

WILLIE GUNN INTERVIEW

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Ron: Let's begin by talking a little bit about life in general on the 534, you as a Yeoman and being...having an overview of the entire ship. Give us a kind of general overview of what life was like on that ship.

Willie: Well, most of the time for me....I think for most of the men it was pleasant. Most days were characterized by routine work all day. Early in the morning the bosan(?) announced all over the P.A. system, "Sweepers man your brooms! Sweep fore and aft!" They would start working and start cleaning up. Everything was clean every day. It doesn't matter if it was dirty or not they were clean. Now, in my office...I had an office in what we call Officers Country...and had a little window that opened to the outside of the passage way where...when the men came up to see me they could either come inside the office or they could come to the window. It was like a little paned window. There were four of us in the office with room for only two. So two people had to work in the office and two people had to go somewhere else, but two of them were storekeepers and they weren't interested in staying up in the office very much except for when they had to type and the other two of us, my third class Yeoman was a man named William Docks from Missena, New York, so he and I stayed in the office.

Virtually....well, not virtually...every man on the ship came by our office at some time or another and the officers did too. Well, the officers dropped in through a side door. They would come and go as they saw fit. So every day I would go to work, but it didn't matter...you didn't have an eight hour shift. You did the work...how long it took you. You had nothing else to do, so I stayed up there almost day and night for the entire time, have even slept in the office.

Ron: What were your jobs primarily? What did you do as a Yeoman?

Willie: Well, the Yeoman kept all the records, all the personnel records. We kept the records of officers and enlisted men. We carried on all the correspondence with the Navy department and with our group in Floatilla. We did all the writing for everything that was written on the ship. We did it.

Ron: So on a day by day basis....

Linda: Ron, excuse me. I'm sorry.

Willie: I've lost worst.

Linda: It's the little things...when you go back home and then you're looking at this and going, "Why didn't I see that hair? It bothers me." So, if something bothers us here, we act on it.

Ron: Give me an example. Why would men come by? What would be the average question or query or thing they needed?

Willie: Usually when they came by it was something to do with their records. Wanted to make sure that we had an entry into the...official entry into the record or making sure that their insurance papers and beneficiaries were right. If they got promotions, we'd have to come by and get them to sign papers and type in the proper entry in their service record.

Every page was almost a different entry. Everyone came by.

Ron: Were those records lost in the...uh...

Willie: No. The ship....our office was on the first deck above the main deck and they were damaged by smoke and water, but when it started breaking the first thing I did was run to my office and secure all of the files. I didn't know what was coming off, but I ran in and I put all of the files that I had been working on my desk...I put them inside the file

cabinet. The file cabinet was the old fashioned type file cabinet. It's much heavy in metal then you see today. I close them up and secured them inside the cabinet, but they were still damaged by water and smoke. But you could read them. I took them all and every day you'd flip through them and try to get the moisture out of them and take pages that were stuck and eliminate those. They came out real well.

Ron: Talk to me a little bit about the most interesting character, from your perspective, on the ship.

Willie: Well, most people would probably disagree, but everybody has his own character. Of all the ones that I knew...now when you say character you don't mean a person that cuts the Tom Foolery all the time...just the....

Ron: The most interesting individual.

Willie: Well, the most complex was the Captain. Captain French. R. J. French. Since I worked with him day by day I had to learn his eccentricities and his mannerisms and his way of expressing things and knowing, reading his humor and reading....almost reading his thoughts, even reading his personal letters on occasion to...from his wife.

Ron: You had to read him his letters from his wife?

Willie: Occasionally I would go in and he would say,...I can't quote really what he'd say...he'd say, "Did I get a letter from my wife?", but he used another expression. I'd say, "Yes Sir." or "No Sir." and he would say, "Well, what did she say?" I'd say, "Well, I haven't opened it." I wouldn't dare open it. He'd say, "Well, open it up and see."

Well, I'd sometimes read the first paragraph. He'd say, "She's never going write anything that'll embarrass me or her." He said, "I always told her don't write anything

that somebody else might read later and misconstrue.” He said, “Just chit chat!” So, I’d read probably a paragraph, hand him his paper...his letter and he would go on his way.

