

ALEX FIELDER INTERVIEW

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

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Ron: Some formalities. Your name, the ship you served on, your rank and what you did there.

Alex: Alex Fielder, LST 534. My rank on the ship was Ensign. I was an Engineering Officer.

Ron: Let's do it again.

Alex: Oh. I'm Alex Fielder. I was on a 5...LST...USS LST 534. I was Engineering Officer. I was an Ensign at the time.

Ron: You were ninety day wonder.

Voice: I'm sorry. Just keep eye contact with him.

Ron: I know it's hard, but just...

Alex: Ah, no. No. No. I've had worse problems. I was a 90 day wonder. That was the typical nomenclature for my situation.

Ron: What did that really...what was a 90 day wonder?

Alex: They...theory was that to embellish the number of military personnel they would give typically a 90 day training session and turn them loose and I was one of those.

Ron: What was the criteria for you in going into...is it a form of OCS at the time?

Alex: Actually, I had...I'd had had three years of ROTC in college...Infantry...and that wasn't my cup of tea too much, but I applied for a commission. I was just...was in the processing of finishing engineering school and I applied for a commission in the Navy. the interesting thing was that I had never seen the ocean at that point in time. I never seen the ocean when I was commissioned an Ensign in the Navy, so it tells you how much practical experience I had had. Anyway, They send you to what they call indoctrination, which is a form of OCS, a Navy nomenclature, and mine was at Princeton University for three months. That was the 90 days.

Ron: So when the three months was up...that three month period was over what did they do with you?

Alex: They...you go different...whatever the Bureau personnel selects you your next duty station that's where they send you.

Ron: And in your case?

Alex: My case, I was sent to diesel school at General Motors Tech in Flint, Michigan. That was another couple of months, I guess, maybe in that time frame. Good duty, good training, good town.

Ron: Good times.

Alex: Good times. The type...type of town that Flint was at that time, there was no military establishments anywhere in the near vicinity, so the town was open. You could hardly spend money. You couldn't pay anything for transportation. You go in a pub and you just didn't spend any money and people were just cordial. Betty and I and another couple, Earl Cane and his wife...the principal of the high school there turned over their house to us while we were there and they went on vacation and just turned their house over to us and we lived there in their household for the time period we were there.

Ron: People were treated a lot different during the second...I mean, military was treated a lot differently during the second World War then they were in subsequent.

Alex: That's right. In fact...in fact, the antithesis was Flint was Norfolk. Norfolk was overwhelmed with Navy personnel, military personnel and the old story, and I doubt if it's true, but the story that everybody told...everybody put signs in their front yards, 'No dogs or sailors allowed!'. That kind of gives you a flavor of different towns.

Ron: That was like in New York where the English refer to the Americans as overpaid, oversexed and over here.

Alex: Right. Right. I'd forgotten. That's true. Yeah.

Ron: So how did you wind up...what was it? So you graduated from the school in Flint, Michigan and then they assigned you?

Alex: They assigned...the next assignment...I had orders changed a couple of times. One was going to South Carolina and the next one....that was cancelled. The next one was going to Florida. Hollywood, Florida, I believe. And then the next one sent me to Camp Bradford in Virginia. There's Camp Bradford and Little Creek were two amphibious bases primarily and they're'....and I went to Camp Bradford and had duty there until I was...got the orders to go to the 534, which was returning from England.

Ron: How much time elapsed from when you went into the service until you got on the 534?

Alex: I went in....I went in...was commissioned in early March and I was assigned and I picked up the 534, the best I remember, around the first of November. Six months or thereabouts. Same year.

Ron: Pick it up in New York?

Alex: No. It came back to Norfolk and there were three officers, and I think we were the only three that boarded as replacement officers. There was Harmon Judson-Green, who was the new Deck Officer and Kempsey Dole was a Gunner Officer and myself as Engineering Officer, went aboard and then we immediately went up the coast to the Hoboken Navy yard for repairs.

Ron: How were you greeted by the crew?

Alex: Aah, not greeted just left...kind of left to be.

Ron: Hold a second. (Sneezes)....chronological order and then we'll get to those.

Alex: Okay. Okay.

Ron: What I am going to be trying to do is just following you through the experiences from that.

Alex: You're welcome to look at them, Linda, if you want.

Linda: We'll shoot them. We'll have you hold them and explain them.

Ron: Excuse me. It just came on me, quickly, suddenly. I got stuffed up and my eyes began to water. I guess, what I was asking you, because you had mentioned earlier that when you first came on the ship as an Ensign that these guys had been through all the stuff that they'd been through didn't view you necessarily as a...how did they see you and or treat you?

Alex: Well, I tell you, my recollection is this, I certainly, as I've indicated before, was not experienced in the least and I certainly looked forward to serving and it happened that the existing engineering officer on there was Lt. Coles, who was a mustang, a mustang being as somebody who came up through the ranks, of course, and he had over twenty years of Navy duty on him and I had six months. So there was a little disparity there in his mind, more than a little, and he...and I understand his position, I really did, that I was a, you know, a non-entity so to speak. And he treated me that way. He would not give me a time of day. I'd ask him a question and I'm trying to learn what I can about the

ship, because we was going up to the navy yard, a two day trip and I wanted to pick up all the information I can and he was not cooperative.

Ron: He was your superior?

Alex: No, he was...I'm replacing him.

Ron: You're replacing him?

Alex: Yeah.

Ron: And for this short period of time that two of you were together he wasn't going to...didn't...

Alex: No, he would not...he was no communication. None.

Linda: Ron, I'm really sorry, but the.....

Alex: He was a...

Ron: We have to wait two seconds to get this ice machine out.

Voice:whining sound....it's like water running....

Voice: It's not really picking up that. As a matter a fact, that's been doing that on and off.

Alex: See we three replacement officers were...came aboard, as I said, and we...ship went up to New York and the officers we're replacing were going on leave and then being transferred to other duties, so my contact with him was going to be very limited. The trip up there and maybe a little time. It turned out it was very little time in the shipyard and then they're gone. Then we got the job.

Ron: You never had contact with him after that then?

Alex: No. No.

Ron: Like to see him here?

Alex: (Laughs)

Ron: With the two of you together and reminisce. What was your impression of the ship when you got on it?

Alex: I had had...I'd been on a couple LST's for very...a couple day training duty around Norfolk, so I was...you know, I'd studied up on LST's and I was somewhat familiar with them and it looked typical of a LST. Of course, the word out on LST's and they were rightly so, they were a tough ships, rough riding and...they are rough riding.

No clipper, a flat bow and a flat bottom and they don't cut through the waves too well, but...

Ron: How was the trip over to Hawaii? Eventful or uneventful? I guess you went from...

Alex: We went around through the canal....some little stories in that path if you want to cover them.

Ron: Sure.

Alex: We were in the ship yard and Betty came up there and we stayed in New York City for that time frame, which is probably about two months, at least two months. We really enjoyed ourselves seeing the city and we lived in an apartment that Captain Regany had on Riverside Drive and we did the...we did the tour of the city and saw all the good sights. You want me to go ahead? So we got the repairs done through hook or crook in the shipyard. The workers were a little somewhat uncooperative sometimes. We'd find them sleeping in spots and so forth. We had to encourage them to do their job, so we can get what was supposed to be done and get out of there, so it would....eventually did. So we went down....went out and did a little shake down and then headed down the coast and around Florida and went to Guantanamo Bay for a couple days and one night. Why we're in Guantanamo Bay with one night being there this certain group of officers had liberty to go into the naval base. In fact, we could have gone to Havana, but nobody did. There wasn't much time. So we....about four officers went to the...and I don't know...I don't recall what the crew did, at the time I did, but...what...they had liberty too, but....but we went to the officers club. Well, the arrangements in officers club on patronizing them, they do not take cash. They take...they sell you a checkbook, which is little coupons, in that particular case, was ten cent tickets. So as the old adage goes, when you're in some new place you enjoy the fruits of that place, the food and drinks and whatever.

