

Richard Robinette Oral History Interview

ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler. Today is November the 3rd, 2012. I'm in Fredericksburg, Texas at the Admiral Nimitz Museum and I'm interviewing Mr. Richard Robinette. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the Preservation of Historical Information Related to this Site.

So let me start first by thanking you, Richard, for spending some time with us today to share your World War II experiences. I'd like to get it started by having you give us your full name, place and date of birth and we'll take it from there.

RICHARD ROBINETTE: I'm Richard [Glen?] Robinette. I was born in Seneca County in Ohio, which is about 45 miles south of Toledo. I was born on a farm. I was a family of two children; I had one sister. She was five years older than I. And it was -- I thought she was always getting everything and I got left out. (laughs)

EM: Well, that's not what she thought, though. (laughs)

RR: No, no, no, no.

EM: What was your date of birth?

RR: March the 27th, 1925.

EM: Nineteen-twenty-five. Okay, so, well, you're one of the, actually one of the younger guys.

RR: Yes I was.

EM: You must have gone in fairly young.

RR: Yes I was.

EM: So what, what kind of crops did you raise on the farm up there in Ohio?

RR: We had -- mostly corn and wheat and hay at that time.

EM: No livestock or?

RR: Oh, we had livestock. We'd milk cows. But we didn't have electricity; we had to milk them by hand.

EM: No electricity in rural Ohio in the '20s.

RR: No. Not back in the '20s.

EM: When, when were you blessed with electricity? I guess sometime in the '30s?

RR: I was probably a sophomore in school and my agriculture class in school wired the house and barn for electric.

EM: And so that must have been pushing 1940 then, because you were born in '25 --

RR: That's right.

EM: You were probably 15 when you were a sophomore.

RR: That's right, that's right. And we wouldn't have had electric then, but they ran the electric acrossed our fields and put a pole right in the middle of one of our fields in order to reach our house.

EM: So you could tap into that.

RR: That's right.

EM: Wow, that was good. And where did you go to school? High school?

RR: I graduated from high school. We didn't have kindergarten at that time. I started in first grade and went through be a senior and graduated.

EM: Mm-hmm. Which high school was this now?

RR: Vanlue.

EM: Vanlue.

RR: It is a centralized school. It was in Hancock County, but I lived in Seneca County. So our school tax was transferred over to Hancock County. And at that time you rode the school bus and the bus didn't want to come over into Seneca County to pick me up. I would have to walk down to the Hancock County Line to get on the school bus.

EM: Well you know, rules are rules. (laughs)

RR: Yeah, that's right. And finally my dad says if my school tax goes over to Hancock County, they can come and pick you up, so they did.

EM: Well, that's good. So let's see. If you -- you graduated from high school there and that must have been, what, '42?

RR: Forty-three.

EM: Forty-three. All right. So, summer of '43 you graduated. The war was on hot and heavy.

RR: Yes it was.

EM: What were you doing on December the 7th when the world kind of fell apart?

RR: We didn't have a furnace in our house. We had an old, what we called a heatrola stove and it sat in the middle of the room and we were standing around it in order to keep warm. We was warm on the front side and froze on the backside. (laughter) And they said -- we fortunately had a radio and said Pearl Harbor was attacked and I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was.

EM: You know, I've talked to so many veterans that say the exact same thing.

RR: I had no idea where Pearl Harbor might be.

EM: But it changed things.

RR: Oh yes, it did.

EM: How did it change things for you and your family?

RR: Well, you know, that was coming right after the Depression and times were tough and -- they restricted what you could buy and then rationing came along, as far as sugar and lard, which we needed to cook by.

EM: Coffee, did they --?

RR: Yes, coffee was rationed out. Gasoline was rationed. It depended on the occupation you had, as far as how much gas you could buy. And fortunately, living on the farm, we needed gas for our tractor, so we would snitch a little.

EM: Well, (laughter) I won't tell anybody if you won't.

(laughter) By gosh. Well, let's see now. If you were the only son, right?

RR: Yes.

EM: And sometimes on a farm they wouldn't actually take the oldest son into the military because they felt like they were needed on the farm.

RR: You got that right. And my mother says, "Well, we can keep you home and you can avoid the draft. We'll just get a deferment for you because you're on the farm and we need you," so I and a classmate went down to the draft board and was going to sign up to get a restriction and stay at home. Instead of that we went down to the draft board and rather

than go in there we went into the door of a bar and we spent our time there.

EM: How old were you?

RR: (laughs) I was 18.

EM: Uh-huh, and you're in a bar.

RR: Yep.

EM: And so what happened then?

RR: We went home. She never asked any questions and I never got the deferment. I was drafted and I went -- I was called in and I took my physical. We had the opportunity to enlist in the Navy. So my dad was in World War I and he always says, "I laid out in the fields of Belgium and ate raw turnips for three days and three nights," well, that kind of turned me against the Army, (laughter) so I enlisted in the Navy. After I enlisted they lined us up and they said, all right, now every seventh one, you step out because you're going to be in the Marine Corps. And the boy that was right behind me, graduated with me, he had to step out and he went in the Marine Corps and unfortunately he had a leg taken off on Okinawa.

EM: Well, if that's all you lost in Okinawa, actually it wasn't all bad, because that was a mess, as you know. You were there, too, onboard ship.

RR: And then the government provided him with the trade of Being a jeweler, after he came home from the service and he had a shop in Toledo on Elm and has passed away now.

EM: Hmm. So now let's see, how old, you were 18 when you went in?

RR: Yes. I served until '45.

EM: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So now they've got you in the Navy. Where did you go? What happened then?

RR: I went to Great Lakes to school. My boot camp was up there and fortunately they sent me to what they called Basic Engineering School and it was a machine shop, where you learned the trade of running a lathe and milling machine, drill presses and all like that. Well, the boys that went with me from Seneca County had already graduated from school and worked in machine shops and they had that skill already.

EM: They were experienced.

RR: They were experienced and here I was off the farm. I didn't know of anything like that. So -- it just happened that they wanted -- after we finished Basic Engineering School, they needed replacements on the West Coast for ships that had come back and needed repair. And the Claxton had come, come back and was in a floating dry dock

out at Mare Island in Vallejo, California. Well, they hadn't received --

EM: Let me interrupt you and ask you a question now. When you were in basic, did they give you a bunch of written tests and IQ tests and those kind of things?

RR: Oh, yes.

EM: Do you think that was one of the reasons they pulled you and put you into the engineering thing is because you...

RR: I think so. Because --

EM: Because you had that aptitude, apparently.

RR: I had that and in my schooling at school, we had, just touched on that kind of stuff. And working in a carpenter shop and things like that -- I think that's kind of why they pulled me.

