

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas

An interview with William A Cobliegh
Florida
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ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler. Today is September 3rd, 2014. I am conducting a telephone interview with Mr. Bill Cobleigh. He is located at his home in Florida and I am located in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the Nimitz Museum. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So I want to kick it off by first thanking you, Bill, for spending the time this morning to share your World War Two experiences with us and let's get started by having you introduce yourself. If you'd give us your full name and date and place of birth, we'll take it from there.

BILL COBLEIGH: My name is William Cobleigh. C-O-B-L-E-I-G-H. I was born July 19, 1920 in the little town of Newbury, Vermont. N-E-W-B-U-R-Y. The largest town in acreage in the state but the smallest in population with 300 people.

ED METZLER: 300 people, now that's what they call a New England Village, isn't it?

BILL COBLEIGH: Right.

ED METZLER: Now, so did you spend all of your childhood years there in Newbury?

BILL COBLEIGH: Yes, up till I was out of school. I went to Newbury High School and went all through, I went to a one-room school house. On Jefferson Hill. We had six of those one-room school houses in the township. We only had horses. We didn't have cars then, you know?

ED METZLER: Yeah. Now what did your father do for a living? Bill, what did your father do for a living?

BILL COBLEIGH: He was a fireman and then an engineer on the Railroad for the Boston Main Railroad.

ED METZLER: And did you have brothers and sisters at home?

BILL COBLEIGH: Yes, I had a brother and a sister. They were both older than me. I'm the baby of the family. My mother used to call me that till I came back from World War Two.

ED METZLER: *[Laughs]*

BILL COBLEIGH: I said, "Mom, I'm not your baby anymore."

ED METZLER: Yeah! So, okay, and you say you went to grade school in a one-room school house and then to high school in Newbury. Is that right?

BILL COBLEIGH: That's correct.

ED METZLER: And, let's see. So if you were born in 1920 that means you were about 21 years old when the war started. So you were out of school, I assume. Were you going to college or did you go to work?

BILL COBLEIGH: No, I joined the CCC. Civilian Conservation Corps. The principal at the high school was a real pain in the you know what. I made a good play playing baseball. Caught the ball barehanded and threw the guy out at first base. And he picked me up off my feet and says, "You outta be a clown. Join the circus. You'll never graduate from my high school."

ED METZLER: Really?

BILL COBLEIGH: So that summer, in June, yeah, the end of June, I went into the CCC at Burke Mountain, Vermont. Went from there to Colorado for over a year.

ED METZLER: Now, what year was it that you went into the CCC?

BILL COBLEIGH: 1938.

ED METZLER: Okay, so you were 18, just out of high school then.

BILL COBLEIGH: That's right. I came back and got my GED later.

ED METZLER: Okay, okay. What project in Colorado was the CCC working on?

BILL COBLEIGH: We were the sole conservation corps of Colorado. We built a lot of homes for cattle on ranches and put in diversion tree planting on the different creeks they had to keep the soil erosion down. That was our main job. And fighting forest fire.

ED METZLER: Yeah, so I guess, you're up in the Rocky Mountains. That's quite a bit different than green hills, green mountains of Vermont, right?

BILL COBLEIGH: Right. Well, the camp that I was at was in Castle Rock. Halfway between Denver and Colorado Springs. But we went over to Leadville. That is up in the mountains. The

highest city I think in Colorado, is Leadville. A mining town. And we fought forest fires from Mount Everest to Mount Helens. Mount St. Helens. Tore up the moss line.

ED METZLER: Well I know Leadville. That's up well over 10,000 feet. That is one of the highest elevation towns I think in the lower 48.

BILL COBLEIGH: I think so.

ED METZLER: So where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked and the war started?

BILL COBLEIGH: I was cooking in the hotel in Bankstown, Vermont. I had come back from the CCC and went to work in the hotel and I wound up being a short order cook. And that's what I was doing that morning. And, let's see, it was noon I think. Right around noon. I was working on the noon meal I know. And four of us had signed up to work in the hotel in different branches of service. The manager's wife asked could we please not all go together so she'd at least have one or two of us come back. And we abided by that. I went in the Navy. One went in the Marines, one went in the Air Force. And one went in the Coast Guard. He was going to stay in the United States and patrol the rivers. Right after the war started, the Coast Guard was taken over by the Navy and I saw him next time in North Africa!

ED METZLER: Yeah, he thought he was just gonna stay stateside but the Coast Guard ended up going everywhere!

BILL COBLEIGH: That's right. They escorted most of our convoys across the Atlantic that I was later in, a tanker. They escorted most of us.

ED METZLER: Yeah. So, you went into the Navy, correct?

BILL COBLEIGH: Right.

ED METZLER: And why did you choose the Navy?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well I had belonged to the Vermont National Guard. If you're 17, back in those days, you're the most patriotic state in the union. If you were 17 and able bodied and you didn't belong to the Vermont National Guard, you couldn't get a job mowing a lawn. So I got sick of crawling around in the mud over the camp in New York. I was in the Signal section of the Vermont National Guard. And so I said, well, I bought the bill of goods that they told to me to

join the Navy, to have a dry place to sleep. Which was a big farce. I slept in a foxhole for the first three months I was in the islands.

ED METZLER: So where did you go to basic training?

BILL COBLEIGH: Newport, Rhode Island. Letter B on the main island.

ED METZLER: Yeah.

BILL COBLEIGH: We were the last company in barracks B.

ED METZLER: Yeah, now was –

BILL COBLEIGH: Then they transferred us to Carrington Point.

ED METZLER: Mm-hmm. Did you find the basic training easy or challenging? How did that go for you?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well you were supposed to have 12 weeks. But we only went for four weeks. So it was kind of a hurry up thing. It was cold down there and see, we went in 23rd of December. Two days before Christmas. Go down on that breakwater and the wind off that salt water would freeze the ears off a brass monkey, I'll tell ya.

ED METZLER: [*Laughs*] It's cold. So after you came out of basic, where were you assigned, then. Tell me.

BILL COBLEIGH: I was assigned to the base force there, cooking. But a buddy of mine went in the submarine service. So four of us, three of us had practiced holding our breath so we could hold our breath under water. For a minute and a half. So we could go in the submarine service. So I went to Groton, Connecticut to New London to the submarine school but I flunked out at the depth meter. Seems when I'd go down 100 feet I couldn't hear a bloody thing.

ED METZLER: Really? They made you go down to 100 feet?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well in the test. They have a test there that simulates.

ED METZLER: Right, right.

BILL COBLEIGH: The pressure at 100 feet.

ED METZLER: So they pressure you up and then check you to see if you can, if you can do what? Hear or what?

BILL COBLEIGH: I couldn't hear! He was talking to me and I couldn't hear him. So he motioned me up.