Ron: When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

Alex: Right. So the Cuba laborers and Rum and Cokes were the order of the day for Cuba, naturally, so each of us bought....the cheapest checkbook they had was two dollars. We each bought a checkbook, so it turns out that a Cuba Laborer or a Rum and Coke was a dime and a double one was fifteen cents, so you can kind of see...get the picture of...you

don't...being economically inclined you don't want to leave with a lot of unused tickets, so we're going to use our tickets up. Well, we shot a pretty good stick at that and when it came time to go back to ship the ship...the LCVP came in to pick us up and it was...the tide was coming in, it was kind of rough and we were...we could all manage to walk to the dock, some better than others and...I considered myself to be the best shape of any of the other officers. The one officer that I remember that was with us, I don't feel for sure who the other two or three were, but Captain French was one of us. He wasn't in too good a shape, but I was in better shape than everybody. Well, I'm helping these other officers get in the LCVP and the LCVP is not too easy to get into when it's rocking back and forth, so I got them all in there and the coxin on there, and I think the coxin on there was Henry. I'm not sure, but I think that's the case. He and the other sailor on there that was on duty was helping them get in and they got them in okay and I'm the last one. So I've helped them and they're looking after them and I go to step over to get in and the ship, the LCVP takes a rollout and I go into drink. (laughs) Uniform and all. Well, the serious part of it is, that LCVP is rocking back and forth, you know, from the tide against the dock and I'm down there between and not a good situation. The coxin took the boat hook very quickly and pushed against the dock to keep it away from me and I popped back up and fished me out and I got in and I was in better shape then. I'd...

Ron: Especially after the cold water.

Alex: That's right. The cold water got my attention.

Ron: A lot of the guys...

Voice: ...gonna break for one...

Alex: Okay. So the LCVP...Henry takes the LCVP back to the ship and had ladders down to...the ship was anchored out about a mile from the base and got ladders down. Well, there's a...little bit risky to climb up those ladders in that condition, but we made it. Eventually. But Captain French, he was a Lieutenant at the time. He wasn't a Captain, but he was the Captain of the ship, and he was...he was stretched out in the bilge at the bottom of the LCVP and, so the rest of us are getting up on....and I think somebody came down from the ship, 534, to help us and he's laying down there in his...in the bilge and the water's sloshing over him, the bilge water, and I said, "Captain, come on and we'll help you aboard." And he says, "Who is this?" I said, "It's Ensign Fielder." He said,

“Well, what are you doing in my state room?” And said, “Captain, this is not your state room.” I don’t think...”What are you telling me? What are you say is not mine? I said it’s my stateroom and I want to sit down(?)” “Okay.” Out we go. So they ask me, “What do we do?” and I said, “Take the LCVP, put the hooks up it and hoist it up on the davits and leave him there.” So...”Okay.” So that’s what they did. They hoisted up, so the next morning...the story I got. I wasn’t in much shape to go check on things, but the next morning I understand that he came out of the LCVP sometime in the morning and retired to his state room and the rest of us are survived, so....

Ron: That’s a funny story. Captain French now...he illicit a lot of feeling among the crew.

Alex: Absolutely.

Ron: A lot of people, it seems, and I don't know what a lot is, I've only talked to a few, but I have a sense that he was not well liked by a lot of people.

Alex: That’s a good assessment. Very true.

Ron: Why?

Alex: Well, I was very fortunate...he seemed to...military officers always seemed to want to do their own thing, their own way and that works sometimes, sometimes it doesn't and he seemed to be one that wanted to show influence and power, I thought too much. He would pick...nit pick things. He would put somebody on report. He'd saw them with....some of my engineering would come up out of the hole to grab something and go back down and he'd be up on the Conning Tower (?) and he'd look and see them and didn't have their hat on or had their shirt unbuttoned or something and he'd put them on report, very easy. I was very fortunate, as I said, I was embryonic in the Navy and I...I didn't get any help from the previous engineering officer, but the big plus was I had several very competent people working in my crew that were experienced and were easy to deal with and were very adequate, so I felt very comfortable. I was lucky. If I had been green crew at the same time, well, that kind of indoctrination I'd been in trouble to try and run that engine plate, that \$2 million engine plate. Well, anyway, he...when I came aboard Captain French said, “Now, I don't know anything about engineering...”. I didn't know a hell of a lot myself, so....he said, “I'm going to let you take care of the engineering and I'll leave you alone.” So I said, “Fine. That suits me fine.” So I was

one of the few, maybe the only officer on there that could stand up to him and not get in problem myself with that arrangement. If he picked on my crew, it got to the point where I could protect them and that worked pretty well.

Ron: So he treated officers the same way he treated the enlisted?

Alex: Not so much. It was a package deal, I guess, the way I've explained it. Whoever, whenever that didn't fit his mold was subject to possibly discipline.

Ron: It's interesting, because most of the guys who served in the Atlantic theater under Captain Olsen loved him a lot. Thought he was an old salt, had been around a lot of years...

Alex: Yeah, I met him and knew him and I...and I shared, a short time, I shared opinion that he was very competent and very understanding and so forth, yes.

Ron: And French was the Exec in the Pacific....in the....

Alex: That's right. He was the obvious choice to relieve him and that's the way it worked and that's a fact.

Ron: Was he competent?

Alex: Well, see I...a line officer stood watches at that point in the Navy and I didn't stand deck watches. Although I had some training in...uh..Indoctrination, but he....so I wasn't in the same boat, and like he said, "You run your engineering and I'll run the ship and neither the twin shall meet." So I can't really answer that. They didn't feel...they didn't feel comfortable. I'll just say it that way.

Ron: So you...

Voice: Ron. Ron, excuse me. Just one second. Al, I don't even know if you're aware of it or not, but you're tapping with your fingers and I'm picking that all up.

Alex: Oh, okay.

Ron: ...People habits...one.....scratching....

Linda: We're going to have to duck tape your hands.

Alex: Yeah, just tell me, 'cause I haven't done this...anything like this for a while.

Ron: That's all right. But you were, you had the feet thing. They were going up and down and you could hear them scraping on that, but that's okay. Are you all set? Could you hear that?

Voice: Yeah, I could. It was very distinct.

Ron: Oh, okay. I didn't hear....

Voice: The feet I didn't hear, but the finger tapping....thank you.

Ron: So you're in Cuba now and you get up the next morning with a headache and...

Alex: You better believe it.

Ron: And you got to get through the day somehow and move on. What was...where did you go from Cuba? What was the next series of events?

Alex: Okay. The next trip was through, across the Caribbean through the canal, the Panama Canal and that was a very interesting experience.

Ron: Why?

Alex: I really enjoyed that.

Ron: What was enjoyable about it?

Alex: I was...well, it was something unique, something I hadn't seen. Locking the ships through there was, you know, interesting and the lake, the big lake that fed the water...I always remembered the name of that lake, but anyway...uh...you know, just watching the operation of locking through that canal was interesting. We had....we stopped at both ends. Calan was on one end and I think Panama City on the other or something like...I don't...because I...each ship had to supply an officer for shore patrol at each end and I got the duty at Calan and it was Good Friday. It was kind of interesting. The Good Friday operations, all the stuff going on in bars and social houses and whatever were in full tilt 'til midnight and at midnight it closed down, everything lock, stock and barrel. Lock, stock and barrel. So the duty I had that night was pretty good. At midnight I had no problems. Everybody was tucked away. That's right.

Ron: So after the Panama Canal you went right through?

Alex: Went through the canal, went up by Mexico and up to San Diego and stayed there for not very long. I'd say maybe a month or something like that.

Ron: What were you doing there?

Alex: I think we were taking on provisions and I don't recall anything other out of the ordinary. I think we did have some technician come out. We were having problem I believe with something on the ship. I think it may have been the gears, but anyway, nothing unusual. We were just there for routine provisions and whatever and then we took off for Hawaii.

Ron: How long a trip is that?

Alex: The large, slow target, maximum speed of 12 knots, so you figure that out. It's...I don't know. Four days or something like that.

Ron: Uneventful?

Alex: Uneventful. Yeah. It was...that was pretty safe area at that time. It wasn't...once in a while you get some strangers, maybe subs over that way. Up around Illusions (?) they were active, but it was pretty safe.

Ron: You were in Hawaii for how long then?

Alex: Aaah, see...we...maybe three weeks. I'd guess something like that.

Ron: Same thing? Provisions and....

Alex: Yeah. The only thing I remember there of a sea story was a....Jim Sayers and I were....got to be real good friends on the ship at that time and remained so for all these years and we were loading C.B.'s and C.B. equipment to take on further west and we went over and borrowed a troop carrier. I talked to the officer in charge of a ...of the vehicles over there and he let me....he said, "Oh, yeah. Go ahead and take it." We wanted to go in and make one last drive around the island and pick up some groceries that we'd take with us that you couldn't get out in the middle of the ocean. So we took a tour around and, you know, around Hawaii is....what, forty miles or something is the maximum you can tour without backtracking, but....so we're back on the other side of the island. The ship is scheduled to leave. It was pretty well loaded when we took off and we...in about a couple of hours. Missing a ship is no the thing you want to do in war time, believe me. That's not good. So we're back on the other side of the island and we ran out of gas, just Jim and I with a.....(Tape fast forwards)

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

FIELDER INTERVIEW (Continued)

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

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Voice: Audio okay? We are ready and speeding.

