but they made...not only made receivers; they made antennae. We...we had what was called a Rombick (sp?) antennae system on Guam.

Dr. Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Croft: Uh, there's a Wollenwoober (sp?)...Wollenwebber (sp?) array of antennas and then there's...A Rombick, and all our antennas were so that you could sit at a position and you could plug into wherev...south if you wanted to copy, say, the Vietnamese which we did also at times, and north on up to the northern parts of...of Russia. You just plug in and then you...you had an antenna that kind of zeroed into whatever your signal was coming from; that was the Rombick...array.

Dr. Lindley: Right.

Mr. Croft: It had a huge antenna field. Uh, oh I wish I could think of the name of that one...off of the...did so many...many. Almost every station I had...we were at, we had some of their equipment. Well anyway, that was really interesting work. And then from Guam...I was on Guam for two years. Now I got married; I was only nineteen years old; my first wife was only seventeen years old (laughter), by the way. Young love, you might say. So she was a...just a...a sophomore in high school; no, a junior; she...she was a junior in high school and I...I graduated from high school. No, I did not graduate; that's something else I left out. When I went into the Navy, was in...uh, February; I wasn't...to graduate until June and so I was two credits short of getting my graduation. So, my smart little wife, she went down to Lincoln...we went to Lincoln High School, both of us, and talked to the Principal, Leroy Higgins, who was the principal at Lincoln, and explained, so they sent a test out...aboard...that's when I was out...still on the Vega, and they sent a test and it took me about three hours in the morning and about three hours in the

afternoon; it was...it covered everything – history; math; thought problems; you name it, and evidently passed it because I was...actually graduated and I got my diploma in 1944 (laughter).

Dr. Lindley: Hmm.

Mr. Croft: I passed that test, so I...I actually did graduate from high school. And in my...all my...my terms in...in the Navy...when the...most of the time we were in the Pacific, I took correspondence courses from the University of Cal; I *loved* to study; I had nothing else to do off watch. I would study one of the course...just indiscriminately, noth...nothing in particular, like I wanted to be a doctor, a lawyer or a beggar man or a thief; it was just...things that interested me. A lot of them were...were history, and a lot...see, I took a lot of English classes...to...per...perfect my English. And when we were on the...east coast, when I was in Morocco...later on in Morocco, and Germany and different places, then I took the University of Maryland extension courses. And I also went to quite a few different schools; both of the...later on when I became a manager in the postal system...post office schools, and in the Navy and then I went to work for Western Electric for...well, I worked for them for two years. I went to every one of their schools, electronic schools, so I had quite a bit of...scattered schooling you might say. I think I...I one time...counted up and had over three thousand hours of study in...in...and I took just about every single naval course that they had, especially in leadership. And I...in the post office, I think I went to about four or five different schools; most of those had to do with leadership. So I had quite a bit of schooling that way, but

nothing...that...that counted towards a degree or anything, and I turned it down...Dummy! We had a Curtis Martin, who was Dr. Curtis Martin, who was head of...for awhile of Seattle Pacific University here in...in Seattle. His wife worked for my wife over at Shoreline School District. And he told me that with all the courses and everything that I had taken...he...he...that I should...that he would set me up so if I went to SPU that he would see that I...that I...I could get...get a degree, and...I...I turned it down. So...I don't need it now! I'm...far as a I want to go and then I...it won't be too much longer...I'm going to retire, but that's the story of my life.

Dr. Lindley: Well we certainly appreciate all the time you spent today telling us...this detailed story. And I certainly want to thank you for your service to our country. I know that you, you know, you certainly had lots of experiences. Is there any other story you might wish to tell us concerning your World War II experiences?

Mr. Croft: No, I think I've pretty well covered that. Like I say, my age...my memory is a little foggy in places; I don't remember names too well.

Dr. Lindley: I would say your memory is quite good!

Mr. Croft: Well, sometime...I...I was...never diagnosed with it, but I know...why it even today still affects me. I know what PMS is, Post...uh, you know...

Dr. Lindley: Post traumatic stress.

Mr. Croft: Post traumatic stress, right. And really never leaves you when you've gone through some of those experiences, but...

Dr. Lindley: Do you have bad dreams?

Mr. Croft: No more. No, I didn't...I could not watch *Tara Tara Tara*, the...movie...

Dr. Lindley: Right.

Mr. Croft: ...until about six years ago. Every time I'd go, I'd say, "This time I know I'm going to watch it," and I would start...soon as it would come on, after about ten, fifteen minutes, I would start getting tighter and tighter and tighter and finally I'd have to turn it off and...and walk away.

Dr. Lindley: Uhm.

Mr. Croft: But I finally forced myself...to watch it, and now I can watch it and enjoy it; it doesn't bother me anymore (chuckles).

Dr. Lindley: Uh hum.

Mr. Croft: Like I say, it stays with you a long time.

Dr. Lindley: Yes, those are very difficult memories...that's for sure. Well I...I certainly do appreciate you taking the time to talk to us and to tell us your story and certainly want to thank you for the many long years of service to our country. You're a real, true patriot, and I...I'm very honored to have had the opportunity to listen to your story. As I say, what we will do...this will go into the archives here; will eventually be transcribed and a copy will be sent to you at...we are working hard to try to get caught up but we've, you know, it...this...all volunteers, and so some of these take a long time to transcribe. I mean, to take a tape and to...to transcribe it, it takes...several hours for every (unintelligible).

Mr. Croft: I bet, yeah.

Dr. Lindley: So, it just takes time for us to do this, but we will eventually get a copy to you. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us before we...hang up?

Mr. Croft: No, just...that it...I think it's quite an honor to be, you know, (unintelligible), and I compliment your group for what you're doing...everything; I think this really wonderful, and I would love to be able to come down there to Fredericksburg sometime and...and walk through your Museum; it would really be neat!

Dr. Lindley: Well, we would certainly be honored to have you come. We would...we certainly would be honored if you...if you were to come. We, for all of those of you who have served our country like you did, we are pleased to have you and we'd give you a special privileged tour. So we...if you ever get this way, we would be honored to have you come and visit us.

Mr. Croft: Well thank you; I appreciate it.

Dr. Lindley: Alright. Well, you have a great day and we thank you for all of the time that you've spent with us.

Mr. Croft: Well the...the sun is still shining up here. Of course we don't have any eighty-seven degrees (laughter)!

Dr. Lindley: (Laughter).

Mr. Croft: We do have bright sunshine out there, so thank you and I...I appreciate what...what you're doing, Doctor, I really do...the time you take to...to...to do all this volunteer, like you say, volunteer work; I take my hat off to you.

Dr. Lindley: Well, we...

Mr. Croft: So I thank you.

Dr. Lindley: ...I'm just delighted to do it. You have...

Mr. Croft: Okay.

Dr. Lindley: ...you have a pleasant day.

Mr. Croft: You, too.

Dr. Lindley: Alright, thank you.

Mr. Croft: Bye.

(end of interview)

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