EM: Mm-hmm. So they sent you out to Mare Island.

RR: Yes.

EM: Now how did you get there?

RR: By troop train.

EM: So had you traveled much before you --?

RR: Oh no, oh no.

EM: So you were just a down home farm boy.

RR: Oh, I sure was. I sure was.

EM: So this must have been a bit of an eye opener for you --

RR: It was.

EM: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) -- went across. Tell me about the trip. What was it like?

RR: It just seems like I had to stand up most of the way.

EM: Oh my God.

RR: And I recall going over the salt flats out in Salt Lake City and in that area at night. The moon was out real bright and you could look out and see the salt flats and --

EM: What did they feed you guys on that train? Did you have a dining car? They just --

RR: You know, they didn't, they didn't feed us on there. We would go by train stations and the USO would be out and give us cookies and coffee.

EM: You know, I've heard those stories. Donuts and cookies and coffee.

RR: By the USO.

EM: Hmm. I bet that tasted good.

RR: It did. And that was the only food that I can remember getting.

EM: How long did it take to get out to the West Coast?

RR: Oh, just a few days. Just a few days.

EM: So you weren't eating balanced then. (laughter)

RR: Oh, no. No, no.

EM: Cookies and coffee for four days.

RR: That's right. And that was provided by the USO.

EM: Well, bless their hearts.

RR: That's -- one of the organizations that I really admire.

EM: Hmm. So you made it out to the West Coast. Now the West Coast is a little different than Ohio, isn't it?

RR: Yes, yes. Quite a bit. I'd never seen a ship in my life. Never seen in that body of water before. Well, when I was at Mare Island and our ship, the USS Claxton was in a floating dry dock and they took me down to look at it the first time. I thought, my land, that's a big ship. Because I was looking at the dry dock and our ship inside of it, which when it pulled out, (laughs) it was just a little skinny rascal.

EM: (laughs) And you were actually were seeing more than than you would normally see because it was up out of the water.

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

EM: So at this time, had they told you what your assignment was going to be aboard ship?

RR: Not really. I went aboard and I think they called us "firemen" at that time. We had a red stripe on our left sleeve, on our shoulder and that kind of classified you as a fireman or a seaman. A seaman had a white stripe on

their right side.

EM: So if you were a firemen, that meant you were down in the engine...

RR: Engine room.

EM: ... or boilers, somewhat --

RR: And machinists.

EM: Machinists. Some were down doing real hardwares type stuff.

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

EM: Now what about your combat station? What was that?

RR: That was on Mount 5, which was the Aft 5" gun mount.

EM: Yeah, the one at the very back.

RR: I would be in the Upper Handling Room passing powder up through a scuttle. She was the gun, the turret.

EM: But you said that you were the fireman, you were down in the, you were on the throttle, didn't you say?

RR: Yes, yes.

EM: So who's handling the throttle during combat then?

RR: We always got a relief.

EM: I see.

RR: There would be a relief come take your place on the throttle while you went to general quarters. Yep.

EM: So let's see. This is what period of time when you went aboard ship for the first time? Is this 19-, still 1943?

RR: No, it would have been '44.

EM: Okay, so it's --

RR: Early '44.

EM: Early '44.

RR: Yes. Yep.

EM: And was Captain Stout still the captain?

RR: He was. He was still the captain.

EM: What did you think about him as a leader?

RR: Oh. I was scared of him. I was scared of all officers.

Because just being a kid out of school, I thought they had the authority and they could whip you into place and he was a man that -- just stern, smoked a pipe, had it hanging in the corner of his mouth and I was afraid of all officers. Until after the war, we came home and started having reunions and these officers started coming back to our reunions. Then I learned what pleasant (laughter) people they were.

EM: You mean they were just normal people?

RR: (laughs) They were. (laughter) They were commoners, just like me.

EM: (laughs) So you thought at the time that they knew a lot more than you did (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) -- I'm not so sure they did.

RR: Yes.

EM: You know, you can't run a ship without a good crew.

RR: No, but I found out later that a lot of them had went to, through their school, went to a university for a couple of months and came out of there as an officer.

EM: They call those "90-Day Wonders".

RR: Ninety-Day Wonders. (laughter) And we had some come aboard like that.

EM: Yeah, well, which one sticks in your mind as a, as a 90-Day Wonder? Who?

RR: There was a fellow by the name of [Nico?] -- I don't know what his first name was, but we -- I always thought of him as 90-Day Wonder. We had several like that. But I was never really in contact with him because the engineers had their own officers.

EM: Okay. So you had a what? Like an engineering officer --

RR: Yes we did.

EM: And he reported to the captain.

RR: That's right.

EM: Is that the way it worked?

RR: That's right. But when he would tell me to go and report to the captain, I was scared to death.

EM: That's like going to the principal when you're in high school. (laughs)

RR: Right. If I had screwed up someplace and had to go take my punishment.

EM: Hell, you figured they make you walk the plank or something. (laughs)

RR: Yep. So when I would go and see Mr. Stout, I just trembled. And then he'd get to talking to me and could tell me the background where I'd come from. Because he was a genealogist and he'd traced my genealogy, where I was born and raised and the community where I was born.

EM: I'll be darned.

RR: Yep.

EM: Hmm. So anyhow, the Claxton goes back to war and you're aboard for the first time.

RR: Mr. Stout said that we're not going to sail right away. I'm going to send you home on leave. So he sent me home on a leave and while I was home they got orders to sail. When I got back to the ship after my leave was up, found out my clothing and everything had been put in a sea bag and set

out on the dock. And I was assigned to the Willard A. Holbrook for transportation over to meet the Claxton.

EM: Oh my gosh, she left without you.

RR: Left without me. And my clothes was gone. They had been packed in a sea bag and set on the dock.

EM: And they disappeared.

RR: And they disappeared.

EM: Oh, no. So you're not only naked, but (laughs) you don't have a ship.

RR: That's right. All I had was my sea bag, with just some underwear and toiletries into it.

EM: So how did you feel at that point?

RR: Well, being young like that, I thought that's the way the service was.

EM: You didn't know any better. (laughs)

RR: I didn't know any better. But I got on this troop transport and we met it, the ship down in Manus, in the Admiralty Islands and went aboard then.

EM: On a troop transport that's a long, slow haul.

RR: It was the President Taft in peacetime.

EM: Oh, it was one of the President's lines -- passenger fighters and they were fast.

RR: And it was converted over into a troop ship, yes.

EM: So do you remember the first time you went across the equator? Did they do all of that --?

RR: They didn't do any initiations for me.

EM: That's probably good, because I --

RR: That was good.

EM: -- I've heard about some (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)
--

RR: I've heard stories about being initiated (inaudible). But they didn't conduct that.

