Veteran:	**SIMMONS, Perry**
Service Branch:	**NAVY**
Interviewer:	**McElhaney, Michelle**
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Highlights of Service:	**World War II; His amphibious force carried MacArthur to Battle of Leyte Gulf; Danced with Lana Turner at Hollywood Canteen**

Interviewer: My first question is not going to surprise you. Tell me about your dance with Lana Turner.

Veteran: Let me go back just a little and tell you that before December 7 I was a junior at the University of Texas, and I happened to be in Baytown on December 7 and I heard that the Japs had attacked Pearl Harbor, so I jumped back in my car and went back to Austin. The next morning I tried to enlist in the Air Force, but I found out that I was color blind, so in order to avoid the draft, I had to join the Navy. I tried to get into the naval officer's program that would defer you until you graduated and then they'd give you a commission, but I couldn't pass that color blind test. So, I went on and enlisted as an apprentice seaman and went through boot camp in San Diego. After I was out of that, I was a radio operator and they transferred me to Port of Spain, Trinidad. While I was in California as a radio man I was stationed in Los Angeles shortly, and they had this canteen that the servicemen called the Hollywood Canteen. They'd take you in and let you stay an hour and then they'd put you out the back door and let a new crowd in. Well, I spotted Lana Turner coming in as soon as she arrived, and so I asked her for a dance. Before most people knew who she was, I'd almost completed a whole dance. Well, after that everybody was tagging me, but she was a real beauty.

Interviewer: Was she very sociable?

Veteran: Oh, yes! In fact, in college I was a member of the Sigma Chi fraternity, and her husband at the time was a Sigma Chi. I believe it was about her third husband. I

think she was married to Artie Shaw, and I don't know who the other two were, but this present husband at that time was a guy named Steven Crane, but I don't know whatever happened to him.

Interviewer: What was the voyage like to the Philippines? Tell me about your journey from here to there.

Veteran: After I left California, I was stationed in Port of Spain, Trinidad, but I came back with the fleet and went to midshipman's school, and they gave me a waiver on color blindness. I couldn't figure it out, but it turned out that the ship I was going to go on, they called them "They Were Expendable." It was a landing ship tank. They'd go up on the beach and let the tanks out. So, after I got out of midshipman's school, I went to New Orleans and went aboard this ship, and we went to the South Pacific. From there, we were stationed out of New Guinea. My amphibious force, not my particular ship, carried General MacArthur back to the Philippines at Leyte, so we were in the invasion of Leyte Gulf. I really liked the Philippines. We made five invasions there: the first one in Leyte, the second in Luzon (where Manila is), and a couple of others—Sabu, Port of Princessa, and then the fifth one was down in Borneo, of all places. After the war, we were up in Okinawa. We were in one earthquake in the Philippines and two typhoons up north between there and China.

Interviewer: What was it like aboard ship? Was it crowded and cramped?

Veteran: It was slow. The ship we were on didn't make but about ten or ten-and-a-half knots. It took us thirty days from the canal zone in Panama until we got to where we were heading, which was the New Hebrides Island, down close to Guadalcanal. I don't remember the exact ports we went to, but from there we went up to New Guinea. That's where General MacArthur had his headquarters at the time. When we went to the invasion of Leyte, we took a load of Australian soldiers, and we delivered them at Leyte Gulf. We landed in a little place about twelve miles from the capital of Leyte called Tacloban, and it was strange. After it had been secured, you saw all these caribou—some people call them water buffalo. The Filipinos were real friendly, and of course they were real pleased that we were there to liberate them, because the Japs had just swarmed them over.

Interviewer: So, their emotions were on a high.

Veteran: Oh, yeah. Not like the Iraqis are now, because you don't really know if they appreciate us coming or not. And, you know, most of them spoke good English.

Interviewer: What kind of food did you eat while you were there?

