

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas

An interview with Frank Lowry
Fredericksburg, Texas
January 15, 2013

ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler and today is the 15th of January, 2013. I'm in Fredericksburg, Texas at the National Museum of the Pacific War and I'm interviewing Mr. Frank Lowry. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, and it's for the preservation of historical information that's related to this site. So let me start, Frank, by thanking you for coming up today in this cold weather to share your experiences with us. And I'd like to get it started by having you just give us your full name and your date and place of birth and then we'll take it from there.

FRANK LOWRY: Well I'm Frank Lowry and I was born in Indianapolis in October 2, 1920. And I grew up in, my father died when I was five years old and my mother when I was about six. And I was, my paternal grandparents became my guardians through a court fight.

ED METZLER: So they fought over you did they?

FRANK LOWRY: Well my father, my step-father sort of wanted, anyway we grew up in Berwyn, Illinois. And I went to high school in-

ED METZLER: Is Berwyn in the Chicago land area?

FRANK LOWRY: Berwyn is next door to Cicero which is next door to Chicago. It's an inner suburb.

ED METZLER: Now. It probably wasn't back then. But it is now.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. And-

ED METZLER: Well now, did you have brothers and sisters?

FRANK LOWRY: I had a sister a year and a half older than I was. And we were both taken under the wing of our grandparents. And we went, I went to high school, Morton Junior, Morton High School. And I went to the Junior College for a year and a half in the same building as the high school. And-

ED METZLER: So if you were born in 1920, you probably graduated from high school in like 1938 or '39. Something like that.

FRANK LOWRY: '38. Yeah. That's right.

ED METZLER: So we're coming out of the depression back then. Things are getting better.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah.

ED METZLER: But we don't, we're not in a war yet. So you went to a junior college, then. Is that right?

FRANK LOWRY: The junior college was Morton Junior College in the same building, on the third floor of- and it was a one block building. A monster building, but three stories high. The full block. It was just one high school at the time. And then I happened to go to a boys' camp the summer, one summer. And then I got out and I was looking around for what to do and when I was in college, I went to college at Morton, or at Northern Illinois State Teachers' College at the time. Now University. And one Sunday morning, I remember we were all gathered in a private home. She took in eight boys. A widow. And, Jolly Pollard. And we heard that December 7th attack by Pearl Harbor.

ED METZLER: Mm-hmm. So what was the reaction of everybody when they heard that?

FRANK LOWRY: We were aghast. But I don't remember details about their reaction.

ED METZLER: What was your reaction? How'd you feel?

FRANK LOWRY: Well I don't remember anything in particular.

ED METZLER: That's okay.

FRANK LOWRY: And when the summer came-

ED METZLER: So you were 21 at the time. Weren't you? Yeah.

FRANK LOWRY: I was 21, yeah.

ED METZLER: Just turned 21 in the October before that December. Okay.

FRANK LOWRY: When summer came I served in as a counselor at a boys' camp in Cherry Valley, Rockford, Illinois. And then casting about, my cousin and I had often visited the Illinois Harbor, Yacht Harbor. And we particularly imagined ourselves aboard a Coast Guard Cutter, and so without thinking about it, I enlisted in, I had no job and it was wartime and I enlisted in the Coast Guard.

ED METZLER: You were probably going to get drafted anyhow, I would guess.

FRANK LOWRY: Well I hadn't heard any signs about it. I didn't know.

ED METZLER: Yeah, yeah.

FRANK LOWRY: That was in August 11th, I think, 1942. And I tried to go to, no, no. I was sent to Curtis Bay, Maryland, boot camp.

ED METZLER: So this is Coast Guard boot camp, then?

FRANK LOWRY: Coast Guard boot camp. Yeah.

ED METZLER: Now at the time was the Coast Guard considered one of the branches of the military per se? Do you know?

FRANK LOWRY: I have no idea.

ED METZLER: Okay, well.

FRANK LOWRY: And then I-

ED METZLER: So what was boot camp like?

FRANK LOWRY: Well my greatest difficulty at boot camp was standing in formation about 6:00 in the morning, when we didn't have breakfast until about 7:30. I remember that very, very well.

ED METZLER: [*laughs*] That sticks in your mind, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: And then the only thing I remember about boot camp is I was assigned to a light ship out in the harbor. Along with a number of others. And I got fairly proficient with semaphore flags and so that was what I was supposed to do. I don't think it was very official but that's-

ED METZLER: You just kind of evolved into it, then, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah, that's right. And then I got, then they, when that was over, I was sent to Fort McHenry in Baltimore.

ED METZLER: That's where they wrote the *Star Spangled Banner*!

FRANK LOWRY: Right. And it was pretty crowded. We did chiefly so called "Guard". Guarded merchantmen at night. With holsters and gun but no ammunition.