ED METZLER: So then what happened?

BILL COBLEIGH: So I flunked out of submarine school. So I got back to Newport, Rhode Island. I was only there in New London a week and went back to Newport. And they came up with something on the bulletin board that said, "Personnel wanted for secret base in the Solomons". That's all it said. Well, being the gung ho Vermonter that I was, I said, "I wanna get into this shenanigan somehow." So I volunteered for that and I wound up on Tulagi Island. In the lower Solomons in October of '42.

ED METZLER: Tulagi Island! I have heard of that! So how did you get out to the Solomons? They put you on what, a troop ship or what?

BILL COBLEIGH: I went out on a Hog Island Floater!

ED METZLER: What's that?

BILL COBLEIGH: Merchant ship.

ED METZLER: Okay. Okay. And where did you board her?

BILL COBLEIGH: San Francisco.

ED METZLER: So you had to get out to San Francisco before you got on board the merchant ship?

BILL COBLEIGH: Went by train to there.

ED METZLER: That's a long train ride.

BILL COBLEIGH: Everything went by train in those days.

ED METZLER: Yup. Yup. What do you remember about that trans-continental train ride?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well it was long and tiresome but we played cards and stuff and entertained ourselves.

ED METZLER: And who is 'we'? You're with -

BILL COBLEIGH: 11 of us I guess. That were in the Navy.

ED METZLER: Yeah, yeah.

BILL COBLEIGH: They were going to different places.

ED METZLER: Right. Did they give you sleeping quarters? Did you just have to sleep in the seat or what?

BILL COBLEIGH: You slept in the seat! Hell no they didn't have sleeping quarters in those days.

ED METZLER: I bet you were worn out by the time you got to San Francisco.

BILL COBLEIGH: No, not really. We were all in pretty good shape. I was in excellent condition as far as that goes. I could bench press twice my weight and I was born and raised on that farm and worked on the farm a lot.

ED METZLER: So you weren't any city boy who was outta shape.

BILL COBLEIGH: I was definitely a country boy.

ED METZLER: Well anybody who worked in the CCC was probably going to be in shape anyhow.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well, yeah, that was the best thing that Roosevelt ever did. I think.

ED METZLER: I think you're right.

BILL COBLEIGH: 'Cause it trained them for what came up later. They knew how to take care of your quarters, make their bunks the way they should and everything else that went along with it. Except the firearms. We didn't have any firearms training.

ED METZLER: Yeah, and I think the CCC did a lot of very good projects, too. I know you see CCC stuff still. All over the United States that they built.

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh yeah. We built the stone building at the entrance to Burke Mountain, down in state forest up in Lyndonville, Vermont. It's still standing. Every bit of that except the middle came out of that park. By hand. All stone and everything. All the wood. We built that whole thing. We built the road up the mountain and around the mountain to Victory, Vermont. And that was good, hard work. We got a couple of bear cubs and trained them.

ED METZLER: Really?

BILL COBLEIGH: Yup. And then the government wouldn't let us keep them. Two of 'em, so we kept one. We gave the other one to the zoo. That was in 1938.

ED METZLER: Yeah, now let's go back out to San Francisco. Now, when did you depart San Francisco? Was that what, early '42 then?

BILL COBLEIGH: Yes.

ED METZLER: Okay.

BILL COBLEIGH: [*Indiscernible*] I got there in October. Took us over 30 days to get there. So September probably.

ED METZLER: Okay, okay. Did you go straight down to the Solomons or did you go through Hawaii or what?

BILL COBLEIGH: No, we bypassed Hawaii. We went south of Hawaii and we went into New Caledonia. Stayed overnight and then went up to the island.

ED METZLER: You're still on that merchant ship?

BILL COBLEIGH: Yeah, no, a different one.

ED METZLER: Okay, so you changed ships in New Caledonia?

BILL COBLEIGH: Right. Noumea.

ED METZLER: Noumea. Yeah. Now, where did you disembark then, when you got into the Solomons?

BILL COBLEIGH: Right there in Tulagi.

ED METZLER: Okay, so you got off at Tulagi. Now, we're right in the middle of the Guadalcanal campaign at that point, aren't we?

BILL COBLEIGH: We sure are. Well, that was the beginning of it.

ED METZLER: Okay, that was right at the beginning. So tell me what happened.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well, we were out on patrol every night. I wasn't assigned to a squadron. My cockiness got me into trouble. I was assigned to the base force. I was a cook. Okay?

ED METZLER: Yup.

BILL COBLEIGH: I went down to the lower end of the island one day when they were practicing firing the sleeve. And they couldn't hit it. So, being the braggart that I was, I said, "You guys couldn't hit a bull in the butt if you were standing right behind him." The guy tapped me on the shoulder and says, "You think you can do it?" I said, "I know damn well I can. It's like shooting geese up in Lake Champlain." I stretched that thing from one end to the other. So this Officer says, well, I thought they were all enlisted men, but turned out he was a Lieutenant. Lieutenant John Claggett from Middlebury College. Professor. And he said, "You're on my patrol tonight." And I said, "I'm sorry sir, but I'm on the base force." He said, "Well I'll take care of that." And he did.

ED METZLER: I'll be darned. So he was a Vermonter as well?

BILL COBLEIGH: Yes he was.

ED METZLER: Middlebury is just not too far away from Newbury, right?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well it's across the state. Straight across the state. On the other side, on the New York side.

ED METZLER: Yeah, but it's a little state.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well, it's 90 miles across the farthest point.

ED METZLER: Yeah, yeah. So anyhow, he grabbed you and took you on your first patrol, huh?

BILL COBLEIGH: Right. And I was a cook during the day.

ED METZLER: Okay, so which PT boat was this?

BILL COBLEIGH: I was on the 111 boat that Captain Claggett had.

ED METZLER: PT-111.

BILL COBLEIGH: Yup.

ED METZLER: If I remember correctly, she didn't survive the campaign, did she?

BILL COBLEIGH: Nope. She burned up.

ED METZLER: So tell me about the first patrol, Bill.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well, never having had been under combat before, it was a pretty nervous bunch that was on there. But after the first round comes zipping by your ears, you just change entirely. I don't know how young people can do that, but we did. We wound up doing a pretty good job on those barges. And our job was to intercept the Japanese forces. They were coming down to reinforce the people on Guadalcanal so they could take Henderson Field back from the Marines. So we went out every night and we'd get right up within ten feet of these barges and just stich 'em with that 50-caliber. They say you can't hardly stand manually shooting your first person, but I don't feel that's so. It was a job we had to do and we did it.

ED METZLER: Now how close to those barges did you get?

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh we'd get within ten feet of 'em sometimes. But usually about 50 to 100 feet away.

