

Paul Harless Oral History Interview

ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler, today is the 10th of July 2012. I'm in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the Admiral Nimitz Museum, and I'm interviewing Mr. Paul Harless. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Well, let me start out, Paul, by thanking you for spending the time today to share your experiences with us. I'd like to get us started by having you introduce yourself, give us your full name, date of birth, and then a little bit about your family, and then we'll take it from there.

PAUL HARLESS: All right, my name is Paul Harless. I was born on the 21st of December 1921, in a little town, about six miles out of Knoxville, Tennessee. There were seven children in my family, I'm the middle one. There was five boys and two girls. And, when I was 18, I joined the Navy. I left school and joined the Navy, and after I came back, after World War II, I took GED and got my diploma and went on from there.

EM: What did your father do for a living?

PH: There was very little living being done, then. It was in the height of the Depression, and he did some various things. One time, he was a law officer. And, his main job was that we didn't -- in the area that I lived, we had no refrigeration, because -- not until 1934, when they build a dam on the river there, and we got electricity.

EM: [TBA?], it was the TBA that brought electricity to the rural area.

PH: Right, right. So, he slaughtered veal calves, and sold them, sometimes on the road, and to restaurants. They didn't last long, so he...

EM: He had to move. (laughs)

PH: He had to move, yeah. We lived a little out of town, so the restaurants, as soon as he would slaughter them, he would take them there, or he would take them around the neighborhood and sell them. And that was the main thing that he did. Then, at one time, during the Depression, the [long?] about 1932, when I would have been 12 years old, well, we had a dairy farm. And, I, along with two brothers, milked about 40 cows by hand.

EM: I can feel the hand cramps right now, from all of that squeezing.

PH: (laughs) Yeah, yeah, and I did get a grip, you know, you talk about squeezing a beer can flat? I can do it. But,

the most fun, though, was the truck. Ton and a half truck would come around and pick up milk, (inaudible) five-gallon cans, and we'd take it to a creamery, and I used to help on that truck, and go to the creamery, because I could get free ice cream. (laughs)

EM: Oh, that's a reason, yeah!

PH: And that is the story of my father. He died when he was about 56 years of age. But my mother was long-lived, and she had a sister who lived almost 107 years. She had two other sisters who died in their nineties, and she died in her late eighties.

EM: And, you're up into your nineties.

PH: Right, I was 90 years old in December.

EM: Mm-hmm. So, you've got some good genes in there working for you, it sounds like.

PH: It seems as though I got my mother's genes.

EM: Well, it sounded like that's good. (laughs) So, you went to high school where, then?

PH: I went to a school called Gibbs High School. But when I was in about the fifth grade, the high school burned -- we had one building that had all 12 grades in it. And, the high school burned down. Arson.

EM: Really?

PH: Yeah, the janitor lost his job and he didn't like it, and the law was after him, and he committed suicide.

EM: Oh, my goodness. Ugly story.

PH: Yeah, and we had a principal that lived to be over 100. Yeah, he was a very good man, a very fair man. He was strict, and he produced good students.

EM: Yeah. But, you didn't actually graduate from high school, did you?

PH: No.

EM: because you mentioned that you --

PH: Left in the third year.

EM: And, that was before the war, though, right?

PH: Right. That was 1939. I went in in June. June 14th, 1939.

EM: So, why did you quit school?

PH: I was a history bug, and I wanted to see the world. And you know the imagination of a young man.

EM: Sure. (laughs) It's not in the classroom that you can see the world. That's right.

PH: Yeah, yeah. It didn't turn out exactly the way that I -- but, I guess maybe so, because I did see practically all the parts of the world.

EM: Yeah? So, what did your parents think about you upping and heading out to see the world?

PH: I have a little story, there. My mother was a republican, and a very radical republican. She was a conservative, and my dad was a democrat. So, when I was born, of course, why, it was shortly after Woodrow Wilson's term in office, and my mother called me aside when I joined, they had to approve it.

EM: That's right.

PH: And she said, "Now, you've always thought that your middle name was William because I just made it the W," and she said, "But I want to tell you, since you're going to work for the government now, I want you to know everything about yourself." (laughs) So, she says, "We named you, your middle name actually is Wilson. Paul Wilson Harlass." She said, "You were named after Woodrow Wilson, and I wouldn't ever tell you, because he was a democrat." (laughs)

EM: (laughs) I thought you were going to say that your middle name was "Woodrow", from the W, but it was "Wilson".

PH: Yeah. (laughs)

EM: Well, you know, republicans in Tennessee were a pretty rare breed back then, because of the old -- I mean, the democrats had a real strangle hold on the whole south back then.

PH: Well actually, actually east Tennessee was as consistently, over the years, went republican.

EM: Really?

PH: Yeah, west Tennessee, from Nashville west, it really --
most democrats.

EM: So, anyhow, you went in in '39.

PH: Right.

EM: And you chose the Navy to see the world, is that right?

PH: Right, right.

EM: And, so, tell me, what was it like in boot camp? Where did
you go?

PH: I went to Norfolk, Virginia. They had training camp there.
And, I spent 13 weeks in training, and at the end of
training, back then, they would send you home for two
week's leave. Well, it so happened that my training ended
at the same time that Hitler started moving in Germany, and
instead of going home, I went aboard the old battleship,
USS Arkansas, a ship that was built in 1909.

EM: Oh, boy, she must have been just about the oldest of the
battle wagons around!

PH: Yeah, she was one of the three.

EM: Was she in the same class as the Texas, I wonder?

PH: No, no, she was...

EM: She was older than that...

PH: She had completely a different superstructure, and guns.
In fact, she wasn't used in combat in World War II, because

her smaller guns could only elevate about 15 degrees, and they were inside the hull of the ship. So, that prevented them from firing at aircraft. So, they made a communications ship out of it, and I have a picture there of it after they made it a communications ship.

EM: Now, was it a communications ship when you were aboard, or was she still a ship of the line?

PH: No. We immediately went up and down the East Coast, and went down to the Caribbean Sea, and pretty well covered it, went to many places down there, but that was [the training?] area out of Guantanamo Bay at that time.

EM: Mm-hmm. Do you remember the hull number of the Arkansas?
BB... I don't remember it.

PH: I don't. I'm not sure, you might be able to see the number...

EM: That's fine.

PH: I believe it was 13, but I'm not certain about that.

EM: I know it's a low number, because she's a pretty old girl. So, you went aboard, and what was your station on the ship?

PH: I went into the deck force.

EM: That means deck scrubber. (laughs)

PH: Yeah, yeah.

EM: I found that out. (laughs)

PH: But, shortly after I got on there, I was assigned the duty to run the liberty boat. It was an open, 50-foot motor launch, could haul about 36 men. Whenever we would anchor out -- we always anchored out, because it's too hard to tie it up, then we would lower that liberty boat and run in. And I was running it when I was transferred. I was transferred seven months after I went on the Arkansas.

EM: So, she was basically patrolling up and down the East Coast?

PH: Right.

EM: She come across anything?

PH: No, no.

EM: Well, what was your battle station?

PH: My battle station on the Arkansas was never assigned. It was more or less a repair party type of thing.

EM: Mm-hmm. What's it like being on an old Navy battle ship like that?

PH: Well, it's easy to get seasick, because if you got in rough water, it rolls so slow, you know? (laughs) Destroyers, which I've spent more time on, once you got seasick, well then, you could take it without too much problem, but a battleship slowly rolled, and is like walking on a deck moving all the time. In fact, when you'd get off and

walked down the dock, why, it'd feel like it was rolling, too.

EM: Yeah, you were kind of weaving along. Still had your sea-legs. (laughs)

PH: Yeah, exactly. (laughs)

EM: My gosh. So, did you suffer from seasickness when you first went on?

PH: Never got really seasick, but I got to where I would perhaps have a little headache, just a kind of overall feeling.

EM: Queasy feeling, yeah.

PH: No, no. But, on the destroyer, one time, though, our cook got seasick coming around Cape [Paterson?], he vomited, and he was wearing false teeth, and he lost them, and we had to get a new cook. (laughs)

EM: I never thought about losing your false teeth when you get sick, but I guess there's a first time for everything. My gosh. So, your high point on the Arkansas was running the victory boat, then -- I'm sorry, the liberty boat, taking the boys in for liberty ashore, huh?

PH: Right, uh-huh.

EM: Did you ever get liberty ashore?

PH: I very seldom went ashore, but usually when we would visit some island, I might go ashore one day.

EM: Well, when you were on the Arkansas, you were pretty much -
- didn't go into port much, or?

PH: Just on duty, but I would usually make a trip like St. Thomas and [visited?] one time, and Ponce, Puerto Rico was one place, and most of the islands down there, we did.