Veteran: To tell you the truth, we always ate on the ship. I don't really remember what we ate on the island. In fact, we didn't spend much time ashore, being in the Navy you know. I know later when we went ashore in Manila; I guess it was kind of oriental food—kind of like half-American and half-Chinese. I don't really remember that much about the food.

Interviewer: How many people were aboard your ship? Do you remember?

Veteran: About 105 crew members and about 7 officers. We had a captain and an exec, and of course I was just a boot ensign. That was the smallest commissioned rank you've got. I was on that ship for about eighteen months, until the war was over, and then I got off my ship in Shanghai. That's when I was waiting for transportation back to the states.

Interviewer: Was there a lot of personal camaraderie on the ship?

Veteran: Oh, yeah, you can't believe it. I had two officers on the ship with me that we've been corresponding or talking on the phone for fifty years. Matter of fact, I just talked to both of them last week. I think I got off the ship in, I believe, January of 1946 in Shanghai, and I had to wait there for about 30 days, and then I got back to the states in San Francisco about late February of 1946. I don't know if you're interested in any of the instances we were in over there, but right after we made the invasion of Leyte, we were on the way back to New Guinea, and one of the southernmost islands of the Philippines in Mindanao. We got attacked by a Japanese bomber, and he came right out of the sun and kind of caught us by surprise. We went to what they called general quarters, and he made it around and dropped some bombs but didn't hit us. He made another swerve and came back out of the sun again. He was attacking the whole convoy, but he was shot down. There was a twin engine Betty-bomber, and everybody in the convoy

claimed that they did it. We all put one of those American flags up on the side of our ship. That's the only plane that we shot down, as I remember. Another instance, we were on the way there and a Japanese submarine must have mistaken us for a bigger ship, like a cruiser, because they fired a torpedo at us, but this LST, the landing ship tank I was on, it has a real shallow draft—about ten or twelve feet. We could see the torpedo coming, and it just went right on under the ship and kept a-rolling. I had hair then, and it was standing up in a heap. If we'd been a larger ship, we'd have probably been blown right out of the water.

Interviewer: Is that the only two encounters that you can really remember?

Veteran: Another time in Borneo we were bombed pretty heavily while we were on the beach. Of course, they didn't hit us, but you could hear the shrapnel and everything hitting the side of the ship. Of course, when we were making the invasion of Luzon—that's where the capital of Manila is—you had to go up north of Corregidor, and these Japanese kamikazes would dive on you. We'd be shooting at them, and they mainly were heading for the merchant ships that were convoyed with us. They'd crash right on their midships. Everybody used to say that those Japanese pilots would get full of that Japanese saki, because they knew they were suicide bombers. We never did get hit. In fact, I don't recall my ship even having a single casualty. I didn't even get a hangnail the whole war—over four years.

Interviewer: Don't complain about that. You've mentioned the convoy several times. How many ships were in your convoy?

Veteran: Sometimes it could be at least 100 ships. I know in the Battle of Leyte Gulf they claimed that that was the largest naval battle. There was over 600 ships assembled there in that gulf. The battleship group, which wasn't part of my amphibious group, headed off a Japanese squadron that was coming up through a narrow portion they called the Surigao Straits, and they were just sitting there waiting on them when they were coming through. In the Navy there's a maneuver called 'crossing the T.' In other words, they had all their guns trained off their sides, and they just met 'em coming through and just annihilated them. That was probably the biggest part of that battle.

Interviewer: What did you do during free time aboard ship?

Veteran: As long as we were in the rear areas, a lot of times we could go ashore at these islands. Like in Australia, there was a place called Hilandia, New Guinea. That's where MacArthur had his headquarters. We spotted a camp where there was a group of Army nurses, so some of us officers invited them to come aboard and have lunch with us. Of course, we had ulterior motives. We were going to give them some of that 'torpedo juice.' But the lady that I was escorting, they'd been over there so long that they were almost brown, because they'd been in the sun so much. As I was walking across the deck with this nurse, one of the seaman hollered at me and said, "Mr. Simmons, I didn't know your mother was in this area." {Laughter}

Interviewer: Oops!!