ED METZLER: Now those barges are being towed by a Japanese ship? Is that correct or are they self-propelled?

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh now, they were self-propelled.

ED METZLER: Okay.

BILL COBLEIGH: I don't know what kind of an engine they had in 'em because we never got one. They got one of these, the miniature subs, the one-man subs. That's still up in Newport, Rhode Island as far as I know. Or no, not Newport. Melville. Melville, Rhode Island. In the museum, the battleship museum. Battleship, Massachusetts.

ED METZLER: So were those barges armed at all? Did they have their own armament?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well they had weapons. They had rifles with 'em. I don't know that they had any machine guns on there for protection. Just the guys that were manning their own weapons.

ED METZLER: Now, when you're on PT-111, what exactly is your position on the crew?

BILL COBLEIGH: I was the ship's cook.

ED METZLER: Okay. So how many people –

BILL COBLEIGH: My position on the gunnery was a 37 and ½ on the bow.

ED METZLER: Okay. So that was your –

BILL COBLEIGH: On the boat's loop.

ED METZLER: Yeah, that was your combat station in essence?

BILL COBLEIGH: Right. I switched from there to the twin-50 forward. I switched from the 37 and ½ to the twin 50s. You could write your name with those. Every third or fourth round was a tracer.

ED METZLER: Right. Now, how many on the crew of a PT?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well it varied. From nine, maybe 10 to start with. 'Cause we didn't have that many weapons. At the end of the war, they was up to 20 on a crew.

ED METZLER: What kind of kitchen facilities did you have on those boats? If you were the cook.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well I could touch all four walls no problem. I had a burner. I had a sink. It was all built, she was [*indiscernible*] to sell some of them after the war. As a one-piece unit. The sink. And refrigerator. One side. And a burner. And an oven on the other side. All in one piece. They could lift it right in and out.

ED METZLER: Okay.

BILL COBLEIGH: The whole thing was four feet by two feet if that.

ED METZLER: Bill, let me put you on hold for just a second and I'll be right back with you.

BILL COBLEIGH: Thank you.

ED METZLER: Okay I'm back, Bill. So I'm trying to think back. The PT boats, there were two basic kinds of PTs. One was an Elco. And the others I think were made down in New Orleans by Higgins. Is that right?

BILL COBLEIGH: That's correct.

ED METZLER: And PT-111 was an Elco, right?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well, let's see. No, it was a Higgins.

ED METZLER: Was it really?

BILL COBLEIGH: It had a fourth deck. That's how you could tell the difference between the two boats. The Elco boats had a solarium, we called it. Well, we called it the Pleasure Room. [*Laughter*] But that was where the Chief, if you had a Chief, they stayed in that room. They slept in there. The Higgins boats, the Officer slept right below the bridge and the enlisted men all slept forward in the forward compartment. They was flush deck all the way at the stern.

ED METZLER: But I think they all had -

BILL COBLEIGH: They were all made of mahogany.

ED METZLER: And they all had the three big Packard V-12s in 'em, right?

BILL COBLEIGH: Most of 'em did, yes. Yeah, I found one guy down here that was making a video interview and he was on a PT. So he said, the other guy asked him what kind of engines he had and he says, "Cadillac". And right then I said, "No, you weren't on a PT boat. You might have been on a PBR. But not on a PT boat." All of our engines were Packard V-12s. Well, we had some that were Langley's from Britain but never used 'em. One of 'em was a boat that was at Key West here. Recently. I think he's moving with them to New York. On the Hudson River now. But it was made by the British. But we never used it in combat that I know of.

ED METZLER: I wonder what kind of engines it had. It probably had the Rolls Royce engines in it.

BILL COBLEIGH: I would imagine so but I don't know for sure.

ED METZLER: Let's go back to your first patrol. So what kind of actual combat did you experience on the first patrol?

BILL COBLEIGH: Firing at barges, mainly. They came down three or four at a time. Sometimes more, but usually three or four. They were escorted by Destroyers. So we'd take on the Destroyers first and try to put them out of commission. Then go after the barges. We carried four torpedoes at that time.

ED METZLER: Right.

BILL COBLEIGH: All we had to start with was the 20-millimeter on the bow. Then they changed it to the 37.5. The two twin-50s, fore-and-after the captain. And a 20-millimeter on the stern. Then as they improved the put a 40-millimeter on the stern, 37.5 on the bow, two 20s on either side behind the cockpit, four torpedoes. Then they took the tubes off the boats. Early in the war. And put cantilever in them. We'd drop 'em off, you know, release 'em from the bridge. And they'd just fall into the water, going.

ED METZLER: So you used the torpedoes against the Destroyers?

BILL COBLEIGH: Destroyers, yes.

ED METZLER: But Destroyers are designed to be able to dodge torpedoes.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well, not from us because we could move three times as quick as they could.

ED METZLER: Yeah, you could sneak up on 'em.

BILL COBLEIGH: That's right. We used to do a lot of that on one engine. And the other two idling. So that the propellers wouldn't be holding us back. They could turn free but they're like in neutral. And we'd go on one engine and we could go 10 knots on one engine once they got the weight going. It was interesting, they kept improving. We finally got radar a couple years later. Which, at the end of the war, I've got a picture of it on the back of my car. Pound for pound we weighed 50 tons. Roughly. We had more armament than a Battleship.

ED METZLER: Yeah, on a pound for pound basis.

BILL COBLEIGH: Right. We had 37.5 on the bow, two eight-barrel five-inch rocket launchers, just forward to the bridge on either side. Two twin 50s, four and a half. Two 20s on the waist back behind the cabin. And a 40-milimeter on the stern. Some of the boats put an extra 2 20s on there, right behind the rocket launchers. See, that was a volunteer outfit, like submarines. Nobody was in PT boats that didn't want to be. Now some of the Officers may have got assigned to 'em. Most of our first boat Officers were millionaires off their grandsons'.

ED METZLER: Well yeah, like Kennedy.

BILL COBLEIGH: Yeah. But we had the great grandson of, oh, God what was that Carr? Double name Carr. It was good because they had boats from the time they were big enough to stand up.

ED METZLER: Now, did you, how many Destroyers do you remember actually dispatching while on these, while on the PT boat?

BILL COBLEIGH: Only three that I know of.

ED METZLER: How many?

BILL COBLEIGH: We made one lucky hit. We fired at a Destroyer and nothing happened. We counted it off. How long it would take to get there. And nothing happened. And all of a sudden *KABOOM!* It went under the Destroyer and the other Cruiser behind it. It didn't sink it but it was surprise to us. You know, war is luck, either good or bad.

ED METZLER: Yup. I think that's right. Now did you have any problems with the torpedoes? I know there were problems with them not detonating and being duds and running too low or too deep or too shallow and all that kind of stuff. Did you have any of those problems that you remember?