EM: Did she patrol alone, or was she accompanied by destroyers and those kinds of things?

PH: Usually by herself. Of course, now that it wasn't... I went on it in September of '39, but I left it in May, so there wasn't a lot of things that I did on that.

EM: So, because you were driving, if I can -- that's probably not the right sea term -- the liberty boats, then that lead you to an assignment on another ship. Go ahead and tell me about that.

PH: I never knew exactly why I was transferred, because one day -- it was on Saturday, and we were in Annapolis, about to take midshipmen on a cruise, a training cruise. And it was on Saturday, and the executive officer called me down to his office, and he says, "You and one other men has been selected to transfer." And he didn't tell us what it was, and he said, "The only way to be fair is to flip a coin." And so he flipped a coin, and told me to call it, and I called it tails, and it came up tails. And he said, "You're going to Washington, D.C., to the presidential

yacht, Potomac. And, since it's Saturday, and we don't have the [paymaster?] here and so forth like that, well then, you get to Washington the best way you can, and we'll follow up on it." And it just so happened I found two or three other boys that would share in a taxi, and we rode a taxi into Washington.

EM: Yeah, I guess the good news is Annapolis is not that far from Washington. (laughs)

PH: That's right, that's right. (laughs) But, it was a problem washing your clothes and so forth like that, so, since I was on this liberty boat, I would wash my clothes in a bucket on the boat, and then I would put them out behind me, drag them in salt water, and then hang them up to dry.

EM: Makes them a little stiff, doesn't it, though? (laughs)

PH: Yeah. Well, I went to Washington without my work clothes. (laughs) I had them in the bucket.

EM: You left them in the bucket.

PH: Got to Washington, and I went to the Navy yard office, and that's on the Anacostia River, and I just went in, and I asked them, where was the Potomac? One person said, "what the hell do you care?" I said, "I've been transferred to it." "Oh," he said, "it'll be here in just a few minutes," and it was just a few minutes, here came the Potomac, up the Anacostia River, tied up, Roosevelt was aboard it.

EM: He was?

PH: Yeah.

EM: And so, did you board at that point?

PH: I boarded it then.

EM: Did you see the man?

PH: Yes.

EM: Well, that was kind of a thrill, wasn't it, to see the president of the United States?

PH: Yeah, but, I wasn't involved in politics, so... (laughs)

EM: No, I know, but I mean, he's our leader, you know?

PH: Yeah, yeah. Well, he had very little protection. He just had two cars, and about three or four motorcycles, and that was it. He rode in his car, he carried his baggage in the one behind him, and escorted by about four motorcycles, and then we took over security duties when he boarded the ship.

EM: Mm-hmm. Times are different now, aren't they?

PH: Right, right.

EM: So, what was the Potomac like? Describe her to us.

PH: She was a converted Coast Guard cutter, since Roosevelt was crippled with polio, he couldn't get around. He had to use his arms and muscles to get around. So, he had been on a small [fire?] on a ship at one time. And so, he was scared that --

EM: He was secretary of the Navy at one point.

PH: He was, yes. And, so they converted a Coast Guard cutter. It's 165 feet long, and we had a Navy crew of about 40, 42 men. And it was a slow ship. It would only make about 16 knots at top speed.

EM: I mean, did they fancy it up? I mean, did we have a little bit of mahogany here and there, or something to make it seem presidential?

PH: No. (laughs) It was very, very plain. Of course, we did do some things to dress it up. We had part of the railing, call it the lifeline or some forth like that, did have a wooden top to it. But most of it was metal. And, around the place where he sat on the main deck, as soon as -- well, when he'd come down to the ship, they would just drive right up to the gain way. And the gain way had two handles. He would swing himself across, and we'd set him in a wheelchair and roll him back to a place where we had cushions, and so forth like that. Then we'd get under way, and then he'd go wherever he wanted to go. And, so, we had wooden, teakwood decks, but up forward, from the bridge forward, it was metal decks, but we did put -- we had a very light grey rubber, like, you see these mats where you'd get sand off of your feet? That kind of matting all over it. Of course, when he brought that dog Fala aboard, well, we usually had to wash (laughs) the mats, too.

EM: (laughs) He was a male, wasn't he?

PH: Yeah.

EM: (laughs) That's a story. Now, tell me, refresh my memory, what's the name of his dog?

PH: Fala.

EM: And how did you spell that, do you remember?

PH: F-A-L-A.

EM: Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah. All right. Well, I know he was sensitive about people seeing his crippled nature. I mean, it was really withheld from the public, although, I think the public knew it, but they never saw their president in a wheelchair.

PH: There is a few pictures of him in a wheelchair.

EM: I mean, he would prop himself up at the podium to give speeches, and, I mean, lock his legs in place, and...

PH: And always, he was using either James or Elliot to support him when he was walking, so that they could work together and it not show too much.

EM: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. So, how long were you on the Potomac as a crew member?

PH: I was on from early May of 1940, until November 1942.

EM: Okay, so, that's over two years.

PH: About 31 months.

EM: Mm-hmm. So, in the early days there, before the war started officially, where was the Potomac going? I mean, what kind of areas was he running on the Potomac?

PH: Well, we went to a range from the Caribbean to Nova Scotia.

EM: Okay. She got out on the open seas, then.

PH: Right, before the war started. Now, when we met Churchill in the north Atlantic, in 1941, well, that was in Newfoundland. And, then -- but usually, very, very often, from May until November, he would just come down, we might just cruise on the river a while, because it was based close to where the Anacostia river flew into the Potomac River. And we berthed in the Anacostia River. So, we'd go down to the Potomac, we may go all the way down in Chesapeake Bay and spend a weekend. He loved to do that. He loved to fish.

EM: Really?

PH: Yeah. And then, sometimes he might just go up and down the Potomac. Then, we had many occasions that he would take visitors down to Mount Vernon to show them that, like Queen Wilhelmina, the Netherlands. Princess Martha and her family, of Norway, and then politicians and things like that. Just, cruise down to the Washington home.

EM: See, because I -- is Mount Vernon downstream or upstream?

PH: Downstream. It's on the right-hand side going downstream.

EM: Mm-hmm, yeah. So, it'd be on the Virginia side.

PH: It's on a hill overlooking the river. Incidentally, every time we passed it, whether we were going up or down the river, we always rendered honors to it. (laughs)

EM: Is that right?

PH: Yeah.

EM: The first George W. (laughs)

PH: Yeah, yeah. (laughs)

EM: So, what were your duties aboard the Potomac?

PH: With the major job that I did, oh, I spent more time on the sun deck. It had a sun deck, they added a sun deck on it that went all the way from the bridge, all the way to the stern. And all that was the two stacks, and I had control of that. I was responsible for that sun deck.

EM: And, what was your ranking at this point? What was your...?

PH: I went on there as a seaman, first class, but I came off as a (inaudible).

EM: What was the most interesting visitor that you saw aboard ship, the time that you...?

PH: (laughs) I'm tempted to say Eleanor. (laughs) She didn't come on very often.

EM: I was going to ask you if she ever showed up. (laughs)

PH: Yeah. In fact, when Wilhelmina came on there, she came on board, and went down to Mount Vernon, and they came back to Washington by vehicle. But the president and Queen Wilhelmina rode off in one vehicle, and Eleanor caught another one.

EM: Is that right? How interesting. Was there much interaction between the crew and the president, or the visitors?

PH: No, we knew our place. Now, usually on the way, he had -- and still has, today -- a place on the main deck that went all the way back around the stern. And we had settees and things like that there, and had it had bulletproof glass about 16, 18 inches above the railing so that he couldn't stand up and get higher than that. But, we had a passageway on each side of the ship, and we had a gate to go back into there, and we, as security, stood at that gate. We didn't go back there except regular maintenance and cleanup. And the president had 13 Filipinos that took care of cabins and things like that, where he used personally.

EM: And I guess there was cooking facilities aboard, and a kitchen, and a mess?

PH: Yes.

EM: And, so, if I remember correctly, usually you had blacks as people who would serve the food and that kind of --

PH: No, these were Filipinos.

EM: Oh, Filipinos did all of it.

PH: All of them were Filipinos.

EM: I wonder why Filipinos?

PH: You know, they were allowed in the Navy then, and they were just like regular Navy people. They didn't get to do a lot of things that we could, but they could make retirement in the Navy. So, they were good workers.

EM: Hmm. So, the Potomac, she went down to the Caribbean? Did you mention down to the Caribbean?

PH: Yeah.

EM: Anything special? Was the president always aboard when she went out?

