

John J Ley Oral History Interview

FLOYD COX: Today is February the 9th, 2015. My name is Floyd Cox. I'm a volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. I'm here with Mr. John Ley in his home to visit with him concerning his experiences in World War II. This interview is in support of the Educational and Resource Center of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the Preservation of Historical Information related to World War II. John, I want to tell you thank you for taking the time to visit with me today and if we might -- I'd like to start off asking you a little bit about your background, where you were born and when you were born. And a little bit about your parents and we'll take it from there.

JOHN LEY: Yeah, OK. I was born in Joliet, Illinois. My father was a blue collar railroad worker, a switchman on the railroad and at the age of 16 I felt as though I had attained all the knowledge anyone ever needed to be successful in life so I quit school at the age of 16. I went to work a lumber yard, 35 cents an hour. And it was a six-day job. And on some weekends, six and a half days. And I loved it. Working in the lumberyard, hauling lumber, unloading boxcars and then one day the boss came out and

said to me, "I need someone in the office. Monday I want you to come in dressed to work in the office." So at the age of 17, I was promoted to work in the office.

FC: What was the name of that company?

JL: The New Lumber Company, Joliet, Illinois. And my boss had no -- it was during the war and we had trouble getting personnel to unload lumber. We were using high school kids and everything else. But anyway, he brought me in the office and I was doing the -- working on accounts, handling customers, making out the cash receipts for the day. At the age of 17, taking the money to the bank, making the bank deposits. It was a -- for me -- a very rewarding time although it was long hours and low pay, I enjoyed it and one day the boss said to me, he said, "We can't get any lumber. I got to go take off and go he lumber somewhere." He said -- he looked at me and said, "Run the company for about two weeks." At the age of 17. People would come in and say, "Do you need anything today?" I'd say, "I don't know, I'll check with the yard men." And then I called them and said, "Yeah, I'll take so much of this." Somebody would end up -- so many (inaudible) and so many doors and I'll give the order at the age of 17. And looking back upon it the guys would come in and say, "Can I do this?" "Yes, OK. Go ahead, take the truck and make the delivery

and then when you finish that do --" And directing these guys that re much older than me but I loved the working in the lumber yard. But the -- I turned 18. And 18 -- 60 days later I got a notice that the draft board wanted to discuss something with me. So I went down for the discussion and find out yes, I was 1A --

FC: What year was this?

JL: Nineteen forty-three. It was -- they -- immediate after I turned 18. And so they -- the nice draft board sent me a ticket to go to Chicago and be examined. And sure enough I went to Chicago, I went to the Draft people. It was interesting. After I took my physical, they said, "Which do you want to be? Do you want to be a Marine, Army, Navy, Coast Guard? Where do you want to go?" And so I said, "I'll take Navy." On June 9th, I reported to the train station in Jolliet and they had about six guys there to go to Chicago and get on the L and go to Great Lakes, Illinois. I went through Great Lakes --

FC: Boot Camp.

JL: Yeah, it was a -- at Green Bay was the -- WWII construction. But then when we were getting our assignments, we all lined up -- there were several hundreds of us lined up -- they said, "The following named men will report to go to St. Mary's University. They are going to

gun smith school." Next guys, "They are going to Notre Dame University." I thought, "Oh boy." And you know the guys -- they were sending them everywhere but Radcliffe, that was the only college they were missing. I thought, "Oh boy this is really good." And finally I look around and there's only a handful of us left and they said, "Those remaining will pick up their C-bags and march across the field to Great Lakes, Illinois." Which was a good assignment. I was 90 miles from home. In radio school for six months. I got every other weekend off. Every other weekend I got to go home. I'd get on the North Shore, go down, get on the L and then go to the -- get on to the down the station in Chicago. And then be home in about two or three hours, I'd be home for the weekend. Six o'clock on Sunday night, I would pack up, catch the train back into Chicago, get onto the L again, go north to Great Lakes and report for duty. It was interesting because the neighbors could never figure out how I was getting home so often. I was home all the time. One moment we're at our Congress and why wasn't her son back from the Pacific every other weekend. But anyway --

FC: So you took radio school there?

JL: Yes, I finished radio school.

FC: OK, tell me a little bit, what did you learn in radio school?

JL: Well predominantly it was typing. Code was relatively easy to get -- it's sort of like speaking a third language or a second language, eventually you are thinking in those terms. And then typing predominantly. You had to be able to type and you could washout if you couldn't type. If you couldn't pass the typing, you're done. It was a very interesting --

FC: Did you learn any electronics?

JL: No. Well we had basically $E = IR$ and that was the sum total.

FC: You didn't have to learn how to repair radios or anything?

JL: Oh no, no. That was electronics technician. That was a higher level of knowledge and I was at the lower level. I spent my life at the lower level. In the subway all the time. But anyway, when we got our assignment it was interesting from the standpoint that when we finished, they marched us out and we got in -- they had a railroad siding into the base, into the naval station. They marched us out with our C-bag to go to the East Coast. And this was an interesting thing here from the standpoint that when we get there, we look around and low and behold their boxcars. They put us in boxcars and there were 30 boxcars full of

sailors. They had put bunks in, they welded bunks into the box cars, cut windows in the side so you could get the smoke from the engine -- at the time it was all steam -- and no showers but they had washbasins there and then they had a railway car -- an old railway express -- and you would march down through the various cars, through the doors at the end of the cars, down and you were fed in an Army field kitchen. So they cooked in that Army field kitchen for 15 carloads of sailors going down to Norfolk, Virginia. And I don't know if both trains went to Norfolk but the one I was on went to Norfolk, Virginia. If you can visualize this, five days to go from Great Lakes, Illinois to Norfolk, Virginia. It seemed like it was 100,000 miles. We were put on sidings for everything. War material, munitions and wounded got top priority and we were living people so we got a lower priority.

FC: You got the siding.

JL: We were waiting on the siding for eight, ten hours sometimes. Sitting on the siding. Then we'd go 50 miles and we'd be put on a siding again. And meanwhile, three times a day, you marched down to the field kitchen and they had -- I think they were Army cooks if I'm not mistaken. I don't know but anyway we would march down the baggage car and eat our food down there in the baggage car and then go

back, back to the boxcars. And if you can believe this, they had Pullman porters on every car. They had a Pullman porter to make the beds for the sailors. I think that was part of the contract to keep the Pullman porters employed because there wasn't any Pullman travel.

FC: Right, that would be unions involved in there.

JL: Yeah, it could well have been. The unions dictated that the -- so the porters did nothing but they would help you make the bed if you needed help and they rode along with you and they went down the boxcar -- or down the mess hall after the crew was finished, the sailors. Five days later we pulled into Norfolk, Virginia.

FC: Now that's a big Naval base.

JL: Yeah, Naval base for reassignment. At the time it was a training base and also a replacement base for crews and new construction. New ship construction. But during the days they had an old World War I battleship that was a gunnery training thing and those guys got "Boom, boom, boom" all during the days as you are in there waiting for your assignment. When we pulled into Norfolk it was -- temperature was I'd say 30 degrees. Sleet. "Pick up your C-bags, we are going to march you down to the barracks." Oh, by the way, the barracks were not barracks, they were Quonset huts. And when you got to the Quonset huts at 10

o'clock at night, where's the heat? Oh, there wasn't any heat. The oil is down there, 10 huts down. And you go down there and they had a lock on the oil so you couldn't get any oil except during duty hours where the chief petty officer had the keys to the heating supply. First night I slept in the Quonset hut, full uniform wearing my pea coat, my bedding. I slept with everything I could put on top of me, C-bag and everything else, I was so cold. Things leveled out then and got reasonably stabilized within 24 hours. From there we progressed into World War I barracks and it was the latrines were interesting because -- or the heads of the Navy. Because I'd never seen anything like it. They had a row of faucets, 20 faucets, and then they had a splash area and it was World War I construction. And they did have showers. So that was that. After about two weeks in that replacement area, we were called out to proceed down for assignment and we went in this large domed building, which was like a large Quonset hut and there we were given our orders. So they would call the name and give you your orders and you'd read -- they'd announce what ship you were on. So they said, "John Ley." "Yes, sir." And I went down and the chief gave me the orders and I looked down, USS *Murphy*, good. "What's the deal on the *Murphy*?" "You are going to New York Navy Yard and pick up

the ship in New York." Good, I went outside the building and I ran into in one of my classmates from radio school and this is a difficult thing to relate and he said, "What ship did you get?" And I said, "I got the *Murphy*, DD603." He said, "Oh, I got the *Meredith*. I'll be dead." He held out his orders, he said, "I'll be dead in 90 days." Just like that.

FC: And what was the *Meredith*? What type of ship?