BILL COBLEIGH: Yes we did. And torpedoes were from World War One. Ones we had to start with. Some of 'em would go, some of 'em wouldn't. But like I said, all these guys were volunteers and we had a lot of shade tree mechanics. They could take it apart and put it back together again. That's what happened in most cases. Gasoline was terrible. So damn much water in the gasoline the guys had to change most of the carburetors around until they got 'em to run pretty good.

ED METZLER: So how long would a patrol last? I mean you were gone what, two days, one day? Just overnight? How did that work?

BILL COBLEIGH: Overnight mostly. If we got caught north in the Florida islands, chasing somebody, we would hole up under the trees. Like our willow trees we have here in Florida, these big ones that grow down the McAndrew Boulevard here in Florida. They were big enough, they hung out over the water so we could pop the limbs and put that 77, 80-foot boat right underneath it.

ED METZLER: So that's where you hung out during the day then, huh?

BILL COBLEIGH: We hung out there in the day till she got dark and then head back to base because by that time we're getting short on fuel. We only carried 3,000 gallons of fuel.

ED METZLER: 3,000 gallons! Wow.

BILL COBLEIGH: Yeah. 1500 on either side. Underneath. We were a big floating torpedo ourselves.

ED METZLER: Yeah, that's no kidding.

BILL COBLEIGH: Yup. Luckily. Well, 30-caliber to begin with. A 30-caliber would go right in and out the other. I think only two boats that we lost early on were hit by rifle fire in the gas tanks. Then they come up with what we called 'sponge rubber tanks'. They would stop anything up to, well they would slow down a 20-millimeter enough so they wouldn't explode the gasoline.

ED METZLER: Yeah, so this was what they called the self-sealing tanks that they had in aircraft, right?

BILL COBLEIGH: I believe so.

ED METZLER: So what was the most exciting patrol that you went on on PT-111?

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh boy. That's hard to say.

ED METZLER: Well tell me about all your patrols then.

BILL COBLEIGH: They were all pretty nerve wracking. But we didn't think about it. We just had a job to do and did it. I think, the time we took, we had to go into Guadalcanal and pick up some Marines. They were trapped on a point. I believe most of us, I think the most exciting time was in Bougainville. On Augusta Bay. I don't know if you know the location of that on a map or anything but there's coral reef all around the bay.

ED METZLER: I don't have a map in front of me but go ahead and tell me what happened there.

BILL COBLEIGH: Our skipper, we had three boats. The lead boat was supposed to get the search light. On the mainland of Bougainville. Right on the coast of Augusta Bay. But they missed it so we got bracketed with the lights and some of the artillery. But on the way in, the skipper noticed, God bless him, that wasn't Claggett either. That was McDowell I think his name was. He noticed that the water was blinking over the coral reef. At a certain point on the way in. So he made three 360 degree turns. With all the engines. Two forward and one aft. And turned up a big stairway. We had a rooster tail on the back of the boats, they were 15-feet high. But this just created a [*indiscernible*], that last wave that he made from his engines and rode it over that coral reef. And we got away. We lost I think it was our Summers Crew. Those guys, I never got involved in that, luckily. But those guys were trained to do everybody else's job. The basic part of it. And they could take off a propeller and put on a new one in a little over a minute. One guy would have the wrench. Another guy would have the wrench to take the nut off. Another guy would have the [*indiscernible*] that was in between that and the propeller. And the next guy would grab the propeller. And another guy had the one going down. It was all on zip, zip, zip. I'm proud of our PT boaters.

ED METZLER: I think so, yeah, you should be. So you got-

BILL COBLEIGH: Out of the Marines that were in combat all the time, I think we had some of the best trained people in the world.

ED METZLER: So what did you, how many Skippers did you serve under on the PT boat?

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh, let's see. Claggertt, McDowell, and what the hell was the other guy's name? I can't think of it right now. I made one patrol with him. I made most of 'em with Claggett and McDowell.

ED METZLER: So were those guys good Skippers?

BILL COBLEIGH: Yes, they were. Tidy was a good Skipper. His crew liked him and the last one of his crew just died here a few years ago. Right here in Brighton, Florida. I'll never forget his name 'cause it was Zynzer. Z-Y-N-Z-E-R. Al Zynzer. He never was in a hurry getting to paradise because he knew he was going to be last.

ED METZLER: So after the war was over, did you have reunions then? With you fellow crewmen?

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh yeah. Yeah. In '43, see then they only left the enlisted men, most of 'em. Only three month tour in Tulagi in those elements. Because you were under fire every night. Nerve wise, they broke most of us up. I went on to a fleet oiler. A tanker carrying five million and a half gallons of gasoline. That's like going from a firecracker strapped to a car to an atom bomb, you know?

ED METZLER: [*Laughs*] Yeah, right! So what was the name of that ship?

BILL COBLEIGH: The *Cossatot*.

ED METZLER: Would you spell that please?

BILL COBLEIGH: C-O-S-S-A-T-O-T.

ED METZLER: C-O-S-S-A-T-O-T. Now, let's go back to PTs for a moment. How many patrols were you actually on, Bill?

BILL COBLEIGH: I think, 11 I think I made. If I remember right.

ED METZLER: And what was your closest call on those patrols when you really thought, oh boy, we're in it.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well probably the third one. When we came in between two Japanese Destroyers. And we picked up a few holes here and there but nothing serious. I think probably that and the getting out of Augusta Bay was probably the next most exciting as far as that goes. Because we didn't think we had a prayer getting out of there. [*Indiscernible*] the Skipper. Those young Officers were good. One thing, 'cause the Navy would have [*indiscernible*] if they knew they were going to do some of the things they did. But they had courage enough and gal enough to do the things they thought would work and most of 'em did.

ED METZLER: So how many months were you actually on PT patrol before you moved onto your next ship?

BILL COBLEIGH: Only three months. That's all.

ED METZLER: So three months is it. Boy, you packed a lot of action into three months.

BILL COBLEIGH: That's right. October the 22nd I went out on my first patrol on the 23rd. Kennedy got there the first week of January, I think it was, of '43. And we left, I left on January the 16th. And went to the tanker. Made a few runs across the Atlantic with the convoys. I only lacked the Indian Ocean of going around the world.

ED METZLER: So, what did you say about going around the world?

BILL COBLEIGH: I only lacked going through the Indian Ocean. From going all the way around the world.

ED METZLER: Okay, so, alright, so you went through the Indian Ocean. How'd you get around Africa? Cape of Good Hope or -

BILL COBLEIGH: We didn't go through the Indian Ocean. We went on convoy, after I got on that tanker we went across the Atlantic, through the Med, down through the west coast to what is now Somalia I believe. The Arabian Peninsula there.