Ron: First let's start...what would happened if you missed the ship? And answer, "If you missed the ship..."

Alex: The most likely procedure is that they would transfer you to the base there or Pearl Harbor and probably hold you for court marshall. I would...most likely.

Ron: And what would the results of the court marshall like that be?

Alex: Well, it could be whatever they decided. I mean, missing a ship in wartime is a capital offense. It can have severe punishment. I don't think it's death, but it's a next best thing. They probably didn't do that that often, but it's severe. It can be.

Ron:could be different then someone who went AOL, just left, but someone might have missed a ship, because they were out drinking the night before or whatever.

Alex: Yeah. AOL...if you're AOL on a ship that is stationery, you know, that's...that's bad, if you're AWOL, that's worse. And if the ship is departing into a combat zone, that's worse. That's the worst situation and that's what mine was doing.

Ron: So here you are an hour away with a couple bags of groceries and a good chance of winding up in the Brigg.

Alex: That's...that's the way it looked and hitchhiking wasn't too good, because there wasn't much traffic out there on that side, you know, gasoline being rationed.

Ron: So what did you do?

Alex: You ready to go? Oh, I'm sorry.

Ron: Oh, yeah. We've been taping.

Alex: I'm sorry.

Ron: That's all right.

Linda: Pick the story up that you ran out of gas.

Alex: Okay. We assessed the situation and figured, well....we'll walk. We don't...how far we were, you know, it was a good distance. So we started walking with out sacks of groceries and a couple cars passed and the time lapsed and finally a fellow came by in a truck that worked...that had a ...worked on one of the plantations there and he picked us

up, took us into town. We got a cab and we're down now to the deadline of the ship leaving as we're approaching. We look, we get in on the base and the ship is away from the dock and is heading up the channel as we come up to the...and we waved violently to get attention and sure enough somebody on the ship saw us and passed the word and they stopped the ship and lowered the LCVP down to come pick us up and we got aboard by five minutes I'd say at the....we'd been...they'd been gone.

Ron: You must be one of those people who gets to the plane just as their closing the door.

Alex: I've done that too. I've chased it down the runway. You can't do that anymore, but years ago...that's right.

Ron: How was the trip then from Hawaii to Okinawa?

Alex: Well, the first place we went was Inawitac (?). It was Quaduline or Inawitac. We kind of skirted both, but whichever...that's mid-Pacific and we stopped there for a very short time for some reason. I don't remember why.

Ron: What were the conditions, because those had been islands that we had taken from the Japanese?

Alex: They had small military operations. Primarily there I think it was...I think they had emergency lane landing facilities. They had that sort of thing and it wasn't a big island and it wasn't a big operation there. Most thing I remember about that is the Gooney Birds, which are very interesting to watch.

Ron: So you stopped there to refuel probably.

Alex: I don't...I really don't remember. It was not anything big deal. Then we left there and went to Guam and in Guam we had a jeep aboard...one things about LST, you always try to have a vehicle aboard, because you unloaded out the bow doors or you can get picked up by crane...many times we've done that in my career. We had a jeep aboard and we got that jeep off and decided to take a little trip up...up looking over Guam, you know, and see what...well, we're up there and it's quiet and peaceful and nobody around and next thing we know here comes a SPG full tilt up behind and he said, "What are you clowns doing up here?" "Oh, looking around and seeing the land." And he said, "Don't you know that that place is full of Japanese just waiting for you?" "No, we didn't realize that." "Well, now you know. Go back and get out of here." So we did. Actually, that's

the place that the one Japanese survived for what...ten or fifteen years? In that very same area there after the war was over, because they never accepted the fact that the war was over.

Ron: In the early '70's when he finally gave himself up.

Alex: Yeah. Yeah. He survived for a long, long time. It was a very dense jungle and very, you know, remote and uninhabited and so it was the ideal place for...we didn't...we found out pretty quickly that wasn't the place to be, so we left Guam and went to Saipan and we stopped in Saipan. Again, I don't recall exactly what the reason was. We stopped in Saipan and Tenion(?)...they were having constant B-29 raids and they were coming out of Tenion primarily and, I think maybe Saipan. I'm not sure about that, but Guam had some. They were flying and constant bombing over Japan.

Ron: Tenion was where they launched the A-bomb.

Alex: Right. So why we were there another officer and I went over to Tenion to check things out and, you know, and see what's going on and study the war, whatever. So we went over there and we got to talking...I think he was a...he wasn't a pilot. he was the...anyway, he was the crew chief of one of the B-29's. We're talking to him and the percentage of survivor planes going over there was well above 90%. We were only losing less than 10% of their planes on any one...one plane. So we thought, 'What's the opportunity...what's the chance of our taking a flight with you?' He said, "No problem at all. We're always short handed. We need a radio operator. We need whatever and we got a job for you, as long as we got parachute, you're welcome to...you're welcome to go." Said, "When?" Said, "Tomorrow." Said, "We...this crew is going to leave tomorrow at 0:900" or whatever it was and "you be here and we'll go." But, maybe luckily...I don't know. Never knew what happened to that, but we took off the next morning and didn't have the time. But we were going to go.

Ron: Would have been a great experience.

Alex: Oh, Yeah. Oh, Yeah. That was another 'almost'. Then we left there and went to Okinawa and Buckner Bay. I'm sure you've heard a pretty good synopsis of Buckner Bay.

Ron: Different...again, different perspectives from different people, but you were...how long were you there, a short time before the kamikaze attack? Had you unloaded your stuff by then?

Alex: We were in the process of unloading. It was a lot of it unloaded, but we...about a month I'd say at the most.

Ron: It took a month to unload one of those things?

Alex: No. You have to wait your availability to get in and processing and, of course, they got people working on the docks there, on the pontoons there that are processing the stuff we're unloading and whatever. It was a month at the most. It was not...probably two or three weeks. We were anchored out in the bay.

Ron: So you were just sitting out anchoring the bay doing nothing until they told you what dock to go to?

Alex: That's right. That's right. We came in, got an anchorage and dropped a hook and sat there I'd say a couple of weeks.

Ron: We're there any kamikaze attacks in that area during that time while you were sitting out there?

Alex: To my knowledge there were none in the bay. Now, there were a lot of kamikaze action out on...particularly on DE's and Tin Cans, outside the bay between there and Japan, a lot of action at that time, but I just don't recall any in the bay.

Ron: So you came in, took your turn, went up to the dock...how long were you at the dock before the...

Alex: We went in...we went in the day before and it was daylight. We went in and went up to...it was a pontoon dock, you know, pontoons like this and like that. We went up to the pontoon dock and started our action and I think we cut it off in the evening and that's when the...I don't know that we were there any...any time before that day. I'm not sure about that. I lose a little concept time, but we...the night of the problem was GQ constantly...not constantly, but very frequently. Want me to talk about the movie part? We had this movie that we were showing out on the tank deck and as soon as it's all clear you go ahead with the movie even though it's exposed and...had a good warning system there and anytime there's any alert, we obviously shut it down and blackout and get back to wait for the next opening. Well, anyway, 33mm movies in those days were...that

movie was a six reeler and you got to change the reel and all that processing bit and it takes a lot of time to show a movie if everything is working, probably a good three hours. Well, we probably started at dark, which is probably 8:00 or 9:00 and we had shown five reels of the six reel movie. The final raid was, I think....final was 4:00...the final GQ was about 4:00 in the morning, so we gave up. Said we'll just keep the movie and show that final reel next night. well, it didn't work that way. The kamikaze came in at 9:00 and before I get into that...

Ron: Nine o'clock at night?

Alex: No. 0:900. I ought to be using Naval. I've got away from Naval terminology. Yeah. 0:900 the next morning after we set there most of the night 'til 0:400 trying to watch that movie. Th movie, and this is what's interesting. We were talking about this last evening. There's....Jim Sayers thought the name of the movie was...I don't know what his was and John Wilson said it Constant Nymph, but I didn't get into the conversation, but I did...I was the only one as far as I knew that had seen that movie in New York City. I remembered the name of the movie for a long time, but it's escaped me and it wasn't either one of those in my opinion, so this is...you have three opinion of what the movie was and everybody was coming up to me asking me how it ended and I remembered, you know, had a good memory then. I was telling them, you know, how it ended and satisfied them and they didn't have to see the other reel. the other reel was damaged in the fire. It was lost.