EM: So what have we got? Mostly what? Army and Marines and what have you?

RR: And all the Navy nurses.

EM: Navy nurses?

RR: They were separated on an upper deck.

EM: With armed guards, probably. (laughter)

RR: Yes, at each ladder. (laughter)

EM: Wow. So at this point you're in with a bunch of strangers you've never seen before.

RR: Oh, they were strangers.

EM: But did you form some relationships with some of these --?

RR: Not really. And I don't remember of even being fed. I really don't. It's been so many years that I don't remember being fed on our way over.

EM: Well, you were probably thinking more about getting back with your ship and --

RR: That's right.

EM: And that was probably worrying you and distracting you.

RR: And on a troop ship like that, we didn't have any armament. No guns to speak of. If we were attacked on our way over (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

EM: And no, no other ships to escort her?

RR: No. No. It just seemed like we was on our own.

EM: Did she zig-zag? Or did she --

RR: She went in a straight line, straight line. Yes.

EM: So that probably took a couple of -- 10 days to two weeks just to get down there. That's a long haul.

RR: Well, it didn't seem that long.

EM: Maybe it wasn't.

RR: It didn't really seem that long. But we slept right out on the deck. We wasn't assigned any bunks or anything like that. It was just wrought.

EM: So when you got down, you linked up with her at Maynus?

RR: Manus.

EM: Manus, sorry. And I'm trying to remember, Manus is in which islands?

RR: Admiralty.

EM: That's in the Admiralty Islands.

RR: Yes.

EM: And so they just welcomed you aboard and you hopped on and everything was going.

RR: That's right. I didn't even know the custom of asking permission to board the ship or anything like that. I just went on and they assigned me a locker and that was down in the Engineers Department.

EM: So, and I guess you had a bunk -- I mean, a hammock or a bunk or something, start somewhere --

RR: We had bunks. It was three high, suspended on chains and your locker, you had a locker at the head of your bunk and a footlocker. Of course, I didn't really need one, because I had no clothing.

EM: (laughs) When did you get some clothing finally?

RR: They issued me clothing chit -- that I could go and draw, so they -- well, being down in the Pacific I didn't need the pea coat or anything heavy.

EM: Oh, you sure didn't.

RR: And being in the engine room, I thought, well, dungarees would be enough. So I just drew the bare essentials.

EM: And so you felt like right at home then almost immediately down there in the engine room?

RR: That crew made you feel at home.

EM: So you had some good, good relationships and good buddies?

RR: I surely did.

EM: Who was your closest buddy, when you --?

RR: Herman [Robie?] was from Wapakoneta, Ohio. And he was my closest friend. And that was over around Lima. And I knew the vicinity where he came from. He was an older man, married and had two children. And he just took me on like a son.

EM: That probably helped a lot.

RR: Yes. And I met Fred Allen and he was the "Oil King" and --

EM: Oil King?

RR: They called him the Oil King and it was his duty to go around and check the ballasts and see how much fuel oil we had aboard. And he made his report to the captain.

EM: Hmm. Straight to the captain.

RR: Yes.

EM: Hmm. So how long were you aboard ship before she started sailing on --?

RR: It just seemed like immediately. We formed a convoy to go into the Invasion of Leyte in the Filipino Islands.

EM: So the Leyte Invasion was in October of '44 --

RR: That's right.

EM: So you, you must have caught up with the Claxton in September then, probably.

RR: Yes. Approximately that time.

EM: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So tell me what happened. You're part of this convoy. I guess this is --

RR: We went through a typhoon, going through the invasion.

EM: Well, tell me what it's like to be in a tin can in a typhoon?

RR: Oh, we just rolled and tossed back and forth. And when you get up on top of a wave, your screws would come out of the water and churn just in open air.

EM: Yeah, they'd grab up because there was no resistance.

RR: Right. And then when it grabbed the water, it just jerked and shook. And it was just really rough duty.

EM: Did you have any trouble with seasickness?

RR: No, I didn't. No I didn't.

EM: That's good. Because some people did.

RR: I didn't get sick. It was after we were out -- a lot of times we would come back to New York for a short period of time and we would trash a bar or someplace and drink.

EM: That's when you got sick. (laughs)

RR: That's when I would get sick. On our next trip.

EM: Oh, you have an excuse there, I guess. (laughs)

RR: Yeah. No, I never got really seasick.

EM: Well, that's good.

RR: Nope.

EM: So, you're part of this task force headed up to, for the Invasion of Leyte.

RR: Yes.

EM: So I guess there's a lot of ships and --

RR: Quite a few ships. As far as you could see. It was destroyers and cruisers. And -- in this convoy.

EM: Now the Claxton was a part of a group of destroyers, wasn't it?

RR: Yes.

EM: What was that, the name of that? It was Descar 23? Or something like that. I'm trying to remember. But you were assigned with some other destroyers as kind of a group then, I think. DESRON 23, that was what they were called it.

RR: Little Beaver.

EM: It was a squadron.

RR: Yep. Little Beaver Squadron.

EM: Now the Little Beaver Squadron.

RR: Yep.

EM: I want to hear the story about Little Beaver. Tell me about the Little Beaver story. What (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

RR: Little Beaver was the sidekick of Red Ryder. Red Ryder was a cowboy and this was a little Indian sidekick that he had. And we had a fellow aboard ship by the name of [Bowler?] -- I'm sure I've got his name's right. But anyhow, he printed or made a picture on our ship of the Little Beaver and as I remember, Arleigh Burke came aboard and he was fascinated with seeing that little Indian boy and asked who it was and they said it was a Little Beaver and he says, "That's going to be the name of our squadron."

EM: And so all the ships had that, I mean, it's a little bit like [Nozart?] on aircraft, wasn't it?

RR: Yes.

EM: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) -- had that as a squadron insignia.

RR: Right.

EM: So to speak. So you're headed up to Leyte, so anything unusual happen enroute? Or was that pretty straightforward?

RR: It was just rough, rough sailing all the way.

EM: Really?

RR: Nothing that really impressed me. Other than when you'd have to take on fuel oil or something. From a supply ship or a tanker. You'd have to transfer fuel oil over by line and it was awful rough. (cough)

EM: Did they tell you where you were going after you departed and were headed to Leyte? Or was that, were you kept in the dark on that?

RR: We were kept pretty much in the dark. We didn't know where we were headed.

EM: But you figured you were headed to something important.

RR: Oh, yes.

EM: Because there were so many ships involved.

RR: Yes.

EM: So as you got closer to Leyte, what happened?

RR: Oh, we went in on the invasion. Seemed like they all CIs and LSDs took the troops in and we bombarded the beach. And my position was in the Upper Handling Room of Mount 5, pushing powder up through a scuttle. (laughter) (cough) And -- my position turned with the turret above.