PH: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, usually. The only time that I remember that we made a trip was when World War II started, we had been for a week down in Norfolk, at the Navy Yard down there, redoing her teakwood decks. Recaulking them, they called them. And, we went back to Washington on Saturday, and the next morning, I went over to the hospital in Washington, see, one of the boys was in a car wreck, and was there when it was announced about Pearl Harbor. So we came back across Chesapeake Bay without him.

EM: So, things changed after Pearl Harbor, I guess.

PH: They restricted him not to out to open sea.

EM: So the Potomac didn't get out a lot after that, then.

PH: That's right. Not in open sea.

EM: Mm-hmm. That sounds like a pretty cushy job on the Potomac, compared to some of the other positions you could have been filling in the Navy.

PH: (laughs) Well, with all my years to retirement, that was the only [shore?] duty I had. (laughs) We had liberty. Three days out of four, we usually worked with three shifts. And at noon, the workday ended, and we could go ashore, or we could stay aboard. The cook would fix us what we want, and we had an open galley in which we could go in anytime we wanted to and fix your own. But, we all got together, of course, and the majority of us went in together and got rented apartments, because we got baseball tickets and football tickets. And if I remember right, Redskin football tickets for the scene was \$9.

EM: (laughs) My, how things have changed.

PH: Yeah. (laughs)

EM: Because, I guess there was always the Washington senators who were always in the [cellar?], and never got anywhere close to anything.

PH: We even saw a good Texas man one time named Sammy Baugh.
And I saw him kick the longest punt, surprise punt, and it
just kept rolling, went 92 yards, believe it or not.

EM: Now, that's a punt.

PH: Yeah. (laughs)

EM: No runback either, I suspect. (laughs)

PH: Yeah. But, we didn't wear our uniform ashore.

EM: I was going to ask you what your housing was, and so, you
guys were basically had an apartment that a bunch of you
shared.

PH: Right. Yeah.

EM: So, tell me about the trip up to take the president up to
visit Winston Churchill, or to meet with him.

PH: All right. It was [advertised?] he was going on a fishing
trip. So, we went up to Massachusetts.

EM: So, this is 42 now?

PH: Forty-one, August of '41.

EM: Oh, it's before Pearl Harbor, then?

PH: Right.

EM: I had forgotten that little detail, okay.

PH: Right. And, we were going out fishing. I believe that
Princess Martha and her family was with us. We went out to
fish, and after the day was when he was getting the end of
the day, why, we went back in to where we were supposed to

anchor, and instead, we turned and went out to open sea, and met the USS Augusta. And, we put him on the Augusta. And, the meeting that he had with Churchill was partially on the Prince of Whales battleship of England, and the Augusta. I've heard many tales that the reason why that they had a meeting on the Augusta is because... no, on the Prince of Whales. Most of the meetings were on the Prince of Whales, because, you know, they -- the British Navy served their men alcohol. (laughs) The Potomac didn't.

EM: At all, huh?

PH: At all.

EM: No alcohol.

PH: Navy didn't allow alcohol.

EM: I thought that maybe you were under special circumstances.

PH: I imagine that he did, some once in a while. (laughs) Only one of the secret service men came aboard when he was aboard. And at that time, it was nearly always a fellow named Riley, and he would come and make the trip with us, and we would take over all the security duties. And the security was that if a boat came close, [warn?] them off. If they did not hear you, fire once over their head. And then if they didn't obey, well then, fire at them. On security, we carried a rifle, a Thompson submachine gun, and a .45. And our instructions was, that if he stood up

to see about anything happening, lay him down, even if you had to tackle him like a football player.

EM: Really?

PH: Yeah. (laughs)

EM: But, you never had to do that?

PH: Never had to do that.

EM: So, there was no fixed armaments aboard the Potomac, other than handguns and that sort of...

PH: After the war started, they put a 50-caliber machine gun on the bough. That's the only one.

EM: Hmm. So, you look back on those 31 months on the Potomac fondly? Was that... or was it boring, or...?

PH: Yes.

EM: I mean, exciting, I mean, what'd you think?

PH: It was pretty good, because we had a little shack out on the dock that we kept our civilian clothes in, and we would come off the ship, go over and change clothes, and go where we were going.

EM: So, how did you come to leave the Potomac?

PH: When the war started, and that would have been in December of '41, we... there was no change in us, except that we didn't go out to open sea. But, there were 13 of us transferred at one time, to Orange, Texas, where a destroyer was going into commission. And, we went down --

and we were the nucleus of the crew of the John Rodgers, the Fletcher-type destroyer. And, on that, I had the second division, which was everything exposed to weather from the bridge back, and I had 61 men, and 59 of them had never been on a ship.

EM: (laughs) That's a real green crew. Green in more than one way, probably. (laughs)

PH: Yeah, we went down on Guantanamo Bay for five weeks for training, went down to Trinidad to escort a carrier back to Norfolk, Virginia.

EM: Now, when did you go on the Rodgers?

PH: It went into commission, I believe it was the 3rd of February in '43.

EM: Okay, early '43.

PH: Yeah.

EM: And what was her number again?

PH: Five seven four.

EM: Yeah, five seven four. Okay. I'll get that down here. Okay, so you're a plankowner, if there is such a thing for a tin can. (laughs)

PH: Right. Yeah. I didn't take any of it with me when I left it at Tokyo Bay. (laughs)

EM: So, you're training all these greenhorns...

PH: Good bunch of men.

EM: Mm-hmm. Did you stay with them, pretty much the whole...?

PH: About 75% of that crew was still on it when the war ended.

EM: So, what's the total crew count on a ship like that?

PH: Well, since we were a flagship, well, we had extra people.
We had a little over 300.

EM: Mm-hmm. So, after the shakedown cruise and all that, where did she go?

PH: We went, for some reason, we went to New York one day.
Came back to Rappahannock River in Virginia, got a
munitions ship loaded with munitions for the south Pacific.
We took it all the way to Pearl Harbor.

EM: Just the two of you? The two ships?

PH: Yes, yes, yes. And I always mentioned that we stayed at
least four thousand yards away. (laughs)

EM: (laughs) Yeah, you want to keep her kind of close to the
horizon a little bit. (laughs) So, who was the captain?

PH: His name was Parish. H.O. Parish. And, he stayed on it
until, all the way up... I would say after about the 5th
battle we were in, and then he was transferred to -- he had
a division of ships his own, and then he eventually became
an admiral, and then he died. He died a few years ago.
Very good man. He was... in fact, I've got some of his
poems he wrote. (laughs)

EM: Oh, really? He was a poet?

PH: Yeah.

EM: Among other things. Now, you mentioned she was a flagship.
What was she a flagship -- what flag was she?

PH: We were the 25th squadron. We -- in the Navy, four
destroyers was a division. A squadron was two or more
divisions. So, we had at least eight destroyers that we
controlled.

EM: And so... We had... how many did you say to a squadron,
four?

PH: Squadron was two divisions of four.

EM: Okay, so eight.

PH: Total, yes.

EM: So, she was basically leading eight.

PH: And late in the war, we became in charge of more than one
squadron.

EM: Mm-hmm. So, you're keeping a safe distance from this
ammunition ship.

PH: Right.

EM: And so, we've got to go through the canal...

PH: Right.

EM: And then...?

PH: We stopped at San Pedro in California.

EM: Okay.

PH: And then straight to Pearl.

EM: Mm-hmm. So, this is a good chance for the crew to come together and learn the ins and outs of the ship.

PH: Right.

EM: What was your impression of this class of vessel?

PH: The best destroyers ever built.

EM: Really?

PH: Right.

EM: Why do you say that?

PH: Because they were harder-hitting, they were faster, and they were just easy to work with.

EM: Mm-hmm.

PH: In fact, I have here a magazine showing all Fletcher destroyers and their history and such.

EM: And there was a bunch of them, as I remember.

PH: It was about 155 built, altogether.

EM: Mm-hmm. So, what was it -- so, you went to Pearl with the ammunition ship, is that correct?

PH: Right.

EM: Were you seasick? Well, we discussed earlier, you never really got seasick.

PH: No, no. Not anymore.

EM: Yeah. You got it out of your system there, early on. So, when you went into Pearl Harbor, what did you see, and what did you do?

PH: Well, there was still oil on the water when we got there, and they didn't have all the ships repaired yet. But, we only stayed a few days, and then we began our first actions. And our first battle star. We raided an island close to the [home?] in Japan. It was close to their perimeter of defense, Marcus Island. And, we just went there, hit it, and left. It was a big Japanese base there. And then we came back to Pearl, stayed a few days, and then we went to Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands and did the same thing.

EM: Now, was this before we had actually invaded Tarawa, then?

PH: Yes, yes.

EM: It wasn't part of the --

PH: We came back there later and took the place.