Ron: He was not well liked by the crew.

Willie: No. No, he was not. He was not well liked, because of his personality and the way of his doing things. He was a loner. I don’t guess he had a single individual that he could he could really call a friend. I suspect that in the end, if he had one, I was it.

Ron: What was your relationship, the two of you?

Willie: Well, I was almost as...like a private, personal secretary. I had a little buzzer in my room and when he wanted me he pressed the buzzer and no matter what you were doing you didn’t say another word. You got up and went in immediately. However fast you got in wasn’t quite fast enough. I didn’t ever get perturbed with him, didn’t excited over it, but I knew he wouldn’t cuss me out like he did some of them.

Ron: Sounds like a Captain Klieg.

Willie: Well, he had his eccentricities that’s for sure.

Ron: Let’s go back to the character, the most interesting character on the ship that you knew or you felt was interesting.

Willie: Well, I tell you of all the ones that I really thought was a character, Mozell Tolbert, who was a Stewards Mate, black Stewards Mate and...some say he was from Mississippi and some say he was from Alabama. I thought he was from Mississippi. Mozell had no middle name and we used to call him Mozell None, because that’s what the Navy entered his name as ‘Mozell (parenthesizes) None’ or a little ‘n’. He always said that when he got back home he was going to name himself a middle name. Well, Mozell...now, if you know what a Stewards Mate does, Steward...we had three Stewards

Mates and they cooked partly for the officers and they cleaned the officers wardrooms, they shined their shoes, kept their uniforms in order. They did everything, three of them waited on the officers full time. Mozell was the youngest and most inexperienced, so he had the dirty jobs. He had to wash the dishes and do other things. But, Mozell was a very knowledgeable young man. Loved history. He and I had many discussions on the Civil War. He would get my opinions on how the white people felt and I would ask him how the black people felt about it and what he had heard when he was a boy, because his parents were old and his grandparents had been slaves, so we got almost a first hand account of that. Moz's and I spend hours and hours and hours and every time I would get a book that somebody would send me from home, they usually would send me a paperback about once every month. One that I liked. Moz's was number two on the list to read it and read every bit of it. He was a knowledgeable man in history.

Ron: Did the three black people on your ship feel any discrimination, not necessarily from you, but by virtue of the way that the country was at the time?

Willie: If they did, they didn't express it very much. Now, one man named Amos Jack was...uh...felt that way a little bit, but the other two....one man by the name of Hayward Sessions, who was from Atlanta and I haven't been able to find him. Hayward never had a complaint. I never heard him raise his voice even to the other men...the two Stewards that would get on his nerves. He didn't do any of that, but never...No. Mozell and I had such a good relationship. I think he would of told me had he had those feelings. There was not as much publicity on it then and some people didn't...wasn't quite...quite paid as much attention to and large cities and they all came from small...well, Hayward came from Atlanta and at that time was about 300,000 people, which was then a big city. But,

No, we didn't hear any. And we treated them all alike. It was no difference. They were...Hayward was on a twenty millimeter cannon with me for a long time and then I moved off of that and I was a Captain's talker and then I later moved back to the...uh...I was a talker for the aft damage control.

Ron: What was the best thing about the 534?

Willie: The best thing I think was the men. Without them you wouldn't have had a ship and we got along well. The officers and the men. I don't think that there was...there were very few harsh words that I remember swore and yeah, there were short tempers and we had a few people that enjoyed hitting each other occasionally, but nothing serious. But, I enjoyed all the men.

Ron: What was the worst thing about the ship?

Willie: Well, if you really got down to it, probably the worst thing was the living conditions. you lived very, very close together. There were three of us in a 'rack'. Men on the lower, middle and top rack. My bunk was on top by my selection and I couldn't turn over without sliding to my left and then turning over, because there were two big pipes right over my head and they made noise at night, but didn't even distract me one bit. When somebody else would sleep in the bunk next to me they would complain bitterly the next morning that they heard bumps in the night and to me I heard not a single one, so...and we were very crowded. You had to almost schedule time to go and shave and shower. Bathing was a ritual. They had a man there, when you started to take a shower, you could stay under the first water, which was sea water. We had a salt water soap, because regular soap would not lather in salt water, so they had a salt water soap and you would lather down in that and you would then rinse the water off with the salt

water and then another man would throw a switch and it would switch it from salt water to fresh water. You would rinse off in fresh water and then...and the rinse...you had better be ready to rinse the moment he said 'Rinse!', because you didn't have time to dilly dally around. You get the soap off of you and dry off and get out in a hurry.