EM: Okay. So that you wouldn't have to figure out where to poke the -- so you went along with it.

RR: No. It was always in a fixed position. All I had to make sure is I picked up that powder and shoved it through that

scuttle and a little finger caught it, so it didn't fall back to me and it was up to them to take it and put it in the gun.

EM: Yeah. Now how big was this powder container?

RR: I would say they were a good two-foot long and five inches acrossed, five inches (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

EM: And they used only one, one bag per shot then.

RR: Yes, that's right. And the projectiles was put into a hoist, nose down and as they went up, they turned and that set the nose or the timing onto them. And if you, if they were set up and you didn't use them, you had to take a wrench and back them off and then put them back in the hold and saved.

EM: So disarm them, basically.

RR: That's right.

EM: So you saw a lot of action then during that bombardment, that you (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) -- and you're handling powder bags up just about as fast as you can probably.

RR: Just as fast as I could. It was just like taking bailed hay (laughs) off an elevator.

EM: (laughs) Go back to your farming days.

RR: That's right.

EM: Now these were single-gun turrets, not duals. Or were they duals?

RR: They were singles. We had a Fletcher Class and we only had singles. Then they came out with doubles afterward.

EM: Right, right. So tell me about the Claxton. Was she a good ship?

RR: I loved her. And I loved every, every person on there. You had some fellas that became characters, that you had to watch out for, but -- and I thought the Claxton was the greatest ship on the ocean.

EM: And that's what you have to feel like when it's --

RR: I did.

EM: And so you guys were a real band of brothers there.

RR: We were, we were. And when we come back to the States and would go on liberty together and you'd get to talking about ships, you fought to -- and said that the Claxton was the best ship out there.

EM: And if you had to punch somebody to convince them of that you would. (laughter)

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

EM: (laughs) And that's what they call "crew spirit" isn't it?

RR: Yes it was.

EM: So after the -- supporting bombardment for the landing troops -- where did the Claxton go?

RR: It seemed like we just went from island to island then. No really great big battles. We would bombard the islands and then troops would land and take over. We never got into any real action till we got up to Corregidor. And it was the mouth of Manila Bay. And we set and bombarded that island and that's when MacArthur said that he was going to return and they had the Death March from Corregidor --

EM: Yeah, that was back early in the war, when they first --

RR: And Bataan.

EM: Death March, yeah.

RR: Up through Manila. And I can remember mine sweeps went into Manila Bay at night and we would sweep in the harbor, so we could get into Manila proper and when we woke up one morning, as the sun came up, here mines had floated out with the tide and it was setting all around us, which we couldn't move. We were setting dead in the water with mines bobbing around that had come out with the tides. So we had the radio acrossed through a cruiser to send a little plane over and he would come down and shoot them and sink those mines. Blow them up and sink them.

EM: That was in Manila Harbor there.

RR: Yeah, just outside of Manila Harbor.

EM: Hmm. That must have been a tense moment.

RR: It was, it was. And they could have hit our ship during the night.

EM: And that would have been it.

RR: That would have been it.

EM: Hmm. Now was the Claxton involved in the Battle of Surigao Strait?

RR: Yep. That was before I got on.

EM: Oh, really?

RR: That was in the first part of the war. I didn't get in on that.

EM: So she -- so she went over to Manila and that's where you had the situation with the mines. Now what other activities in the Philippine Islands was the Clax--

RR: Interesting -- we skipped from island to island, bombarding and chasing the Japanese out, because they were dug into every cave and everything that they could find to stay in.

EM: Now did you ever see the Japanese? I mean, the --

RR: Only aviators that we would shoot down. They would come in and by that time they had started as suicide planes.

EM: Yeah, the Kamikaze.

RR: The Kamikazes. We would shoot them down and they would have a life preserver on, but rather than be picked up, they would shed that life preserver and try to swim away from us. And it was up to us to put the motor whale boat or something out in the water and go and try to lasso them and get them to come back, could take them as prisoners of war.

EM: And could you do that? Could --

RR: Yes, we could.

EM: Because I know they didn't want to be --

RR: No, they didn't want to be taken as a prisoner. But we were fortunate to do that with one or so.

EM: Could you get a close-up look at him?

RR: Oh yes, we could talk to them. Once we got them aboard ship we took the ammunition out of a locker and put them in there as a brig or a prison. And we could talk to them, but they'd just sit there crouched down in a corner and wouldn't talk to you. And we could give them some of the best food and they would refuse to eat it.

EM: They never ate or?

RR: It seemed like the best food, they didn't want it.

EM: I guess they wanted rice and fish heads, huh?

RR: I suppose. (laughter) I suppose they did.

EM: I'll be darned.

RR: Yeah, but they would take off their life preserver and try to swim away from us. Because the preserver would hold them back from swimming.

EM: So what did they do with the prisoners that came onboard. Did they turn them over to somebody else? (inaudible)

RR: I think the one we had they eventually shot.

EM: Hmm. Wow. So now was the Claxton involved in supporting the invasion at Lingayen Gulf? North of Manila. Tell me about what happened there.

RR: Well, we bombarded and a lot of these islands, we didn't know what the names of them were. We never got, until we read the history after the war --

EM: That's when you realized where you were, I guess.

RR: That's right, that's right. But then we were at Leyte and took a suicide plane, a Kamikaze, and it hit right at the water line, right by Mount 5, or the stern of our ship on the starboard side.

EM: Hey, that's where --

RR: That's where I was.

EM: Yeah. That general quarters, that was your --

RR: And we took on water there. And the Abner Read was Fletcher-class destroyer, but not in our squadron. It came

over and was trying to assist us in any way they could and another Kamikaze came in, hit them between the stacks over on the port side and sank them. So then we had to pick up their survivors.

EM: Now the roles were reversed weren't they? Yeah.

RR: Yes they were.

EM: Well, that shows you what a Kamikaze plane can do to a destroyer.

RR: Oh yes, yes. But their aim was to try to hit in the fire room or between the stacks.

EM: So where were you when the Claxton had this near miss with the Kamikaze? Were you down --?

RR: I was in the Upper Handling Room.

EM: Okay, you were in the general quarters.

RR: I was, I'd been called to general quarters and a lot of fellows hadn't arrived yet. And as I remember, I had got my station already and they had the hatch open to pass the ammunition and stuff up onto the lower hatch and one fella that was supposed to come to there stopped at what we call a "scuttlebutt" or a water fountain to get a drink before he went and that's where it hit, right behind him and as I remember and looking out the hatch of the door, all we could see is just blood and guts hanging from the

electrical wiring. We didn't know if it was from the pilot of the Kamikaze or the fellow stopping for a drink.