Veteran: That really hacked her. But we had a big tank deck. You know, the construction of an LST has a big hollow in the base of this ship, and they load the tanks in there. When they hit the beach, they had what they called "bi-doors," and they opened the bi-doors and lowered a ramp, and all the tanks rolled out of the ramp onto the beach. So, at that particular time the tank deck was empty, so we'd had a small dance down there. We had a great time. A lot of times we'd be in some rear area island where we'd play softball or something of that nature.

Interviewer: Did you ever play any practical jokes?

Veteran: When we were in China—you know, a lot of people think Shanghai is on the Yangtze River, but it's on a tributary called the Huangou—these Chinese would come up in what we called bong boats, and a lot of them were born and reared and lived on those boats! But they'd always be coming up along side begging or wanting something, and the only way we could get rid of them was to hose them with water, and they didn't care for that. But they really were pests. You sympathized with them, but they just were always hanging around, and if you were fixing to get under way or something, it was real dangerous. But you could see that they just lived on those boats.

Interviewer: How many tanks did your LST carry?

Veteran: I don't recall, but I would say probably 40, but we had the troops that operated them, too, so we had our 100 or so, too.

Interviewer: How many troops accompanied those tanks?

Veteran: I really don't know, to tell you the truth. I know we had soldiers galore on there. We got caught in a couple of typhoons when we were on our way. One time when we were in Okinawa—this was after the war was over—we heard that a typhoon was coming. Really, that's similar to a hurricane other than a typhoon is generally over water. It comes up, and then it makes a big curve. So, we took off headed for China—this is in the South China Sea. The closer the typhoon got, it was just like a vacuum cleaner was sucking on you, so it was kind of like a revolving door. When it would start making its curve, we'd try to make a curve ahead of them. We saw one LST that it snapped their doors off, and I don't know how it stayed afloat, because it was bound to have taken on a lot of water, but as far as we know it made it back to port alright. When we got back to Okinawa, it had blown their fleet post office away, and it had done a lot of damage. I'll tell you, those waves in a typhoon really get tremendous. They'll get 40 and 50 feet high. When we were in a storm or high water, an LST is just like a loaf of bread. It's flat bottomed, so when you'd go up on one of those huge waves, then all of a sudden, it was just like all the water abdicated, and it just comes down, and your mast would go like 'that,' you know.

Interviewer: So, you're inside while all of that's going on.

Veteran: Yeah. I have been up on the 'con'—that's kind of like where you steer the ship from—and you'd look at that mast you didn't know if you were going to make it.

Interviewer: Did they have any pumps on the ship if it did start taking on water, or was it pretty much sink or swim?

Veteran: They generally have what they called ballasts. There's a plenzil(?) mark on the side of the ship that you could generally tell if the ship was loaded, because the lower it is in the water, you don't see that plenzil mark. A lot of times they take on a lot of extra water to make it heavier. To my knowledge, we never did take

on any water. Of course, a lot of it would slosh up on the deck, but then it would drain right off through those scuffers.

Interviewer: I talked to another gentlemen who was in the Marines, and I've asked him this question. I'd like to hear your answer. Were common comforts such as shaving cream, soaps, and deodorants, and all that stuff made available to you?

Veteran: Generally when we were in a port, they'd have these ship stores—that's kind of like an Army PX. We didn't have a ship store onboard the ship, but we would supply ourselves whenever we were in one of these shore bases. What used to get me—I'm sure if you've been around ships—they cook in these HUGE open pots and stir it with these boat paddles, and then they reach in there and serve it out of that. You'd go through a chow line, kind of like a cafeteria. According to Navy regulations, you're not supposed to have anything alcoholic onboard, but we used to get beer issued to us. We couldn't drink on board, so we were supposed to save it, and when we hit a liberty port we could go ashore and drink it. We were nested alongside a regular Navy destroyer. We were mostly reserves—what they called U.S. Naval Reserves. Of course, we were in the same war and on the same type ships as the regular Navy, but we were in kind of like a nest of a couple of destroyers, and some of our seamen were walking across the deck drinking beer. This captain on the regular Navy ship got on the loud speaker system and ordered that our captain report aboard, so he had to go over and explain to them about why we were drinking onboard when it was against Navy regulations.