ED METZLER: So were you put aboard a ship to guard it?

FRANK LOWRY: That's right, a merchantmen. Filthy. I remember in particular.

ED METZLER: [*laughs*] Really? Well you're glad you weren't in the Merchant Marine, then, I guess? [*laughs*]

FRANK LOWRY: No. Then I was, then I, I remember they asked who can type. And I was transferred to, I had taken typing in high school and I was transferred to the Captain of the Port's Office in Baltimore. US Coast Guard. And put in the Identification Office. And from there I was, after a short time there, I was transferred to be a Teletype Operator on the second shift. From 4:00 in the afternoon to 8 the next morning.

ED METZLER: All the way through the night, then.

FRANK LOWRY: That's right. Yeah. And I sort of enjoyed that.

ED METZLER: Now this is still in the Baltimore Harbor Coast Guard Office?

FRANK LOWRY: That's right. And I was on subsistence after I left, as soon as I got into the Captain of the Ports Office I was put on subsistence which means the Navy paid me so much money and I found a room in town. And I lived, I shared a room with two different Coast Guardsmen in succession while I was there. That was a very interesting place. The one place that every morning we'd have about eight or ten people sitting at the table, as I remember. And a full breakfast repast. I was extremely fortunate.

ED METZLER: Almost like a rooming house, then.

FRANK LOWRY: It was a rooming house. Yeah. Most of them were shipyard workers. With about two or three enlisted personnel. I think we were the only two.

ED METZLER: So was this kind of a rough group or just kind of nice guys?

FRANK LOWRY: We got along fine, yeah. No problem at all. I don't remember any.

ED METZLER: Okay.

FRANK LOWRY: Then along came Navy V-12. And I-

ED METZLER: About how long were you involved, then, with the Coast Guard in this? I mean is this months or a year or?

FRANK LOWRY: I don't know. It wasn't very long.

ED METZLER: Okay. I don't need exact dates. Just fairly quick.

FRANK LOWRY: It was quite quick each time. I never stayed in one place very long. And they transferred me out. I was the only applicant from the Coast Guard Office personnel to Navy V-12. I had a year and a half college, approximately, at junior college. And I was sent to

Plattsburgh, New York. Told to report there. No, no. I was sent, first I was sent to Duke University for eight months.

ED METZLER: North Carolina!

FRANK LOWRY: Talk about luck and fortune.

ED METZLER: Tell me about that!

FRANK LOWRY: Well I was, I took a regular college course except in the direction of a little more math and so forth.

ED METZLER: Mm-hmm.

FRANK LOWRY: History. And I had one room to myself. And I remember in particular I overslept one morning, and a Lieutenant JG was as green as I was, because he just told me to get up and get dressed. *[laughter]*

ED METZLER: That was it, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: That was it! And I was there for eight months. And then I was sent Camp MacDonough up in Plattsburgh, New York.

ED METZLER: That's upstate New York, isn't it?

FRANK LOWRY: That's just, that's on the shore of Lake Champlain.

ED METZLER: Oh, that far north, okay.

FRANK LOWRY: It was a teacher's college. And my wife happened to be going there. We were there for about three and a half months.

ED METZLER: This is all part of the V-12 thing?

FRANK LOWRY: This is the V-12 program, yes. I went through as a midshipman after Duke University. Oh! To backtrack for one moment.

ED METZLER: Sure.

FRANK LOWRY: For one day at Duke, right at the beginning, I was discharged from the Coast Guard and the next day I was enlisted in the Navy.

ED METZLER: So you were a civilian for one day, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: For one day. About 12 hours.

ED METZLER: How was it? [*laughs*]

FRANK LOWRY: I didn't recognize any difference.

ED METZLER: You couldn't tell the difference, could you? [*laughs*]

FRANK LOWRY: But it was extremely pleasant. I was aware of that at the time.

ED METZLER: So you have fond memories of the Duke period then?

FRANK LOWRY: I don't have too many at all. But I made friends with three or four. Oh, while I was at Duke, I joined the wrestling squad. Lightweight. And I wrestled in one meet before I got transferred out.

ED METZLER: Did you win?

FRANK LOWRY: No.

ED METZLER: Oh. [*laughter*] Sorry I asked.

FRANK LOWRY: No problem. But I really enjoyed that. Then they, it was a large, as I remember, I think it was a class of about 1200 but that could be wrong. At the Midshipman school. In old Camp MacDonough. They had taken the enlisted Army soldiers out of there. Every other week, they'd give us weekend Liberty. But only every other week because we'd inundate the town. It wasn't that large a town.

ED METZLER: And there's a lot of people there at Fort MacDonough, too.

FRANK LOWRY: Well it was all 1200-

ED METZLER: Right! That's a lot!