JL: He was going to -- where the ship was -- I don't know, wherever he was going for it to pick up the ship but probably one of the ways that Quincy, Massachusetts or somewhere there, East Coast. So it would be East Coast construction. They made (inaudible), they made Destroyers at Quincy, they also made cruisers at Quincy, Massachusetts. But when he looked at it he said, "I'll be dead in 90 days." How prophetic. It was almost to the day that I was on the radio and I heard his ship had been hit and it was sinking and he was lost. Which is another story because -- I'll pick it up and we'll pick up that part of the story later on. The Kenny -- the John Kenny story.

FC: That was his name.

JL: Yeah, I well remember. Big red-headed Irishman out of New York. You know, blustery New York type. But anyway, from there they said, "Now the *Murphy* is in New York." The

Murphy was in New York and we told to catch an across Chesapeake Bay and they had a Navy vessel. Now if you can visualize this in World War II, a Navy vessel that was just transporting personnel around Chesapeake Bay. You'd go to the area that's the center of the ship -- mid ships and look down and hear it was coal fired transport. They had guys -- they had fireman, Navy fireman -- real honest to god Navy fireman -- shoveling coal into the firebox of that ship. It was a steam driven vessel probably left over from World War I I imagine. Anyway, I -- you are going to have a tough time finding any Navy fireman that shoveled coal in World War II. There are some I'm sure but you are going to have a tough time finding those guys that were down in there. But you can stand up there on the deck and watch them shoveling coal into the boiler to get across Chesapeake Bay. And then from there we caught a train, we went up to Brooklyn, New York City. And reported to the ship.

FC: What year was this?

JL: Nineteen forty-three, that would be April of 1943. I'd say early April because we reported aboard -- those of us -- now this was a replacement crew for those that were killed aboard the *Murphy* when she was cut in half.

FC: Oh, the *Murphy* was cut in half? How did that happen?

JL: Well, they were coming -- the first thing is the *Murphy* originally was in Sicily, the Battle of Sicily and downed two German aircrafts in the invasion, the Sicilian Invasion. They were coming back from a convoy. Because we also did convoy duty. They were coming back to New York, the home base for the vessel and the *Bulkoil*, the SS *Bulkoil* who was a tanker that was sailing alone -- she was not in a convoy. The ships were converging; I think they could pick it up on the radar. The ships were -- the *Murphy* radar. They could not pick it up -- the *Bulkoil* did not have radar. And the *Bulkoil* had a sonar device that they could hear another ship for -- predominantly for submarines. So but they had sonar on board and they could pick up the noise from the *Murphy* engines and they -- the sonar gave them correction to direction. The *Murphy* meanwhile was taking corrective action to avoid them and bam, they hit -- they were both on a collision course. Each one trying to avoid the other. The *Bulkoil* with sonar, the *Murphy* with radar. And of course the rest is history. They met with the *Bulkoil*, cutting off -- cutting the *Murphy* mid ships between the number one and number two stacks, right over the torpedo tubes. So they lost 30 plus men on that tragic incident. I have talked to a man who was in -- and he's still alive in New York -- he runs a

heating and air conditioning business still in New York, Rochester, New York. And he was on the watch duty on the *Bulkoil* and he was trying to give direction to the Captain to change -- about changing course to avoid the collision but it was such a -- it was a dark night and the collision came and the *Bulkoil* cut the *Murphy* in half. The radioman, the one I replaced, tried to go through the passageway, across the passage way because the ship was listing -- the folks who was listing. And he tried to get out the window, or I should say porthole. And he was a little bit obese and he couldn't get out the porthole and the guys that used the passageway survived and the radiomen in the porthole was screaming, "Help me, help me, help me!" And they couldn't. He was stuck. And went down. He was one of the casualties aboard the vessel. So they towed the vessel -- the aft half back to New York Navy Yard and under tow, they put her in dry dock and constructed a new half -- the front half of the vessel. Fifty percent of the vessel was new construction. And she was a 1650, that's a 1650 ton which at the --- in 1944 the newer destroyers were coming out, the 2250s. We were what was called the Bristol class which was a -- maybe late period when we were under preparation, 1940, 1941 type construction. So -- but the 2250 -- the other vessel, they were the 2250. Newer construction. We

had broken deck which is -- means that we had to go topside to go from cruise quarters to go to radio room which was under the bridge. So we were part of the bridge and we were part of the communications center for the ship and our -- the radio room was probably seven feet wide with two huge transmitters. Fifteen-hundred watt transmitters going up to two thousand watt transmitters and then they had like -- we had, let's see, we had four topping positions. Where we had the receivers in front of us and on four hour shifts so we would do our shifts for four hours and then we would have eight hours off. We were sleeping or other duties as assigned. The radio room as I said was small, we had generators there that -- under aluminum so that made it a little bit warm under normal conditions. But we were next to the Capitan's cabin of course where the crypto room was right across the hall, right across the passageway from us. So we received the message. Now the code at that time was very interesting -- they had a machine that would break the codes down. They were five letters. Our ship, the voice call, was moonbeam. Moonbeam as I remember -- moonbeam 17. But we were moonbeam audio. On the copy, negq, which was when we got a message it would come in five letter code now. But you put in a little manual with a sliding chain and you push down -- you put the stylus in, pull it down on

the thing and it would tell what ship it was or by the letter. So yeah this a cruiser, it's not for us. Or this is a battleship or a carrier. It doesn't concern us.

FC: So you wouldn't copy it.

JL: Well, yeah, if it's a long message, a 1,200 yeah. It was coming across at 18 words a minute and what we would do -- this is post war cheating. We would break the message that the ship was -- the message was intended for. And then it was a 1200 group message or 1400 group message. A long, long -- you would close it out and forget it. We had one bad incident on that one, I'll tell you. Where it was for us and the guy that wrote it off -- the radio (inaudible) -- I think they were going to execute him but they let him live for doing that. Dereliction of duty would be the charge. But anyway, the ship was under construction when we got to New York. There were lights hanging from it. There was welding going on. Welding ashes going down on the deck as you walked by the ship yard. Workers working on it. The -- you'd go into the mess hall, the dining hall which was really one deck down from the main deck if there was a main deck -- there were two main decks. But you'd go down there and eat one deck down. SO you had to go down a passageway and a ladder in order to get to the mess hall. But while you're eating there would be people welding at

the next table. It was rather convoluted living. We did have water. We did have showers and water and electricity and bunk, a clean bunk.

FC: So you went aboard then.

JL: Oh yeah, I was living onboard when they were welding and going through all this thing and your -- step over a ship yard worker that's on his belly doing something underneath something and you'd -- you had that to work with. But they wound it up quite quickly. Now we were afloat then but right next to us was the USS *Missouri* under construction. So during the day when I was -- during leisure hours during the day, I'd go over and watch the construction on the USS *Missouri* which I thought was -- she was in dry dock at the time, under construction. Now this is 1944. So she was being finished off in '44, the *Missouri* which is now in Pearl Harbor.

FC: What rank were you at this time?

JL: I was -- covert position -- seaman second class. Yeah, I had to work to make seaman first class. I had to quit going on the *Missouri* and watching new construction during the day. But we finally wound up in Easter Sunday, 1944 we had sea trials. That's where you'd try the electronics, you'd turn on the radar, you'd turn on the radios, you'd copy the messages, you'd do everything you are going to do

at sea. Full-bore, full speed. Where did we do the sea trial? The Hudson River. We were chugging up the Hudson. Well you couldn't very well stay in the Hudson because we'd go out and check the girls waving to us, and there we were, cruising up the Hudson, waving at the young ladies who were waving back at the sailors. It was a successful day on both counts, morale-wise and material wise. We took supplies. We degaussed the ship -- degaussing, take off your watches because the ship is going to be magnetized. So we went into New Jersey, they wrapped cables around the vessel and degaussed the ship so we wouldn't be subjected to magnetic mines. That neutralized the magnetic mines. Next day we took on munitions. I didn't know there was that much munitions on the East Coast. All hands turned to -- all hands, officers, men -- all hands carried bullets. So we were -- we had the time limit. We had to get the bullets on board, get out of that dockage with the ammunition ships on both sides. Both sides. Took on oil for fuel. Took on food supplies and went out to sea the following day. The following day we went out to sea. Our first mission was convoy. We caught a convoy and took a convoy over and brought it back. Let it go. We took a convoy over and brought it back. And then the deal was shaping up whereby we were going to be go to for the

invasion -- Normandy. So we left around I would say -- we had a convoy we were carrying with us. We didn't go over alone. So we had a convoy we took over with supplies for Britain and then we diverted and were sent to Londonderry - - Northern Ireland. And again we were there just to take on fuel and supplies. The thing that impressed me was that the people that were servicing the ship -- the people with water and food supplies that were giving us our -- no ammunition, we were loaded. But the people that were serving were Irish, well Scots-Irish which is Northern Ireland and they were wearing wooden shoes. I found that very interesting. Apparently wooden shoes were the order of the day for the workers or they may have been economy -- they had leather tops with wooden bottoms, wooden soles.