EM: But it was the guy.

RR: It was the guy.

EM: How many, how many crew were lost in that Kamikaze? Do you remember?

RR: I can't recall, I just don't know. But we was wearing beards at that time. And Grisham was a gunner's mate and he had a beautiful beard -- he was from Kentucky. They took him up and they had to shave his face because his face was cut up bad. And they had to shave him before they could dress his wounds. And he eventually passed or died from losing so much blood.

EM: Hmm. Now there was a pretty good size hole in the side of the Claxton, huh?

RR: Yes. It was large enough that they could take our bunks apart and take our bedsprings and put them over the hole and then a bunch of mattresses and then more bedsprings and we always had 4x4s tied down while our life preservers and we could use those as bracing to hold those bedsprings in place.

EM: So that's how you managed to fill the hole, huh?

RR: And we pumped our valves over to the port side and lift that hole up out of the water. And we had little, we called them ["handy billys?"] -- they were pumps, sump pumps that we could pump the water out of our compartment over the side and stay afloat.

EM: Now this Kamikaze attack, this was while you were in the area of Leyte?

RR: Yes.

EM: So where, where did the Claxton go to get repaired? Because you were kind of hanging by a thread there, weren't you?

RR: They took us back down to Manus in the Admiralty Islands and put us in dry dock with another destroyer and the crews were Canberra.

EM: Now she was an Australian ship.

RR: She was an Australian ship, but there we were in a dry dock with another destroyer and a big cruiser.

EM: And so they repaired the hole.

RR: They repaired our hole, and rather than get to come back to the States, we stayed there and went back up to battle.

EM: Well, they got to be pretty good at repairing ships out there in the Pacific.

RR: They sure did.

EM: So you didn't get the ticket back to the States.

RR: No, no. They would cut that section apart, put new steel up against it and weld it fast and send you back.

EM: So what did you, what did the crew do while she was being repaired? You just -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

RR: You just -- stayed in our bunk or stayed aboard ship. We could get off and go down to the end of the bottom of the ship and play ball, throw a ball back and forth. Things like that. But -- we stayed right on aboard ship.

EM: Hmm. What was the food like aboard ship?

RR: Oh, it was great.

EM: Really?

RR: It was great. A lot of times we'd miss a meal because we was in general quarters and our food was prepared and we couldn't leave to go get it, but it was good food. We never had ice cream or milk or anything like that, but it was very good eating. We had a lot of ripe olives. They would come aboard in gallon cans and when they called for all hands to go and handle stores, we managed to walk by the engine room and drop a gallon of ripe olives down and we could have those on our midnight watch.

EM: (laughs) Midnight requisition, they call that (inaudible)
(laughs) --

RR: Yep.

EM: Now I've heard stories about how ships like a destroyer didn't have ice cream.

RR: No.

EM: But the big ships did.

RR: Yes.

EM: And at sometimes the destroyers, if they picked up like a downed airman or something and they would take them back to the ships, that they would exchange them for ice cream. Have you ever heard that?

RR: Ice cream never went around. We never got -- (laughs)

EM: Never got very far.

RR: It never got very far.

EM: Didn't make it down to the engine room.

RR: (laughs) No. It always got to the fan -- the fellow manning the motor oil boat or the gig. (laughter)

EM: Hmm. Well, now did you have fresh meat? Or was it mostly canned and dried stuff?

RR: I don't -- no, we had fresh meat. It came from Australia and a lot of it was mutton. And I'd never eaten mutton, but food was food to me. If you get hungry enough you'll eat anything.

EM: Even mutton. (laughs)

RR: Yes we would. And it seemed like our cooks knew how to prepare it and it was good.

EM: Now you mentioned you were sharing a dry dock with the HMAS Canberra.

RR: Yes.

EM: Did you get a chance to interact with the Aussies at all? Did you --?

RR: No.

EM: So they stayed aboard their ship, you stayed aboard --

RR: And I can't recall if we did repair while we was in there or not. But I remember being in the engine room, we had what we called a condenser, where we took the steam after we'd used it in our turbines, and run it through the condenser and return it as water to the fire room. And I remember going in that condenser and putting plastic plugs in the ends of the tubes and I'm sure that was why we was in the Canberra. Because they was, as you went in this little round hole and done this work, it was fish and shells and everything that was brought in as cooling water, to condense the steam.

EM: And you think that was --

RR: I think that was still while we was aboard the Canberra and we could do engine work.

EM: So you did, you actually were aboard the Canberra.

RR: Yes, and doing this repair work.

EM: So what was it like being on like, I'm sure that ship was probably built in Britain since, since Australia was a British colony at the time.

RR: Oh, yes.

EM: What was it like being in a different kind of ship like that?

RR: Well, we never went aboard that ship.

EM: Oh, I misunderstood.

RR: No, we never went. This condenser that I was in was aboard the Claxton. It was aboard the Claxton. And as I understood it, there was little plastic tubes that we put in the ends of these tubes, was to prevent corrosion.

EM: Hmm. Corrosion must be a real problem, because you use --

RR: It is. Use salt water.

EM: You're using sea water as crew (inaudible) -- so that's bound to be a problem.

RR: Yes, because when you were underway, that fresh water come in through the condenser and cool the steam. But when you slowed down to a certain point, you had to start a pump up and pump that water through in order to condense that

steam. And that was fed back to the fire room by feed pumps.

EM: Hmm. So she was in dry dock for repairs probably for weeks, huh?

RR: Yes. Yeah.

EM: And so this is late '44, I would guess, because the Leyte was (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

RR: Yep. And we got hit on November the 1st.

EM: Well, this is November the 3rd, so it's not far off of the anniversary of being hit by a Kamikaze. So that was '44 and this is 2012 -- that's a long time ago.

RR: Yes it was. (laughter) And your memory fades.

EM: Yeah, I bet it does. But some of it doesn't fade. Some of those things stick there forever, don't they?

RR: That's right.

EM: So after repairs she goes back to sea.

RR: Oh, yes.

EM: So where did you?

RR: We went up through the islands and we were on what they called a picket line. And we would intersect planes coming down (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

EM: And this is in Okinawa.

RR: Yes. And we would notify back for them to send planes up to intercept these, because we knew they were Kamikazes and we would be on a picket line and we'd just go up there and run a circle in the water, a large circle. But we'd always have a little LCI or an LSD following us. And we always said that was a meat wagon. (laughter) They would pick up survivors if they come down and hit us.

EM: I've never heard that. Each ship had a kind of like a -- a following LCI or something?

RR: Oh, yes. We had a little -- it would follow us and we always called it a "meat wagon".

EM: A meat wagon. Oh my goodness.