Ron: Was there any privacy at all? Did anyone ever have...

Willie: Never. No privacy. Never. We didn't think about it really. I mean, it wasn't really a problem

Ron: What did people do when they were off ship or were they ever off ship formally?

Willie: Oh, Yes. They were off...they had almost regular hours, regular duties. Almost every sailor had a paperback in his pocket. If there was any one thing that was characteristic, was that they had a paperback in their pocket, so most of them, if they were readers now...and most of them were...they'd stop for a while and you'd go back all over the ship and you'd see a man reading. We played a lot of...we had card games going almost all times and up in my office we would play Casino and Black Jack in between duties. The other men played Poker and other games all over the ship. They played Poker almost incessantly. But I didn't have time to play poker, so we played the short games, Dock's and myself and Pascasal and Cumella. Well, Cumella usually didn't stay in very much. He didn't like the office work. He stayed down and worked in the bottom of the ship where we stored all the goods, so it was constant activity though.

Ron: Who was your best friend on the ship?

Willie: Ooooh, that would be a hard thing to say. You wouldn't even want to say the best one...I'd say...I'm going to take it down to two, because then I wouldn't....if they saw that, they wouldn't...I wouldn't hurt their feelings, because neither one was number one.

William Dock's was my Yeoman that worked under me and Dick Drew was the ships cook, so between Dick and Bill Dock's...I was lucky. I had two good first friends. Two best friends.

Ron: How did...uh...did friendships usually develop within divisions on the...

Willie: Almost entirely. Almost entirely. A man was a friend with the ones that he worked with. But for me I had ships cook friends.

Ron: You came in contact with them all.

Willie: Yeah, I came in contact and they would come in and...I like guns, so I hung with the Gunners Mates. A big old first class named Arnt whose hands looked like a ham, he had a little shop on the stern of the ship and I stayed in that shop all the hours that I didn't have something else to do. I'd clean the officers .45's for them and break down the carbines and...I called it play and they called it routine duty, so they were delighted to have me do the greasing and working with them. SO I worked with a good many of them.

Ron: Did most of the people on the ship know each other regardless of what division they worked in? Know them on some level.

Willie: Yeah, on some level. Yes. It was still...we had a 127 men and 11 officers and they usually bedded up with the ones and they would know the others usually by sight, but many men would stay right within their division.

Ron: It's like working...like living in a little community, you know, is that...

Willie: Well, they did. They was a community within itself, because they worked on small boats, the ones that the Coxins (sp?) would work with the Motormac's, the ones that worked on the diesel engines. They would work with sometimes the Shipfitters that

had to go work on the boat with them, but other than that they usually stayed right within their division. Some of us were luckier though. We got to talk to all of them.

Ron: What are your memories of Henry Alvers?

Willie: Well, I knew Henry. Henry, like the rest of them came to my office. If I had one memory of Henry, it would be his ready smile. He had an infectious smile. The second thing, he was always neat when most of the men would just absolutely...disheveled. He kept his hair combed. Most of us...I just kept mine cut short a lot of the times, but he kept his combed and in place and his dungarees looked like they were washed and pressed everyday. I didn't ever know how he did it, but he was one neat man and when he was a Coxin he was neat. Many of the Coxins...now, they were very...the Coxins were very independent people. They had a character all their own, because they ran the small boats. They had all hours, they had to work sometimes bad conditions of going from the ship to the shore in rough weather and got wet, soaking, half the time couldn't eat with the regular schedule that we did, but they were the least complaining people that I knew and Henry was one of them.

Ron: What were the....so he was part of the deck crew...

Willie: Right. Part of the deck division, right.