FC: Wow.

JL: Which to us was pretty primitive but that was -- it was beautiful. Londonderry was green and fresh and we had been to sea and we didn't go ashore and do any eating or dining or anything like that. We pretty much stayed around the dock and resupplied and got our orders, went down into Plymouth for the preparatory, for the invasion. Little known in historical events. Unknown to us but just prior to our arrival in May -- that was May -- we were in Londonderry on May 25th was when we pulled into Londonderry.

But in mid-May the Army infantry was practicing invasion techniques in Dover, in the white cliffs of Dover, in that area. And the German intelligence picked up that they were practicing invasion techniques. Now the troops, the infantry, was coming aboard the LCT, drop the thing and hit the beach just like they were going to do in Normandy. Germany e-boats came out of Amsterdam and caught these Americans practicing. They sunk the landing craft. The Americans were fully armed except for ammunition -- they could not fire back. They had all their rifles and everything but they could not fire back so as a result the Germans had a field day with machine guns and small arms -- like 40 millimeters.

FC: Explain what an E-boat is.

JL: And E-boat was the German version of the PT boat. A very high velocity light weight -- I think they carry one torpedo. And they were docked in Amsterdam, those that came over to welcome us -- they were docked in Amsterdam and it was a terrible thing. And today if you go to England there is a cemetery for the casualties of that practice landing. The US Army infantrymen. We went back into the port -- or we were in port. We went down to -- we were both in Bristol and Plymouth -- in those two ports. And during the period as well. Again, it was a resupply

thing. We were confined to the ship. Nobody could leave the ship for fear of leakage. On the third of June we -- a message come in, "Prepare to land on the fifth of June. Prepare for an invasion to land on the fifth of June." On the evening of the fourth, after our evening meal, they fed us early, we put out to sea. We headed over to our assigned position at Omaha beach. We were Omaha and we were due in station by about four o'clock in the morning 0400, we were due on the beach, at the beach before the invasion troops ever hit. Our mission was to lay smoke for the incoming troops. However, wait a minute now, this is for the fourth. We were half way over in the English Channel. There were ships everywhere, as far as you could see. There were aircrafts overhead. The B-17s were going over one altitude, coming back at another altitude. The Spits and the Lancs-- the Lancasters. The British bombers. As far as you could see on either side, going over one altitude, coming back at another. The fighters where accompanying them but the fighters had stripes around them, white stripes so you could identify friend from foe. Well it wasn't 100 percent effective, some people can't tell white from grey and some of those aircraft at low altitude came under fire during the invasion from the support ships, the merchant men. I didn't see any firing from combat

ships but boy I'll tell you, they sure caught it from the merchant ships. Anyway, we went back in on the fifth. I said, "Hot dog, we are going to be in port for a couple of weeks now, put that thing off." No, another message come in. Prepare for the six. More of the same. Go to sea, be on station. Omaha beach, no change. At that time, I was taken out of the radio room by my assignment and assigned to the combat infantry -- combat intelligence center -- CIC. If you go to Fredericksburg, Texas, if you go to the museum, as you go through there is a combat information center replica right there. So you could see. Now my station which was one corner -- I had approximately an area of about 18 square inches for the radio operator. OK. My area was just in one corner but every time they fired the five inch guns the gun barrel, the muzzle, if they fired starboard, the gun barrel was right next to the bulkhead -- the aluminum bulkhead -- no insulation. But the aluminum bulkhead between me and that muzzle. And boy when that gun went off, you knew it because you were virtually under the muzzle of the gun. The five in .38s. So anyway we were -- then on the fifth we went over again. More of the same from yesterday. And again, ships, aircrafts -- the world was going to France. When we arrived on station we did some trials on laying smoke -- the Germans were not firing

on us at that time. I think the Germans were getting organized. But the smoke was no good. The weather was so bad, the wind was blowing, it was terrible. So we were deployed around 10 o'clock. Now between eight and ten we were offshore in Omaha and that was --

FC: Now are you in the fifth or the sixth?

JL: It was the sixth. The sixth of June. June 6th, 1944 up to about 10 am. Ten hundred hours we were on station at Omaha. I looked and the thing that crossed my mind, this is ridiculous maybe -- the thing that crossed my mind. I said, "My good we are at Gettysburg and we are at Pickett's Charge." That's the only thing I could think about. "We are at Gettysburg and we are Pickett's Charge." It was mad. The wounded were coming off the beach. They were coming by our ship. They would stop -- I have a difficult time talking about this. I'll tell you -- it's OK, I'll gain my composure. They were bringing out the wounded and the dying, they put them beside the vessel and you looked down and hear the infantrymen are dying ten feet away from you. It was a very, very emotional period.

FC: Yes, it was.

JL: They wanted water and they would come in and they would ask for water for the dead and the dying and let me get a Kleenex -- it was -- but here we were being served

sandwiches for our meal and coffee aboard and while we are on deck eating our sandwiches the dead are coming off the beach. It was a very emotional period.

FC: Still is, isn't it John?

JL: Oh gosh. You always live with it. You'll never, never, never outlive those periods. At 10 o'clock the Rangers -- the Army Rangers were having trouble up at Pointe du Hoc. And we were told immediately, go to Pointe du Hoc and give the Rangers fire support. Well they lost something in translation in command. We went up there and we had five inch guns, 40 millimeters and 20 millimeters. What we really needed were Marine snipers. We were 100 yards -- I'd say maybe 75 yards sometimes -- off Pointe du Hoc. Sent there to help the Rangers. How do you help the Rangers with a five-inch gun at that range and shoot the bad guys and save the good guys? How do you do it?

FC: A shell doesn't know the difference does it?

JL: No, we put in two rounds high over -- which were fruitless but close enough that the Army Capitan called -- I was on the radio and, oh, he was upset. He said, "We've got everything we can handle with the enemy, we don't need any more fire support from you. Stop firing. Cease fire immediately." He told the capitan of the ship that on the radio. I regret -- and I'm sure that was in the log that I

was writing. It was a manual log and I also wonder what happened to that log because I copied everything. Up 50, right 50. That type of thing. For the combat information center and I kept a log and I wrote in longhand. So I was writing this down, "Cease fire, we've got all the problems we've got here with the enemy, we don't need any more help." And of course the Rangers were decimated. They lost -- I don't know probably half, two thirds of their personnel. I stood there and I watched them climb those cliffs and they had those hooks that they would throw up there. Boy that would get them. Throw those hooks up, climb up that rope and get up there and do in the enemy. Well it didn't work that easy. The enemy was on top of the heap and they were fighting a defensive position and the Rangers -- I stood on the deck -- I said to the electronics tech, "Copy for me, will you? I've got to go out and see what's going on." And I went out on the deck to see what was -- what I was copying about really. I saw those guys scrambling up on those stupid ropes and it was a very difficult thing because I -- I yelled -- No, that's all right. So we were assigned to that position there to support and we spent the day. And I stood on the deck and I yelled, "Dig in, dig in guys." Off course they couldn't hear me. They had their hands full, they didn't need any

information from some yahoo on a deck of a ship yelling, "dig in, dig in." They may have known that. I should have figured they should have figured that out early in the day. It was interesting though. In the combat information center, we had maps -- intelligent maps. And I looked at them -- pardon me -- where we were hitting the beach and so forth so I could follow the battle and the intelligence maps were dated June third. Three days before we went there. Now right near Pointe du Hoc, on the cliffs, on the high -- they had -- the Germans had placed telephone poles to give the guise of artillery. So they had these telephone poles and they were all marked on the maps -- telephone poles, you know, telephone poles. Yeah they were marked on the maps as of June 3rd.

FC: They weren't guns, they were poles.

JL: Yeah, that may have been aerial intelligence, picked off fighters going over with cameras. Or it could have been French intelligence. I don't know. Anyway, that was very interesting.

FC: Now was there a lot of aircraft?

JL: Alive, alive.

FC: The skies where full and so was the beach.

JL: We were primarily concerned with the beach because the aircraft -- first thing is they wanted air superiority to

keep the Luftwaffe down and the Luftwaffe was kept down, the fighters did an excellent job and the bombers bombing the German facilities did extremely well because there were very few fighters getting through.

FC: Did you happen to see any make swoops over the beach?

JL: Well, there was a JU-88, not the first day but the second or the third day, a JU-88 that picked us out -- the pilot was apparently wounded -- and he picked us out to do a Kamikaze on us. And he apparently didn't have control of the aircraft or maybe he was wounded or something. Now the guys on deck said he missed us by five feet.

FC: Now that's a two-engine bomber, right?