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. And I wasn't on the first liberty, I was on the second liberty. And I attended a dance at the college which they had every weekend. For the girls, 'cause there were no men. And I was introduced, on the dance floor, by a fellow, one of the sailors, to the girl he was dancing with. And that happened to be my future wife. And then after the dance was over I, looking around, I saw her at the side of the room. It was an old gymnasium. *Old* gymnasium. And I just went and asked her to dance. And we got along. We clicked it off quite well right away. But I had asked another girl, about a year or so older than I, if I could walk her home. And so I told Gene that, "Well I'm sorry I can't walk you home" but we made a date for Sunday. Sunday morning. And this girl found a better fellow than I. And so I ran back and my wife was

waiting under the clock at the entrance to the building. For who, I don't know, but I showed up and I walked her home. And that was it. We kept in touch by phone very, very frequently.

ED METZLER: While you were still there in the program?

FRANK LOWRY: While I was still in the program. And before I got out of the program I remember clearly, I said, "Well consider yourself proposed to." And that was the way I asked her to marry me.

ED METZLER: Oh, you didn't get down on your knee and all that kinda stuff?

FRANK LOWRY: No. And I told her I wasn't interested in getting married and I wouldn't do that until the war was over. And that took care of Midshipman school. And I think I remember just when I finished, but it was about three and a half months or so. I remember it wasn't quite four months. Then I was-

ED METZLER: So what do you do? You come out as a-

FRANK LOWRY: Ensign.

ED METZLER: As an Ensign.

FRANK LOWRY: Yes.

ED METZLER: But a Commissioned Officer.

FRANK LOWRY: Commissioned Officer, yes.

ED METZLER: Right.

FRANK LOWRY: And they equipped us with all these glorious new clothes and the whole works. And then I was sent down to Charleston, South Carolina for small boat training. And I was there for just a very few weeks. And then I was sent to Miami Beach, Florida for further small boat training.

ED METZLER: And when you say "small boat", what do you mean?

FRANK LOWRY: Well as I vaguely, vaguely remember, it was submarine chasing. Sonar patterns and so forth. I don't think radar showed up on the scene while I was there.

ED METZLER: Mm-hmm.

FRANK LOWRY: And then, while I, after I was there for two or three weeks, very short time, among other things I sang in the, I was a Methodist but I sang in the Baptist Church choir. And

met a girl there and had a few dates and met her at her home and so forth. And then I received orders to the *USS PC-819*. 137-footer.

ED METZLER: PC- A?

FRANK LOWRY: PC-819.

ED METZLER: PC-8-1-9.

FRANK LOWRY: 8-1-9.

ED METZLER: Now tell me about PC-819.

FRANK LOWRY: Stands for "Patrol Craft" but they never used it. It was *USS PC-819*. And out of the Aleutian Islands.

ED METZLER: Okay.

FRANK LOWRY: And I received, I received for Liberty for home in Berwyn, Illinois. And I got there and then I flew out to, I think it was Anchorage. I believe, I'm not certain, but I think I boarded the ship in Anchorage, Alaska.

ED METZLER: Had you ever flown before when you took that plane ride?

FRANK LOWRY: You know, I'm not sure. If I did, it may have been my first flight.

ED METZLER: It probably was.

FRANK LOWRY: I am sure it was. Yes. Indeed.

ED METZLER: At least you didn't have to ride the train all the way out there, like a lot of the guys.

FRANK LOWRY: Before the days of, again, what's the Chicago airport?

ED METZLER: O'Hare.

FRANK LOWRY: O'Hare. Before the days of O'Hare I flew out of Midway.

ED METZLER: Right.

FRANK LOWRY: Are you familiar with it?

ED METZLER: Yeah. Midway is the smaller, older airport, in close.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. Way south. South end of Chicago.

ED METZLER: Right, right.

FRANK LOWRY: And I remember I boarded ship as a green officer.

ED METZLER: Now was this during the summer or the winter or what time of year was it?

'Cause you're way up north.

FRANK LOWRY: I can't, when was it? It must have been spring or summer. Probably summer sometime.

ED METZLER: You would have remembered winter, probably, up there.

FRANK LOWRY: Well all of that weather up there is, as I call it, Chicago weather. Because it isn't that cold and it's up and down. Thaw, freeze, snow.

ED METZLER: Wind [*laughs*].

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah, wind. Yeah. But I was, at our, and we rode out, we sailed out passed Dutch Harbor, the tree line up there about. And then past Kiska and we went to Adak. Which is

probably the main, the Thousand-Mile War took place before I got there. And it was over by that time. And when I got there, just shortly before, Task Force 81, we were told, had sailed for the potential invasion of Japan. And our ship's duty was to sweep the harbor for submarines. And we did six days of that. Back and forth, back and forth.