Ron: ...the deck division. What did....what kind of job was it driving one of those things? Was it a difficult job? Was it dispecial? Did it have...

Willie: It was like driving an eighteen wheeler. Anybody can drive a car to some degree. Many people can't drive them as carefully as others. They...people who ran the boats had to be...they had to have a talent for it. It was....I've tried it and...on occasions when they'd let me drive the boat part the way tot he shore and when you got up close though

they wouldn't dare trust me to bring it in. They were afraid somebody would get hit, but with the ship moving sometimes up and down and sideways and they'd have to come along side, those small boatmen had to be very, very skilled. They had to know exactly when...they had one control. They had a stick and this stick had a handle on it and the handle would go left and right and they could pull it backwards and forwards. When they shifted it forward it made the small boat, the LCBP, go forward and then they wanted to gun the engine they just turned the handle. Then when they wanted to go in reverse they'd bring it back to neutral, hesitate for two to three seconds to give the transmission time to stop motion, then they'd pull it back and gun the engine the other way and it was a constant...it was almost like a mechanical ballet. They would bring the ship...the LCBP, around in a circle to come to the ship and they would have to know exactly how fast to put it in and exactly what time to put it in neutral and let the momentum of the LCBP swing along side and they had to know exactly when to jerk it down into reverse and gun it so they would not hit the side of the ship. So the Coxin's had a...they were in a precarious position almost all the time. They could ruin a boat before you knew it and they did hit things occasionally no matter how good they were. They would bump into....we had bumpers on the side. We had big bumpers about this large and about half as long as a man that we'd put over the side, so that if they did a ship or hit a dock, it would hit that bumper first. But those men learned their skills very quickly.

Ron: I'm just going to jump around to a variety of different things.

Willie: It's all right.

Ron: In the Normandy....you weren't in the Normandy?

Willie: No, I wasn't in Normandy.

Ron: In the Kamikaze attack where were you and what were you doing?

Willie: Well, I was on the phones for the aft damage control. My position either was in Mr. Fielders office or on the outside of the ship on the...right outside of the Officer's Country and we had to have our earphones...we called them Mickey Mouse phones even then...had to have our phones on and we had a jack wherever we were we had electrical connections and wherever you were you just plugged your phone into a jack, 'cause you might be working with damage above deck or below you had to carry your phones and equipment with you. My job was to relay information to the Captain and also other...we had people in damage control such as the Ship Footers that would repair pipes, repair water damage. We had electricians. If we had damage done to electrical circuits, they had to be there. We had a Boson's Mate on aft control that had skills of tying things up and using heavy equipment like jacks and pri-bars to do those things. Then my job though was to relay information to and from the central office, which was on the main deck.

Ron: So ten or fifteen minutes before that attack what...you were...

Willie: I was outside....I was outside on the starboard side, that's on the right hand side in the after part of the ship where we were just standing by waiting for anything to do. We always hopped we'd have nothing to do. You really didn't appreciate the damage control until you had to have them. It's kind of like the pharmacist. Everybody complained about Pharmacist's Mates all the time, 'cause Pharmacist's couldn't be made to do anything. Nobody could order a Pharmacist to do work. A Pharmacist did not perform any menial duties. They did not chip paint. They didn't pull any extra duties. Their duty was in sick bay at all times. But when the time came for a Pharmacist to be needed, and

we did need them, nobody complained about the Pharmacist. The same was true for the damage control. They just sat around doing nothing until they were needed and then nobody complained about the damage control. So I was outside standing on the deck right by myself just waiting, because I always when they would call the damage control, the damage control people were stationed at different places for the...after...we had an 'after' damage control and we had what we would call a 'forward' damage control. We divided the ship into two parts...bowing half and they handled the bowing and my group handled the stern 'for' damage control, so we were just standing by waiting for something to happen. The gunners were at their duties and everybody...the signal men were there at their...with their flags and their lights and we were just standing by, so we had a ring side seat without being encumbered by having to shoot our twenties. I was on a twenty for a while and a forty for a while and then I changed three or four jobs, but we were privileged to just see everything as it happened.

Ron: So, run me through the process from your eyes of what happened.