Interviewer: You referred to torpedo juice awhile ago. What was that?

Veteran: In torpedoes, they use 190 proof alcohol. That's pretty potent. So, they'd drain some of that off of those torpedoes and mix it with grapefruit juice. They called them 190 cocktails. That's another thing you weren't supposed to have, but we did. That's about the only type of amusement you had was something like that. I don't know if you've ever seen the movie *The Caine Mutiny*—of course, that's probably before your time—but it depicted how this captain was kind of psycho. He had all kinds of fantasies about steward mates stealing strawberries, and that reminded me a lot about our captain. This captain was so way out that some of

his officers mutinied against him to try to get him turned over. I thought maybe you'd seen it—it's a great movie.

Interviewer: Did you ever receive care packages from home while you were at sea?

Veteran: I don't remember getting any while I was at sea, but when I was in Norfolk, Virginia, before I was sent to Trinidad, it was really cold, and I had written my mother to send me some long-handles. She sent them to Norfolk, but I had shipped out on a troop transport. When I got to Trinidad, that's just like in the tropics—it's just almost on the equator. When they finally arrived, the package was all busted open, and everybody said, "What do you want with these down here?" So, I sold them to some of the natives for pajamas.

Interviewer: Did you make a good profit?

Veteran: I don't remember, but I sure didn't have any use for them.

Interviewer: Would you have enjoyed getting care packages while you were at sea?

Veteran: I got a lot of mail. I got two leaves to come home and get married, but I never got married. I was engaged to this girl, and every time I'd kind of lose my nerve, and my reason with her was that I knew I was going to be shipped overseas, and I just thought it would be the better part of wisdom to wait until the war was over or until I got back. So, while I was in Trinidad we corresponded daily, and when I came back, the first place I landed was in Miami, and I got one of those "Dear John" letters. She'd met an Air Force guy and was fixing to get married. So, I tried to get a leave to come home, but I never could, so there went that marriage.

Interviewer: You don't regret it now, though.

Veteran: Oh, no. That's been 60 years ago.

Interviewer: If you could complete one particular assignment, what would it be?

Veteran: When I was an officer, after I'd come up through the ranks, they used to call that a 'mustang.' Every quarter, we had to fill out what they called a fitness report. You had to put down what all you'd done, what all your assets were, and everything, and the captain would rule on it. One of the items said, "What would

your request be for shore duty?" and I put down, "Commander of the Waves Barrack, Hunter College, New York." He said, "What would your request be for sea duty?" I said, "Commander of the Coronado Affair in San ______." I wanted a good duty.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you have been appropriately honored or appreciated for your time of service?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. My roommate in college went on just a year and a half later and got his degree, and went on to midshipman's school and got a commission. He got out in the class of '43, but due to the fact that I had to join the Navy when I was a junior, I didn't go back to college and get my degree until 1948, but I did get the G.I. Bill, and that's what financed my going back. I liked a year and a half, so I went back. Some of the course I took in the Navy were transferable. I went to two colleges before I went to midshipman's school. One of them was Carson Newman College in Tennesee, and the other was Emory University in Atlanta. Some of those courses I transferred back to the University of Texas. Then later on in my adult life, I worked in the governor's office in Austin, and he made me an admiral in the Texas Navy. Well, you know there ain't no such thing as that, but I've got it hanging up over there. Then, too, I had an honorable discharge from the Secretary of the Navy—a guy named James Forrestal. I don't know why, but he committed suicide. He jumped out of a building. I had a letter from President Harry Truman, who was president when I was discharged—the letter that everybody gets.