EM: Okay, okay, okay. So, tell me about Marcus Island. I've heard of it, I don't know where it is.

PH: If you drew a straight line from Pearl Harbor to Japan, (inaudible) Japan, it was maybe 800 miles from Japan itself. It was twice as far as it was from Pearl Harbor.

EM: So, it's just a little, an atoll, just a little spot of land, or?

PH: Well, it was a base, a strong base. Now, what it was, was, the reason why we hit those islands -- and we got Wake after that, later -- because Marcus, Tarawa, and Wake were

in supply line. The reason why we hit Marcus is because the Japanese were still moving east, and they'd gotten as far as the Gilbert Islands. And, so, this was to start stopping them from supply lines. We went to Tarawa because the Gilbert Islands was in line with the south pacific, and Australia, and Wake was in the middle, for supplies going along, just north of the equator, towards Indonesia.

EM: So, let's talk about the strike that you guys made on Marcus Island. I mean, was this quick in, quick out?

PH: Quick in, quick out.

EM: Was it just destroyers, or?

PH: No, we had one battleship, and a carrier. A couple just cruisers.

EM: So, we had air power to go in, and what was the Rodgers' role in all of this?

PH: Oh, only for protection and so forth.

EM: Okay, so --

PH: But, it was enough surprise that we got away with it.

EM: So, there wasn't a lot of organized resistance.

PH: Right, right.

EM: So, was it considered --

PH: They were surprised, yeah.

EM: Yeah. So, pretty successful little raid then, huh?

PH: Yeah.

EM: And no particular losses to speak of on the part of our ship?

PH: We didn't lose any.

EM: That's great.

PH: Yeah. One very odd thing that we did, which we took a lot of embarrassment, was, on the way back from the battleship, we were refueling, and underway, and a destroyer was refueling on the other side, and when they sent their line over to pull the oil hose over, we could take the fuel in two places, they hit -- our one responsible failed to take the charge out of our depth charge racks, and it just so happened, as Murphy's Law is, that that had hit the [fire end?] on that K-gun, and fired one of those 350 pound...

EM: Depth charges.

PH: Depth charges. (laughs) Straight across the middle of the battleship, and down between it and the destroyer on the other side, and didn't touch either one of them.

EM: That must have been interesting.

PH: Yeah. Our captain got a message.

EM: So, he caught it for that, I'll bet.

PH: (laughs) Yeah.

EM: My gosh. Which battleship was it, do you remember?

PH: No, I believe it was the Massachusetts.

EM: Okay.

PH: There were several of them out there that we operate with, the various times, I can't remember.

EM: And, the aircraft carrier that was part of the Marcus expedition, do you remember which one it was?

PH: No, but it was -- I don't know whether it was the Enterprise or --

EM: There weren't many of them at that point, they were just really starting to crank them out.

PH: That's right.

EM: Yeah, the Enterprise, she was everywhere. Okay, so, we dodged the depth charge, and so, where after that? Let's kind of go through the sequence of the battle stars that the Rodgers...

PH: Incidentally, the captain in charge of the task force became -- was in charge of amphibious forces at Leyte Gulf, and he got back at us. (laughs) He kept us nine days after the battle of Leyte Gulf, [firing star shells?] and things, where the troops was. From Marcus, we stayed back at Pearl for about a week. That was usually about when we stayed when we'd come back off of a strike. And we went to Tarawa, and it was the same thing. We got away with it, no damage. Except, on the way back, we hit a typhoon.

EM: Yeah, you mentioned that she survived several typhoons. So, this is the first one that...

PH: Right. Right, we just went in, and... it's kind of strange that the main island in Tarawa was Betio, there were three islands that the Japanese were on. And the main island was Betio, which had an airfield. It was one of those atolls. And there was not any room left once they got the airfield on there. (laughs)

EM: Covered it up. (laughs)

PH: Yeah, that island was only about half a mile wide, and about two miles long. And, of course, we concentrated on stuff around the airfield and so forth like that. And, with their defenses, and they say the Japanese admiral that was in charge of it said it would take a million years for our marines to take that island from them. And they had things with the coconut logs around, and metal, and concrete, all together, that even their [block houses?] and things, even direct hit from some of the big guns didn't knock them out. They had to use fire, flamethrowers.

EM: Yeah, I know Tarawa was a mess.

PH: It was. But, we learned a lot of lessons there, too. Probably the most horrible site that we saw was on the second or third day, why, we saw bodies floating in the water, you know, and we tried to take their dog tags, but we got word that a submarine had torpedoed one of our carriers, and the captain, he -- well, the medical men did

go out and try to get their dog tags, but they didn't get many, because the captain says we can't take the chance on being still like this.

EM: Right, right. Become sitting ducks, yeah.

PH: Mm-hmm. Yeah. And, we had, one time, somebody hit a... looked like maybe an ammunition dump, and just looked like the whole island went up in explosions and...

EM: So, this is during the invasion?

PH: No, this is during the raid.

EM: Okay, this is still the raid part.

PH: Yeah. And one boy on the gun, I heard him say, "God, I [say, a man could get?] killed around here, [couldn't he?]?"

EM: Now, that was when the revelation came --

PH: No, that was in the invasion part. The other, we hit and ran and then back to Pearl Harbor.

EM: And then, did you come back for the invasion as part of the invasion force?

PH: Well, first, there was something else. We left there, and went down to Treasure Island Bougainville in the Solomons area, and supported that troop landing. And, we were there about two weeks, and when we got the troops on the beach and secured, why, our little support group had a night fight. We were trying to protect the landing, to keep...

but, we had a night fight with the aircraft. In the afternoon, we had a spotter plane fly around us, all afternoon, we couldn't do anything about it because he was out of range, and we didn't have any fighter support. And, we knew they were coming, that they'd be there around sundown, so we were ready for them. And there was about, we estimated, 35 to 40 bombers and torpedo bombers. Well, we escaped. One cruiser got hit, we had two cruisers with us.

EM: Really?

PH: One of them got hit. Outside of that, we didn't have any damage. We kept -- they hit us about 6:15 in the evening, and it was about two o'clock the next morning we found a rain cloud and hid in it, and got away from them. (laughs)

EM: My gosh, that's a long period of time to be under attack.

PH: Yeah, well, we were dodging them all the time, they were dogging us, and they'd find us, and then we'd... every time we found a rain cloud, well, we'd get under it.

EM: Yeah, I'll bet. So, what was your station, then, during combat operations like this?

PH: I was gun captain of a twin 40-milimeter antiaircraft gun.

EM: So, you were right in the thick of it, then, huh?

PH: Yes, yes. Mm-hmm. Even on a superstructure, [on deck?], we were up there.

EM: So, how did your boys do on the twin forties?

PH: Wonderful, wonderful. We shot down one kamikaze that was so close, it's the one the picture is on. And, we estimated it'd be a hundred feet from us before we got it. And we were lucky enough to hit the bomb, apparently, because he disintegrated. And parts of the plane came down and hit on the ship, and we picked up springs out of the engine and so forth like that. Propeller hit on deck, and went over the side before anybody could get it. After we got through, I told the boys, the gun crew, said, "See? You've been bitching and complaining because all this training you're doing," you know, practice, practice, practice. I said, "You did everything exactly like you was supposed to do. And that's all to save us."

EM: And it made a difference.

PH: Because he was coming in from the stern, and any way we turned, he could turn with us.

EM: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Darn. So, that must make the hair stand up on the back of your neck, when something like that happens, huh?

PH: (laughs) Yeah.

EM: So, were any of the other tin cans hit by aircraft, or bombs, or any of that?

PH: On this particular action, I don't know, but... we were under an awful lot of air attacks. And, the further we went in the war, the more planes there was.

EM: And the more kamikazes there were, as opposed to just being bombs.

PH: Right. In fact, the kamikazes started in the Philippines. They was a surprise. And the destroyers alone hit, and I have a list here of all the ships that were hit. A lot of pictures and things. And, there was 35 destroyers hit in the Philippines. But, there were 122 hit at Okinawa.

EM: Yeah, Okinawa was the big show when it came to kamikazes and losses of ships and sailors. And a lot of them were the [picket?] ships and the destroyers.

PH: Right, the picket ships was particularly busy. Because, they caught on that we were putting them out there to warn our radar that they were coming in, so they started picking on us out there. We went out there a total of 11 days.

EM: My gosh.

PH: Quite a busy time.

EM: So, let's go through the sequence here, then. Which battle star are we on now with the Rodgers? After we worked our way through Tarawa and Bougainville.