Ron: Who was in the movie?

Alex: I have no recollection. It's just gone out of my mind. I don't know. I would know...I think I would know the name of it, if I heard it. I think.

Ron: Do you know if it was a comedy or?

Alex: No. No. It was a serious type of movie. It was.

Ron: Do you know it was Humphrey Bogart or any of those people?

Alex: No. I do not recall any specifics.

Ron: So the next morning where were you when the 9:00 in the morning....?

Alex: Okay. We had the next G...General Quarters at around 0:900 or a little before, obviously. It was I think maybe a half an hour or an hour before that. We had another General Quarters and, of course, ...particularly movie watchers...hadn't a lot of sleep. We

all went to our G.Q. stations trudgingly and...a lot of false alarms you kind of lose...lose the edge, unfortunately, so this one....we're all in G.Q. I'm down in the engine room, main engine room and we're sitting there and the....we hear all this activity up there, hear the guns firing and I'm the person on the phone down in the engine room. I was....you know, everybody's asking me, "What's going on? What's going on?" _____ , "Can't hear! Can't hear!" So...so...next thing I know and after a little bit of this and a lot of gun fire and so forth this Bang, you know, and I'm...dump me on my can over across the engine room and everybody else's and ship takes a dip to the port. What had happened, on a kamikaze attack...he came over on our port side....no, I beg your pardon...on our starboard side there's a...the island...the islands around us. On the starboard side there's a pretty good little hill over there, a ridge along there. He came over the top of that ridge and he was heading toward our stern, a little bit aft of our stern. When he got to the stern and we're firing him everytime, he got hit, but they didn't ever knocked him out. Twenty millimeters and .40 millimeters are just not that effective really. He turned and headed for the stern directly and so he made another ninety degree turn to the right and now he's over to the starboard's, right side of the ship and then he makes another left hand ninety degree turn along the starboard side and he goes to make a left hand ninety degree turn into midships. What he was trying to do was hit the engine room, because they know if they get the engine room, that's it. The ships done for. Fortunately, for me, he didn't...he couldn't make that turn. He was too far forward and he made the swing and he came in forward of the engine room by about three compartments I'd say and he hit...that right went right through the compartment, went into the tank deck and went down and then they...the 500 pound bomb or whatever he was carrying was exploded.

Ron: We're there any people in that section at the time?

Alex: No. The interesting thing was that we were, of course, in the process of unloading and the bow doors were open, the ramp was down and a lot of people up on the pontoon deck were working. To my knowledge...there was still equipment down in there and to my knowledge there was nobody in the tank deck, as far as we know. And, of course, the force of an explosion will go to the...seek it's easiest path. With that door being open and access to the atmospheric pressure the big force of the explosion went right out the bow

door. That was fortunate in the fact that it did less damage to the ship and part of the explosion, since the bomb was sitting down there below deck, below water was downward and blew a hole in the bottom and then the side, but...but there were two officers standing on the...right at the bow door on the pontoon bridge talking when this happened. I guess they froze when it....it didn't take long for that plane to whip around there and Bang. I mean, I...who knows, three minutes maybe, five at the most. Probably seemed like an hour to some people, but it wasn't long. One of the officers was Harmon Green, our deck officer, who I mentioned before. The other one was a C.B. officer that he was talking to and they were standing side by side. The best I can assume was that the C.B. was standing more in the line of the inside of the ship and Green was standing behind him toward the shore and they blew both...the force of the explosion blew both of them all the way off the pontoon about thirty feet back. Harmon gets up and dusts himself off and banged up some and looks around. Unfortunately, the C.B. officer was killed. They were standing side by side talking.

Ron: The...if he did engine room, you would have been a....

Alex: I wouldn't be here telling you this story, I don't think, because that would have been bad news.

Ron: How far away were you from the blast or from the...?

Alex: Let's see, that's a good question. About three compartments. I'd say forty...thirty-forty feet at the most. Oh, Yeah. But you got steel...you got steel compartments between you and, again, if the force of the explosion...if that bow door had been closed, the force of explosion would be a different...a whole different story anywhere on the ship.

Ron: But it blew up, so people up on top got...for example, her father was blown...he went up and came down some place.

Alex: That's right. Yes, that's a fact. The force explosion went primarily out the bow doors and up and we had an...LCT's we were carrying...we were going to eventually unload that...setting up on the main deck. That was damaged, but it was still in tact. The people in the forward gun tub took a beating and I think Henry may have been assigned to the duty up in that forward area. I believe that may be the case. In fact, the officer up there in that forward gun terrate was Wayne Jens and he was wounded pretty...quite

seriously. He was carried away unconscious and then taken back to Hawaii, I think. We finally found out that he survived, but he never...we never had any contact with him until about three conventions ago. He came to the convention and he approached me and he says, "You know, I have agonized all these years over knowing what happened." He says, "I do not know anything that happened after I hit the deck." He says, "It's all...that's the end of my memory." And he said, "I did not have much interest in finding out." But he says, "As time goes by the curiosity is getting the best of me, so here I am. Tell me what happened from then on." So we did and he went home from there and that's the last we've seen of him. He was very appreciative of it though and he was very receptive and he was glad to finish the story.

Ron: Where would someone like her father have been? He was part of the deck crew and, I mean, at that particular time what would he have necessarily been doing on the ship?

Alex: I'm guessing that he....see, there are a lot of people assigned to gun crews and we had gun mounts on the...on the...on the front of the ship. I suspect....of course, I don't know. They were assigned by the gunnery officer and then the...a lot of positions are assigned by the deck officer and I didn't have access to know who was where occasionally. Some of my engineering personnel were assigned to gun crews on G.Q.

Ron: Oh, really!

Alex: Oh, yes. And some were back ups and some were ammunition loaders. Everybody had a job, a position, a place to be. I suspect that he was assigned up forward since that's where the....

Ron: In a gun crew?

Alex: Very likely or an ammunition loader or...or...or standby, whatever. I'm just guessing.

Ron: Medeiros said that they got struck by one of our own ships over there.

Alex: That's correct. Absolutely correct. I'll cover that then. The 1022...years ago I probably wouldn't have given these numbers, because somebody may come looking for me, but time...time kind of equates what...the 1022 was in a position maybe 500 yards to our port, lined up parallel to us at the pontoon. Typically, with kamikaze...and this kamikaze...it had divert him...and this kamikaze was not a true kamikaze. It was a Zeke

fighter. They were getting desperate. They didn't have many kamikaze's and they were converting everything that would fly into a suicide plane at this point in the war, so this was a Zeke fighter, actually. There's a picture in my stuff there of a Zeke. Well, anyway,...and one of their techniques when out in the destroyer range, they'd fly down between carriers. They'd fly right down between them and catch the gunners on both ships shooting at him and they're shooting at each other. Oh, that was a typical procedure, you know, you get several ships out there in the open ocean and they'd just see a path right down between 'em and away they'd go and the guns would do more harm than they would do. Well, this 1022 started firing at this kamikaze when he was off our stern, because they were a G.Q. also. They kept firing and, of course, when he turned around maybe he'd potentially knew that too. He turned around and he's heading down the length of the ship and they kept firing and they're raking across the top of our deck. An LCT I think may have provided some....the guy in the LCT did get wounded. I know that. He was one of the fellows....the LCT only has a small crew, maybe a half a dozen, but he was wounded. I remember that. They....they did cause some casualties. I can't differentiate which was which.

Ron: Medeiros said that in their gun tub the .20 millimeter hit the outside of the tub and on the inside was where they kept the shells and it hit, it caused some of the shells that they had internally to explode and that's how they got wounded.

Alex: That's...that's very likely, very likely.

Ron: What did you do right after the....I mean, what was your...the thing exploded, it's gone, you're knocked on your rear end and you get up and you say, "What the hell is this?", huh?