ED METZLER: Right.

BILL COBLEIGH: And picked up a load of fuel. And came back and picked up a convoy coming back. When I got back on the boats again I got back on a mothership. The AGP-12. The *Acontius*. It was a mothership for the boats that we could pick up a boat and put it on the foatsail and hang one on either side and work on 'em. Then we got back as far as Hallaniyat Island. Which is off Borneo.

ED METZLER: Yeah, Borneo. So you literally went around the world.

BILL COBLEIGH: We lacked Somalia from going around the world.

ED METZLER: So when you were doing support work for the north Atlantic convoys, you say you went through the Med and then what, through the Suez Canal, correct?

BILL COBLEIGH: Right. Right.

ED METZLER: Yup. And what time frame was this? This was in '43?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well, '43, yeah. '43 to '44.

ED METZLER: Through '44. And then in '44 you went at that point, where, back over to –

BILL COBLEIGH: To the PT boats, back on the mothership.

ED METZLER: On the mothership to the PT boats.

BILL COBLEIGH: Right.

ED METZLER: And how long were you on the mothership, the PT mothership.

BILL COBLEIGH: Till the end of the war.

ED METZLER: Okay, so from –

BILL COBLEIGH: January, '46. We took it back to San Francisco. January the 15th of '46 we got into San Francisco. We took a whole bunch of Doggish with us too. Boy were they a sick bunch of guys. The problem there was they took all of our spare engines out. The government wastes more money than you'd ever, ever, ever believe.

ED METZLER: Right.

BILL COBLEIGH: Each one of those engines, I have no idea what those lack of engines would cost. But we had, let's see, 15. Three engines, we had at least 35 if not more engines down in the hold. Outside of Leyte Gulf and deep-sixed those.

ED METZLER: You are kidding.

BILL COBLEIGH: No I'm not kidding.

ED METZLER: They just dumped 'em.

BILL COBLEIGH: Just dumped 'em so that they wouldn't be taken over by anybody. And we burned the boats!

ED METZLER: Man. Oh my.

BILL COBLEIGH: We didn't burn our boat. Our Skipper refused. He says, "No, that's been our home. Would you burn your home after you lived in it for three years?" And Admiral Magruder, God bless him. He was the sailors' admiral. He said, "No, my guys are not going to burn the boats. If you want 'em burned, you let the police force do them." And that's what they did. They burned 'em on Vulcan Point in the Philippines. So that they wouldn't fall into untrustworthy hands I guess.

ED METZLER: Gosh. Well, I mean the Japanese had been defeated so you would think there would have been a use for those somewhere.

BILL COBLEIGH: Yeah. Well some think, several of the Hollywood people bought those. I don't know where they got 'em. I think they got 'em stateside. The ones that hadn't gone over yet. I don't believe any of the boats we had out there had gone back to the states.

ED METZLER: Yeah, we have a PT boat on display here at our museum here in Texas. And it came from the Mediterranean. It was used in the assault on France in the Mediterranean and then it ended up being a fishing boat. I believe. For years and years after the war.

BILL COBLEIGH: Right. I haven't seen that one. We offered 'em from our PT boat organization, we offered them the one we have in Newport, Rhode Island. And they turned it down. I don't know why. I wasn't too impressed with the memorial museum at that time when I was there.

Let's see, I was there in '88. Something, I think it was. Had to be the 80s. So I heard they were going to get one. I don't know what it is. Was it a Higgins boat or an Elco boat? Or a British boat?

ED METZLER: I think it's a Higgins.

BILL COBLEIGH: If it's a fourth deck, it's a Higgins. They have the Packard Engines in 'em?

ED METZLER: Nope.

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh they probably took 'em out and put in a diesel.

ED METZLER: Yeah, that's right, and so it doesn't have any engines in it now.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well the one we got in Newport has got the regular, original engines.

ED METZLER: Does it?

BILL COBLEIGH: I tell ya, if you ever wanna ride one, you go to Portland, Oregon, on the Willamette River. And you have a 77-foot boat, Elco, with the original engines. Some of the original engines, not the one that was on the boat. And they'll give you a ride on the Willamette River. You tell 'em you know me. I'm sure you'll get a ride.

ED METZLER: I'll be darned. So you've ridden on that baby, huh?

BILL COBLEIGH: Yup.

ED METZLER: Was it the way you remembered it?

BILL COBLEIGH: But this last year my doctor refused to let me fly. Because of my heart. Wouldn't give me permission to fly again. But I used to go there. I rode it three times I think. And that was good publicity for us. We used to lead the Rose parade out there in Portland. On the Willamette River.

ED METZLER: So where were you when you heard that the war was going to be over?

BILL COBLEIGH: We were in, let's see, we had just gone with the mothership to Okinawa. On the northern most basin. I can't remember the name of the damned thing. Mingi or some silly

name. The little base they had there. Our job was to pick up the pallets that had run out of fuel. Escorting the bombers over Japan. That was our last duty. We'd go out there, out of our tanks of gas, and then patrol back and forth in a certain area. And pick up the pilots that'd go down. The P-51 Mustang wasn't worth a damn for pancaking. Just rip the belly out of it and they go down like a stone. The 38-Lightening with the Gull wings, no the 38-Lightening twin, two slides, they were good. The Corsair, the black Corsair with the gold wings?

ED METZLER: Yup.

BILL COBLEIGH: They dropped down. They'd rip 'em off and they'd be sitting there on a wing with their little radio going. The LP-40s, they just flew forever. And that P-38 Lightning, well the Navy called 'em the Blackhawk. They were black. But they were the same thing as the P-38. Little Navy variations. Navy would never do anything the same as somebody else.

ED METZLER: Yeah, that's right. So the P-51 would sink like a rock?

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh yeah. Tear the belly right out of it.

ED METZLER: Yeah, I guess for one thing it had that big air scoop underneath.

BILL COBLEIGH: Scoop on the bottom, yeah.

ED METZLER: Yeah, and that thing just ripped it right off when it hit the water.

BILL COBLEIGH: And take the [*indiscernible*] right with it too.

ED METZLER: Yeah, plus it has a narrow wing. You know, because of, the earlier aircraft designs had big, wide wings and the P-51 had the fairly narrow wing. So you just didn't have as much surface either.

BILL COBLEIGH: I'd like to get out to Fredericksburg again but I don't know. If I'll make it or not.

ED METZLER: Well I hope you can. Well let's, I have some more questions to ask you Bill, if you've got a few minutes.

BILL COBLEIGH: Go ahead.

ED METZLER: I want to come back to the mothership that you were on. Tell me some more about that ship.

BILL COBLEIGH: Which one are you talking about?