PH: Well, then we got word of the taking of Tarawa. So, we left down there, and met the amphibious forces going to

Tarawa. And we went in with them. And stayed there -- well, we went in there in October and it took over 30 days total time to clean up everything, and we went into Ellice Island group, a little island named Funafuti, and...

EM: Now, that one, I have not heard of.

PH: (laughs) Funafuti, yeah, it's spelled that way, too.

EM: You're going to have to spell it for me.

PH: F-U-N-A-F-U-T... E. And we spent Christmas Day there. We stayed through Christmas -- I think I've got [one?] handy, here.

EM: Oh, here it comes, it just came back. Funafuti...

PH: And then, on the 26th of December, we went back to Pearl Harbor. Then we went and raided Wake island, the third island.

EM: Now, what went on at Wake? You don't hear a whole lot about taking of Wake, so...

PH: Well, it was just another "Destroy their facilities to keep them from interfering with our supply lines." It was, "Knock out the aircraft facilities." In all of those raids, we usually left time bombs that would explode later, after we had left.

EM: Really?

PH: Yeah. They say six hours after we left, it'd start going off.

EM: Hmm. I'll be darned. I didn't know that. (laughs) So, Wake was a hit-and-run, destroy...?

PH: Right.

EM: And, again, you're with, what? You were with airpower, and a battleship?

PH: Yeah.

EM: Or cruisers, and a flat top of some sort.

PH: About the same, yeah. And, the Gilbert Islands, where Tarawa was, the equator went straight through those islands. And we didn't have an airconditioned ship.

EM: Really?

PH: We had -- (laughs) we had 300 men sleeping below [sea?] decks. And at night, we would close all the hatch doors, and the one that went up and down out of the ship. They had these little quick open and close the doors, you know, spinner wheel?

EM: Mm-hmm, just like in the movies, yeah.

PH: Then you get up there and push it back down, and...

EM: So, you got used to sweating in your hammock, or bunk, or whatever.

PH: You'd get out of there if you could.

EM: Did they allow you to sleep on-deck at all? I know some of the larger ships, they would let some of the crew sleep on-deck.

PH: Yeah. In fact, I had one 15-year-old boy came out there in 1945, he didn't get a bunk for a long time. He slept wherever he could.

EM: Fifteen years old!

PH: Yeah, yeah. He... (laughs)

EM: He must have messed with his ID card a little bit so he could get in.

PH: They started to send him back a couple of times, but it was never convenient. But, I believe it was at Okinawa, they checked him again, but they let him stay until the peace was signed.

EM: He must have been just about the youngest veteran of World War II.

PH: As far as we know, that he was the second youngest in the Pacific. And he went on, and after he came back, he went back in the Navy, and in the submarine service, and was in North Korea. He got hurt, got a medical discharge, and I talked to him in Florida. Went down to see him in Coco, Florida, not less than February. And, he's still alive.

EM: So, he's, like, 82 years old, which is just literally a baby.

PH: Yeah. (laughs) In fact, I have his career day-to-day things, and it's a good judge of how things happened, every

day, when something was happening. And I'm going to give you a copy of that.

EM: Okay, that'd be great. Okay, so, after Wake, then what?

PH: After Wake, let me see, we started out... let me look...

EM: Start referencing some of this information that you brought along here. What was the food like, onboard ship? Did you guys eat well on that...?

PH: (laughs) Did you ever eat dried eggs and so forth like that?

EM: I never have.

PH: (laughs)

EM: But that's what you ate, huh?

PH: Yeah. (laughs) And one time, we got some food from New Zealand, but we couldn't eat ox.

EM: Oh, I thought they were giving you sheep, mutton.

PH: (laughs) That was... oh, yeah, right over here. (papers rustling) That's a view of the ship, and the battles after Wake. That's battle number one. Raids, and Treasure Bougainville, Gilbert Islands, and then we went to the Marshall Islands.

EM: Wow, she just goes on and on. She really got around. Okay, what's the summary of the Marshall Islands?

PH: The Marshall Islands was another atoll. And, the biggest one, they had a pretty powerful naval base on Kwajalein.

And, that's where we went, and we were at Kwajalein. Did a lot of bombardment there. And, we did find quite a few targets, too. I know at one time -- if you're watching through binoculars with Navy, I don't know what power binocular [shell?], but you can see the shell go, if you happen to be watching it. And they had little block houses, and they had big ones. And, then they had trenches running to them. So, we were firing at one little block house, and when we fired, one jumped out of the trench and ran in the door at the same time the shell went in. And, then another time, we watched the Marines use flamethrowers to get into the big block houses. And we heard -- I couldn't prove this, but we heard that they counted over 450 dead inside that block house. They were big. And they were, of course, mostly log plus metal, plus concrete. And, another time, the Marines were coming up the beach, and they had a banzai charge in, it looked like, about a ton and a half truck. And, we fired at it with all five guns, and we hit right under it, and it just...

EM: So, you were really close in, supporting?

PH: Oh, yeah. We were in machine gun range.

EM: Dang.

PH: In fact, it was at Kwajalein that I began to believe that we were a miracle ship. Because, one boy says, "What is

that sound?" and somebody said, "Well, that's machine guns." They were machine gunning us, and so... I never did get scared after that, I figured we had made it, this was our fourth battle and landing, and we hadn't lost anybody, so...

EM: Never a scratch.

PH: That's right.

EM: So, you, at that point, figuring you're special, huh?

PH: Yeah, yeah. And, we had five islands that we had to take there. Incidentally, one of our local personnel in Augusta, Georgia, right across from my home, he won a medal of honor there.

EM: Really?

PH: He was lieutenant colonel, and he was killed there. And, a lot of things back there are named after him.

EM: What's his name?

PH: His name is [Dice?]. Lieutenant Colonel Dice.

EM: I believe we've met him. I think he's been...

PH: Well, his son-in-law was General Smith, who writes a lot, you'll see him on TV every once in a while and so forth like that, he writes. He married Dice's daughter. And he went out there, after the war, to where Dice was killed.

EM: So, I see something here, Bismarck Archipelago.

PH: Well, after we got through in the Marshalls, after we got through with all five things, we'd been there about three weeks or so, and we went in and anchored in the Kwajalein area, and we got a message from commander of the fleet, said, "You've got 48 hours turnaround." That meant we had 48 hours to make all repairs and be ready to go back to sea again. So, that's where we went, to the Bismarck Archipelago. That was some big islands, actually got swamps and mountains and so forth on them. In fact, Bougainville was maybe three or four hundred miles long. And, New Britain, and Admiralty Islands, so that made up the Bismarck Archipelago.

EM: Okay, okay.

PH: And, the Japanese had their main base on New Britain Island, at Rabaul. And, so, what we did, we went in there and supported taking those islands, and it took a long time. I forget how long it did take us. (laughs)

EM: Wow, I mean, I'm just looking down the list here... you guys got such a long list of things that you did, you can't almost find it, it's so long. See, I'm down to Ulithi, to come in later. There's Kwajalein. Always -- can never spell Kwajalein when I have to. (laughs) Ah, here's Espiritu Santo, that's in the New Hebrides.

PH: Espiritu Santo.

EM: Yeah.

PH: Yeah, that was our operating base down there, in that part.
We crossed the equator --

EM: How many times did she cross the equator? I saw that --

PH: Nineteen times. Twenty-one, twenty-one times. The best I can count. Every time that Admiral Nimitz was going to move west, why, Admiral Nimitz was in charge, but when [Old?] MacArthur coming up towards the Philippines, he was in charge. What we did, we shifted back and forth each time one of them made a move, then we would go in. That's the reason why we put so many miles on.

EM: You literally are involved with both arms of the pincer movement, working your way towards Japan. Now, did I not see a reference somewhere where you actually saw the MacArthur return to the Philippines?

PH: I have a picture of it, yeah. We saw it. (laughs)

EM: Yeah, tell me about that.

PH: We had left Hollandia in New Guinea, and had picked up our amphibious forces from the islands, so it took us 10 days to get from New Guinea to the Leyte Gulf. And, we got the troops on the beach, and on the second or third day, MacArthur came in with a group of ships. He was on one of the other war ships, and communications ship. So, he came in, oh, just not far from us. Couple hundred yards at the

most. And, he and his group waded ashore... twice.

(laughs)

EM: I was going to say, how many times did he do it? (laughs)

What's your impression of MacArthur, based on what you saw?

PH: I admired him, but I didn't. (laughs) He was... he was quite a general. In fact, I believe that if he hadn't been pulled out of North Korea, I believe we wouldn't have had Vietnam.

EM: Could be.

PH: Because we didn't win the war in Korea, Vietnam happened. We didn't win in Vietnam, reason why it's going all over the near east, now. You've got to win a war when you start it.

EM: Yeah. Yeah, draws don't count.