Alex: Well, first thing I checked is any communication. The phone lines were knocked out, so that wasn't any help. Let me....Let me finish the 1022 bit. That's got a little...that's got a little...yeah. And they raked our deck, which is understandable, you know, to this point. But one of the crew came over the next day after we got everything settled and back and some normality the next day. He came over and said, "Mr. Fielder," said, "We have a problem." "Oh?," said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, the 1022 over there has painted a Japanese flag up there on their con that they shot down." "Oh, really?" "Yes." I could hardly believe it. They shot us down instead of the plane and he

said...I said, "You sure?" He said, "I just came from there." "Okay, get..."...one of the enlisted men, I don't remember which one it was. I want to...Szymanski...anyway, we got to couple of 'em...husky guys, obviously, and another officer and I and we went over there and sure enough there it was. They just painted it pretty quick up on the Conning Tower. So we went up and got a hold of the officer of the deck and very, very emphatically told him, "We're going to stand here and we want that obliterated now." He said, "You..."...we had our .45's...you carry a .45's...and he said, "I don't have authority to do that." I said, "Yes you do." I said, "The authority is this .45 and either you get the painter up here and paint that thing lose while we stand here or else I'll shoot it out." "Oh....oh...oh!" And they did. They got it wiped out pretty quick, so...

Ron: They could have put it back on later.

Alex: Well, that's possible, but we got our...we proved our point.

END OF TAPE

FIELDER INTERVIEW

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

=====

Ron: How old are you now?

Alex: Seventy-five.

Ron: Are you 75?

Alex: Yep. Geez, you look great. You really...I mean, you keep your weight down...

Alex: You people really know how to...how to make a fellow feel good.

Ron: I'm serious. You're still trim. You obviously....I don't know whether you work out or not, but you keep yourself in good shape. ...Have a good...uh..what do they call those systems?

Linda: Immune system.

Ron: Not Immune system, but metabolism.

Alex: Yeah, I don't work out.

Ron: You walk upstraight, because, you know, people they get a little old, they start to bend a little more, you know, hobbling around.

Alex: I try...you know, I think about that sometimes, but you automatically slump as you get older and I notice that I've...in the last 2 or 3 years I've noticed a little bit of that, but I don't have the English way of posture, for sure.

Ron: You know, as people get older then they walk...you see them, they walk like this. You know, at your age you see a lot of people walking around like that.

Alex: Like the comedian...what's the little guy...anyway, that....

Ron: Hey, listen...you're about what...about 5'8"?

Alex: I was 5' 10 1/2" and I'm probably about 5' 9" now. I did measure once and I had, you know, I had shrunk some. It was typical you do. You lose an inch or two.

Ron: You definitely look good. If I make it to 75 and if I do, I wouldn't mind being in the condition your in, believe me. Okay, onward and upward. You rolling now?

Linda: We're rolling.

Ron: Back on to your rear end here.

Alex: Okay, I'm on my rear end, so get up and dust myself off and check for any wounds, which was minor really, scrapes and bumps and bruises. So I head up the

ladder...undo....I...the rest...the rest of the G.Q. engineering crew were still there and they were kind of looking at me, you know, 'What are we going to do?' I said, "I'm going to stick my head out and if it's still there," I said, "I'll give you...we'll give you some direction and if my heads gone, you're on your own." We have no way of knowing what's up there. All we know is the ship tilted and sank to the bottom and it got kind of quiet. But opened the hatch and looked out and then everybody is running around and there is some fire and everybody.....so I said, "Okay, couple of you keep the station and the rest of you can join...I'm sure we've got some damage control to look after." Each person is assigned, not everybody, particularly engineering personnel, and the deck crew are assigned to...crews that repair damage. Then we started into damage control. Like I said, the damage control crews are getting organized and assessing the situation. I went over tot he auxiliary engine room and looked at that damage and it was about the same shape as the main engine room. The fire was raising pretty good in the back end of the officers quarters and the galley. There was an ammunition locker back on the fan tail that looked like it was...the fire was underneath there and I think 180 degrees...some number...is getting to the point of severe danger. We took the temperature and it was up in the range, so we started spraying water on it. Everybody is trying to get organized and get things working and working in tandem with each other. And some of the ships...small ships and small boats came along side to help, which is, you know, the American way. They came in and they came aboard. They had their own, some of them had their own hoses and water power and they're helping, because our water, you know, the pumps were down and whatever and they were a big help. But since I'm telling it all, the other side of the coin...when you see an automobile accident on the street there's always a scavenger there and a lot of people will go out their way and risk their life to help somebody and the guy next to him is picking the pocket. That's a fact. You all know that. While some of these people that came aboard, our fellow American sailors were going through ripping radio equipment out of...off the bulk head and whatever. I caught one guy and my hat was hanging up on...of course, my port hole in my room was right along the side and one guy....and the water...the ridges around the deck in that area, the officers quarters, was about that high and it was full of steaming water. So, you know, you get burned pretty good if you go in and walking in there. It's like a well.

Evidently, this one guy had walked around the side with his feet on the wall around and he's in my room. He had my hat, for one thing, and I don't know what else he had, so I said....45 comes out, and back to the .45 again....the .45 comes out. "Unless you're gone by the time I get it out." "(Unintelligible)" I says, "Good. Too bad." SO he disappeared. I don't know where he went and when he went, but he was gone, so he's fixing...I don't know what he was after, but...that's unfortunate.

Ron: Did he have your hat when he left?

Alex: Yeah. No. No. No. He tossed that back. No-no.

Ron: You wound up living on the...on Okinawa then for a little while there, right?

Alex: I went up....I went up....we all got assigned to facilities up there bunking with the people that are already there and they made room for us. They were very accommodating and very helpful.

Ron: Officers went to a different place then the enlisted?

Alex: Generally, that's true. I....yeah...that's true. Yeah, that was the case.

Ron: So you had a little better accommodations...from what I gather from some of these guys, they had nothing, barely anything. I mean, no one.....one of the complaints that they had, interestingly enough....a couple of these guys, was that the officers after...didn't take any responsibility for the men. They just sort of worried about themselves and it was kind of everybody on your own.

Alex: There's some element of truth in that and there's a reason for it. There was...there was disorganization at that time. There was no focal...you know, we're....we didn't have somebody that's saying, you know, this is what were going to do and this is the direction today and next week and whatever. We didn't have that. My job was, in my opinion, was to get the engine room in as good a shape as we could, get the facilities back in operation that we needed and go from there. What the other arrangements were was, you know, I had enough to do with that without somebody else. That's probably true that there was some disorganization there.

Ron: They said they felt like they were up there, they had no authority. They...uh...it was just a bunch of guys doing what they wanted to do it, when they wanted to do it, the way they want to do it. Survival on a very basic level.

Alex: That's some truth to that. My focal point was to get that ship...until we heard something different...to get that ship back and do whatever we need to do. We....the obvious long term plan was if...if we were going to invade Japan, and at that time that was still eminent, we need to get that out, get it fixed up and taken to dry dock somewhere and repaired or whatever's it's going to do.

Ron: What happened to the people who you were responsible for on the ship after the....in the engine room people? Engineering.

Alex: Most of them....most of them were...had...had been located, and with a facility and I...if there's a major complaint...I do remember a couple of fellows that were kind of upset at whatever and we, you know, tried to take care of that, but most of them would come to the ship during the day and we'd organize and do what needed to be done to get the thing facilitated and back into operation or whatever the operation was and go from there. We just handled that aspect of it and the rest of it, you know, was somebody else bigger than me.

Ron: So the officers on the ship didn't really take a lot of responsibility for the crew after that when they had to live out on the island.

Alex: It's hard to say what the others did, because it wasn't...you know, I wasn't exposed to it first hand, so I don't really know. That's very possible. I just know that I was concerned and responsible for my engineering crew.

Ron: Yeah, that's what I meant.

Alex: That was my responsibility and I tried to my best, I'm sure, to do that. I don't know how successful it was, but it was the old college try. Yeah, our facility was a tent, a good size tent, maybe accommodated eight or ten people, bunks and it had put a floor in there, which I'm sure was better than some of the other facilities. The only thing I remember was scorpions. They did...were good enough, the people that were already there to warn me that scorpions really like to get in a shoe and all you got to do is stick your foot in that shoe and a scorpion in there and you're in big trouble, so you automatically without even thinking, you get up in the middle of the night and have to go to the latrine and the latrine is down the road a ways and you got to put shoes on and if you don't knock your shoe off, you're in trouble.

Ron: What....you.....the ship got refloated and you were in the...you were in the...

Linda: Ron, hold on one second. The ice machine is...

Ron: Taking the chance of a big typhoon. That's the word I'm looking for.

Alex: Ah, the typhoon.

Ron: Hold on a second.

Linda: Before you go on I have some questions....go!

Voice: Okay, we are at speed...

Linda: Look at me.

Alex: The one thing...

Voice: Stand by. I'm sorry. Okay.