RR: Because if we didn't pick them up on radar and radio back, that they should come and intercept them, we had the feeling that they was going to attack us. And that -- little meat wagon would pick up the survivors if they decided to hit us.

EM: Well, did you get hit?

RR: No, no. Never got hit.

EM: Ever have any close calls?

RR: Oh, yes.

EM: Tell me about the close calls.

RR: Well, we fired onto them and we'd knock them down, but -- we never really -- an engagement.

EM: So you just knocked them down before they got to you then, huh?

RR: And we would run that circle up there and do that job for three or four days until your fuel got low and then they'd send up a replacement for you. And that's what a destroyer did. They'd go up there and make that big circle with a meat wagon following along behind. And -- we'd go all the way up to Okinawa.

EM: And so what would you do? Go back down south and get refueled and then come back up and do the loop again?

RR: Yes, yes. Keep going for supplies or refuel and you'd go right back up on the pick-, we called it a "picket line" --

EM: Yeah, the picket line.

RR: Uh-huh. But we always had that little boat following us.

EM: Did you see any other destroyers get hit by Kamikazes while you were up there?

RR: No. But we went through a lot of bays where they drug the ships in that had gotten hit and all you could see was masts sticking up -- where they had drug them in like a junkyard. A salvage yard. And all you could see was a

mass setting on the sides and you had to go through there to get to the bay.

EM: Was that down in Okinawa or?

RR: No, that was farther down, away from Okinawa. We called it Buckner Bay.

EM: Oh, Buckner Bay is actually in Okinawa.

RR: Is it?

EM: Yes it is. And I've heard those stories from some other guys. It was a real graveyard.

RR: It was. But being young as I was, I didn't know where we were at.

EM: No. You just did your job --

RR: Yeah, our job (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

EM: Showed up for chow and -- (laughs)

RR: And read later where we had been and what we did.

(laughter) And we was making history all this time and didn't know it.

EM: Well, 18, 19-year-old kids, not a lot into history anyhow.

RR: No.

EM: What was your toughest moment on the time you were on the Claxton? When you thought you'd bought the farm or when you were the most worried or scared?

RR: When the suicide hit us down at Leyte. And the Abner Read came alongside to assist us. Here I was up in that handling room yet to pass powder and the water came in and I couldn't get out. Because the water was up to your waist and I couldn't go up through the scuttle or anyplace through the turret -- I had to wait until we got the water out before I could get out.

EM: So what's going through your mind right then?

RR: I prayed a lot.

EM: I'll be you did.

RR: I prayed a lot. And I had enough confidence in the rest of the crew that I knew that they would get that water out and get that hole patched and we would be saved. And we brought the projectables out of the deck below us and I don't think it was over 18 inches to two-foot acrossed, where they passed the ammunition out of the lower hold. We usually had colored fellas, mess attendants get on there to do that work. And whoever stopped and give it the forethought of closing that hatch or door on that ammunition hold, I don't know. But that saved those fellas that was down there passing that ammunition up. And to think that your communication was shut off down there and

didn't know what was going on topside until they got the water pumped out and was able to open that hatch.

EM: Man. Who knows what was going through their mind.

RR: Oh, no communication, no lights, no nothing. They didn't know what they might have been on a ship like the Arizona and it was at the bottom of the ocean.

EM: Never to be seen or heard from again.

RR: That's right, that's right. But someone had the forethought of closing that and sealing that off. But I think that was the only time I was really scared is when we got hit and the Abner Read came by and they, they caught on fire and you saw so many of those fellas swimming through that oil that was on fire and -- picking them up. Because ours -- had been uprighted enough that I'd gotten out of there and was up on the deck and could see them by that time.

EM: So they pulled a lot of those guys aboard, huh?

RR: Oh, yes.

EM: They must have been burned.

RR: Oh imagine -- well see, there was only 300 in our crew and I'll be you we saved 180 of them. Well, you're limited to how much more weight you can take aboard your ship.

EM: Well, yeah, they're not, they're small ships. I mean --

RR: No.

EM: Man. So that destroyer, she went under, huh?

RR: She went down.

EM: She went down.

RR: She went down. And the only fellas that were saved is the ones that we took aboard our ship.

EM: Wow, that's sobering, isn't it?

RR: Yes it is. Yep.

EM: Now the commander of the squadron -- I think, not just your ship, but the group of ships that you remember was a guy named Arleigh Burke.

RR: Arleigh Burke.

EM: Tell me about him and what, did you see him or, what was the role that he played?

RR: We didn't get to see him very often. Because I was below deck and when he'd come over and visit with Mr. Hubbard, who became our captain -- you knew what was -- the operation was going on, but you never got to see him very much. And I never met the man until the war was over and we had get-togethers with our squadron on the East Coast and he came and he was just as common a man as you would ever saw.

EM: Just like the guy right next to you on (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

RR: I've got pictures of he and his wife and myself, taken together. And I just treasure those photos.

EM: I mean, he really became a quite famous guy.

RR: Oh, he did. He did.

EM: I can see, he was already a pretty big --

RR: Oh yes, and to think that after the war he designed a destroyer that he thought was top of the line. And that the government and the Navy Department thought enough of him to go ahead and build it and call it the Arleigh Burke Class.

EM: Yeah. If it was good enough for him, it was good enough.

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

EM: (laughs) Yeah, he has a wonderful reputation for --

RR: He does.

EM: -- excellence and leadership qualities.

RR: And whenever I see an article and it says "Arleigh Burke" boy, I pick that up and I treasure that. Because I admired that man. For the education he had and to be what I called "our leader".

EM: Yeah, yeah. Now what about Admiral Halsey? Now he was out there commanding some of the ships and --

RR: He was commanding the ships, but we never got near
(inaudible).

EM: Never heard anything about it?

RR: No, no. You heard rumors -- that the --

EM: Yeah. And what about Nimitz? I guess he, you heard, you
knew he was the head guy, but you never heard --

RR: He was a head man, but we never got to meet him or close
enough --

EM: Did you ever get any R&R while you were aboard ship? I
mean, did they ever take --

RR: No.

EM: Never? No rest for the weary, huh? (laughs)

RR: Nope. Other than when we got hit and went into a dry dock.
That was the only time we ever had any --

EM: That's the wrong reason to get R&R.

RR: I don't think they come up or had R&R back then, in World
War II.

EM: Well, they did on some ships.

RR: Did they?

EM: Yeah, but I mean -- the guys that were in the front lines,
they generally didn't but --

RR: We never had it.

EM: Now did you get letters from home? Did you write letters home?

RR: I got letters from home. It seemed like they were awful far and few between. I wasn't married at the time and I would get letters from my classmate, which became my wife and she would write. Her mother would write to me because she had four sons in the Army right at that time. And she would write to me as well as her sons. And I would receive letters from her more than I did my own mother.