ED METZLER: So this is using your sonar, then, right?

FRANK LOWRY: Pardon?

ED METZLER: Using sonar?

FRANK LOWRY: Using sonar. We swept it with sonar, radar too. But mostly sonar. And we'd come in every one day a week. We'd come in and refuel and restock.

ED METZLER: So you were out six days, in one, and then out six?

FRANK LOWRY: That's right. And every day I'd get seasick for about 12 hours and then I was over it completely and it never bothered me after that.

ED METZLER: So you had that one, right at the beginning when you first went out, and then you were okay?

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah, it just lasted about a half a day.

ED METZLER: Now did you go through that again every time you went into-

FRANK LOWRY: Every time. Yeah. Yeah.

ED METZLER: [*laughs*]

FRANK LOWRY: It diminished.

ED METZLER: You got better as you went along.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah, yeah.

ED METZLER: So that was the first time you saw PC-819 was when you boarded her up there in Alaska.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah.

ED METZLER: So describe her. Was she a beautiful ship? An ugly ship?

FRANK LOWRY: It was a very old ship.

ED METZLER: Really?

FRANK LOWRY: And there was, I think there were only, there were a number of them still in service at the time. But I, it was just one of the smaller ships. Only a YMS as I remember at the time, were about the two of us were the smallest, smallest and still called a ship.

ED METZLER: [*laughs*] Right and not a boat.

FRANK LOWRY: [*laughter*] Yeah. It was 173 feet.

ED METZLER: That's a pretty good size though.

FRANK LOWRY: A three-incher. A twin 40-millimeter in the rear and 20-millimeters on either side of the pilot house. And that was our armament. And depth chargers. And mousetrap in the front. Depth chargers in the back and mousetrap in the front.

ED METZLER: Mousetrap?

FRANK LOWRY: That's what we called it. But it's a sort of a rocket thing that lobbed the explosive into the water ahead of us. If we came across something.

ED METZLER: A depth charge.

FRANK LOWRY: It was a type of depth charge.

ED METZLER: Yeah.

FRANK LOWRY: But it was a missile.

ED METZLER: Ahh.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah and the, as opposed to the depth charge which were cans.

ED METZLER: Right, right. Mousetrap, I've never heard of that before.

FRANK LOWRY: That's what we called it.

ED METZLER: Now what was your station aboard the ship? What was your position?

FRANK LOWRY: Well I had, each, it was a, the standard, the standard officer complex was four Officers. But we always had a fifth Officer in, so called "in training". So we had five Officers. And I was, my first job was Communications Officer.

ED METZLER: Were you still an Ensign at this point?

FRANK LOWRY: Oh yes.

ED METZLER: *[laughs]*

FRANK LOWRY: Green as grass.

ED METZLER: Yeah. *[laughs]*

FRANK LOWRY: And then over time they, we lost a Captain and gained a new Captain. And I was promoted to Engineering Officer. Can you imagine that?

ED METZLER: You could hardly spell 'Engineering' and you were an Engineering Officer, right?
[laughs]

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. And I had a, there was a Chief Petty Officer, Spang, who recognized my greenness and was rather insolent from time to time but, I remember, and he showed it. But he was duly respectful except once when he overstepped and I, in some way I found myself telling him that we didn't choose these positions. We're here and I put him in his place so to speak and he accepted it. We got along. We always got along. Then eventually I became Executive Officer with a new change of command.

ED METZLER: All on the PC-819?

FRANK LOWRY: All my time was on the PC-819.

ED METZLER: So it sounds to me like the Captains are changing fairly frequently.

FRANK LOWRY: That's right. Yes.

ED METZLER: I wonder why.

FRANK LOWRY: Well they're probably replenishing vacancies further along.

ED METZLER: It's probably a good training ground for Captains.

FRANK LOWRY: I'm sure it's training ground for the Captains, too.

ED METZLER: So which was your favorite Captain? Or did you have one?

FRANK LOWRY: My favorite Captain was an Executive Officer. He never, never became Captain. He was transferred out. He had gone to Dartmouth. His name was Chick Wyker.

And he was a full Lieutenant when I first came aboard. But he didn't stay aboard very long.

And he was, I had immense respect for him. Nice fellow.

ED METZLER: Why did you respect him so?

FRANK LOWRY: Because he was knowledgeable, he was friendly, and he knew what he was there for and he was aware of the war. And he was a real gentleman. But very thorough. Nice fellow. And I remember we had a, particularly, I remember a big beef. He was, his standard position when we were out at sea, was to man the wheel. And I remember thinking at the time, and shortly thereafter, that he was smarter than I was. But we got along fine.