Interviewer: How did the voyage home differ from the voyage over there? You're facing where you're going in, and you've got this aura that you're going into war, and then the voyage home is, it's over.

Veteran: I'll have to admit I wasn't gung-ho to be hero. I really wanted to fight in what they called a delay in action. Down in Trinidad, I probably could have stayed there the whole course of the war if I hadn't been so ambitious to get back to the states and see my girls, because we never had any hostile activities. When I came back, I wondered why were they giving me a waiver on that color blindness until I found out they were going to put me on one of those landing ship tanks. I spent

30 days in Shanghai before I could get transportation, and it was headed back to San Francisco. I think it took us 18 days from Shanghai. We had some Chinese cadets that were coming back with us on this ship, and they were going to be stationed in Arizona. When we came under the Golden Gate Bridge, there was a harbor boat that came out playing *California, Here I Come*. When got alongside the dock, we were ready to go ashore, but they started playing *The National Anthem*, and we had to stop and salute. Then we took another few steps, and they started playing *The Chinese National Anthem*. I was beginning to think we weren't ever going to get off of this ship, but we finally got ashore.

Interviewer: If you had one piece of advice now, what would it be?

Veteran: Of course, I'm talking in retrospect because, like I say I didn't aspire to be a hero, and I was really reluctant about going into the service at that time. I really believe that we had more cause to be eager to go then than probably we do now ... {End of Side A}

{Start of Side B} The only thing that I really disliked was when President Jimmy Carter became president; his first official act was to forgive the draft dodgers that went to Canada. My thoughts on that were that since they made their decision to flee to Canada rather than be drafted or have to go into Vietnam, they ought to leave them there. But President Carter's theory was that he wanted to heal the wounds, but I couldn't quite endorse that, because if you had a son that you lost in the Vietnam War and you saw your next door neighbor's son come back from Canada, you wouldn't feel too good about that. I just don't think that the patriotism is the same today, and I'm real apprehensive or critical of people who denounce, once we've made the decision to go to war, to bad-mouth it. I was really put out. You know, Walter Cronkite was supposed to be the most trusted man in America, but he made some comments that I thought he should have left unsaid, because he was critical of President Bush's intent to go into Iraq. I believe in freedom of speech, but I believe there are times—especially from a guy like him—that it's better left unsaid. He can think it or say it privately, but to go public—I didn't agree with that.

Interviewer: We were also criticized many times for our choice to use the atomic bomb. Where were you when you heard about that?

Veteran: Well, I think that was a good decision, because while we were in Okinawa, and we were getting ready to invade Japan. The first bomb they dropped on Hiroshima and then one on Nagasaki. They had estimated at the time that we'd probably have a million casualties if we had to invade Japan. Being in an amphibious group, it would be hitting the beach, and we'd probably have been among them. Of course, when they dropped the first atomic bomb, that got everybody's attention, but when they dropped the bomb in Nagasaki, that put the nail on the coffin. They all hollered 'surrender.' We got to see Nagasaki. We repatriated Japanese prisoners from China back to the southern part of Japan, and it wasn't but about 70 miles from Nagasaki. We took a trip over there, but of course they would only let you get so close. I don't remember how many square miles they had that was out of bounds, but it just looked like they'd dumped garbage. Whew. It wiped them out. So, I endorse that, and I think a lot of others did, too. You know, the Japanese philosophy of being told that their term for Heaven was to give their life for their country and that would have assured them eternity. They were just fanatical. I guess some of these suicide people in the Middle East are just about like the Japs were in those days.

Interviewer: What's your most memorable time of your time in the service?