Willie: What I saw?

Ron: Yeah.

Willie: Well, the first ...the first....now we had been at General Quarters. Some of the men thought it was a different time. We had been at General Quarters 48 hours and that was right straight from my log. Forty-eight hours straight. So the men were getting a little bit tired and probably not as attentive as they should have been, but they were still wide awake and everything was going, because not long before that most of them had been....my crew, the aft control...I had told half of them to go take a break and get them a sandwich and some water and take care of the personal needs and come back. I had

already recycled my people, so all of them had been rested and were doing nothing. Most of the guns had their crews standing by a General Quarters. They really weren't at full General Quarters. They were all in the 'gun tubs' and the first thing that I heard, one of the men on the top twenty right up above me...I was standing underneath the....almost underneath the gun tub...and he hollered, "Look, coming over the hill!" Well, he was pointing. They say you're not suppose to point, but that's the best way to get attention and direct somebody. So when he pointed I looked and had to lean over the side of the ship and I saw him coming. Some of them said it was...take thirty seconds. It didn't...no...he was traveling at a pretty fast clip. I would estimate from watching other planes he was probably doing 300 miles an hour. So he closed the distance when he came over the hill to our stern, to the ship in seconds. It wasn't thirty seconds. It was probably more like ten seconds, twelve seconds when he came in. When he...I saw him....I saw him and he was over to my right....(Tape fast forwards and then goes dead).

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

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Ron: Let's pick it up with you seeing it come over the mountain.

Willie: We had a boat along side us. He was standing off about 150 feet from us on the right. He was suppose to give us extra fire support. It was a small boat that had twin .50 caliber machine guns on the top, just one set of twin .50's. They were manning it and they were looking back when they pointed the plane...toward the plane, I looked at the plane and saw it coming, but the plane...when our ship was here, the plane was off to the right and was coming down...he'd come in off of the thing and I saw him when he leveled off and he was not coming toward us at all, so I didn't become very perturbed. I was just watching and then I glanced over at the little gun boat over on the right hand side and I saw all of the men jump overboard. And I said, "What in the world in happening? They're abandoning their boat." And they thought that he was going straight for them, because he was heading for them not for us. So they just thought that they were going to be machine gunned, so they did the best thing. They jumped over. It was almost humorous, but I didn't have time to even think about it being humorous. I thought he was going to go right up and right out, because he wasn't...there was not another ship on our starboard or right side. We had another ship on the left side, the LST 1022. They were right there, so I knew he wasn't hitting them and he was over too far for us and then I was really just surprised beyond belief when I saw him just do the most magnificent roll. His plane went a little to the right and then he dipped it down just perfectly and when he dipped his wing down he came right in just about at a thirty degree angle. I thought that he had missed the ship. I thought that he had gone into the docks, into the loading area right in front of the ship, but then he just disappeared right from my sight

and I knew that he had hit the ship and he hit right under a .20 millimeter gun tub. I was just totally sure that everybody on the gun tub had been killed, because the ship shook very violently, went up into the air and settled immediately. We estimate that it took about fourteen seconds for it to go from floating to on the bottom. We were out about a little better than a hundred yards. Maybe a 150 yards from shore. Where the water, at high tide, was deep. But at low tide it was enough to get a LST very close to the shore. So we were there and they had built metal causeways out to the ship to load the heavy equipment and take that off, so I knew that the bow doors were open. I knew what we were carrying in the ship and I knew it wasn't good to be hit. I knew the moment he hit that we were in for some very bad trouble.

Ron: What was the immediate aftermath?

Willie: Well, the immediate aftermath the...we started getting damage control reports. They had...first thing that the Captain did was order the Forward Damage Control into action. Within about two minutes he ordered the 'After Control' to go forward to control the fire, because we had nothing to do where we were, so we went up and fought the fire and helped to evacuate a lot of the wounded on the ship. We went up immediately and went through the smoke and went up to do what we could on ours, but a good many of our men got up there and they either got...some of them got burns and...my after damage control was depopulated very quickly, but we weren't needed where we were, but we did help out up in the forward part where the damage was.