EM: (laughs) Boy, she cranked out the letters, didn't she?

RR: She did. She had to. Unless she used a carbon copy (laughter) to her sons.

EM: Maybe a mimeograph. (laughs)

RR: Well, I don't know if they had mimeographs then. (laughs)

EM: Well, I'm not sure they did. I honestly don't know. Before my time. (laughter) So okay, after the picket ship duty, what happened then to the Claxton and where did you guys go?

RR: We went back to Pearl Harbor, then over to Panama Canal, through the Panama and up to New York and then Washington, D.C. for the Presidential Unit Citation.

EM: Hmm. Do you remember when Japan surrendered? Was there a big celebration? You were still -- you guys were still in the Pacific, I'm sure.

RR: We were still in the Pacific. There's no celebration, really. We just knew the war had ended. That was it.

EM: Yeah. And just glad to have it behind you.

RR: Yep. I didn't really read much about the celebration until we got home and they said about how they celebrated and -- danced in the streets and had parades and all. We didn't celebrate that much.

EM: Hmm. Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on --?

RR: Yes. Yes. She would feed us a lot of scuttlebutt that -- (laughter) it was interesting to listen to her. You didn't have to believe her, but it was interesting just to listen to Tokyo Rose.

EM: She seemed to know a lot, though. I know guys are always wondering how she found out all that stuff.

RR: I don't know who fed her that information of what was going on. Yes, you heard Tokyo Rose. She would come over the radio and --

EM: Did you guys ever get a beer ration or anything aboard ship or?

RR: Maybe once in a while, if we was back someplace they would send a party over on an island, but just very few of us. The only thing we ever got was being, getting close to a beach and a lot of Filipinos would come over on a little bit of a raft and we would trade a pair of our dungarees for some sea shells, or toss coins in the water and they would dive for those coins. But we never got over on the islands for anything like that. Uh-uh.

EM: So you -- you guys on ships were kind of famous for kind of pulling pranks on other guys and you know, having a little bit of fun on --

RR: Oh, yes, yes.

EM: Tell me about some of the funnier things that you remember either happening to you or things that you did to somebody. If anything comes to mind.

RR: I can't, I can't really. I just -- it just seemed like if we pulled a prank, we know it was going to return eventually. (laughter)

EM: Did they ever play poker or that kind of stuff?

RR: Oh, yes.

EM: A little bit of gambling going on?

RR: When it was payday they would take their money and go down in aft compartment and -- shoot, throw dice and stuff. But

I was one of the ones who left my money right on the books.

I didn't draw a paycheck.

EM: Okay, so you just had them keep it and keep records.

RR: They kept the money until I was out and then I took a lump sum to come home on.

EM: That was smart. That way you didn't lose it all playing poker. (laughs)

RR: No. I never, I never knew how to play poker.

EM: Or shoot craps either, huh?

RR: No. I never had the opportunity to learn. I guess I lived a sheltered life. (laughter)

EM: A farm boy from Ohio, huh?

RR: That's right.

EM: Okay, so the war is over and so the Claxton goes back through the Panama Canal. Correct?

RR: Yes.

EM: Now tell me about New York, where you finally landed and --

RR: We landed. Went up to New York. Went down to Washington then for the Presidential Unit Citation; the entire squadron met there. And --

EM: Tell me about that.

RR: Really, there was no big ceremony or anything. Didn't seem like. We just went in there, tied up to the dock. We had liberty and that was the end of it.

EM: This is at Washington?

RR: Yes. We didn't know what the Presidential Unit Citation was, really. (laughter) We received it, but --

EM: So they didn't line you up and go down the list?

RR: No. We wasn't out there for glory. We was out there to win the war.

EM: Yeah, absolutely.

RR: And we thought that's what we did.

EM: Yeah, you did it.

RR: Yes, yes. But as far as a ceremony or anything like that, I don't recall of any big ceremony. And then after we left there we went down to Charleston and at the Charleston River and it was supposed to be sealed up into a mothball fleet. And we was tied up with other destroyers and we sealed up all of our pumps and things in the engine room, with a sealant to prevent corrosion and rust and they did the same with their guns, only they made a screen over the top of them and blowed sort of a plastic film over them to keep moisture from getting into them. And -- then I didn't have enough points to get out yet and they put me over on

the Eberle, which was an old destroyer and I stayed on there. A whole new crew -- didn't know anybody, but I had to help seal it up, until I got enough points to get out.

EM: So how long did it take you to get enough points?

RR: Oh, it seemed like six weeks.

EM: Okay. So it was still '45 then (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

RR: Yes. Yeah.

EM: You got out before Christmas.

RR: Oh, yes. And then I got -- discharged from there, but I had to go to Great Lakes to get my discharge. And I traveled on my own to Great Lakes, get my discharge and then go home.

EM: What did you do? Hitchhike?

RR: You traveled any way you could get there.

EM: So you had to go by bus or train, you did it.

RR: Yes.

EM: Did they pay for it? Or did you have to pay?

RR: Well, I think they gave you a requisition.

EM: Yeah, they probably gave -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

RR: I don't remember. I don't think it was on my own. But after I got home I found that the calves or cattle that I

had in high school and was raising as a project, had been sold already and my parents had used the money. I had to start over.

EM: Start from scratch.

RR: Yep. So --

EM: But you said that you had not been drawing your money yet.

RR: That's right.

EM: So how much money did they issue to you when you got out?

RR: It seemed like I must have had a thousand dollars on there.

EM: Wow. That's a lot of money.

RR: I know it.

EM: Even today (laughs) (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

RR: And I don't even remember drawing that, where I drew it at.

They could have mailed it to me after I got home, (laughs)

(inaudible).

EM: What did you do with it?

RR: Got married.

EM: Got on with your life.

RR: Got on with my life. Yep. I was married on the 29th of

June after I got home. I was discharged in May.

EM: Oh, so you must have been discharged in May of '46 then.

RR: Yes. And got married the 29th of June.

EM: Right away.

RR: Right away.

EM: So what did you do? Just put the war experience behind you?

RR: Behind and forgot it.

EM: You did.

RR: Yes.

EM: Ever talk about it or anything?

RR: No.

EM: But what about the reunions? You went to reunions, didn't you?

RR: The first reun-, my wife and I had acquired a home or a house and a fellow by the name of Ed [Ryder?] lived in Pontiac, Michigan and he was returning from a winter in Florida, up to Pontiac, Michigan and he stopped at my house and he says, "Are you going to the next reunion in Chicago?" and I says, "I don't know anything about a reunion," "Well," he says, "They've been having them for a couple of years," he says, "The next one's in Chicago. If you're going to go, I'll meet you at Sturgis, Michigan and pick you up. So he came from Pontiac, Michigan down to Sturgis. I took my car and drove up there and parked behind the fire department. Crawled out of my car, didn't lock it, didn't do anything but take my underwear and

clothing along and went to Chicago I think to the first reunion.