ED METZLER: Now this is the one that you said was the, I thought I understood you to say it was a mother boat for the PTs?

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh yeah, AGP-12.

ED METZLER: And, give me that number again. I didn't quite get it.

BILL COBLEIGH: A-G-P-12.

ED METZLER: Okay.

BILL COBLEIGH: *USS Acontius*. A-C-O-N-T-I-U-S. We called it the 'unconscious'.

ED METZLER: I got that down now. So how large a boat was that?

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh gosh.

ED METZLER: I mean round numbers. Not getting you down to the final foot.

BILL COBLEIGH: 400 and something feet long. It had a-hundred ton brim on the float sail.

ED METZLER: Okay.

BILL COBLEIGH: And we could pick up a boat in the cradle. Swing it over to the savage side. Hang it on the side. Put one on the deck and hang one on the port side. So they could work on three boats at one time. And they could do everything on that ship including the crosshairs and the gun.

ED METZLER: And so what was your station aboard her when you were on her?

BILL COBLEIGH: I was first class cook. I was the head cook.

ED METZLER: So you're still cooking. Okay.

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh yeah, yeah. I went from third to first, and well, they actually promoted me before they should. But, I almost got it taken away from me, but. I was with the Navy. I wasn't USMR so I was supposed to do six years. But I had over four in, and over half of that was the sea. The passed what they called a five trough bill. And let me get out. I didn't have any Chief Commissary Stuart who was supposed to make up the menus and order all the food and everything. So I had to do that. So my Skipper says, you're doing the work, I'm promoting him. So I went from Second to First in about four months. Which I wasn't supposed to do. Some Lieutenant came out from Guam, called me up into the War Room with the Captain and explained that they couldn't do this or that and he asked the Captain why he promoted me and he said, "Cause he was doing the work of two people. And doing a good job at it."

ED METZLER: Yeah.

BILL COBLEIGH: Admiral Magruder, he come in, with a cup a joe and he just, "Carry on." He sat down and he listened for a while. Finally he come over to me and he said, "Do you think you're doing a good job? Do you like your job?" And I said, "Yes I do, sir." He said, "Do you think you're doing a good job?" I said, "Well, all I can say is that everybody on this ship knows I can't swim, and I've never been thrown overboard."

ED METZLER: *[Laughs]*

BILL COBLEIGH: He said, "By God, that's the best answer I've had in a long time." And he turned around to that Lieutenant and said, "You go back to wherever the hell you came from and tell 'em that Admiral Magruder says that he keeps his rate and that's the end of this conversation!" He was a good, he was a good Skipper.

ED METZLER: Yeah. Now I want, go ahead.

BILL COBLEIGH: We had the flag at the end of the war. We had the flag for PT boats.

ED METZLER: Now I want to go back to some of the discussion we were having earlier about rescuing downed planes up in the Okinawa area.

BILL COBLEIGH: Right, between Okinawa and Japan, yeah.

ED METZLER: Was this, yeah, and this was after the Okinawa Campaign was over? Or were they still fighting on Okinawa when you were there?

BILL COBLEIGH: They were still fighting on Okinawa.

ED METZLER: Uh-huh.

BILL COBLEIGH: Not as much as they were before. They'd taken Suribachi already.

ED METZLER: Well Suribachi was on Iwo Jima.

BILL COBLEIGH: Iwo Jima. Yeah, they'd taken that one. Well, they never had, well I guess they did early. I don't know, I wasn't there with the Marines. There wasn't too much excitement going on except up in our neck of the woods.

ED METZLER: So most of these were fighter craft? Not B-29s that you were –

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh no, most all of 'em, I don't think. Well, our boat never did. We never rescued any bigger ones. Most of 'em could make it back but the fighters would run out of fuel.

ED METZLER: So the bombers could make it back but the bombers were stretched on their range.

BILL COBLEIGH: Right, because they were fighting the Jap Zeros and those others that they had left. They didn't have too many left at that point.

ED METZLER: Now when you were doing that, you were on the AGP-12, right?

BILL COBLEIGH: Right.

ED METZLER: Okay.

BILL COBLEIGH: I made patrols because everybody in their squadron had, we had the Soul brothers, Jack and Bob. Jack was squadron commander of 31. And that was the last one that came up to the island. And they all knew me so, guess what?

ED METZLER: What?

BILL COBLEIGH: I got stuck with patrols.

ED METZLER: Did you find the patrols boring or what?

BILL COBLEIGH: No, not really. They were compared to what we went through to start with, yes.

ED METZLER: I would think so.

BILL COBLEIGH: Because we had nothing. Once in a while, I don't know what kind of a plane they were, but oh, we had an American plane shoot at us once! That guy should never have been a pilot. A B-25. He shot at our boat and the Skipper says, "What the hell is this?" We started zig-zagging. When he come back he says, "Shoot the tail off that son of a bitch. He'll come down." He did. He said, "What'd you shoot at me for?" Skipper says, "What the hell did you think we were?" We had a white star painted on our float sail. So they had a really good argument. But otherwise it was just monotonous. That's all it was. We'd patrol back and forth on one engine. On the same frequency as the pilots.

ED METZLER: Yeah. Did you, were you able to communicate with your family while you were overseas? I mean did you write letters? Did you get letters?

BILL COBLEIGH: I wrote letters, yes. Well, to begin with, it was almost a year before my wife knew where I was. When I left Newport the last time. I finally got a letter and the Coolidge? Do you remember the Coolidge transport?

ED METZLER: Tell me about it.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well there was a troop ship and it took the whole 173rd infantry from Vermont. I think they had four guys from Massachusetts on there. The rest of 'em were all Vermonters. And they got hit off of Nova. And sunk. My cousin carried a Captain that was only 5'2" and he was 6'4". He carried him ashore on his shoulders. So he got promoted to Sergeant real quick. Sergeant. So then I wrote to my wife and I said, "I saw [*indiscernible*] stomping grounds." That's all. Shew knew what I was talking about. That's when she knew where I was.

ED METZLER: Yeah, because you couldn't tell 'em where you were because they would censor your letters and it never got out.

BILL COBLEIGH: They'd censor all your letters. And some of the guys had codes that they used.

ED METZLER: I've heard that.

BILL COBLEIGH: Yeah. They'd keep repeating eggs or shoes or something.

ED METZLER: Yeah.

BILL COBLEIGH: And depending how often they used it. They'd figure out a way. Our GIs were innovative.

ED METZLER: What do you think about the Japanese? How do you feel about the Japanese?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well, that's a good question. My granddaughter is married to a Japanese. She was born in Hawaii.

ED METZLER: Yeah.