JL: Yeah, a JU-88, a German twin-engine bomber. But formidable, a very formidable aircraft. Now at night the primary -- the fighters were of no use during the night but General Eisenhower had in his battle plan had air superiority as one of his primary features. So as far as strafing and so forth from aircrafts -- I didn't -- if there was any there wasn't any at Omaha. There may have been at Gold or Juno or Sword but -- and we were the ones that were catching all the trash. We were the ones that were getting it at Omaha. Sword and Juno and Gold, they were -- but see, I didn't have -- our frequencies didn't cover those other beaches. They had their own frequencies

so as a result I didn't know what was going on down there. But we were catching all the difficult part at Omaha and Gold and those guys -- they by, some of them, the Brits -- I don't know, what were they? Were they Juno or Gold or Sword? I don't know, anyway, the Brits had easy going compared to us. But I believe, in my opinion, looking back, I think that General Eisenhower felt as though the other people had been in the war for years. And I -- he felt that Germans were formidable and they were -- they did a magnificent -- General Rommel did a splendid job on defending the Atlantic wall, the defenses. I think that Rommel was a magnificent officer. Magnificent officer.

FC: Forced to commit suicide.

JL: Yeah, unfortunately. He was invited. But he was an outstanding general. And the defenses that he put up, I thought were just -- from a German standpoint -- wonderful. From our standpoint, they were terrible. Because we had to pay the price. So --

FC: Let me ask you this, if I might interrupt, during all this time you've got all this radio traffic going? Is there any mores code traffic or--?

JL: Oh yes, solid. Morse code, for those guys in the radio room, they started -- now we were copying Whitehall which was the Brit-- so the messages, we were not receiving

direct from Washington, NSS Washington. Dah, dip, dididip, dah,dip, didididip dididip. And then then when they started --

FC: Dahdip -- that's NS right?

JL: NSS -- Dahdipdipdipdip. Dah dip dip dip dip. NS Washington. Da dip didadip da. Dah. NAGQ.

FC: After all these years you remember some of those.

JL: I could work a circuit today. In a matter of one hour, I think I could be back copying in one hour. Dah dip. Dah ditditdit dah dip. And didah didadip. AR. So yeah, AR, end of message, no more response required.

FC: So you had voice and Morse going all the same time.

JL: Oh yea but voice was separate. I was up in CIC with voice and the rest of the guys -- now once they started copying -- this started probably on June 1st I would say, no more breaks at two in the morning. The NSS used to break at one in the morning. They would break and then they would maybe pick it up again at five o'clock. When they were preparing for the invasion, it was solid. They'd made up messages -- they'd send false message. We'd say to the guys, "Break this." And then they'd break the internal address to find out what ship it was for and they'd say, "Yeah, it's a fake message. They are just creating a message to keep the

traffic." So the enemy would not know when the traffic was heavier or less, they couldn't tell the action.

FC: They were monitoring our radio.

JL: Oh yeah. We monitored them. We had stuff aboard for monitoring the submarines and we had a finder, a direction finder and when the Germans were very through in their -- you know, they are, everything had to be right. You had to dot the I's and put the commas in and whenever they had a wolf-pack or a submarine that was going to attack, they would report to Berlin. And Berlin would give the OK or whatever as part of the big battle of the Atlantic. So we had a device aboard that -- it wasn't in the radio room, it was down midship. A little room, it was about six feet wide by maybe about fourteen feet long and in there we had the equipment where when the submarines -- and we had a guy monitoring the submarine activity -- so when the submarines were there, they could get the direction of the signal, where it was coming from, press a button and give you the true bearing and the relative bearing to the submarine.

FC: Can you describe how that worked? Did you ever see it in action?

JL: Yeah, it was a scope -- like an oscilloscope, circular. And when the sub would be transmitting -- the Germans would be trans-- you just punch a button and it would form from a

-- you got a big one -- Bababaabop Babababop -- and it would, then when you press that it would go like that. It would form a curve and you put your cursor on that and then you've got your relative and your true bearing on the one scope. And that was what did in the submarines because the Navy had the little Jeep aircraft carriers and they were in the Atlantic so they knew the location of the submarine by triangulation. We would call in what the bearing was and two or three vessels would call in, you've got a triangulation.

FC: He's inside that triangle.

JL: And the little -- the F4Fs or whatever they were flying would go out and knock them out. It was, I think, one of the keys -- the German radio killed the crazy Marine, reporting to Berlin. And then also they had decrypted the German code and at a staff meeting -- I read this in one of the historical books -- at a staff meeting, they couldn't figure out how they were losing so many submarines. And one of the staff officers said, "You know it's possible that they broke enigma" -- which was the German code -- "It's possible that the allies have broken enigma." And the German staff said, "No way. We are German. No way. We can't break it; they can't break it." So anyway, so then we also had a machine -- we had enigma that we got off

that captured 505 submarine, so the 505 gave up their code machine.

FC: Now the 505 is in Chicago now.

JL: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Which I think was a very wonderful story in itself. But I wasn't part of that.

FC: Back to D-day.

JL: Yeah, for food we were around the clock of course during D-day. Around the clock duty stations. Now an interesting point though, on the night of June 5th, the message came across the loudspeakers, "All crewmembers will take a bath and have clean clothes by 1800 hours or 1900 hours. All crewmembers must have clean clothes and have a bath and be clean by a certain time." So then -- the doctor ordered that. We had a pediatrician on board. But then the pediatrician also ordered -- going in on the night of June 5th -- he said -- there was combat people on board and new crew, people like me. So he said, "All enlisted personnel," -- presumably the officers got in this deal too -- "will report to the dining hall or the mess hall for a shot of whiskey." So that was maybe around 2000 hours. On the fifth. Maybe it was 2200 hours, I don't know, it was the night before anyway. And they had -- they were in the dining hall, they were dispensing a shot of whiskey. I kept thinking, this may be -- see I didn't know what Sword

and Juno was doing, I only knew what Omaha was and I thought that all the guys were getting the same stuff. And I sat there between transitions and I thought, this may be another Dunkirk. By 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock, mid-day as I was copying and we were moving on up to Pointe du Hoc, I thought, "We are going to have another Dunkirk." And then I started thinking, "How the hell are we going to get all those guys off the beach? Because they'll be fighting a defensive position." Fortunately, the tide of battle changed as the day wore on but I can only say that my experience in dealing with German shore placements, they were splendid. They were splendid.

FC: Did your ship -- was it ever subject to German artillery?

JL: No, what I was thinking, you know, at Pointe du Hoc -- of course they had their hands full with the Rangers but the defense was more concerned with Rangers than they were with us and hell, we were right up there and I figured -- you know later on I thought, "If they just raked our vessel with a machine gun, they could have killed 20, 30 people on the guns." But they had their hands full with Rangers, because believe me, the Rangers were a handful for them. And meanwhile, also, the defensive position of the Germans -- for the Rangers, they were formidable foe, formidable.

Later on -- as I say, we went back, we were d-- we had to go back for supplies and --

FC: That was D-day plus?

JL: Ten. D-day plus 10.

FC: So you went back to England.

JL: Back to England, yeah. For resupply. For resupply and if anything broke out, then, why, we would go back and support the new move -- whatever it was. The part that I really -- as an enlisted guy knowing nothing but copying other people's transmissions, I figured -- the first thing I thought was we are at Gettysburg and we are Pickett, we are in Pickett's Charge. And then the second thing I thought as the day wore on -- it crossed my mind from the defense we were getting and the ability to knock out pillboxes and the hedgerows with the German armor coming in -- see there was no armor on the first day. We didn't have -- they could have done a heck of a job if they had armor but the Panzers on the beach to support the shore -- but they had these guys in the pillboxes and they were splendid because the pillboxes further back than the defensive -- you'd knock them out, report them knocked out and they'd be back firing in no time at all. And that also went on June 26th when we went in, the Army could not take Cherbourg -- they were too heavily fortified in the town. We needed

Cherbourg as a port for supplies. They had the facilities to handle the supplies. They had the transport to handle the supplies. So we needed Cherbourg. So it was critical and on June 26th, we went into Cherbourg -- June 25th maybe, anyway, June 25th I think.

FC: You are talking about the *Murphy* now.

JL: Yeah, we are back in the *Murphy*, we are support for the USS *Texas*. *Texas* was also Normandy. We were not support of the *Texas*, they had their own squadron. We were DESRON 17, destroyer squadron 17 so we were assigned by squadron. But going from probably Omaha beach down to Cherbourg. The firing started -- maybe around noon I guess we were in there, maybe earlier than that. But we were in -- now we had five-inch 38s. We were there to protect against E-boats and things of that nature. So -- which were not a threat at Cherbourg. And again, the skies -- the fighters, the 51s, the spits, the Bristols, the RAF and USAF had control of the skies at Cherbourg. So there was no problem there. But they could not disengage those -- the German in the defensive position of the gun emplacements regarding Cherbourg. Now there was a German general in there and he was told to hold at all costs. Which he did a splendid job of. He finally had to give in because there is no way -- now the *Texas* see -- they needed the big guns on the *Texas*.