Veteran: I was always a big swing favorite, because I was in an orchestra in college, so when I was in San Diego in radio school right after I'd got out of boot camp, Benny Goodman—I don't know if you've heard of him—he and his orchestra played there on our grinder—which is a drill field—and he had some pretty great musicians with him. One of his vocalists was Peggy Lee, and I really enjoyed that. We were entertained by a lot of Hollywood stars. When I was stationed in Hollywood, we were only there six weeks, but we got to go to the Hollywood Palladium, and I got to see all the big bands—Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey, and we got to go to the Canteen. I danced with Deanna Durbin, but I asked Bette Davis to dance, and she politely declined. I asked Olivia DeHaviland—she was in *Gone With the Wind*, too. They were polite, but they just said they had a duty there to serve the food. I really thought I was on Cloud Nine when I was dancing

with Lana Turner. When I went to midshipman's school, it was in upstate New York on Lake Champlain, about 30 miles from the Canadian border. I liked to have frozen to death up there, and that was a negative for me, because I just couldn't take that. I wrote home that George Washington didn't have a thing on us at Valley Forge. The only difference was that we had shoes. Boy, it was cold! I said I'd never go back north of the Mason-Dixon Line unless it was in the summer. But I have been back to Boston a couple of times. I even went back to the town where my midshipman's school was, but it had changed so much that I hardly recognized it.

Interviewer: How often do you get to see the old guys?

Veteran: One of the guys that I told you I'd talked to, I haven't seen him since we left the ship, but the other one that I stay in close contact with, he's been to the Astrodome, and I met him at one of the ballgames. His first wife died, and we had a reunion in Birmingham one year—they've had them every year, but I've only been to one—I saw him and a couple of other officers there. He had remarried, and he and his wife are divorcing, so he's got all kinds of problems, so he's been calling nearly every week. He had to move out and get an apartment, and his landlady said he'd really like it there, because there was a lot of young, single women there, and he said, "That will be the least of my worries." Of course, he's about the same age that I am. I'm 82, so I'm sure he's at least past 80, so he's not too interested in looking for women. I'd say they are two of my best friends, and we've stayed in touch, and that's been since 1946—about 57 years—you hope that you've got some friends that you're still talking to when you're that age.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you were aboard ship and you knew you were delivering soldiers to their possible death? Did you think about it?

Veteran: When I really came face-to-face with it and it made a serious impact on me—when we invaded a little island in the Philippines called Sabu, and we made our landing at the capital of Sabu, after we'd secured it, I got to visit the grave of Magellan. You know, supposedly, he was the first guy who went around the world, but he didn't make it. His crew and his ships went around, but I got to

visit his grave there in Sabu City. But we had two small boats—landing ship vehicle personnel, and they were up on what they called davits—they hang three on each side—and they can lower those small boats, and they could carry about 40 infantrymen and whoever their commanding officer was. One of our boat officers—I don't remember if he got sick or got transferred or something, and they were trained to operate them—so when we were supposed to make the invasion of Sabu, since I was one of the junior officers, I was assigned to take his place. When we went it, my small boat had 41 infantrymen and a lieutenant, plus myself and two crew members—a signalman and a helmsman—and we were in the fifth wave. In other words, there were four waves that preceded us into the beach. On our way in, even in the fifth wave, those mortar shells were just landing all around us. When we got in close to the beach, we could see a lot of the infantrymen were just lying flat on the edge of the water, and they had discovered, I guess it was a couple of hundred yards from the edge of the beach up to the coconut trees, and later they said it was the most heavily mined area they'd seen since Tarawa. When the first wave or two got in there, they found out that there was mines, and when we beached, I told the lieutenant to get his men off, because we're fixing to retract. I told my helmsman, "Back 'er down." We called that famous naval maneuver: Get the hell outta there! But on the way back to the ship, boy, you talk about glad to get back home. I never appreciated that ship more. I would say that probably was the most dangerous incident, just worrying about whether you were going to make it or not during the whole war.