BILL COBLEIGH: His father was a dentist and I met the whole family. Very nice people. They never were involved in the war. She was a nurse in the Army and she was stationed at a hospital there in Hawaii for a while. Tough duty. And they got acquainted. And I went out and met his folks and they treated me like a million dollars. I can't say anything against them. I feel more that it's not their fault. It's not the Chinese fault. It's the millionaires' fault that we're in the trouble we're in now. With China. The only people are millionaires that are making money.

ED METZLER: Yeah, I've talked to some veterans who say, hey, it was the leaders' fault and not the common soldier or sailors' fault for the whole mess.

BILL COBLEIGH: That's right. Except for the grace of God we could have been where they were and they could have been where we were.

ED METZLER: Yeah. And then I've talked to others that say, "I hate 'em and I always will and I won't buy Japanese cars" and this kind of stuff. So you know, everybody feels differently about it.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well I've found over the years, I was involved in the VFW as Commander in Illinois, Kingsville post. And I was District Commander of 14 with 30 post. So I got quite involved with that. And over the years, I have come to realize the ones that were really in it don't want to talk about it very often. But when they get with another veteran that's been there, they'll have a good conversation. The ones that you hear bragging about this and that and everything else, most of 'em weren't even in combat. I've found that over the years.

ED METZLER: Yeah, that's an interesting observation.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well I've met so many. I was Assistant National Public Relations Director for the National VFW and I heard all kinds of stories. The ones you can believe are the ones that are a little bit reluctant about –

ED METZLER: Talking about it.

BILL COBLEIGH: Yeah.

ED METZLER: Yeah, you know, I think that's a good observation. It's almost like some of the veterans back in the day, maybe 10 or 20 years ago, maybe not so much now, who are almost all a speaking circuit, telling about their, you know, their experiences in the war. And after a while you begin to wonder, did all that really happen? And then, you're right, the guys who are reluctant to even talk about it and are kinda holding it in, they're the ones that really have the stories to tell and were really, you know, right on the front line.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well this is the bluntest I've ever talked to anyone about it, I'll tell you the truth.

ED METZLER: Well let me ask you another question. You were 21, young man. Went to war. Came back. Boy, you were gone four years plus, weren't you?

BILL COBLEIGH: I guess. Let's see from the 4th of December to the 23rd of December, it would have been six years.

ED METZLER: Yeah. And you were all over the world in all different kinds of vessels. And tell me, when you came out, when the war was over and you came out, how much of a different person were you than the young man who went in?

BILL COBLEIGH: I went back to cooking in the hotel but I had to give it up because I couldn't stand the, coming from the Pacific back here, my sinuses just went berserk and I couldn't go from the freezer to the kitchen and work. The doctor finally, I was taking four diazepam to go to sleep at night. The doctor says, "If you want to live to be much older", said, "you better get an outside job." So I went to work for the power company. Digging holes, climbing poles, driving trucks. I didn't, I had experience but I was just a beginner. With those people. So I kinda cooled it a little bit and then, I don't think I changed too much. I don't think I did really.

Because I was involved with the guard before I went in. So I knew what that was all about. No, I can't say –

ED METZLER: Well you came back –

BILL COBLEIGH: I'll tell you what, if the Japanese had known what shape our coastal defenses were on the West Coast, we'd have been speaking Japanese.

ED METZLER: [*Laughs*] If they'd just known, huh?

BILL COBLEIGH: I served with a guy in the Post Office in Middlebury who was a Captain Artillery. He was in charge of 12 weapons in the Portland/Seattle area. Only five of them worked. Most of 'em wouldn't even fire.

ED METZLER: When you came back from overseas, did you often think about your war experiences or dream about it or any of that kinda stuff?

BILL COBLEIGH: You know, I really, well, once in a while. Once in a great while, if I was really, really tired from working. I told you that I went with the power company. Once in a while I'd wake up hearing gunfire. But I never really had nightmares about it, no.

ED METZLER: That's good. That's good. Because, I've still heard stories, you know, every time 4th of July came around, they couldn't, you know, they just didn't even like to hear explosions or fireworks because it bothered 'em so much.

BILL COBLEIGH: It did bother me a little bit but not too much. I, every time they play the national anthem I have tears in my eyes. I just can't help it. I used to have a pretty [*indiscernible*] singing voice till the doctor down here cut my throat. Cut my vocal chords when he operated on my goiter.

ED METZLER: Yeah, that's what you were telling me when we were on the phone earlier. Are you getting any better or are you stuck with what you got now?

BILL COBLEIGH: No I'm just staying with what I've got. I had an implant put in to get what voice I've got. I could kill the doctor real easy if I could get ahold of him but that's unnecessary. Put a squinch on my life, I'll tell ya.

ED METZLER: Absolutely. Absolutely.

BILL COBLEIGH: I sang the national anthem in the Busch Stadium with a group. We had a group of senior citizens from [*indiscernible*]. From the Catholic Church, my wife then, at that time, was Catholic. So I always made sure she got to church and everything. And I went to church and I joined their chorus. We went to Busch Stadium and Jack Buck was announcing then. Well I didn't know they were going to do it, but they knew I wouldn't quit once I got started. Because I'm not a quitter and never was. They all just decided to hum. So I wound up singing the national anthem. The flags, I take care of the flags here in the park. I try to. Because some people just don't care.

ED METZLER: Yup.

BILL COBLEIGH: I get to 'em, I tell 'em about it. Replace it! Little things like that bother me, that's about all. When they place Amazing Grace over the bagpipes, that gets me. I have tears in my eyes. I'm not ashamed.

ED METZLER: Yeah. Yeah, I'm with you. The bagpipes and Amazing Grace and that kinda stuff, that's, that gets to you, doesn't it?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well I heard it so often I guess. At different times. And then when I was in the VFW I got to present the flag to the survivors, you know? And remembering that was when I would stammer and stutter. And it took me a long time before I didn't have a tear in my eye.

ED METZLER: Yup. Well we've talked about a lot of things, Bill, but I am sure I haven't asked all the right questions. So let me just ask you this. What else would you like to tell me about your World War Two experience so we can get it down?

BILL COBLEIGH: Well, it was really interesting. It came on me in a hurry so I really didn't have a chance to do much planning.

ED METZLER: Yeah.

BILL COBLEIGH: I guess my dedication, being a Vermonter, a Green Mountain Boy, that's what I got on my stone here in the park.

ED METZLER: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

BILL COBLEIGH: The Green Mountain Boy.

ED METZLER: Well you're a long way from home right now being down there in Florida.

BILL COBLEIGH: That's right. It just all happened, I guess. That's the best way I can put it.

ED METZLER: Yeah.