Our guns would bounce off those emplacements. Bing. Oh it's a bother, give me another aspirin. But when the *Texas* got in there and the cruisers with their heavier guns -- they would report the gun being out.

FC: Now those were -- they were firing 14 inch?

JL: They were -- yeah; I think they were 14 inch. They were World War I, they may have been retrofitted in the '30s, I don't know. But believe me, when the *Texas* fired, you knew that there was some firing going on. And even that is an understatement. Compared to a broadside from the *Texas*. But I stood on the deck and watch them fire. I watched the engagement. Again the shore batteries were not concerned with destroyers, tin cans. Tin cans can't hurt them. So you fire on the people that can hurt you. And there they did. And I swear -- they report the gun emplacement out. It would be silent for 15 minutes. Fifteen minutes and boom, they are back firing again. Along comes the *Texas*, the position we reported out. Neutral. Fifteen minutes. What in the world? This is going on all day? We running a sequence? A scenario here? But the Germans where in their defensive position were splendid. They did such a -- I look upon them in -- I admire the fortitude of those people. You are going in to a gun emplacement, you are the third guy to go in that day. The third team or the fourth

team to go in that day. How does that hit you morale wise? I guess it is sort of the morale of a Kamikaze. Yeah, interesting. Later on I may tell a little something if I may digress just a little bit from Normandy, or actually post-Normandy. If I may digress a little bit. I was in the 58th fighter squadron. Originally we had machine guns, later we got rockets.

FC: Now what year was this?

JL: This was 1952 or '3. We would have our crew meetings on flying safety. New procedures, new techniques, developments, new equipment that may be coming online. We got a briefing every week, we got a briefing. Pilot briefing for the day every day. What's the order of the day and then once a week we got this overall briefing? And we had -- on the machine guns you had so many -- and flying machine guns is terrible because the smoke comes into the cockpit -- you get sick from the smoke from the machine guns. The nitrogen. So then we got rockets. Now you just fire, woom, woom. We had two volley of rockets, 48 rockets, 24 per volley.

FC: Now what type of plane was this?

JL: F-94. So the ops officer said, "Now on your first run I want you -- radar operators, you are going to have to get that thing lined -- I want you to line it up like this."

And then they have the -- "You got to do -- line up the bomber -- come in, you are better with a cross thing or if you got a head on this, this is what you've got or if you are doing a tail shot. On you first run you give them the first volley of rockets and then on your second run you come in this way. On the next aircraft, the next bomber, Russian bomber. And then on the third, you come in any way you want." "Wait a minute, we only got two volleys." and the officer looked at the lieutenant that asked the question, "You are the third. Every meeting, you have two runs and you are the third. You are the third rocket in." So I figured that was -- never been published, never heard it said but I heard old Metcalfe say that and later Chappie James who -- he became a four-star general, Chappie became a four-star at Air Defense Command and he had his run in with Mr. Carter, and Mr. Carter overruled him, and Chappie retired.

FC: Right, he sacked him basically.

JL: Yeah, Chappie -- there is a green pasture out there. Go find it. And it's interesting because Chappie James died just a few months after retiring. He didn't live very long after retiring. But anyways, after Normandy and Cherbourg, we went back to England, resupplied and then we were sent

down Mers-el-Kébir. Now -- nobody's ever been to Mers-el-Kébir --

FC: I've never heard of it.

JL: Yeah, well Mers-el-Kébir is Algeria. And the Germans had left Mers-el-Kébir so we went in. And again Mr. Rommel, General Rommel owned that real estate. But that was our port. And our operation port. And so we were assigned to the invasion of Southern France but interesting -- since we are going down anyway, leisurely cruising down to Africa, why they had a mission for us -- and that was a munition ship just pulled into England with a new round for artillery, Army artillery. And the round was the bomb that would explode over the area rather than on the ground. So it would explode at 50 or 100 feet in the air with shrapnel. So these were the new shells. So they had to get them down to Southern France quickly because the invasion hadn't taken place yet. So we were assigned to go to the ship carrying the bomb -- the bombs and take them down on the deck. We had more artillery shells on that vessel. You couldn't go anywhere. There was a little path to walk and all the rest was artillery shells -- everywhere were Army artillery shells. And we were a munition ship really. If we had ever taken a torpedo, we would end up back in New York. So that was flank speed to get the

bullets down to the people before the invasion. We were not assigned to the combat invasion forces. They hit Marseille and Toulon and there because there wasn't nearly the opposition that there was in Normandy. However, the Navy was concerned because the Italians had a bunch of submarines in the Mediterranean and although the Italians were no longer active during that period of the war effort, the submarines -- the intelligence people were fearful that the Germans would put German submariners aboard and raise hell with the supply ships. Which was a distinct possibility. So every day we copied a report on the Italian submarines in port. Where they were -- we knew where they were and we station out so if they left, we were to knock them out. But we were not to go in and knock them out unless they left because they figured it was an iffy thing. So one afternoon we got a message, "Germans escaping Marseille on a boat, pick them up." And so we went down and here was three Luftwaffe people, one officer and two NCOs in a sailboat that they had taken out Marseille, France and were sailing down to Spain. They were going to get to Spain and if they got to Spain, they'd be safe. So we were sent out to pick them up. Also, another little side line --

FC: Did you pick them up?

JL: Oh yeah. We picked up -- let me tell you the end of that story. The NCOs -- we had a little prisoner cage aboard the *Murphy* for holding prisoners. There was a little jail and aft over the steering gear. So anyway, we picked up the two NCOs -- they went into confinement -- the officer, a lieutenant, went into the US officers' quarters. And there he was. Now I would take a message down for the Capitan to sign and it was ridiculous -- the stewards would be serving the meal, here was a German officer next to a British officer next to an American officer. They had the Brit on board, the German on board and the whole thing was very humorous to me because the German -- under conditions that he will not try anything to gain -- to disrupt the flow of the traffic of the ship. I imagine that the (inaudible) officer said if you do so you are dead. To do so you are dead. But he would -- now they'd break out the NCOs every day and bring them on the deck. And also -- I didn't see the German officer but they'd bring him out also for exercise. Every day they had to do half an hour of exercise. They were out there doing pushups and jumping jacks and keeping their physical health up -- every day, they were fed the same meals we were, three times a day. They had a guard on them, an armed guard all the time. The enlisted personnel, the sergeants. It was a very unusual

thing and finally they got a message -- there was an Army -
- prisoner of war ship that was coming in -- we transferred
them. So we transferred these guys to another ship that
got them to a prisoner of war vessel. And then I guess
they went to the US, I don't know but it was interesting.
And then -- we've covered Cherbourg and we've covered the
air overhead. We went back -- back in England, it was
interesting. I've read one article -- I've seen one
picture of this. They had -- the Brits in World War I
built a battle ship with one turret and one gigantic gun.
It was about a 20-inch gun. And we tied up near that one.
I thought what in the world -- it was archaic, a World War
I 20-inch gun on a boat? A ship, pardon me. Oh you've
got to say ship. Boats are carried on ships, OK, I got it.
But that's the deal. I thought that was rather
interesting.

FC: Let me ask you this. When you got a message, say from
another ship to your ships Capitan by voice. Did you write
it down in longhand?

JL: Yes, I'd write down the essence. You know, approach on the
portside for oil transfer or fuel transfer. Approach at 20
knots or 18 or 12 knots. Whatever the sea would take.

FC: And did you do this in longhand?

JL: Yeah.

FC: You didn't do shorthand?

JL: Approach USS Quincy at 18 knots.

FC: Now did you write it in longhand or print it?

JL: Longhand and I'm not too good a writer and that made me -- one time they called me to the war room to explain, "What's this?"

FC: Like a doctor, huh? Like a doctor?

JL: They are worse than I am but anyway, that was the deal. But anyway, the three big engagements -- also, later we were anti-submarine patrol, after the war had turned into an Army war but the submarines remained a threat. So we were called back to the States and then assigned to Casco Bay, Maine. That was one of the most -- toughest assignment.

FC: What year was this?

JL: Nineteen forty-five. Actually it was -- the German submarines were operating up till August but we were up there during some inclement weather and in inclement weather you are on a tin can. And when you are typing, you had to type with one hand and move the carriage with the other because the roll of the ship would bring the carriage back.

FC: Right, return.

JL: Yeah. So you didn't have automated -- so you had to keep one hand on the ship and type with one hand so that the role of the ship would -- and sometimes I'd think we were going to roll over. And I've never in a storm -- I was never in a hurricane. But I did think, "This ship was welded together." I'm on a welded boat that is --

FC: Could come apart.