ED METZLER: So that would be a good station then, to be at the wheel?

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah, he was a, I'm not sure what his rating was. Second or First Class. I got to be moderately good friends with the radiomen and the signalmen. And of course the Officers. We didn't have much in common, but I mean we got along very well.

ED METZLER: So most of the duty was patrol duty, then?

FRANK LOWRY: It was totally patrol duty.

ED METZLER: How far out did you range? Did you stay pretty close to the-

FRANK LOWRY: The outer harbor.

ED METZLER: Okay, that was it?

FRANK LOWRY: That was it. Yeah. We had a man overboard once. A third class, a seaman. And he was probably one of the oldest men aboard the ship. In his early 30s or 30.

ED METZLER: [*laughs*] An old man, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. I remember he was 30-something. But we saved him. 'Cause there's not much time to last very long in that water.

ED METZLER: You don't last long in 33 degree water.

FRANK LOWRY: He was dumping the mess house refuse and was swept overboard.

ED METZLER: But you got him, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: We got him. Yeah. Yeah.

ED METZLER: So you must have endured a lot of rough seas up there. And storms. Is that right?

FRANK LOWRY: I don't remember storms. Except once. Later on, I'll mention that when we come to it.

ED METZLER: Okay.

FRANK LOWRY: But the seas were rough but I don't remember, I only remember one storm that stands out in my mind.

ED METZLER: So that patrol craft must have handled the rough seas pretty well, then, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah, it did. Just as long as you take it on, take it not sideways. But not head on. But just off to port or starboard, I don't remember which. Just off head on.

ED METZLER: Now you mentioned PC-819 was an old ship.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah.

ED METZLER: Do you have any insight into how old she was?

FRANK LOWRY: No, I have no idea but I remember in particular we had to be very careful about our starts. In starting the engine. Because we didn't have too much air pressure. I just vaguely remember this. Which assisted our starts. Or we'd, we wouldn't have enough to finish the start and get it started. So in doing that, it was something we kept in mind. It's amazing what I didn't know. *[laughter]*

ED METZLER: So what was the food like aboard ship?

FRANK LOWRY: Well we had two black mess men. And I was, too many new experiences, but in retrospect I'm just amazed that it was segregation down the line. But I wasn't conscious of it. I accepted them and I remember they were in the Ward Room. I don't, I don't know what their quarters were below deck, but they served us on and off, the four, the five Officers.

ED METZLER: So you had a separate dining facility, a room, board room of some sort?

FRANK LOWRY: Yes. Behind the Pilot House. Yeah.

ED METZLER: Do you know how many were on the crew? I mean how many total crewmen were on a Patrol Boat?

FRANK LOWRY: As I vaguely remember, it was something approaching 60. Yeah.

ED METZLER: So the food was okay?

FRANK LOWRY: The food, I never complained about the food. Once we had, one of the Officers got a can of sardines, and we gathered in the mess room and we split that single can of sardines.

ED METZLER: One for you and one for you and you [*laughs*].

FRANK LOWRY: Right. I met three of my friends from Berwyn, Illinois out there. And a seaman, Bud McArgle.

ED METZLER: Really?

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. And a much closer friend of Willard Boss, Bill Boss. He was aboard a much larger ship, but I'm not sure what size ship. But he was an Ensign like I was. I also met another fellow from high school. Bill Godine. He was Captain of his PC. I don't, yeah.

ED METZLER: Now that's a small world that you would run across three of your, I'll call 'em childhood buddies, up there-

FRANK LOWRY: Yes.

ED METZLER: In the middle of nowhere.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah, that's right.

ED METZLER: Now did PC-819, when she did patrol duty, was she alone or were there multiple patrol ships?

FRANK LOWRY: As I remember we were the only one.

ED METZLER: And you were out of the harbor there in Adak.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah, yeah.

ED METZLER: Now was that Dutch Harbor or was that another-

FRANK LOWRY: No. Dutch Harbor is about the tree line. Close to the tree line. And Adak is about, as I vaguely remember, about two thirds or three quarters to the way from the US from Alaska.

ED METZLER: Way out the chain, yeah.

FRANK LOWRY: And it swings down and a big arc. And then eventually we were sent to, oh, when the war went over, we were sent to Attu. Which is the last island. Of the US chain.

ED METZLER: Right on the end, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: Right on the end.

ED METZLER: So let's go back to Adak for a moment.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah.

ED METZLER: So there's a harbor there and I guess a town there at the harbor. Or a small town of some kind.

FRANK LOWRY: A large Navy base. It seemed large to me at the time.

ED METZLER: Okay, but it's a naval facility and not like part of a town, then.

FRANK LOWRY: No, as I remember it was a naval facility, yeah.