Interviewer: But all of your men made it back?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. Just me and my three guys, but I don't know what happened to those infantrymen and that lieutenant, but I'm sure they got on in there after they got the mines cleared.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Veteran: I've always been real proud that I served in the Navy. Of course, you know I love to watch Army/Navy football, and I think I was real fortunate to get a commission. I was going to tell you one humorous thing about after I found out I couldn't get into the Air Force, they had a Navy recruiting unit in Austin, and I

went to take that color blind test again, it's called the Ishihara Color Test, and it's just a series of colored dots and everything, and they'd say, "Trace a line from x to x," or they'd have numbers in there, like a 2 or a 4. A color blind person just couldn't detect them, so the guy in Austin turned me down, and said, "I'm sorry. You're just color blind." So, I came home one weekend, and my dad told me the Draft Board had called, and so I went and took that test again in Houston. I had learned a little about the test from having been there, so I took it in Houston with the same result—I flunked it again. So, when I got back to Austin, the third time I went over to San Marcos, and it just so happened that I was really on to it then, and the guy said, "Trace a line from x to x," and I got onto it just like a dog after a rabbit, and I went all the way across and came out on the other side, and I smiled and he said, "You know, nobody but a color blind man would have been able to see that. By the way, didn't I examine you over in Austin a couple or three weeks ago?" I said, "No, I got a twin brother over there," which I didn't. He said, "Well, you're just as color blind as he is." {Laughter} So, I never could pass that color blind test. You know, the way I see a green and a red light, I'm sure it's different from someone else, but I know just from association from seeing cars move. I was red and green color blind. I had trouble in the Navy, because you use a lot of signal flags, and certain flags, like a yellow flag with a black dot in it, that just didn't register to me, so I had trouble reading those flags.

Interviewer: How did you make it through with such difficulty?

Veteran: Generally, I'd rely on my signalman or seaman or somebody that could. I'd ask them to read the flags for me. For instance, I remember after the war was over we went into Korea. The Port of Seoul was called Inchon. The commander of the convoy ran up a series of four flags, and I couldn't read it but there's a book that has all the color signals in it, so if you're not familiar with it, you could look it up in the book. What it was, the signalman said he was discharging us from the convoy, and it said to proceed independently to an anchorage. Having been a radioman, I knew the Morse Code well, and I could take code real good.

Interviewer: Are you still fresh with Morse Code?

Veteran: Oh, no. I know a few like ‘repeat your message’ and ‘roger,’ but I used to know ‘em all. When I was in Trinidad, I was in a message center, and they had messages they’d send out of Washington—they called them NSS messages. They were all in code. We’d record it and take it next door to the communication decoding office, where they routed submarine warnings. I enjoyed being a radioman, but I was glad to get out of Trinidad, because there are hardly any white people there. We had a lot of Chinese, and a lot of mixed breeds, and a lot of natives. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard the song *Rum and Coca Cola*, but that was popular down there, and when I got back to the states about a year later nobody in the states had ever heard it. They had a lot of Calypso bands there. They all had names, like the Young Pretender or the Old Line, and it’s just kind of impromptu. They’d satirize different political things and songs. A lady on the next block is from Trinidad, and I talked to her a lot about certain places. Down there they call the eighth wonder of the world Pitch Lake. They dig asphalt out of it and put it on the road. There’s a myth that there was a village there, and somebody killed hummingbird—which is a sacred bird—and the whole village just turned into a pitch lake. The war was a great experience, but I wouldn’t want to go through it again. I was in four years and two months, and I was ready to get out. I went in when I was 21, and I was well past 25 when I got out. They offered me a spot promotion if I’d sign on for another year, but I’d had all of this I wanted.

Interviewer: Would you recommend little boys do it today?

Veteran: I’ve got two grandsons that are in college, and they don’t have the draft system anymore, but I really think for kids that don’t have the intent or prospect of going to college, I think a couple of years in the military—whether it’s Army, Navy, or Marines—would be really good for them. They’re in a stage where they’re indecisive about what they want to do, and so the service would finance their education, if they don’t learn a craft while they’re in there. I know a colored man who has twin sons, and both of them went into the service, but one of them wasn’t in but two months, and he put on the aircraft carrier *Kittyhawk* in Japan, and as soon as he got aboard, they transferred him to the Persian Gulf, so you might say he was right in the war less than three months after he got in.