JL: -- is in jeopardy. I always worried about that weld. That midship weld. But we were on anti-submarine patrol. When we'd get a contact of course we'd drop the depth charges and I always had great empathy. They wouldn't tell you -- they went to general quarters. So as soon as they got a contact, "Boom!" When it hit, when that boom would come in, you didn't know whether you were hit with a torpedo or whether it was a depth charge. You had no way of knowing. The ship jumped out of the water. That's all you knew, the ship jumped out of the water with the explosion. So then of course you get "Ding, Ding, Ding, All hands, general quarters." You run up the starboard side, run aft on the portside so you never conflicted with the people going aft. In foul weather, like I was just mentioning, they had a line -- we had to go topside to go -- in foul weather. Now remember you are only about seven feet above the water under cruise conditions. OK. In a storm, the waves would

come over the deck and if the waves were coming over in 3 foot increments, 4 foot -- all hands stay below deck. So everybody would stay below. And I was in the radio room one time and I missed the call because I was copying and I didn't hear it. So it came four o'clock in the morning and it's time for the shift to change. So I -- the NCO in charge said, "Ley, go down and wake up the watch." "Yeah, OK." I go down. Now, going topside they had a rope --

FC: Lifeline, yeah.

JL: Yeah, lifeline. And it would go around your wrist and you hang on to the rope and that's it. Now you catch the rope up at the ladder where the break in the deck is and you walk down that cable all the way to the hatch where you are going to enter the aft part of the ship. Now the ship is listing -- I don't know, 15 degrees but anyway the ship was like that. And there you are, dangling on that rope with the waves washing on your feet up to your knees at night. What a sensation. What a delightful sensation. Your whole life is in your right hand because other than that they'd never know you went overboard. I get down to wake up the watch and the guy said, "Well, did you miss the word?" "No." "Everybody stay below deck." "Hey wait a minute." "I'm sorry, I'm not getting up. I've got orders to stay below deck." Get back up, get the rope again, get the life

line and walk up the cable again with the up to my knees in water, salt water and in the dark. Oh what a wonderful sensation. What a wonderful sensation.

FC: Beats any thrill ride doesn't it?

JL: What?

FC: Beats any thrill ride doesn't it?

JL: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. That's a great experience for one to have. But I went back on up to duty, went back to my duty station and I got wet coming down, wet going back on up and survived.

FC: Is this what you were doing when the war with Germany was -
-

JL: Winding down but the submarines were still active. And we are in the North Atlantic. We are out of Casco Bay, Maine. We would pull in every week. We would pull into Casco Bay. They would have the bullets on one side and the depth charges and on the other side was the fuel. They run the bullets off, if we didn't take many, run that off and put a supply for food. So we had food, fuel, ammunition, back on out for another week. You are looking over -- here's the beach. People are dancing over there. Going to the USO and doing all sorts of exciting things and we are going back on out looking for submarines. And you'll be copying -- boom! And here comes the typewriter. One typewriter

fell apart. We had a Woodstock typewriter that fell apart on a depth charge. Boom and there goes the carriage. Gone. That was interesting.

FC: Did you guys ever sink any subs that you know of?

JL: No, some of it would be at night. We had no way. So we would -- but I always felt empathetic for those poor guys down below.

FC: Submariners.

JL: Yeah. To be in a submarine. And they lost so many, many people in the submarine. I think that was their number one -- percentage wise -- their number one casualty for the Germans, the Nazis. I think submarines were the number one loss of life percentage wise. From there, after the submarines had subsided, we were reassigned -- retrofitted -- they took off torpedo tubes, put on 40-millimeter guns. Retrofitted us. More electronic equipment in New York and put us down through the Panama Canal. Going down through the Panama Canal we also stopped off -- I don't know how this got into the act -- but we went to Trinidad for some reason and they put us into Trinidad for about four days. And Trinidad was heaven. They put us in a Navy base there that had no personnel, it had very few personnel at the base. And quarters were magnificent. Open quarters. Built -- it was like building a two story building --

square -- with two stories and the walls are all open with netting. So the crew was sleeping outside all the time, in effect. The water was crisp and blue. Just -- it was like a tourist attraction with the blue water and you could go diving and skinny dipping and all that. Which also -- when we were in the Mediterranean, the capitan would say, "Swimming break." And stop the ship in the middle of the Mediterranean, drop the hook and just everybody -- drop the nets overboard and all crew jump over and go swimming. So we were swimming in the middle of the Mediterranean where it was hot. And then you could go swim over, grab onto the net, hold on to the net if you were tired or wanted to climb back on board. And he'd have us out there swimming for maybe an hour to two hours out there. As long as there was no submarines around, it didn't matter. We were just out in the middle of the Med, swimming. And I always thought that was a recreational swimming break which was very nice. In North Africa, when we went to Mers-el-Kébir we had a recreation, R&R. Now the Army was furnishing the transport to bring us out to the recreation area. Where was the recreation area? In the middle of the desert! Not near any women, not near anything. You know in the middle of the desert. I don't even think there was a palm tree in the area. But that was our recreational area.

They took us out in trucks and going in from North Africa on pre-World War I, pre-World War II roads, there was a cliff along Mediterranean. And I swear, it was straight down 200 feet. Straight down, the cliff was perpendicular and we had an Army driver and some of us were sitting in the back of the Army truck and when he'd go around the turns on these old roads, your rear end was hanging on 200 feet straight down. Oh, you talk about an undesirable voyage. That was the worst road trip I've ever had in my life. Surpasses anything in the recreational parks. Then we get to the desert. They had some ice, they had beer. But I don't drink beer. Can I have a Coca-Cola? No we don't have any Coca-Cola, we only got beer. Sailors are supposed to be beer drinkers. So I would steal some of the ice from the thing. Other than that, if they caught you -- don't you dare take any of that ice, that's for beer. Cooling the beer. So I drank some beer and as I remember I was calling in a -- and I don't know how many beers I had but I don't drink beer. So anyway, I remember I was crawling in where the machine guns were on the vehicle. So I was crawling in and out of this machine gun turret area. I remember that. And then I guess I went back in the back of the truck, the truck back to the vessel because -- but - - you can either drink beer or die of thirst out there in

the Sahara Desert, which do you prefer. And I figured it was probably the only time in history that any military has ever been confronted with a deal -- we don't have any water to drink, only beer. No Coca-Cola, beer. From there we went back as a I say to the States and was retrofitted again for the Pacific duty. And then we went out to the Pacific, through the Panama Canal.

FC: You were in Trinidad and then you --

JL: Yeah, Trinidad and then we went into the canal and through the canal. And then up to San Diego. At the destroyer dock in San Diego, some angel, absolutely had to be one of the Lord's angel -- see we had no ice cream on board. When we would pick up a pilot, for example on an aircraft carrier, we'd pick up a pilot, we got ice cream for the crew. Because they had ice-cream machines and we didn't have. So they'd send us over ice cream. Or when we'd go by a cruiser and make a good successful fuel transfer, they'd send us ice cream because we had not ice cream. So we came up through the canal into San Diego. We pull into San Diego and, as I said, some angel had put an ice cream stand across from where the destroyer docked. It was five cents a pint. A nickel a pint for name brand ice cream. I saw that, I couldn't wait to get over there to order ten cents worth of ice cream and I got a spoon from the galley

and I ate ten cents worth of ice cream on that deck. I ate the whole thing by myself. Going out into the Pacific we were tied up next to ships coming back -- coming back for repair. And you talk about demoralizing, ships that had been hit by kamikazes and when you pull up next to one of those things and tie up, you say, "My goodness, I'm going out to replace that thing?" The decks would literally be bent up like that. They'd be 15-degree angle on the deck of the vessel where the bomb had hit. And it had not sunk the ship, kill the people but not sunk the ship. And they brought it back for repair.

FC: Do you remember what ship you saw?

JL: No, I don't remember the vessels that were there but they were bringing back combat damaged vessels and we were tied up next to them and that was a very, very emotional event. Because -- well it was demoralizing. Well, I'm going to -- it was sort of demoralizing for me to be replacing a guy that got stuck in a porthole. So I immediately lost five pounds, ten pounds. If I'm going to use that porthole, I am going to be thin. I don't want to be a big guy. So anyway, that was -- Oh, we also, while we were in the Med, we got a message, "Go down through the Suez Canal to pick up the king of Arabia." We went into Jeddah -- there was no facility for a vessel, a large vessel, to go into

Jeddah. It wasn't a port, it was a fishing village and we went into Jeddah. In order to do so, we had to get an interpreter. So we sat out there and guess who came out to be an interpreter and inspect the quarters to see if it was adequate for the king?

FC: Who was that?