Alex: The one thing that I remember distinctly about being in the camp there in....is we worked on the ship in the day and went to camp at night. In the tropics there is no dusk. There's day and then night. Like a curtain. you learn that. I, unfortunately, one time forgot it. You have to get off the ship and get up to where you're going before dusk, so called dusk or you're in trouble. There was a password throughout...for each day. It changed each day. Well, the camp...the camp was totally infiltrated by Japanese coming in and out and the alarms were useless, the goats triggered them all the time and then we wouldn't pay any attention to them, you know, if the Japanese come and go, they figured...rightly so, there was a goat that tripped it. But anyway, they would come in and they would forage the big food....whatever's there they'd forage, stick it down in their blouse and then go their way. They either go back to their caves they were in...and caves were very dangerous for anybody that fooled around with them and they...they were very brazen. In fact, they'd get in...they'd get in chow line after dark and go through the chow line and they had foraged some American uniforms and they'd go through the chow line.

Linda: That's unbelievable.

Alex: And another diversion...I'm...I keep getting off on. We were watching an outdoor movie one night and, I don't remember the name of that movie either, but we were sitting about six rows behind a couple of...one was a Marine Sargent and one was an Infantry Sargent or something, I believe. Anyway, a couple of sergeant's. We hear this turmoil down there and punched each other and looked and watched what's going on....well, what had happened, there were two Japanese soldiers sitting down there in American uniforms setting down there about three rows in front of these two sergeants and the movie was

somewhat of a comedy and what they were doing was laughing at the wrong time. One sergeant...and they...and then they're watching full tilt and sure enough, so this commotion we heard, they eliminated that threat, as I understand it.

Linda: But the war was still going on at this time. I mean, what did you do with them if you found Japanese in the camp? Would you make them a POW or capture them or scoot them away?

Alex: Well, that's a tough question with not a simple answer and I'll answer it this way. That their *motis apperendi* (?) was pretty loud and clear. They all had a hangnade. They all did. If you approached them, they would be very solicitous and very disarming and very ready to cooperate until you got close enough and they pulled the pin on...that was *motis apperendi* almost invariably, so you didn't have a lot of choice of negotiation with them. And the Geneva Convention...read that to them...didn't work to well, so that was the situation.

Linda: It's best to just turn the other cheek and...

Alex: Well, whatever you had to do, you know, it's war time. You have to protect yourself, but that was the way it operated and you had to take action accordingly.

Linda: Was the general camp in danger? I mean, there were Japanese, apparently, on the island over that.

Alex: The fighting...the fighting was a little remote. It wasn't directly there. The ones that were hanging around were stragglers, I guess, primarily. They lived in caves and the war...the fighting was still going on and somewhat bitter. They were...they were probably five miles away or more, so it wasn't...the fighting itself wasn't there. The biggest danger...that island had one of the most poisonous snakes in the world called a Habu. It was a four-minute death if you got nailed by a full tilt by a Habu. What they did when they invaded the island, they went and brought...what's the indian animal that's fast, that takes....I'll think of the name in a minute. They kill snakes. They're from India.

Voice: Mongoose.

Alex: Huh?

Voice: Mongoose.

Alex: Mongoose, right. You got it. So what they...what the Americans did when they invaded they brought a lot of mongoose in and take care of the snakes and they were very

effective. In fact, they were so effective that they had a problem with mongoose, because they were over running and eating all....eating all the crops of the people there. Solved the snake problem, but...

Linda: You added another problem.

Alex: That's right. But anyway, the last thing in this story...I keep remembering other things. Each day there was a...I mentioned...each day there was a code word and they came down...somebody went around and passed the word. And I'm down at the ship and I'm working late and everybody else had gone, because it's getting...and, like I said, they knew to leave. I'm down below fooling around and I come up and it's essentially dark. I had not heard the code word for that day, the password. And I'm not going to stay on that ship, because that's not the place to be either. So I can make it, so....the tents were on a hill, pretty good slope hill and the main road went up there from the pontoons up and I had to go up that hill and cross over to my tent. I take off and I'm moving fast and I hear the car beam click. The big food dump was right over there and that's what I said, that's where they...that's where they were guarding. We had Marine guards there. And....uh-oh! I don't know whether the guy said something or not, but...but I said... didn't know the password. And I said, "Yesterday's password was 'Howdy'!" Yesterday's password was 'Howdy'!". I kept saying that waiting to feel something. That's probably closest I came to getting knocked off in the war. I tell you that. And stupid, really...you think about it. The next thing I know there's a car beam right in the back of my neck there and he said, "Identify yourself." I told him...told him why, you know, I was at the ship down there and I was working on it. He said, "You're lucky." He says, "I'm not trigger happy, but..." he said, "It'd been somebody else you'd been another statistic." I said, "Yeah, I know." I said, "Next time I'm leaving the ship to go to the tent about three o'clock in the afternoon." Be a good idea.

Linda: Is that one time when that gun was in your neck that you're going, "A-A-Alex F-F-Fielder"?

Alex: No. I was...I was coming out pretty fast, I think, maybe too fast, but that....things like that are things I remember for some reason. But that pretty much...

Linda: Go back to the kamikaze time. You know, you said you were down below. Was water coming in fast? I mean, because there was a hole in the bottom of the boat, right? I mean, could you feel.....

Alex: But the hole was out in the tank deck. See, the ship is all compartmented and it's water tight integrity in each compartment as long as the openings are closed and sealed. And the engine room is certainly one that has water tight integrity. And the explosion was out in the tank deck, the big tank deck and that's where the water came in like that and then the compartments that were damage with the plane going in were filling with water, but the engine rooms were not...bilges were slushing and such, but no there was no...there was no...there was no water...that damage.

Linda: Well, the ship sunk.

Alex: Twelve feet.

Linda: Was it on fire and sinking at the same time? Was it sinking and then got on fire?

Alex: It sank immediately. Immediately being a very short period of time. I mean, it...as soon as the hole opened up and soon as the water went in, I'd say five minutes at the very most. It settled to the bottom, because that was...you know, a lot of...bow doors were open and everything and a lot of non-water tight integrity, and it settled to the bottom very quickly. I don't know the time frame, but it wasn't long. Then that's when the smoke and fire started and then we fought that for a while and seemed to have it under control. The ships that came along side and most of them left. Then it flared up again a little bit later and it really raged then. We thought there was no hope for it, but we did manage to get it under control, so it far lasted.....see.....I'd say from the time that the ship hit 'til the time the fire was under control was eight hours.

Linda: So the ship sunk, but it's pretty tall. So if you were in a bay or in twelve feet of water it went down to the bottom of the shore.

Alex: The bottom is sitting....bottom is sitting on the bay shore...on the bottom. You can see the picture of the ship. The numbers were...the top half of the...I forgot how long...what the....I think it...probably feet from keel to deck, so about half way, about half way down.

Linda: This is sort of a gruesome question, but what did you do with the pilot, the kamikaze pilot?

Alex: Oh, I can answer that. One of the...one of my engineering crew members and I don't remember which one, after things...I think this is between...either between the fires or after the.....

Voice: ...let's have him stop...

Linda: Where's it coming from? Are those guys in there going to the bathroom?

Voice: No, I think that might have been where.....

Linda: Okay.

Alex: After...after...it was either...either between the two fires or after the last fire, but...but...people were kind of running around, you know, figuring what to do, how to do it, so one of my engineering crew members came up and, "Mr. Fielder. Mr. Fielder." Said, "Yes?" "You want a souvenir? You want a souvenir?" I said, "Yeah. What are you....oh," I said, "Good souvenir from the crash." I said, "Oh, okay." So he handed me....he said, "That's his ring.", which is in there. I says, "Oh?" He hands it to me. The only thing he didn't tell me was it was still on the finger. You said a gruesome question! He said, "Don't throw it away. You don't want it, give it back." I said, "I'll take it." Discarded the finger and I still...still in there.

Linda: I was hoping you weren't telling me you still had the finger in there too.

Alex: I tell you, I have done several presentations to fifth and sixth graders and my daughter is a teacher in the vein in a good school. I've done several presentations down through the years to these people and when I was in the fifth-sixth graded I was probably just out of ABC's and these kids today are a little bit further along then that. Well, my thrust of my presentations has been Navy nomenclature. That's always interesting with the poop decks and the fantails and the mess hall...mess and so forth. Anyway, it happened to be my daughter's class that time and she says the most intelligent class she ever had. I said....and I had taken the ring, but I wasn't going to show it and she evidently told them and they said, "Where's the ring? Where's the ring?" I thought these people sitting around like this, you know, and just be oblivious to it and no they're into a hundred percent. I mean, a thousand percent. They said, "Where's the ring? Where's the ring?" And I said, "Okay." I showed them the ring, passed it around and they said, "Where's the finger?" I said, "The finger?" She said, "Yeah, it was on the finger when you got it." I said, "Yeah, it's true." "What'd you do with it?" I said, "I threw it away."