Interviewer: You mentioned colored people. Were there any colored people on your ship?

Veteran: We had colored steward mates. Today you're not supposed to call them colored, but I was born and reared in Mississippi, and we always called them colored. The officers always ate in the board room. It was the captain, and the executive officer, and some other officers—usually five or six all together. One time, there was a colored war correspondent—I believe his name was Rowe—and he came aboard and was going to go with us on some invasion. We had an officer from South Carolina, and he said wasn't going to eat in that board room with that colored fellow. So, this guy from up north said, "Oh, hell, Butler, ya'll let 'em cook for you, you let 'em raise your kids, you sleep with 'em, and yet you don't want to eat with 'em." He really told him off. You know, I was reared by a colored mammy until I was about ten years old, and that's why I talk like I do. My mother was a school teacher, and I had a sister and that colored lady dressed us and took care of our clothes, many times fed us.

Interviewer: Because you had a mammy, did you see segregation as a good or a bad thing?

Veteran: At that time, I lived with my grandfather and my great uncle. My daddy had gone to World War I, but he and my mother got divorced when I was about four. That was in the 20s, but the Civil War ended in '65, and both my grandfather and my uncle had been born about the time of the Civil War. Grant had laid seize to Vicksburg, and he came right through the town where they lived. You know, the southern culture had always depended on slaves, and looking back on it you can see how unfair it was, but that was just the way it was. Of course, there was more animosity created about the way they were treated after the war than the way they were treated during the war. Of course, a lot of Southerners were killed during the Civil War. The carpetbaggers and scalawags came down there after the war was over and really treated the Southerners badly. Looking back, I think it was the best thing that ever happened. We got along fine with colored people, but there was always this thing—as long as they 'kept their place.' There was a kid named Emmitt Till that whistled at a white gal, and they throwed him a river with weights. They just didn't tolerate that kind of stuff. That's the way the Ku Klux Klan was born right after the Civil War was to put the fear of God in the colored

people to keep them in line, supposedly. That was history. Of course, Abraham Lincoln was one of our greatest presidents, but his forte was to free the slaves. Looking back, other than the color of our skins they've got just a much rights as we've got.

Interviewer: Did you treat your stewards any differently than any of the other boys aboard ship?

Veteran: Well, we got along alright, but we only had two of them, and every time we'd go ashore, it seemed like one of them would come back with a social disease. That made us kind of apprehensive about them serving our food. They just always got in that kind of trouble. We only had two colored boys. They cooked all the food in the galley, and then the steward's mates would bring it in and clean up. Another thing we did, we used to play bridge a lot. Generally there was one officer up on the con tower and the rest of us stood four hours watches. We had enough that with the captain we'd have two tables of bridge. I didn't know much about it, and was just learning, and I drew the captain for a partner. I did something that was atrocious. I either trumped one of his aces or something that was just way out, and it cost us the game. About a month or so later, he had to write a fitness report on us, and he wrote on mine, "This officer is very attentive to duty, but it seems like he's limited in intelligence." {Laughter} That was the only episode I'd had close to him, so I guess it had to do with that bridge game. When we were in Luzan, we had beached and had a heavy surf, and generally an LST had a stern anchor, which was an anchor you would drop when you were going onto the beach. It was on a cable, and when you got ready to retract, or leave the beach, you had a winch that could pull on that anchor and it would pull you off of that beach. Generally, you'd drop that anchor and the line would be right behind you, but due to the heavy surf setting up against the side of the vessel, it got to where we were kind of turned and this line was almost 90 degrees. So about 0300, the pressure of that surf and the way that line and the anchor were, it snapped and we broached…

{END OF TAPE—NO ADDITIONAL TAPES FOR THIS INTERVIEW.}