JL: The executive of Standard Oil Company. He was the ambassador that was sent out to say, "Yes, this is OK for the king of Arabia." And the king brought aboard livestock and he brought aboard melons and food for the entire crew. We had sheep all over that ship, all over the fan tail. The boatswain had rigged up a sheep pen aft and they had a sheep pen back there and then there were melons also stacked up six or eight feet high to feed the crew. And of course, we were -- and they had -- port starboard had on a destroyer -- so the port head was designated for Saudis only and the Saudis came aboard and I looked at it with a little bit of question because they are all armed with Lugers and Mausers as they came aboard.

FC: German weapons.

JL: Yeah, Mausers and Lugers. So we had the king aboard for I don't know, maybe two days, three days.

FC: Now this was in 1944 wasn't it?

JL: Yes, in 1944.

FC: Now what were the sheep on board for?

JL: Eating meat. They wouldn't eat pork and they could not use any cooking vessel that had been used for beef or pork so they had their own vessels. They did everything. They were completely separate from the crew except the king slept in the captain's cabin. The captain's cabin was next to the radio room. To go to the radio room, initially, you had to step over a guard on the metal deck -- with nothing but his clothing. And he slept on that deck, that aluminum deck. And then after we got a little bit more organized, then he was promoted, so he stepped outside the king's cabin. He was fully armed, he had a Mauser rifle and a Luger and he protected the king. Now the king of Saudi was handicap. And he had people carry him from his -- he had his aides would come up and carry him to go to use -- fortunately we had a private head for the capitan. A little head. No bath in there but there was a commode and a washbasin and so forth. So his attendants could come up and bathe and feed him and everything else. But in order to do so, they had to step over or move the guard. There was no pork permitted to be eaten while he was on board. None of us. At the time of his departure, the king presented to the capitan, a gold sheathed dagger, a gold handle with jewels in the handle. And it wasn't synthetic

gold, it was real gold and he had this dagger that long. And I often -- what happened to that dagger with the gold sheath? But I don't know if it's one of the things lost in history I guess. But I know the Capitan was very grateful. So anyway, it was a gold dagger. All of the officers got Rolex watches. Every officer got a Rolex watch and the crew was given money -- so it came out to 42 dollars per crew member, enlisted. So I got 42 dollars from the king of Arabia. In American dollars. They converted to American dollars and gave us the deal in American dollars. So that's what the king gave us.

FC: Well where was the king going?

JL: Oh, very good question. The king was going to meet Franklin Delano Roosevelt on Great Bitter Lake in Egypt which at that time was a colony of England. So it was going on board, of course, pulling up. We had a ritual -- 21-gun salute. Twenty-one-gun salute. Well, it dates back to the sailing boat era because if you gave a 21-gun salute then you emptied all your cannon and you couldn't be aggressive. So it was a peace symbol. So we had a 21-gun salute for the king of Arabia going in. He was aboard the USS *Quincy*, which was a cruiser. And we dropped him off there and then we proceeded on back into the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal. It was a historical moment really.

And we participated in that historical moment. And you go to Fredericksburg and I think they make reference to that cruise if I'm not mistaken -- no it wouldn't be in Fredericksburg. It was another thing they made reference to. When we went into the Pacific after viewing the carnage of previous days, we stopped at Pearl Harbor and then we went -- by then they were still combat but they had already surrendered.

FC: So the Japanese had.

JL: The Japanese. We were dispatched to Nagasaki and at Nagasaki we docked -- we were the third ship in. First ship in mine sweep, clean the mines. Second ship, hospital ship, take out the wounded, take out the prisoners of war and the dead. The dead were piled in urns, stacked up I'd say maybe eight feet high. And I don't know how many urns were on that deck -- on that dock. I've never seen any reference at all to that deal. Where -- now they were in earth urns and they had the dog tags around the neck of the urn. So in other words the combat -- the casualties, the prisoner of war casualties were identified. When I was in the fighter squadron, I served with a pilot I used to fly with who was in the Bataan Death March and lived as a private in a Japanese prison camp for the entire war. He came out as a private in that prison camp after digging

copper for four years in a copper mine and weighed 89 pounds when he came out, 89 pounds. He said the Bataan Death March was such that, if for any reason a soldier stumbled, they bayoneted him, on the spot. He was bayoneted. It was really a very -- for lack of a better word -- can I say oriental type of a punishment. Beyond our comprehension, a guy trips from exhaustion and you bayoneted him for ingratitude. But this John Crown was 16 years old when he joined the National Guard in 1941. John Crown was called up in 1941 as a 16-year-old private. Came out of the POW camp, went through college, finished college, went into the Air Force as a pilot. And was an excellent pilot. I don't think John ever weighed over 180 pounds. When I was flying with him -- as a pilot -- he must have weighed 120. I would say that was his weight. He never fully recovered all of his body composure so he was pretty stunted for life. But you think I'm emotional about Normandy, talk to John Crown, he's emotional about the Japanese.

FC: I would guess -- speaking about, you said you landed at Hiroshima or Nagasaki?

JL: Nagasaki.

FC: Did you go on shore?

JL: Oh yes, I went on shore and I went down the dock with all the urns, the dead. There were hospital corpsmen around, active. The hospital ship had already apparently taken on their patients. There were a few Marines in there, they had to be on the hospital ship is all I know -- or come in on the mine sweeps but there were a few Marines with machine guns. As we walked down the end of the dock, there was a picture in Fredericksburg, Nagasaki after the bomb. I know exactly where that spot was because I stood on that exact same spot and surveyed the damage of Nagasaki.

FC: That's ironic isn't it?

JL: They had to take the picture the same day, the same day I was there. So it had to be a Navy photographer that was in there that took that picture and it had to be from -- well, maybe a museum, maybe it would be a Navy photographer.

FC: Can you describe what you saw?

JL: Well, it's very vividly depicted in the picture. Everything was completely destroyed, we were walking -- we didn't have wheels so we couldn't drive around and look at things. The streets had been cleaned of debris -- not the streets, for lack of a better word, the big sidewalks. Because you could run a vehicle down but there was no room, I'd say 20-feet across total. For foot transport and vehicle transport. There was a Japanese officer still

armed when we went ashore. And we asked -- one of our crew members said, "Oh boy, look at that sword." And the Marine went over and put a machine gun to the Japanese officer and said, "Go ahead, take the sword." And the sailor got the sword by an exclamation and a machine gun. But I only saw one Marine, I only saw one Marine. And they were running around with Geiger counters taking the radioactivity of the things. As I walked down the street -- quote "streets" -- we were by the Mitsubishi aircraft factory where they were making parts -- assemblies for the Mitsubishi fighter. It was very touching because all the lathes of that whole row, all the lathes were from Milwaukee, Wisconsin and that of course was demoralizing that that we armed our own enemy. But it's the free enterprise system and I guess that's the way to do it.

FC: Now did you see any Japanese civilians?

JL: Oh a lot of Japanese civilians but you never saw their face. They would not look at us. That first day they would turn their back. Would you excuse me for just a moment? One thing that is memorable is that in all of this destruction and all of this death -- and there were still bodies in the debris. I looked down in the Mitsubishi factory and here in a little piece of soil is a lily blooming. And I thought, "Oh, that's a sign from God."

A lily blooming." Thousands of people dead, many of them still under the debris, impossible for a US vehicle to get through -- there was no room. So I don't know how they -- they must have started pushing with bulldozers I guess. The Army had to put bulldozers and push stuff out of the way.

FC: Now do you remember what date this was when you went on shore?

JL: What?

FC: What date? Was it no long after they surrendered?

JL: No I do not remember that. I cannot. Now the logs of the *Murphy* will have that. The logs of the *Murphy* are available and I don't have the gentleman's name but he was aboard -- he was one of our crew members and he sent me a letter that said, "If you want a log, you can get it on DVD." The logs of the USS *Murphy*, he said, "They are all available. So the crew can research that." But I would say it would be around August -- I would say about August - - 20th, 25th -- the end of August, I'd put it.

FC: The information I'm looking here John said that you went to Okinawa temporarily and then you went on to Nagasaki and Nagoya. Do you remember going to Nagoya?

JL: Oh Nagoya? Yeah, they had a Japanese battleship in there, still afloat. They had this battleship and I often

wondered what happened to the battleship. Now in Nagoya, they had an arsenal there that produced small arms and they had sailors taking the small arms out and dumping the small arms in the ocean. So these guys would fly -- would go out -- and sailors being lazy as they are -- they would go and pull up beside the ship and say, "You guys want some rifles?" And the exec comes down and says, "Yeah, we'll take 200 of them." "OK, taking out 200 of them." And then they were stacked and when we got back to the States they'd say, "Do you want a new rifle or a re-issue?" So I took a new one, unfired in combat, unfired rifle that was never issued. So my brother didn't like it though so he modified it.

FC: Did you go onshore in Nagoya?