“You threw it away? You didn’t keep the finger?” Fifth grader. I said, “No, I didn’t have any use for it.” He said, “Well, that’s a shame. You should have had the finger.”
(Laughs)

Linda: So what did they do with the rest of the pilot? I mean, would it be something where you just picked him up and threw him overboard?

Alex: That’s a good question. I do believe...and I’m not sure about this...I do believe that...I don’t know what happened to the plane and I don’t know... I’m not sure what happened to the pilot. I think they extracted what was left and not a lot was left and disposed of it. That’s the best I can tell you. I’m not sure about that.

Linda: What do you know about the kamikaze pilot?

Alex: Nothing.

Linda: Nothing?

Alex: No.

Linda: One of the guys said he was carrying a parachute and that meant that he was probably more seasoned.

Alex: Well, like I say, it was a fighter plane, so it probably was given an option of what he would do with...kamikaze is a one shot deal. You don’t have any return, you know, it’s like a glider plane. They send you on a kamikaze and launch you, you’re there. With a fighter you could go back, I guess. I assume that. Oh, one thing I do remember. He did have a syringe on his wrist and....assumed that it was drug, that all he had to do was flick his wrist and inject him in his arm, so I guess if they got...typically, if they got gun shy, that he had the option of...of injecting himself with heroin or whatever it was...

Linda: Or captured maybe they would not want to talk and then do that or...?

Alex: Yeah. I don’t think many of them survived, but...yeah, it was a possibility.

Linda: That’s amazing.

Alex: Yeah. yeah, it was....

Linda: Huh! Did you ever know that the 534 was given an order to fire against the...against that pilot?

Alex: My understanding...of course, I’m down below and not privy to that specific information, but my understanding was, yes, the order was given by the...either the O.D. of the Captain. I’m almost positive that’s true.

Linda: Were you ever wounded in...?

Alex: Not really. Banged up and near miss on walking up the hill. My psyche was wounded then.

Linda: If you had to summarize the legacy of the USS LST 534,...

Voice: I'm going to have to make a tape change on that kind of question.

END TAPE

FIELDER INTERVIEW (Continued)

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

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Alex: When things....

Voice: I'm sorry. One more time. Just make sure you keep eye contact with....

Alex: Okay, I'm sorry.

Linda: With me.

Alex: My pleasure. When things settled down a little bit after the kamikaze hit....I don't remember for sure whether it was between the two fires or after the last one, but anyway, one of my engineering crew members came up to me and said, "Mr. Fielder! Mr. Fielder, you want a souvenir from the....?" I said, "Yeah, Sure. Why not?" I said, "What is it?" You know? He said, "I'll get it for you. I'll get it for you." "Okay. Okay." So he reaches over and he hands me this and he says, "This is the ring that was on the pilot." I says, "Oh, really?" "Yeah." He's holding it sort of tight and he says, "Here!" So he hands it to me, but what I didn't know until then was, the finger was still in the ring. So he laughed and he says, "If you don't want it, give it back. I'll take it." I say, "No-no. That's okay. I'll keep it.", which I did and disposed of the finger.

Linda: So this is the ring.

Alex: That's the ring.

Linda: That's amazing, isn't it?

Alex: It's even got 14k inside. I don't whether Japan uses...I guess, they obviously all use...they all use that terminology, 14k and twenty...

Linda: Well, you have some other memorabilia here, which we'll talk about. Go into the typhoon. The last question I want to ask you is about the legacy that...talk a little bit about the typhoon.

Alex: Okay. We're anchored out along side a...waiting disposition of the ship, which is, you know, to say the least, inoperatable and unseaworthy and whatever. We were waiting for directions and disposition and then the typhoon...I don't think they had names then. A typhoon came along and it was a dandy. The anamometers there as I understood it, pegged it 200 knots and these were...were pegged, so there was more than 200 knots and here...

Linda: How many miles per...

Alex: Huh?

Linda: How many miles per hour is 200 knots?

Alex: Two twenty, about 1.10 factor between miles and knots. So we were tied up along side a liberty ship, I believe. I forgot which...but anyway, I'm sacked in there having a dose and the crew's, the ships bouncing all around and I'm tired and I'm taking a nice nap and the crew's starting....my engineering crew is starting to worry about me in there, you know, "Is he alive?" They're peeking in the port hole and wanting to know is he...."Somebody go check on him." So finally I roused and they laughed about it and we still laugh about it. So we got up and the next thing got worse and worse. The next thing we know the lines all break and away we go. Visibility is practically zero. You can't see anything. You don't know where you are. You don't know whether you're going out to sea, in to sea, what happens and you don't...visibility just may be fifty feet, so away we go floating around. We come along side, just as nice along side...and that was a liberty ship and right side by side. Our port side and their starboard side, and they were just sitting there just as nice and secure. Awful temptation. In fact, a couple the guys, I think, jumped over and jumped back. Awful temptation to get off on that dude, because we were in bad shape and there's a ship looks pretty safe, but not a soul around. We couldn't figure...it wasn't a hide nor hair of any person. Turns out later that they were all down below with dysentary and couldn't move and we didn't know that at the time, so maybe we were better off not getting on there, but the ship did survive. So we blew on. The next thing we know they...in toward...we're blowing in toward the land, Naha. And there was a reef there that had been...there was a great big dredge pipe, 24 inch, 36 inch dredge pipe laying across that reef and they'd been dredging that channel to try to get more depth for ships coming and going, so we blew up on that reef against that dredge pipe. Very fortunate! Very fortunate! We, you know, stopped and the wind that was the front half of the typhoon and the wind....and, of course, typhoon or hurricane's the same except they revolve different and different part of the world. So, as I recall, I don't know exactly how it started, but we...it was pretty evident to me that that ship, when the wind shifts around 180 degrees and blows...the other direction blows off, with the damage we've got now on the reef with the bottom ripped out more, there's only one place that ship can go

and that's down. So what do we do? So," You talk to the Captain, he listens to you." "Okay." So I says, "Captain, the ship is unseaworthy to say the least and we need to abandon...". I didn't use the word abandon, because I knew that was not going to work well. I said, "We need to get over the side." Actually, that dredge pipe was a haven. Behind that pipe we were really protected. He said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "You talking about abandon..?" "Oh, no-no, just get over there on a safe haven, you know." "Oh, can't do that. Can't do that." So, "Okay". He said, "What's the problem?" I said, "Well, there's probably 500,000 gallons of water holding this...that's going to sink this ship here and unless there's some way to get rid of that we're not going to survive." He said, "Well, pump it out." I said, "We have three handy-billy pumps that pump 60 gallons an hour and assuming nothing comes back in I think in about six weeks we'd have this thing...the water evacuated." "Keep pumping. Keep pumping." "Okay." So I got...Harmon Green was a deck officer, and he did listen to him. Harmon was a lawyer and he...a older fellow. So I said, "Let's have a meeting of the officers in the ward room. This is touchy subject, as you well know." He said,...I said, "Fellows we have a situation here. When that wind switches 180 degrees it's going to blow this dude off of this reef and no and, ifs or buts about that and it's going right to the bottom. No ands, ifs, butts about that! Now, the only question in anybody's mind is 'Are we going to be here or are we going to be over there on that reef?' There's no other alternative." Well, not mentioning too many names, the other officers were, you know, wishy-washy or, you know, go along with the flow or whatever. So it was obviously up to Harmon and I to make a decision, so we toured the ship as said we should. We toured the ship, substantiated what our opinion was, came back and called in the Chief, a couple of Chiefs and said...I think Carlton Keating was one...he was a first class...my senior guy, and we said, "Get your..." ...the crew was in a mild panic state, understandably. Mother Nature, you don't fool with. Everybody, including me, was apprehensive to say the least. Well, anyway, I said,...we said, "Go down and have your crew pack one little bag and get up before the wind shifts on the deck so you can get off, because once the wind gets up to speed you can't do anything. I mean, you have no control. You can't open a hatch. You can't open nothing. Nobody in their right mind can fathom what a wind of that volume and force can do. Nobody. There's nothing you can do, you know, no place to run. You

can't hide. You got an enemy shooting at you can shoot back, but Mother Nature you can't shoot back. Anyway, they did and they went up and we said, "Okay, now is decision time. We're going the side." Put it that way. I think the crew was going to go pretty damn quick with us, so they looked, "Yeah, okay. Okay." Captain French is pacing back and forth outside the ward room where we were sitting and discussing this and he...he...you know, he had a good concept of what's going on, so he...in very short order the crew started going over the side first. So he called a chief, stopped somebody...I'm not sure about this, exactly how he did it, but he gave the word, "Abandon ship!". Thank God for that. Then it was all right. We all went over, got hunkered behind that dredge pipe. When the wind shifted and down it went. Thank God for that. If it still been sitting there, we'd had a problem. Wouldn't be here discussing it, I don't think. So...so boats out there with 25-30 people trying to head to shore, water 40 feet high would come over and that was the last of the boats. you didn't see anymore. Gone. So after we went over...I don't think that there was anybody lost in that deal, to my knowledge.