ED METZLER: So when you went in after being on patrol for a week and you're re-provisioning the ship and everything, could you go ashore?

FRANK LOWRY: We went ashore but I don't remember much of it around.

ED METZLER: There wasn't any liberty per se or shore leave-

FRANK LOWRY: Yes there was. We gave liberty to the crew and some of the Officers and we took turns.

ED METZLER: And what did you do when you were ashore?

FRANK LOWRY: Nothing.

ED METZLER: I see. *[laughs]* What else could you do, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: One Sunday morning I had liberty so I looked around for a church and I found a black church.

ED METZLER: There's a black church up there?

FRANK LOWRY: And I went up there and I felt out of place so I left and I don't remember what I did from there on. But I don't remember much at all ashore. There was so little. For the time we were in, it wasn't a time for liberty, it was a time for refueling.

ED METZLER: Yeah, it was really work time.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah, I don't remember any time at all. It's just that one experience ashore.

ED METZLER: Right, right. That's interesting.

FRANK LOWRY: And on one occasion I had to, I guess, when I took command I had to report to the Captain of the base for one moment. I don't remember the occasion.

ED METZLER: You took command?

FRANK LOWRY: I eventually took command. Yes.

ED METZLER: So you eventually became Captain?

FRANK LOWRY: Yes. Yeah.

ED METZLER: Oh, I didn't know that. I've got you working up from Communications Officer to Engineering Officer to Executive Officer. And then you made Captain.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. This was after the war.

ED METZLER: Okay, so PC-819, were you still assigned to her when you became Captain?

FRANK LOWRY: I was all, that was my experience, yeah.

ED METZLER: Okay. Now during the war, before the war was over, and you went out to Attu and became Captain, did you ever see any sign of the enemy at all?

FRANK LOWRY: No. None at all. After it all when I got home I read about the Thousand-Mile War and the vicious fighting at Attu and it was really something.

ED METZLER: But that was before you got there.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. It took the edge off the fighting south.

ED METZLER: Right. What was it like to have night times during the winter that lasted almost all day? I mean you were up almost to the point where you could see a midnight sun during the summer and in the winter I guess you didn't get much daylight at all.

FRANK LOWRY: No, I don't remember. I remember it, I remember particularly that it just seemed like Chicago weather.

ED METZLER: [*laughs*]

FRANK LOWRY: The whole thing.

ED METZLER: Well you were perfectly designed for that assignment, then.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. But I do remember the ground cover. Outside of the base. For some reason I ran across it. Was a soggy turf. Just an overgrown grass and soggy, soggy.

ED METZLER: Now when you're, you're time up there, were you getting letters from home? Able to write letters home?

FRANK LOWRY: I wrote letters to the, I wrote a letter, one or a few letters to the girl that I met in Florida. But I wrote letters very, very frequently, maybe two or three letters a week, to my wife to be. And there was just no, we never had a particular agreement or anything. We just both knew that that was it.

ED METZLER: And so she wrote letters to you as well?

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. Yeah. That's the way I remember it.

ED METZLER: So the war was over and you were still aboard the 819. Do you remember much about when the war was over? Was there any celebrating going on? How did that work?

FRANK LOWRY: No, I don't remember. I remember listening to it and being aware of it but it didn't, I don't remember any abrupt break in our routine. Other than being sent to Attu. And we reported to the repair dock in Finger Bay. And that's, we were, I remember we were tied up in a very, extremely narrow, dead-end slip behind, inside, a YMS that was, mine sweep, that was tied up remarkably close to us. And we were headed in and that was where, unfortunately, where I took command.

ED METZLER: [*laughs*] They say timing is everything.

FRANK LOWRY: From Robert Kohankie. That was one fella that I got to be good friends with. He was, he must have been about five years older than I was and, but he was a good friend.

ED METZLER: So tell me about getting into that slip as Captain of the-

FRANK LOWRY: I don't remember getting into it but I remember particularly, getting out of it because, given the limited number of starts we had with the engine, I gave it one start to back out and I had to swing the stern to the port side to back around the YMS because it was *extremely* narrow space. Because it was just a dirt wall on the other side. And I saw it wasn't so I stopped and I remember everyone ran up on aboard the YMS in consternation when I was

starting to back out. And I stopped and then I did it again and came out very smoothly and successfully.

ED METZLER: [*laughs*]

FRANK LOWRY: I got out in one piece. Well, the interesting thing, and I recall, everything is so new to you, in my experience, and so completely new and one experience after the other. I don't recall having any time to worry about it. I really remember that particular quality. We got out there and that was it.

ED METZLER: So how long were you Captain of 819?