Ron: Was there any panic on the ship?

Willie: No. No. Very little. It was very little real confusion as far as I'm concerned, where I was. When I met three of my men that I always work with on the damage control

the first thing they said...we almost kind of put the boson in charge. I mean, he was...he was the man who would make an assessment of the damage and what should be done quickly and I unplugged my phones and got up to where he was and he says, "Let's go on up and"....now there was a lot of confusion, a lot of running around, but it wasn't panic by any means. The only panic that I saw when some of the men were blown into the air and they fall down into the hole...fell down into the hole that the bomb had made. We really were almost in a state of panic to get them out, because we knew that if that stuff started burning, right away they would never make it out. We working just about as fast as we could to control....we were getting our hoses attached and between getting hoses attached we were putting lines down to try and get those two men out of the ship. One of them was Pescasol, the man that I worked with, so I was anxious that he was not hurt.

Ron: Now, where would Henry Alvers have been, because he used to say that he was...when the Kamikaze hit he was...I think he said he was blown into the air and landed, whether it was on the ship or....I always thought he said it was something...another ship close by.

Willie: There was one very close.

Ron: There was? And he landed on his knees and he broke his knee cap. Where would someone like that have been?

Willie: Well, we had up at that part of the ship....now, the only place they could have been...the only people forward where that plane hit were the gun crews. We had a .20 millimeter gun crew right where he hit. Right immediately forward of them was a .40 millimeter gun tub with a single .40 millimeter and it was pointed toward the attack.

Then we had a twin .40 millimeter mount on the very bow of the ship and it's guns were

turned back toward the ship and all those men were still in their gun tubs when I got there, which was seconds, half a minute maybe, at the most from the time it hit and all of them were still in their place, so where Henry was...he could have been in any one of those gun tubs. If he was in either one of the ones on the right, those men were thrown out of their gun tubs onto the decks. The men in the .40 millimeters, except the ones that were seated...that were seated. Now, they were seated and holding onto their controls, so it didn't throw them out. I'm almost sure that the two men who were loading the shells, they were on their feet. They had nothing to hold to, had shells ready to go and it could have easily pitched them out. Now, I saw what happened to the men on the .20 that...where the plane hit. You had one man that was a pointer and we had one man that was a loader and we had one man that operated...that stood on the left side of the gun that had a crank that could raise and lower the .20 millimeter and he would in normal practice, the man was strapped to the .20 millimeter and the man on the left would crank the gun up so that if the pointer could lay down and shoot almost probably as near vertically as he could get. Not quite, but almost. So only one man was attached to the gun. The other two...you had a first loader, second loader, a pointer and then the man who rolled it up, so Henry could....if Henry were over there, it's a thousand wonders that he wasn't thrown against something and injured permanently or even killed, because it made a hole as big as half of this room straight up in the air, so it probably catapulted him. Pescasola was the number two loader and it threw him in the air and he went back in the ground, back down in the hole where the water was and the man that was with him couldn't remember whether he was blown into the air and fell in the hole or whether he was

thrown off his feet and just dropped in. He had no idea what happened, but both of them were hurt.

Ron: There were some stories that fires that subsequently started were started by...happened not because of the plane, but for other reasons. Is that right?

Willie: Well, from the damage control from what we saw...we didn't see any way that it would have started by us or anything that anybody else was doing, because they had...we always had cutting equipment in case we had to take blow torches and cut away cut of the ship. I saw none of those in action at the time that I got there from my damage control. Now, it's very possible that all those electrical wires that were blown loose they could have started, but I don't think that we ever really knew how that started...there was suppositions how it started. Some say that somebody was cutting with a torch, but I didn't...I saw nothing where they would need to use a torch for cutting, those men...because none of...none of the men had any reason to be pinned under anything. All of them...their bodies were free.

Ron: Why did it take so long to put the fires out?