PH: That's right, that's right.

EM: Now, the support that your ship did on the Leyte Gulf, I mean, you've got the invasion of the island of Leyte, and you've got of course all of the naval battles that are lumped together, called the Battle of Leyte Gulf. So, how was she involved in all of that very complicated...?

PH: We went in with the amphibious forces. MacArthur came in, I believe it was the third day, and he went ashore, and then he got back on the ship, and they left, going back to his headquarters at Hollandia. And, we were staying there

at the landing, and the first night that we were there, I counted 26 [air raids?] over us, coming in from land-based planes. And, then we got word that the Japanese fleet was moving in. Two submarines over towards the Indies.

Spotted a task group, and there was a task group coming from Kyushu. And then there was the main force, which was coming through San Bernardino Strait, and Admiral Halsey was up there with the carriers to keep them from coming down, and coming in Leyte Gulf and catching our men down there.

EM: Right.

PH: But, the two submarines really messed that invasion fleet... the one coming from Kyushu, and the one coming from the Indies, was going to meet right outside of Surigao Strait.

EM: Surigao Strait, right.

PH: But, these two submarines sank a couple of their destroyers, and a couple of their cruisers. And they happened to sink the communications officer. And, of course, that fleet lost their communications. So, they missed their connection, so one admiral, Japanese admiral, they say was [saner?] than the other, and he decided he was going to go ahead and get the glory. And, so, he came in

first, in the Surigao Strait, and the other one turned after the battle. But, the...

EM: Now, where was the Rodgers during all of this?

PH: We were sitting there at the amphibious landing. But, being the flagship, we were told, were instructed to lead the torpedo run on the Japanese fleet.

EM: Oh, really?

PH: But, we made a report of how much fuel we had, and we'd been on the way for about 10 days, so we was running short on fuel, because, I think that they said we had about 12,000 gallons, which is only three hours of run, at high speeds, see.

EM: Wow.

PH: So, they replaced us with another destroyer named the Grant. And, in that battle of Surigao Strait, the Grant was the only one hit. And it was hit (laughs) on her ship, right under my gun station on our ship. And they sent us out to patrol the mouth of Leyte Gulf with another destroyer. And that's the reason why that in the rest of the battle, that we didn't get into anything. But, the fleet coming down that came through San Bernardino Strait, the main Japanese fleet got awful close to Leyte Gulf. Because, Halsey, who was supposed to protect us, he got out of position.

EM: Oh. Now, he went north, with the carrier force.

PH: And they told us we couldn't go out and help these two destroyers and destroy escorts that delayed the Japanese fleet.

EM: Right.

PH: They kept us on post to patrol Leyte Gulf.

EM: Samuel [Hubbards?], and the others...

PH: Johnson.

EM: Yeah, Johnson.

PH: And, so, the Grant was hit. I heard they lost about 45 men. But, they were hit by -- their ID identification on radar was knocked out by a Japanese destroyer. They used 6-inch shells. So, one of our cruisers, challenged her -- it was dark. Challenged her, and she couldn't answer. So, they thought she was a Japanese ship. And they also hit her.

EM: Holy mackerel...

PH: Right in the engine room. They got her over to shallow water, to where she settled down and had just a little bit of deck sticking up. Well, they sent divers down and welded up the holes and so forth like that, and we took her back to Manus in the Admiralty Islands. Well, they kept us there for another five days, firing star shells for the troops in the jungles and so forth.

EM: Now, this is the reference you made earlier to...

PH: Yeah.

EM: Yeah.

PH: So, we --

EM: Did you come under air attack during this period of time?

PH: Oh, there was constant air attacks, yeah.

EM: So, are these the kamikaze -- your first serious taste of kamikazes at this point?

PH: Yes. Now, we didn't see the kamikaze at that time. But it was after that, and our fleet then began hunting down the Japanese fleet, and sinking... I've got the record of what they sunk, how many we lost, how many they lost, ships. And, we had our division, was released as soon as we got troops on the beach, and secured, and came back to the states, other duties, and we had been out there for 19 months, and they...

EM: And I mean, constant action, too.

PH: Yeah. (laughs) So, they sent us back to California, Mare Island, and told us we had 38 days turnaround to get the work done to go back.

EM: So, this is after Leyte?

PH: After Leyte, yes.

EM: I've got to look at your list here, my gosh... Okay, there it is, Mare Island Naval Yard, San Francisco, 11-24-44 through 1-19-45.

PH: Right.

EM: So, is there any upgrading being done to the ship? I mean, later sonar, radar, that kind of thing?

PH: Our radar was getting quite old by that time. They gave us new -- but the main things we wanted, we had been in the Marianas, and we fired so many rounds there that we had just worn our guns out, and they gave us new guns and things like that. We fired at Guam, we fired 3600 rounds of five each.

EM: That's a lot.

PH: It sure is. (laughs) In fact, we had to go out twice and meet an ammunition barge and refurnish our magazines. Because, after we got the troops on the beach, why, then we would fire at caves, and machine gun this... Then, they had, on top of the island, they had a crossroads up there, and we figured that would be a gathering point, so every once in a while, we'd throw 5-inch shells in that area, catch some vehicles. They also, at Guam, was the site of the people off the cliffs.

EM: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I've heard those stories.

PH: Yeah, we were close enough, we could see that.

EM: Really?

PH: Yeah.

EM: That must have happened on several islands, because...

PH: It did. It did, it happened on Saipan, happened on Guam.

EM: When you were in Mare Island, or when the ship was, did you get liberty? Were you able to go home?

PH: They gave everybody two weeks leave. Half the crew went, the other half went.

EM: So, you got to go back to see your family?

PH: Yeah.

EM: Was that good?

PH: Well, by the time I get there, I was able to get there six days out of that fourteen. (laughs)

EM: Oh, no. The rest was in transit.

PH: Yeah. It was wintertime, it was November, and we got snowbound in Albuquerque. And had to take a train into Chicago. (laughs)

EM: To get back down to Tennessee, right?

PH: Yeah.

EM: My gosh.

PH: Well, no, when the war was over, you know, they paid for unused leave. There was a maximum of 120 days. I got to 120 days.

EM: You did?

PH: Yeah.

EM: Wow, that's a nice little bit of cash.

PH: Yeah, yeah.

EM: Were you able to communicate much with your family, when you were actually in combat? I mean, get a letter once in a while, and it'd be a month late?

PH: That was one thing we told them at Kwajalein, when they said that we was going back out. We says, "See if you can find our mail. We haven't had any mail for four and a half months."

EM: Four and a half months, wow!

PH: "Send it to Indonesia, or somewhere, so we can pick it up."
(laughs)

EM: My gosh...

PH: They would -- well, what they would do, they'd send it out on a ship, and then a destroyer would distribute it to the other ships.

EM: Now, as a destroyer, you also picked up downed flyers and what have you, did you not?

PH: Yeah. (laughs) That's one of my favorite stories.

EM: Well, give it to me.

PH: We had an agreement with the carriers, that for every aviator that we picked up, they would give us 15 gallons of ice cream.

EM: I've heard this ice cream story before. It must be true.

(laughs)

PH: Yeah, it is! (laughs) And we picked up 26 aviators.

EM: It really focuses the mind, doesn't it, when you know there's some ice cream. (laughs)

PH: Yeah. (laughs) Yeah. We couldn't make ice cream, the carriers could.

EM: Yeah. The big ships had that facility capability, and the destroyers did not.

PH: Mm-hmm.

EM: So, what were these, mostly just downed aircraft pilots from downed aircrafts?

PH: Well, like the Mariana. Say, the Mariana turkey shoot. The fleets were so far apart...

EM: Ran out of fuel, yeah.

PH: Running out of fuel, and damaged, and so forth like that. And then, we had a few that tried to make the carrier, that for some reason couldn't, any reason. And in fact, one man, separated from the fleet and went inside Japanese homeland to pick a pilot up. He was in this little rubber raft, and just having a big time. (laughs)

EM: Was inside of the mainland of Japan.

PH: Yeah.

EM: My goodness. Was that towards the end of the war, or...?

PH: Yeah, it was.

EM: Okay. Well, I noticed there was one thing here. After the Mare Island upgrading and repair, Tokyo, Japan airstrike, in February of '45. So, tell me about that.

PH: We left California, Mare Island, in early January, just went down to San Pedro for some reason, I don't know why we went. But anyway, then we went to Pearl Harbor. We only stayed three or four days or something like that. And, then we were sent out, this time we joined, instead, the amphibious forces, we joined the big carriers. But, we were doing, still, supporting the amphibious forces, so what we were doing was we were bombing Iwo Jima, softening up for the landing, and then we would go over to the Japanese homeland, and we'd go up and down the coast, hitting them, and then we'd take a swipe at Okinawa, and back to Iwo Jima and hit them again. It just made a circle.