FRANK LOWRY: They sent us back shortly after we got out of there. I don't think we did any duty at Attu. I just, we just reported to the repair dock there and had some sort of work done. And then we were ordered to return to the states in the company of an ocean-going tug whose Captain was a full Lieutenant but he had been a former Chief Petty Officer, I remember. During peace time. And that was our fleet.

ED METZLER: The two ships.

FRANK LOWRY: The two ships returning.

ED METZLER: Task force. *[laughs]*

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. And I remember we tied up in route, some place along the chain, I don't remember just where in a sort of inlet. And in the night the Watch Officer let the slip, let the ship ground slightly. Just very slightly. And I had to get it off. I got it off very easily. And then that was the only experience I remember of interest on the way back. And we returned to Puget Sound Naval Base and I remember coming into a wide, a wide area between two piers. On the one on the far side was a small aircraft carrier, as I remember, and on the starboard side there was just an opening for the PC-819 in between two larger ships. One was, I cannot remember the type of ship it was but I do remember, I can remember the type but I can't remember the name. But it was larger than a DD but it was a type of supply ship for DDs. And I happened to make a very, very, particularly good docking. I did it in about two moves and I was particularly pleased with myself. And then I never had to do it again.

ED METZLER: That was it, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: That was it. When I went, then it was my time to be, to go stateside. And I remember I had an all-Navy bulletin called an "ALNAV". Came through and I was, the Captain was offered a full Lieutenancy if he would take it down to Panama as a training ship. And I chose not to take that opportunity and I remember chiefly, it was a prob 50-50 that I wanted to get back to wife to be but 50-50 was that I realized that I was not qualified to take it down.

ED METZLER: Why do you say that?

FRANK LOWRY: I was too green. I had-

ED METZLER: Still too green.

FRANK LOWRY: Too limited experiences. Because I only served as Captain to take the ship down out of Attu and back and dock it. I didn't have experience to do anything else. And I felt green. But I had, I also remember I was able to handle the ship very well given my experience in route.

ED METZLER: So you decided to leave the Navy then?

FRANK LOWRY: I was sent to, Oh! The Captain, the Officers that had been sent one by one as each promotion of Captain, they were so green, the fellow that was presently serving as Executive Officer was an Ensign and he refused to take command because he didn't know enough to do it. And they had to, as I recall, they were able to get him to do it but with a limited responsibility.

ED METZLER: I never heard of that.

FRANK LOWRY: Well that's some way in my mind. That's the way I remember it. I don't know how they could handle it but probably they just let him take command while it was in dock.

ED METZLER: In port.

FRANK LOWRY: Because none of, as Captain I never had a chance to operate the ship or even practice when I became the Captain. You just move in to that position and you better do it right.

ED METZLER: There you are and you're on the line.

FRANK LOWRY: That's right. Yeah. But no war. I didn't see the war.

ED METZLER: How did you hear, how did you and your crew keep up with what was going on during the war?

FRANK LOWRY: The radio. Yeah.

ED METZLER: So this is, so you listened to the radio. Did you ever here Tokyo Rose?

FRANK LOWRY: Yes we did.

ED METZLER: Tell me about Tokyo Rose.

FRANK LOWRY: Well I just can't. I haven't thought of it for so long. But, it's a woman's voice and she's telling us how well things were going and sort of making sarcastic remarks about the sailor's life and so forth. That's the type of thing I remember vaguely. But we listened to her quite often.

ED METZLER: And then you'd listen to, I guess they had an Armed Forces radio back then or-

FRANK LOWRY: Some, not too much.

ED METZLER: 'Cause you were way up there in the middle of nowhere when you were there.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah, yeah.

ED METZLER: And so I guess you got communications, too, from the Naval Command.

FRANK LOWRY: Well, as I remember as Communications Officer, having to break the bottom code for some of the communications from time to time. Yeah.

ED METZLER: And so what do you have, a code book to do that or how did that work?

FRANK LOWRY: I believe I had a code book but I don't remember.

ED METZLER: So what do you think about the Japanese after being at war with them even though you never actually saw 'em?

FRANK LOWRY: Well I was appalled all of the stories and everything I read. Just a exceedingly strange culture. But interestingly, after the war, some years after it, we went, I took a job. My wife and I took jobs on Taiwan. And, a two-year stint. Because I was a school principal. And we took a trip in the summer on the two-year stint, to visit Japan. And they were remarkable. They were so friendly. And courteous. It just seems like two different people.

ED METZLER: Did they know you were a World War Two veteran?

FRANK LOWRY: I have no idea.

ED METZLER: So you don't feel like they were being deferential or friendly just because –

FRANK LOWRY: I never felt that. No. I remember in particular, we landed at the airport, some airport in Japan. And here we're reading the airport bulletins for directions and flights.

ED METZLER: Right. Right.