EM: So how was that reunion?

RR: It was a drunken brawl. (laughter) Everyone -- then they had a hospitality room -- they drank and they smoked, they drank and they smoked. That's all they ever did. And fought the war over again. Fought the war over. And -- I didn't drink, I didn't smoke. You just stood and watched them -- (laughs) carry on.

EM: Well, did it ever get any better in subsequent reunions or?

RR: Yes it did.

EM: Okay. They settled down.

RR: Later in life -- they hardly had a bar. They gave up smoking.

EM: People do grow up after all (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

RR: They got smart after a while.

EM: Got smart.

RR: Well, they married and got a family. They would bring their families to the reunions then and our children met their children and -- I really enjoyed them.

EM: Hmm. What do you think about the Japanese?

RR: To this day I have no use for an Oriental. And my daughters have grown up and they think it's awful that I don't accept them. But I can't. My dad was in World War I and I can remember this day, he always said, "Watch out for China, watch out for China," and I didn't, it didn't -- it didn't really register, but I can remember him saying that.

EM: Well, of course, the Japanese, you know, had some atrocities that they did during the war. Some of our veterans forgive and forget and some never (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

RR: I can't forget. I can't forget.

EM: That's fair.

RR: Just the way they snuck in at Pearl Harbor and did what they did, I hold everyone responsible for that. I really do. And I've returned to Pearl Harbor or the Hawaiian Islands after that and the way they shove and get ahead of you with their cameras and stuff, it's just sickening to me.

EM: The Japanese?

RR: Yes. I went to see the Arizona and -- I don't know, they just crowded ahead. I went to the Missouri over there for an Easter Sunday and we got up early and we went down, thought we'd want to go early so we could get a first place

on the Missouri for Easter, for a sunrise service. And we got there so early we had to sit in a little bit of tent. Pretty soon a fella comes to the gate. He says, "Anyone with children or are handicapped can go aboard first," you never saw so many Japanese coming with kids in your life. They went up and got the first row. So it kind of burnt me up at the time and as I got, or we got called to go aboard the Missouri, I says, "They sure don't have much respect for veterans," and he under-, or overheard what I said and he says, "I'll get you a place right up on the front row," and he did. And we really enjoyed the sunrise service on the Missouri. Was that the way we were treated.

EM: Well, at least they treated you special when they heard.

RR: They did. But you have to make your feelings known.

EM: Sometimes you do.

RR: You do.

EM: Squeaking wheel gets the grease and all that.

RR: I guess you do. I guess you do.

EM: (laughs) Now do you feel that being in the -- this probably is a naïve question, but how do you feel being in the war and being in the Pacific changed you as a person?

RR: Well, it gave me a lot of respect for my elders. By the officers that I had. I respected them and how they come

back to our reunions and they're just as common as you and I. And one officer had his wife, Charlie Nelson, brought his wife, Mitzi and somehow she had heard that we might be cousins, she and I. She's always called me "Cousin" (laughter) because -- and I just enjoyed those officers so much and I have a lot of respect for my elders and now being on the Memorial Squad and we have funerals for veterans that have passed away -- I can go to a funeral and shed tears for people that I don't even know. Because I realize how much history we're burying that day that has never been told.

EM: That's right. Everybody had a story.

RR: He does. But he keeps it within himself.

EM: And you kept it within yourself for a lot of years, didn't you?

RR: Yes I have.

EM: When did you start letting the stories go?

RR: When they commissioned the USS Stout, down in Houston, Texas. I'd just lost my wife, my first wife and I was invited to go and I was still going through a stage of depression and my kid says, "Don't you want to go to that?" and I said, "No, I don't feel I want to go," and I just kept putting it off and putting it off. And I thought,

well, this old world's going to keep on turning without me -- I'll just stay at home. Well, my son got a hold of it. He went through the recruiting station at home, wanting to find out where the USS Stout was going to be commissioned. He called Columbus, Ohio and through the Naval Department and everything and traced us all down to Houston, Texas. So he come to me and he says, "Are you still going to stay at home?" I says, "I think I will," and he says, "Well, I'll give you a little time to think it over. I think you ought to go," so I thought it over a while. He come back again and he says, "Do you want to go with that, if I go with you?" and I says, "Yes, I believe I would," here he had already made plane reservations. (laughs)

EM: He knew the answer before you did, huh? (laughs)

RR: He had made reservations (laughs) and everything to go and that brought he and I closer together than anything. And then just different occasions that have happened, my other three daughters have heard and I was voted Veteran of the Year at home in Finlay at one time and my family was invited to a ceremony at the [DAV?] and they heard the history of what I'd gone through and that was a first that they knew and from then on we've just bonded a little bit closer.

EM: And now you're able to talk about it and --

RR: At one time I was so tight-mouthed that I couldn't talk about it.

EM: And there are so many veterans that are like that or were like that. But I think maybe it's good to talk about it.

RR: I just didn't want to say what I did for fear they'd say oh, you're trying to be a hero.

EM: That's absolutely (laughs) how you guys think, I know that. And I'm just glad --

RR: I was no hero. Nope. But I just didn't want to talk about it. That was in the past.

EM: Yeah. And that's really what your generation did. They said, that's behind us and let's get on with our lives.

RR: That's right.

EM: Well, what else can we talk about?

RR: It just -- it irks you to see how the world is -- and our government is operating today. We've got people in our government that should have been retired 25 years ago. They're holding down an office and voting. And they have no idea what the conditions are for the little man.

EM: Yeah, the real, out in the real world.

RR: They've lived in Washington so long and drew a paycheck, they have no idea what other people are going through.

EM: Yeah. Well, we get a chance on Tuesday to vote, so --

RR: I'm going home to do that.

EM: (laughs) (inaudible) (laughter) Any other World War II items that you'd like to discuss while I've got you live and on, on the recorder?

RR: I think I've spilled my guts. (laughter)

EM: Well, we've covered a lot of territory. And I appreciate you being so open and discussing it all.

RR: I sure appreciate meeting you, Ed.

EM: Well, it's been a pleasure meeting you. I'm always honored, for you guys truly are the greatest generation. So I'm going to end this, if I can, by thanking you for what you did for our country.

RR: You don't need to thank me, Ed. It was an honor to do it. But when I say it's slipping down through the tubes, it hurts.

EM: Yeah, don't let it, don't let it. Thank you, sir.

END OF AUDIO FILE