Linda: It's incredible.

Alex: Incredible. That's right. Then we got some help from the shore and after it died down and all went ashore and went through the line for the Red Cross passing out dollar charge, little packets and that sort of thing and the rest you've heard the story on.

Linda: The ship then was beached when the tide went back out and the storm was over. The 534 was then...was it?

Alex: You mean, ultimately?

Linda: No. Right after that typhoon.

Alex: Oh, when the typhoon...see were sitting up on...we're sitting up on the edge of this reef like this and a good size reef then built up sitting like this and then the wind blew us up and then when the wind shifted it blew us off. The waters right out here and it went...the ship went kazoo, right straight out to the water, straight to the bottom. The water at that point was probably 50-60 feet deep. I'm not sure how...how deep it was, but it was, you know, certainly over 20-30 feet. In my estimation that's one of the few ships in the Navy that's ever been sunk twice in the same war. I don't know that's a fact, but I suspect that not many. To this day, the best I've been able to find out, that ship is not

listed as sunk at this point in time. Now, there's been some debate about that, but the ship has been discovered, as you found out, has been discovered by people that have been diving out there. I've heard three different people that have encountered that ship with diving in Okinawa.

Linda: We're going to go try and find it.

Alex: You can follow...you can fill in the next phase.

Linda: We're taking you with us Allie. You can say, "It's right out there. I saw it."

Alex: Yeah, things change, but what the heck? I'm available.

Linda: So tell me the legacy of the 534.

Alex: I think I may have commented before, the legacy is the people on the 534, that the ship is a piece of iron and, you know, I guess there are different personalities, but it still reverts back to the people. That had a good crew...good crew, very competent crew, good comradery, everybody knew their job and did their job, I thought and we did our best. I think the legacy is comradery, teamwork and some good luck. That's about the best way I can summarize it.

Linda: Sounds like you had a lot of good luck.

Alex: That's correct. I wouldn't...this is typical for any people who've been through war time...I told my fifth grade class this. I said, "You know, I tell you all this stuff, but war is hell and that's the fact and that's a fact." And I said, "The upshot is that you wouldn't miss what you went through for the world, but you wouldn't do it again for two worlds." That's about the best explanation that I can come up with. The friendships...(Pause)...friendships are just priceless. Absolutely priceless. That's about it.

Linda: One last thing. You were recalled into the Korean War.

Alex: Yeah. Another story.

Linda: Well, this is not about the Korean War, but tell me the difference in just the overall attitudes or mood or feeling of World War and that time and then, what, fifteen years later, the Korean War.

Alex: It wasn't that long. It was...I went back in September of '50 and we're talking...you talking '45 to '50. That's...you talking....

Linda: Not that long.

Alex: No, it's not that long. It seemed longer. Huh?

Linda: Was there a difference?

Alex: Oh, yes! Good question. Really hadn't thought about that much, but that was...war time was war time and World War II was war time and no ands, ifs or buts about that. The Korean Police Action as it was designated was a lot more on the nomenclature of peace time action, not really, but to more of a degree. the different people, different concepts, different risks. It's different. It's a different concept. It still had duties and still had responsibilities and risk and so forth.

Linda: It just seems like there was never such a fascination over any other war as there was this fascination...lasting fascination with World War II.

Alex: That's right. And the reason was everybody, most everybody in this country got the clear indication that they were at risk. Everybody was at risk and that's a fact. There wasn't any question about it. Survival was...a lot of people maybe never...never really accepted that, but that's a fact. Anything since then was not a matter of survival. It may have been a matter of survival to participants, but in World War II it was a matter of survival for everybody and no doubt about that. I may be going against the grain, but Truman launching the atomic bomb was absolutely a lifesaver in both Japan and America both. It would have been millions of people lost, no doubt.

Linda: Yeah. It would have gone on and on and on.

Alex: That's right. And they were going down to the last person, because I was back in Japan, you know, operating and during the Korean War and I was absolutely, totally amazed at the....the Japanese people had accepted that there was no safest place in the world to be in Japan in 1951. You could walk the streets middle of the night, dead drunk...some of the sailors and fall down, just been paid, full of cash and they would take you into their house and look after you until you sobered up. You try that in a large city in the United States and it don't work that way, but it was different era.

Linda: You've been great.

Alex: One of my good experiences that I liked, when I was at OCS or indoctrination at Princeton...I think I may have mentioned there...that Albert Einstein was up there running that advanced science...was...was...at the time we didn't know, he was working on the A-bomb. And every morning we'd go out to muster before daylight and he'd be out doing

his walk through the environs there for his exercise and his white flowing hair. And Betty was living up there in the apartment over there at Princeton about three houses from where he lived and she...and I told one of the guys one time, we broke muster and I said, "There he is. I'm going over there and talk to him." "Oh, no! You know who that is?" "Certainly, I know who that is." He said, "You're an idiot." I said, "Yeah, I agree with that, but I'm going to talk to him, if he'll talk." So I said, "Come on." He says, "Oh, I don't know." So he went...so I went over there and I said, "Good morning, Mr. Einstein." He stops and he looks, in pretty heavy brogue. He cops and he says, "Oh, hi fellas". Essentially, he says, "Glad to see you. Appreciate your..." and he just as cordial and friendly. I think he'd stayed there for a half and hour, if he had wanted to. We had to get back, but he was friendly and cordial and receptive and it was an absolute priceless, to me, experience. I bit the bullet and he responded as humane as any person could....

Linda: Did any of his intelligence seep out and come into you?

Alex: I didn't ask him 'E='. No, I didn't absorb any. Unfortunately. I didn't have the guts to ask him if he had any secrets.

Linda: Or anything he could share?

Alex: Right. To shares. I need all the help I could get, but I didn't get any.

Linda: That's great. Anything else you want to tell us?

Alex: I think I've covered probably more than I should, in some cases and less maybe in others, but no.

Linda: It's been great.

Alex: I enjoyed it. I really did. We tell these sea stories to each other and they get embellished and as I said in my disclaimer, everybody remembers things different and that's fact of life, but that's my recollection. Good, bad or indifferent.

Ron: Great ring.

Alex: Is it? I've never had...I never had it assessed. I've never done anything with it.

Ron: Are we still shooting?

Linda: Well, I'm just going to say 'Thank you.'

Alex: Oh, well. My pleasure. One say I would say and I said before and I say again, you're doing this, to me is priceless. It's been needed all these years and none of us bellied up the bar to do it. None of us have the capabilities you have and I'm glad we

didn't try it, because it would have probably been...certainly wouldn't have been this. It would have been...maybe not worthless, but maybe useless.

Ron: When she sets her mind to do something it's an amazing thing.

Alex: I don't doubt that. I don't doubt that one iota.

Linda: Well, it's with your help, all the help of the crew and we're going to try find more and we're going to get together for a 534 reunion.

Alex: Good.

Ron: You'd be interested in going to Okinawa?

Alex: She mentioned that. I would consider that.

Ron: Are you in good health and everything?

Alex: Yeah, I'm in reasonably good health.

Ron: No major problems?

Alex: No. No. I've had a couple of major operations, colon surgery, but ther than that.

Ron: But I mean you can travel?

Alex: Oh, yeah. I don't have any limitations at all. I have high blood pressure, which I take medicine for, but no, my health is reasonably, for my age and condition...I'm pretty good.

Ron: In other words, you're in pretty good condition for the condition you're in.

Alex: That's right. That's what I tell everybody. You've got the key.

Linda: Okay. Cut.

END OF INTERVIEW