JL: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. By then, Nagoya, things had settled down to the fact that Americans were Americans and you are looking for Saki and females.

FC: Was there still a lot of damage? Because Nagoya was subject to firebombing.

JL: Well not -- comparatively speaking no. Comparatively speaking it was not -- Nagasaki and Hiroshima were the top of the list as far as damage goes. But -- well not really. I guess you could say -- if you look at Berlin in August of

'45, I guess that would be the same. Berlin would be the same as Nagasaki.

FC: Yeah, probably.

JL: Yeah, it was gone. There was nothing there.

FC: So once you went to -- take us from Hiroshima back to when you got back to the States.

JL: Well, we had -- going back we'd stop at the islands. R&R, take on supplies. And we were in a boat one time -- a motor oil boat, going ashore. We were anchored out and we saw this mine that was floating. And when that mine hit the beach, boom. I'll tell you. It shot water into the air 200 feet. Yeah. I thought, "Oh, boy." I was glad we went through that degaussing process in New Jersey because that was a tremendous explosion of that mine. It was a mine that broke off of its moorings or maybe a mine sweep cut the cable. But there was later on -- you know, I guess they were floating for a year later. There were still some floating out there a year later.

FC: That's what I've read.

JL: As far as I know there's two out there yet. For all I know. I don't know. But anyway, then we were called back to the States, back through the canal and into Charleston, South Carolina for decommissioning. And that was a -- that was about as plush an assignment as a sailor could get.

They were preparing the ship for decommissioning, we were still living onboard. We were docked and we could -- had -- been served good meals. The German prisoners were still there. If you washed your hands in the PX or the ship's service, a German prisoner immediately washed that sink out. After every sailor washed his hands, a German prisoner would clean the sink. That was interesting.

FC: Now, when you -- after you were decommissioned, did they put the ship in a mothball fleet?

JL: Yes, I was very fortunate because by then the news was out that the GI Bill was being expedited. We could go to college. Now I was a high school dropout remember. So I went to the com officer and ask -- I requested -- Lieutenant Oliver. I said, "Lieutenant Oliver, I'd like to take leave so I can go back to school." And, "Oh you're going to--" "No, I'm not going to college, I'm going to high school." I went back to high school and I carried books and I took geometry and I took history and I took English in high school carrying my books. And I was still on active duty. I wore my uniform a couple of days and the principle of the thing said, "Why are you still wearing uniform? Are you having trouble finding civilian clothes?" "Oh no," I said, "I got civilian clothes but," I said, "I am still in the Navy and I'll be in the Navy for

30 days." So I wore my uniform for a couple of days and then I figured, "Aw, to heck with it." So I dressed as all the other students. It was like -- like you going to study with a bunch of grade-school kids. That's what it was like. It was a different world. Their thinking was different than my thinking. There was no comradery because I was a world apart from them.

FC: Yeah, they never saw people die like you had.

JL: Well -- no, that but -- and I had some business experience. I had a year of business experience in the lumber yard but then it -- a friend of mine that I was in grade school with and high school up to that time and he too dropped out of high school. So when I saw him after he was discharged, he said, "What are you going to do? I'm going to school. I'm going to college." So we both went to college together. So we were in grade school, middle school and high school all at the same -- and then college all at the same time.

FC: What college did you go to?

JL: I went to a community college first -- for my first two years. Living at home, cheaper, I could do it. Well not really living at home because I got married in my freshman year. Freshman year of college, married, living on the GI

Bill. Yeah, there were a few days when you had to make ends meet.

FC: Been there done that.

JL: Yeah, is that right? Well OK. Then I went to -- of course, going in -- transferring from a two-year to a four-year, of course there is a bulge in the charts on that one. So the bulge in the charts would indicate that you've got too many students for the available facilities. So I could not get in to the University of Illinois and I could not get into Wesleyan and -- they were filled. You know, guy got their application in -- were accepted before me.

FC: Now had you got -- you are discharged by now?

JL: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

FC: When were you discharged?

JL: I was discharged in -- let's see -- '46. I'd have to look it up. The date of the discharge. Because --

FC: Nineteen forty-six.

JL: It all blended in together and --

FC: And that's when you started college, after you got your discharge.

JL: No, I started college -- immediately, I had my discharge -- I finished high school. I graduated from high school in August of '46. I graduated from high school then, I went

to college and I graduated from college in '49. So that was the deal.

FC: What was your major?

JL: Liberal arts predominantly. I wanted a business course. The college I went to had no business. A little college in Missouri that -- in Springfield, Missouri. They had no business course per se. So I took economics, I took a lot of economics because I wanted to be in business. So I had to take something so I just took sociology. And I'm glad I never followed through on sociology because it's a thankless job. And I don't see any sociologists driving Mercedes. I haven't seen one yet.

FC: Well, I'll just touch up on it briefly but you got out of college, you ended up going into the Air Force.

JL: Well, I was in college. Along comes another war, the Korean War. And during Korea, I was in the Reserves. During college I was in the Navy Reserves as a readyman second-class. So that's when the recruiting officer for the Air Force said, you know, he said, "You're going to be called up. You are going to be called up as a B5." I said, "Yeah, I know it." Because I went down and looked around and I was the senior guy in the radio room. So I said, "Yeah, they are calling them up and putting them on active duty." So he said, "Well, I'll get you a commission

in the Air Force if you want to go in the Air Force." And I said, "Sounds good to me, where do I sign?"

FC: Did you have to go to OCS?

JL: Yes, I went to OCS.

FC: Oh, OK. Where did you go to OCS at?

JL: I went to OCS; I was class 51a. So that was the deal. And then I went right into the -- into radio school for a year and then into the fighter squadrons and the 58th Fighter Interceptor and then the four 37th Fighter Interceptor out of Otis and then I got assigned to Alaska as a communication officer and crypto officer. And so -- an [ACNW?] site -- and then back into training for fighters. F-89s. So I went to Moody and I was a radar instructor for F89s at Moody Air Force Base. As they say down South, "Moody Field." "Are you working Moody Field?" "Yeah, I work in Moody Field." So yeah, OK. I was in Moody Field and then because of my extensive knowledge in electronics and radio, an assignment comes through and they assign me to missiles. So I was assigned as a missile officer. And I went to SM78 Snark missile as a launch officer. Teach launch officer. Well, how do you learn about the SM78? Well, the circuitry was so complex that it was virtually impossible to understand the flight control system and all of the control systems because it was an air breathing

missile. It was airplane with a guidance system in it. And that was the one they send -- the Snark -- into Brazil because it had vacuum tubes and it had hundreds and hundreds of vacuum tubes in it. And if a vacuum tube goes out, that airplane ain't going where you want it to go. So the program -- we were training launch crews. And I don't think we ever turned out a launch crew. I think the program was cancelled before we ever got a launch crew trained, for lack of a better word. We couldn't even get it through a count -- a count down. You start the count and a tube goes out. You get a technician to fix the circuit and it takes an hour and a half and then you pick up the count at T-minus 21 hours or whatever and all the way along the line you had to stop the count so you could put in a new tube and pick up the count. And -- but it was a phenomenal -- today it would be great piece of equipment because vacuum tubes are very unreliable. So the SM78 -- at Amarillo Air Force Base now. Nobody's ever heard of Amarillo Air Force Base -- well not many I'll tell you. Because it was a very small base. They were training command. And then while I -- once they closed the program, I was available so they made me a Squadron Commander, oh boy, Squadron Commander.

FC: What rank were you?

JL: I was first Lieutenant.

FC: OK.

JL: So yeah, I had to wait until I got into missiles, real missiles, to be Captain. And then I made Major and then I was reassigned as a major. And then I was going to go to another war and I said, "To hell with it, I retire."

FC: What year did you retire?

JL: Boy that's a good question. Sixty-eight. Sixty-eight. Vietnam was still raging. Winding up but raging and I was going to go over as an intercept officer for incoming missiles. you know an electronics officer was what I was going over as. And I was going to be up at Austin for -- I don't know, six months or something like that, training in Austin, up there. That would have been a good assignment prior to going to Vietnam, it would give you another six months. But I figured to hell with it because I felt -- when I got orders that I had cancelled -- I got cancelled on a technicality. But when they put the orders in my hand, I said to myself, "I'm dead." When those orders touched my hand, I said, "I'm dead." Just like Kenny. Just like Kenny.

FC: Your friend. So you made your quick decision -- you are getting out.

JL: Well yeah. I wanted to see my kid graduate from college. Well I got three. I got two daughters. One's a college professor and one's a doctor. And then I've got a son that won't work. He's a college graduate but won't work. A Marine.

FC: Well, with that -- you had a full career and I want to shake your hand and thank you for your service to our country.

JL: Oh, it was a pleasure. I loved every day aboard ship. Every day, I loved.

END OF AUDIO FILE