EM: Do the loop, huh? (laughs)

PH: Yeah. In fact, Saturday evening post, one time had a story about one of those trips, and 93 days, I believe it was, and they destroyed 2200 planes, beside doing their bombings. Then, when the actual landing was made at Iwo Jima, then we moved in and helped the amphibious forces, and still, run out -- now, we hit another one of those

typhoons that caused us so much damage that we went to -- the only time we left the area was we went to Leyte for 25 days because the typhoon caused so much damage.

EM: So, tell me about, what is it like, being in a typhoon on a tin can? That must be exciting.

PH: (laughs) Well, in the first one, there was a cruiser that broke in two, named the Pittsburg, I believe was the name of it. And, we were within sight of it, and we'd come up on top of a wave, and we could look over, and they'd be going up and down, too. Two parts of it. And, they actually, after the storm, drove that thing in and took it back and reattached it to the bough.

EM: You are kidding.

PH: Two hundred and sixty feet of the cruiser. You heard stories about aircraft carriers that the storm [had folded?] flat deck then, they certainly can. Because they did. And in the first one, we had a boy have appendicitis, and it's too rough to get him to a big ship for operation, so our medical student had to do it. (laughs) I think he had already got his medical degree. But, anyway, his name was [Chambers?], he lived in Atlanta. And, so he gave him -- the boy -- a spinal, and we had a pharmacist's mate, and he helped him. They just laid him on the table. And, they took his appendix out, but as they were sewing him up,

well, the doctor got seasick. He got sick, then, I guess he was not able to watch the roll of the ship or something. And he had the pharmacist's mate finish sewing him up.

EM: Wow...

PH: But they did let him sleep in the captain's cabin back to Pearl Harbor. (laughs)

EM: My gosh.

PH: But, the big storm, we lost two destroyers in that. They turned over. And we lost about 700 men, on those two destroyers.

EM: Was there a time when you thought that the Rodgers was going to...?

PH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Captain told us, said the ship was built for 58-degree roll. We took a 61, and still made it. But, we were lucky. What we were about to do before the storm hit was refuel, and so what happened to the destroyers that did turn over, was that they -- you know, they pump salt water in with the fuel to raise it up, and then when they get ready to refuel, they pump it out, and refuel. And, they had pumped out and had lost their balance, see. And that was a terrible thing. They said we were clocking the wind at 162 miles per hour when the meter broke. (laughs) It did -- this boy from Florida told me, said, "I didn't

really get scared until I saw the waves higher than the masts of the ship."

EM: That's when you know you're in trouble. (laughs) Golly.

Now, you had mentioned Iwo, and I see that's on the battle star list for the Rodgers. So, describe to me what her role was in the Iwo Jima invasion.

PH: Well, it was just the common thing. We were operating with the amphibious, and with the carriers, too.

EM: So, this was when you were doing your circle of destruction thing.

PH: Right. And, incidentally, I had two brothers at Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, and didn't know that either one was out there.

EM: Really?

PH: My mother had four sons and two son-in-laws overseas at the same time.

EM: Lose any of them?

PH: No, no, they all came home.

EM: So she was a blue-star mother, and not a gold-star mother, that's good.

PH: Yeah.

EM: Tell me about Okinawa, because that's where it really got rough for the...

PH: We had so many planes in the air, and we shot down so many, that it got to be kind of like -- I've always said -- like

shooting ducks. They were apparently students, because at the Mariana turkey shoot, we had gotten all their carrier-trained fighters.

EM: That was pretty much the end of their pilots.

PH: Yeah. And, these men would just come in and just fly straight in [to nothing?]. Now, they would be one of two things. They would just fly right into the ship, or, a lot of times, they'd send out a twin-engine bomber with a bomb, a guided bomb in it, the man riding the bomb.

EM: Now, that, I've never heard of.

PH: And he would guide it into the ships.

EM: Crazy.

PH: Yeah. And, they also had wooden boats, torpedo boats made, so that our radar wouldn't pick them up. And I heard a story, I don't know if it's true, but I heard a story that one destroyer had about 16 or 18 attack them one night, and they fought the group that night.

EM: Well, they were suicide torpedo boats, too, to come up and just, like an aircraft, only they were doing it on the surface of the sea.

PH: Now, this one that we shot down that was so close, and that was identified as being the John Rodgers that shot this one down. In fact, I've got a citation in there from the commanding officer about that. But, one of our fighter

pilots was following it in, but when it got something like 4000 yards, why, then it was coming in air range of the antiaircraft guns, so he veered off, and the Japanese plane kept coming. And we looked, and there he came, at about a 45-degree angle, and you could see the pilot, you could see his guns flashing and so forth like that. How we hit his bomb, I just -- it's just one of those things, I believe in miracles.

EM: Mm-hmm. Miracle ship, huh?

PH: Yeah. We didn't lose a man in 12 battles.

EM: That's amazing.

PH: Amazing.

EM: And, I mean, these were not skirmishes, these were battles.

PH: Right.

EM: Man. That is something. Now, was she -- was the Rodgers actually on picket duty, per se, out first line of defense?

PH: They were. Yeah. Eleven days, eleven days we went out there. And the plane is, some said that it came in like swarms of bees, 50, 60 at a time, and then they began to pick on those destroyers. We had two of them out there one day, they said in 4 hours and 56 minutes, shot down 42. They had one at Mount Pleasant, the place there... where the [Yorktown?] is now, the show, and the name was [Lefty?], and she was attacked by 21 of them. She shot

down 9 of them, 5 of them flew into her. But, that time, the fighter planes got there and drove the rest of them off.

EM: So, some of the ships and the destroyers... how many were actually sunk, of the squadron that...?

PH: We lost a total of 81 destroyers during the war. There was, I believe it was 21 that was sunk by kamikazes.

EM: Most of them were on picket duty, I assume, or were --

PH: Well, they just came right in and just flew right into the fleet with the destroyers there, helping out, and securing the troop landing. But, they did pick on the picket destroyers.

EM: So, of all of the battles that you and the Rodgers were in, what was your closest call? What do you feel like you kind of, (sighs) "Boy, that was close"?

PH: That was the closest call.

EM: Yeah. The pieces of the airplane all around you on the ship.

PH: Yeah. My gun pointer, being gun captain, I stood right beside the pointer on the twin 40s. Well, on the left-hand side is the pointer of the gun, and on the right hand is the trainer. And, my pointer had been excused to go to the toilet. We call it the head. And here come the plane in, so I just had to get up and become the pointer. And those

40-milimeters, we had seven shells to a -- what do you call it?

EM: Clip, I guess.

PH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, then we had the passers, too, and they were loading the guns, so forth like that. But, when we put those clips together, why, about every third or fourth shell, was coated with phosphorous or something.

EM: Tracer.

PH: And you can fire it, and it became a tracer. You could see it. So, the trainer over there was on, and I was on the pointer's side, and you fire it with your foot pedal. And I could see that tracer walking up on him, and here he was, coming in here, and we beat him to the punch. (laughs)

EM: That's real hands-on experience there, isn't it?

PH: Yeah.

EM: What do you think about the Japanese after going up against them?

PH: I don't have any hate for them. Now that it's over, they're better friends than a lot of friends.

EM: (laughs) They're a pretty good ally, now. Yeah.

PH: Yeah, I don't despise them at all. During the Korean war, I did pretty well with them, because every time we went into Japan, usually we stopped at Yokohama to discharge servicemen to go to Korea, and the civilians, we carried

475 cabin [class two?]. Well, they'd give me 50 men to clean the ship up while we were there. We'd usually stay four days, and then return to San Francisco or wherever we were going to pick up passengers. And, so, I don't have any hate for them, but they were cruel. They believed that you became a no-person if you surrendered.

EM: Mm-hmm, you lost your soul.

PH: Right.

EM: Nothing left to you. You remember when they said they dropped the first atomic bomb?

PH: (laughs) Certainly do. We were about 160 miles off the coast. And, we heard about it, but... now I lived, my home in Tennessee was only about 40 miles from Oak Ridge. But I'd never heard of Oak Ridge. I didn't know anything about the bombs. And, when the Japanese said that they would surrender, why, they didn't do it at first, they had some diehards, and Admiral Halsey was making a speech, and they got a report from one of the pickets that there was so many bogeys, we called them, coming in, and so he continued his speech, but in it, he said also that if you shoot them down, said, "Shoot them down peacefully." (laughs)

EM: (laughs) Be as polite as you can?

PH: Yeah. And then, that day -- the day that they said they'd accept the peace thing, well, we shot down 38 planes.