FRANK LOWRY: And some, wise and old Japanese workman, about middle age, came and took us and interpreted it all. Took us completely across the airport and dropped us off exactly where we were supposed to take it.

ED METZLER: That was very kind of him.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah.

ED METZLER: Hmm. Well what other things can we talk about of your World War Two experience? I see you've got a lot of notes there, Frank.

FRANK LOWRY: Well I remember once when we were in Adak or Attu, probably Attu, but, a Second Class Seaman came late to board ship and we were supposed to get out so he missed it. And I'm busy thumbing through the Watch Officer's Guide. How to hold a Captain's Mast. And I managed without, I had *no one* to talk to of any experience and I didn't know what I was doing, but I managed to get through the Captain's Mast and I reduced his rating to Third Class. And then I remember once, when we were in, I think it was Adak Harbor, I'm not sure whether it was Adak or Attu, but I believe it was Adak. We encountered the storm. And we were tied up at the dock on the Inner Harbor. And the Harbor Master gave us orders to get out to sea 'cause we would have battered the ship and battered the dock. And we're doing that at night. In the middle of the night. And I, it was a little harrowing, but like I say, everything I did was the first time. And so I had no time for worry. And we got out and I can remember very, very

clearly, a moment of experience, we're coming out of the harbor, the Inner Harbor to the Outer Harbor, and the cliff on the starboard side was a sheer cliff. And, not all that, and it's night, and the storm is blowing, and we're rocking. And I'm in the wing, not up on top. And I was thinking, it just fleetingly went through my mind, "five years from now, this is going to be over."

ED METZLER: [*laughs*]

FRANK LOWRY: I can remember that so clearly.

ED METZLER: So you were feeling a little vulnerable at that point, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: But everything happened from so rapidly, there's no feeling of, I recall no feeling of fear, worry, or anything like that. We just did it.

ED METZLER: So I mean I guess this was just one of the normal winter storms that comes through there, huh?

FRANK LOWRY: It was just a normal storm, yeah. It just, we were in the wrong place.

ED METZLER: Well you've got all kinds of notes there. What else you got?

FRANK LOWRY: No, there just what I did.

ED METZLER: Did you keep in touch with any of the acquaintances you made during the war, after the war was over? Any of your fellow crewmen? Ever go to a reunion?

FRANK LOWRY: No, no, no I didn't.

ED METZLER: So are you proud of what you did during the war?

FRANK LOWRY: Well I'm very thankful and very, I've always been very appreciative of how lucky I was. Because I could have been any of a number of places that would have been very difficult. And I had it easy. And I was fortunate. And I'm very aware of it.

ED METZLER: How did it feel when you came back and put in in Puget Sound and put your feet on good old United States territory? Well I guess you were in the United States anyhow, weren't you, in Alaska.

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. I didn't have any particular, I don't remember any particular- Well, I remember thinking seriously about taking the ship to Panama but then I just decided I, I just decided I was not qualified.

ED METZLER: Do you think you made the right decision there?

FRANK LOWRY: I've often thought of it, re-thought of it. Yeah. I have no idea.

ED METZLER: [*laughs*] No way of knowing, is there?

FRANK LOWRY: No.

ED METZLER: Did you think about the war years at all after the war was over or did you just put it behind you?

FRANK LOWRY: I just put it behind me. Yeah.

ED METZLER: Didn't wake up at night dreaming about the storm you went through or anything?

FRANK LOWRY: No, no. No.

ED METZLER: Well okay, what else do you want to tell me?

FRANK LOWRY: That's about it. My wife, I met, I went to the Naval training station up in Glencoe, I believe. Along, north of Chicago. And was transferred to inactive duty. And I took the train to Berwyn, Illinois. My wife, that short acquaintance with about a half a dozen

meetings with my wife beforehand, she had the nerve to take the train from New York and meet my family before I even showed up.

ED METZLER: She was there waiting for you! *[laughs]*

FRANK LOWRY: She was there waiting for me. And I always have found that rather remarkable. Given the briefness of our acquaintance. And we've never had a problem.

ED METZLER: That's great. So how many years have you been married now?

FRANK LOWRY: 67.

ED METZLER: Wow. Isn't that wonderful?

FRANK LOWRY: Yeah. Yeah.

ED METZLER: Well, I'd like, Frank, to close this recording. First I want to thank you for the time you've spent with us today and we appreciate your going back and remembering those things. I know it was a long time ago. And I want to thank you for what you did for our country during the war. I still don't think we show our appreciation enough to you World War Two veterans, so I want to say that one more time.

FRANK LOWRY: Well I don't think we do enough for the Iraqi, particularly the Vietnam veterans. Our son, our eldest son was a Vietnam veteran. He came out as, almost as fortunate as I, but we don't treat the veterans properly.

ED METZLER: I think there's some truth to that.