BILL COBLEIGH: I never, we got torpedoed on that tanker, when our Skipper was smart enough so that when he bumped the fuel out to refuel, we were left with mostly explosives in the center tanks. And the diesel and the Navy tan and black oil were on port or starboard. When he got done refueling, he pumped that out and filled it full of salt water. And Norfolk Navy Yard gave him bloody hell for doing that. Worried them all. He said, "Don't worry. It's my ship and I'll take care of it. We'll clean the tanks." But a torpedo hit us in number two, and we didn't even slow down. It just exploded in the water. It made a hump in the deck, maybe eight to ten inches high and four in diameter. And that was it. We just kept on going. Ten knots.

ED METZLER: Now tell me exactly where that happened.

BILL COBLEIGH: That happened right outside, between Gibraltar and Port Lyautey. Right in the Med.

ED METZLER: Were you in the Med? Or were you out in the Atlantic?

BILL COBLEIGH: Right in the Med. No, no, we had just gotten into the Med.

ED METZLER: Okay so you –

BILL COBLEIGH: Right at the Rock of Gibraltar.

ED METZLER: Okay so you just got in. Okay. Okay.

BILL COBLEIGH: Just got in, yep.

ED METZLER: So were you in a convoy at that point or were you alone?

BILL COBLEIGH: We had two escorts with us.

ED METZLER: Did they give this up?

BILL COBLEIGH: So the convoy went with us north. With other escorts. But we didn't need to refuel the escorts anymore so they put us into Port Lyautey. And we waited until the next one come back.

ED METZLER: So did they get the sub that torpedoed you?

BILL COBLEIGH: Oh no. No, no, no, no. And they took off. They didn't hang around.

ED METZLER: So what, tell me what, roughly, the date was for that. Was that '44.

BILL COBLEIGH: Let's see. It went into commission in June of '43. It'd probably be, probably July of '44. Oh wait a minute. No it was that because I was back on the *Acontius*. It was probably June. May or June of '44. Because I went back on the *Acontius* in '44.

ED METZLER: Okay. So what did you do to, did they repair her at port or what?

BILL COBLEIGH: They what? Say again?

ED METZLER: Where you took the torpedo, did they repair that when you got into port or, what, do they dry dock her or what?

BILL COBLEIGH: No, no. We kept [*indiscernible*] on the bow all the way back across the Atlantic to Norfolk, Virginia.

ED METZLER: [*Laughs*]

BILL COBLEIGH: Didn't slow us down a damn bit. No, we had a good Skipper. He knew every piece of water in the world like his hometown. He'd been at the Merchant Marine since he was 14 years old. He came on our ship and had his 60th birthday on our ship. The best cake, birthday cake, he said he ever had in his life. 'Cause we had a baker on the ship who was an assistant pastry chef in the Waldorf Astoria in New York City! His son went in the Navy so he went in the Navy. He set up and I helped him by steaming up the pans that we cut out of barrels. We had a 20-gallon barrel we made a tin out of. The bottom half. He made a five-layer cake with the old man and an oxygen symbol on the top of it. And that was a five-gallon that we made it out of. And all the ships that he'd been on were around the side of it. I stole one of the Officer's swords so they could cut it for him. Handed him that thing and I mean, he cried like a baby. Most of us did too, you know?

ED METZLER: That is something. I mean here's a 50-year old veteran who's been in the Merchant Marine for 36 years and he cried like a baby.

BILL COBLEIGH: He sure did!

ED METZLER: That's a story.

BILL COBLEIGH: Now we went to Murmansk once, we were on a convoy to Murmansk.

ED METZLER: You went to Murmansk?

BILL COBLEIGH: Murmansk, Russia.

ED METZLER: Yeah, I know exactly where that is.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well we just made the turn south around Norway, whatever the Scandinavian peninsula.

ED METZLER: Right, right.

BILL COBLEIGH: When they said the [*indiscernible*] was out ahead of us. We didn't have good radar then, nobody did. So the Skipper and our Skipper went to Merchant Marine academy together. They were old hands. I happened to be on the bridge copying code for him. But that day I did everything I could to keep occupied when I wasn't cooking. He calls our Skipper and says, "Bill, okay, get your tanker and the other three Merchant tankers and get your ass back to Scapa Flow, Scotland as fast as you can." So we left the convoy and he took us in so close to the harbor, to the shoreline, that we had to take soundings off the bow. We drew 32 feet of water. He got us all there. And he told the rest of 'em, he says, "You just stick on my tail and we'll get there." And we did. Had one hell of a party when we got to Scapa Flow, I'll tell you.

ED METZLER: Oh I'll bet.

BILL COBLEIGH: Those Merchant Marine tankers, we had three of 'em with us. And they really got the food, those guys did. In those days. We went aboard one of 'em and had one hell of a party. Yeah, we had some good Officers. Thank God. I've been very, very lucky. That's all I can call it is luck. You just happened to be on the good luck side of it.

ED METZLER: Well, thank goodness.

BILL COBLEIGH: To live to be my age, I have a tag on the front of my car now that says, "I'm Vermont Strong". Everybody says, "What do you have that on there for?" I said, "Because that's why I'm so strong. I'm still living."

ED METZLER: And I am just thinking of where you went during the war. All the way from Murmansk, North Atlantic, Mediterranean, all over the Pacific. Wow. You really, really got around.

BILL COBLEIGH: And I couldn't swim. I couldn't swim.

ED METZLER: That makes it even more amazing.

BILL COBLEIGH: I had a brand new life jacket! About every two months. Because they didn't want to lose a cook.

ED METZLER: Don't want to lose the cook, that's for dang sure.

BILL COBLEIGH: In the Navy, like everything, they could make changes with the stroke of a pen. We were supposed to be able to swim twice the length of the pool in Newport, Rhode Island before we could go on sea duty. One day I looked up, my name's on sea detail. So I went in to see the Commander. He said, "Don't worry about it. We'll give you a big life jacket." So here I'm out in the middle of the damned ocean on both sides, and can't swim. I never worried about it. I never thought about it.

ED METZLER: That's amazing.

BILL COBLEIGH: I really never did. Didn't worry at all.

ED METZLER: What a story. Well this has been fascinating for me to hear your story. And I thank you for spending the time with us today. I want to thank you for what you did for our country. We still don't thank you guys enough.

BILL COBLEIGH: Well, I wouldn't take a million dollars for it but I know I'd do it over again.

ED METZLER: That's pretty close to what most of the guys tell me. They say that it was an experience I wouldn't trade for anything, but I sure wouldn't want to do it again.

BILL COBLEIGH: No. That's, I think most of us over there feel the same way. I'm sure we did. If I survive this trip to Colorado, I think I've got your phone number here. I want to try to go to Fredericksburg.

ED METZLER: Well I sure wish you'd come here.

BILL COBLEIGH: Give me your phone number that I can get ahold of you with. Please.

ED METZLER: That's great. We'll I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to end the interview here and then we'll talk on the phone.