EM: Is that right?

PH: Yeah.

EM: Shot 38 down the day that they [sued?] for peace.

PH: Yeah, yeah.

EM: That is amazing. Now, the Rodgers was actually in Tokyo Harbor at the signing, is that the way I read this?

PH: It went in for the signing, but I got transferred to a battleship just as a passenger, back for discharge.

EM: You were -- okay, so, when were you discharged, then? I mean, when did you go off of the Rodgers?

PH: I went to -- the day they went into Tokyo Bay.

EM: So, what battleship did you go onto? This is just as a passenger, huh?

PH: Yeah, just as a passenger, I don't know for certain, but I believe it was either the Massachusetts or the Indiana. I think it was the Indiana, though.

EM: Mm-hmm. So, you're pretty glad to have that all behind you at that point, I would think, and without a scratch on you.

PH: Yeah, yeah.

EM: Or any of your shipmates.

PH: We had one man wounded, he was hit by a piece of shrapnel from one of our own guns, I think. Because, we were protecting the larger ships from the side, and these torpedo bombers came in and they were shooting at him, and

they were shooting over us, and some of the shells that they were using, those [fuse?] that I think you see them down in here, the type of fuse that --

EM: Proximity fuse?

PH: Yeah, which was a great... it was number two help for us, because the first being radar, really, that...

EM: Made a difference.

PH: Made a difference, because if it would come within 50 or 60 feet of a plane, it would explode, and they're shooting, but it was taking (laughs) it was going off over us.

EM: Mm-hmm, well, you were in proximity. (laughs)

PH: Yeah. And this boy got hit by a piece of shrapnel. And that's the only wound we had. Now, we had a couple of accidents, bad. A man got caught under a gun one time, and his pelvis and all crushed, but outside of that...

EM: After the war was over, did the crew stay together -- in touch, I mean, and have reunions and that kind of thing?

PH: We've had reunions. I haven't been to one in recent years, but I understand that the last one they had about 16 or 17 at it. Now, the publisher of my book there was in my division, and he's still alive. I stay in touch with him all the time.

EM: After the war was over and you went back home, did you ever have dreams or recollections of what happened to you, or

did it just kind of went behind you and you never looked back, or what?

PH: Never, never, never worried about it. I used to say I'm not the worrying kind.

EM: Well, that's useful.

PH: Yeah, yeah.

EM: Not to be the worrying kind.

PH: Yes, sir. The only result of anything that I can recall was that when we were down in New Guinea area, they gave us some kind of a -- almost like quinine -- for...

EM: Malaria.

PH: Malaria. And, I did get a light case of malaria, and it came back on me twice after I came back.

EM: Really?

PH: But, I haven't had any now in 35 years, I guess.

EM: Mm-hmm. So, when you came back home, where did you come into? San Francisco, or...?

PH: I came into Seattle, Washington. And they sent me -- they said we had a letter from Admiral Halsey, said, "Don't hold these men up. They've been out there too long." So, because Seattle was full of people for discharge, but they sent the whole group out the next day on a train. I went straight to Memphis, Tennessee, and was discharged there.

EM: So, how'd it feel, coming into Washington after being out?

PH: Strange. (laughs)

EM: Strange, it felt strange?

PH: It's even stranger now. Going back to Washington, when I was stationed there, why, you could get around anywhere, the pattern of the street was such. Alphabetical order, number order, and name order. And it was easy to get around. But, it's tough to get around Washington now. I work with a group that they call Vets to Washington, which we send veterans --

EM: Is it like the Honor Flights?

PH: Yeah. But we do it by bus. And, we send them up there for three days, and show them everything. And, the only thing that costs is what they eat. And, so, we -- it was a hard place to find anything up there, now.

EM: Well, what else can we talk about? I mean, I know we haven't touched anything but the tip of the iceberg, but...

PH: Recreation. Practically zero.

EM: You never went to Mog Mog.

PH: (laughs) No. I don't even know where it is. I never visited a city west of Pearl Harbor, except Suva in Fiji Islands, and that was when we're going down for the Bougainville support, we stopped there overnight. But, all the rest of the times -- now, we were close to [attack Logan?] at Leyte Gulf, but you couldn't see it from where

we were. But we never had any liberty at all. What we had was, we had some old magazines, but behind our number five gun, we had a place on the deck big enough to make an almost full size boxing ring, and we could set that up real quick. But, when we'd take certain islands, a lot of them, why, then, the army would take -- while they had their equipment there -- would take bulldozers and cut us out a softball field, and put up a little shack, and then they sent ships out from Seattle with beer. And every man was issued -- on our ship, anyway -- was issued what we called chits for two beers. And me, being a boatswain mate, they gave them to me to distribute. I had a lot of friends.

EM: I bet. You were really a favorite there, weren't you?

PH: But that was it, softball, two beers, and... that.

EM: What did you think about your officers?

PH: We had fine ones, fine ones, fine ones. I never had any problems with the first one I had, I was boatswain mate of the watch, whenever it went into commission, and my division officer was from Texas, and so I asked him if he had any preference on which way to hold reveille, and he says, "No," he says, "you're supposed to know how to do it," he says, "I've never done it." He says, "The biggest ship I've been on was a fishing boat on the Red River."

(laughs)

EM: Must have been must of those 90-day wonders. (laughs)

PH: And he was the only man that I ever had any kind of an argument with. And we were out one day, and we had ready gun crew at all times, and most of the deck men manned the guns, then they'd have a gunners mate in charge of it. One of the boys came down off the gun and told me, said, "They're taking our crew, and handling ammunition." And I said, "Well, go on back up to you gun." And this man that was not my division officer then -- he had been transferred to another group -- he came and got on me, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm using those men on the gun." So, I said, "No, sir," I said, "they're designated to be on the ready gun, but if you want all hands on it, why, then, they can come off of it." He said, "I see that you did your part." I said -- his name was [Josh?], I said, "Mr. Josh, you couldn't make me handle ammunition, because according to Navy regulations, my rate says I'm to be in charge of working parties, not be involved." He said, "Well, okay, you do that, then. You have..." Yeah. We got along good then. Next man that took over then, why, he told me, he said, "You run your division the way that you want to." He said, "If you want any help from me," he says, "I'll be in my cabin." (laughs) He did. He was a [BI man?].

EM: Right, he could delegate authority, huh? Yeah.

PH: Yeah.

EM: Okay, well, what else would you like to go on the record saying here, Paul, before we shut her down?

PH: I just... just don't know. Done a lot of talking, but our biggest... one of the most exciting times was when we went all the way to the southern tip of New Guinea, which was in the Coral Sea, and that was when the Australians and the Americans were fighting the Japs that had gotten down that far, and it was just a little piece over to Australia.

EM: Right.

PH: And, so, we went down there and our assignment down there was we were to move Australian and American servicemen, once they took a place, to move them to another place, and we moved them five times up the New Guinea coast, until we got to where the New Guinea coast went. That way, Hollandia, where MacArthur's established his base.

EM: So, you got some exposure to the Aussies, then, huh?

PH: Oh, yeah, I admired them.

EM: Really? Why is that?

PH: They were good fighters. In those jungles down there. See, a lot of them became what we call watchers, in which they would take natives up and establish a radio, and see the ships come down the channels, and tell us where they

were. And I just admired their toughness, their good fighting ability. Yeah.

EM: What do you figure their view of the Americans were? Or do you have any --

PH: Very good, very good.

EM: It was a good relationship.

PH: Yeah, mm-hmm. Yeah.

EM: Okay, well... I must say, I've interviewed a lot of guys who were on tin cans, but I do believe the Rodgers got around more than just about anyone that I have ever actually talked to.

PH: Some have said that we've had more, yeah.

EM: Yeah. So, I think you should -- and I know you are -- proud of being associated with that ship, and it'll always have a special spot in your heart.

PH: It remained afloat until very recently, when, in 1972, I believe it was, it was given to Mexico, and they used it for patrol craft of narcotics and so forth like that. So, we tried to bring it back, wanted to put it in [Mobile?] Bay, and the Mexican government said their finances are so bad that when they got it in good shape, that we could get it back. And, they never would let us have it back. Because, we even sent a crew down one time to get it ready

to come back, and they didn't get it, because they had to pay off so many officials.

EM: Right, yeah.

PH: So, it decayed, and now it's -- I think it's being used now for razor blades or something.

EM: Yeah, it got recycled. (laughs)

PH: Yeah. (laughs)

EM: Okay, well, I want to thank you for spending the time with us today, and I want to thank you for what you did for our country. Go on record with that, we do appreciate it.

PH: I appreciate that.

END OF AUDIO FILE