Willie: Well, we were carrying...we were carrying forty barrels, and the barrel was 55 gallons, we had forty barrels of high octane aviation gas. We had fifty barrels of calcium carbide. Each one of the barrels, each one of the big packages contained 50 pounds of calcium carbide and then we had hundreds and hundreds of barrels of oil, crude oil, so on our tank deck we were carrying oil, we were carrying the high octane gasoline, we were carrying calcium carbide. We were carrying the calcium carbide to the C.B. camp that was nearby. The C'B.'s used the calcium carbide to generate acetylene fuel when they were welding, because if you take calcium carbide and you mix it with water, it forms

C₂H₂ acetylene and gives off calcium hydroxide as a waste product and it's highly explosive. Without any doubt in the world when that bomb hit it ruptured calcium carbide and it takes on the tiniest spark. Only one spark no matter where it comes from...it could have come from a shoe. It could have come from an electrical appliance. It could have come from a broken wire. It could have come from two pieces of metal being scraped together when they were blown apart and that set it off. So when that set the calcium carbide off that blew some of the gasoline...it ruptured some of the gasoline. It started burning and then burning would rupture more calcium carbide, they'd go in the water, generate more acetylene, so one event just led to another to another. It was a back and forth movement for the whole time, so it's a wonder it wasn't worse than it was.

Ron: How did it get put out?

Willie: Well, after about thirty minutes we had a commander come aboard who was specialized in fighting fires and he was a...he'd been working on fire fighting for years and years. After....he and I talked later and we found this out. He was in charge of all of the fire fighting. I was his number one talker. I just stayed with him for the whole time and he told me to....he told me to unplug my phone...take my phones off and go forward and come back and give him an assessment of what the progress was and tell him what was happening, because he couldn't afford to be right inside of any one place. He had to coordinate efforts from two boats that had come along side to help fight the fire and he was coordinating those efforts and I was his eyes and ears. I came back and told him that they were pumping water into the hole and he said, "Well, that's fine." I said, "But we're carrying calcium carbide." He actually said, "Why didn't you tell me that to begin with." Well, I said, "It's one of those things. I didn't think about. You didn't ask me what we

were carrying.” I said...he said, “Well, what else are you going to tell me that you’re carrying?” I told him, “We’re carrying high octane gasoline.” He said, “That’s great news.” He said, “What else?” I said, “We’re carrying oil.” He said, “Well, that’s not too bad. It’s a little harder to burn, but”, he said, “once you get it started it’s as bad as gasoline.” They were throwing water in there so he said, “You go up and tell them to cut all water off. Just let it burn for a few minutes. Don’t throw anymore water, because we’re going to switch to complete foam.” They had a substance they call Foamite. It came it....I think...I don’t know...bucket was about this big and about this high. Most of them held about ten gallons of Foamite and it had a tube leading from that up to the hose and right at the nozzle of the hose they had a handle and you could move the handle half way back and you’ve got water, you pull it all the way back and it would start sucking Foamite from the bucket and the Foamite would mix with the water going out and would form just a big thick foam. It cut off the oxygen. At that instant we started using nothing but Foamite, no water. Even with that we used every can of Foamite that we had. We sent a LCBP over to another ship and a...LCBP...and I wish I remember who was in that LCBP, but they loaded it down with Foamite, brought it back and so we fought the fire with Foamite. But even then....see there was one fire that started immediately. The ship was hit at 9:25. We had one fire that lit and burned for about an hour and it was contained. We thought we had it completely under control. Then at 11:30 we had the second fire and that’s the point that I think you were making, who started that second fire. Now, the first fire was evident. The second one any of a dozen reasons could have been given for what started the second fire. It burned, but we had already gotten more Foamite on the ship and we were ready for that, but then we used every bit of the second load of

Foamite. We had to send for a third and fourth small boat went over and got Foamite from the other ships and about 4:00, 1600 we...the fire master said, "We got it under control." He was confident. Right then it was under control, because up until then he was really afraid there was going to be an explosion and ruin everybody's day.

Ron: Was the...was the ship abandoned?

Willie: No. No.

Ron: Even though you might have had an explosion they still kept people where they were.

Willie: Oh, Yeah. We stayed....well, he was confident. His confidence gave me confidence. I was absolutely sure he knew what he was doing.

Ron: But if said to you, 'Geez, we could have an explosion...' that'd make me a little nervous.

Willie: Yeah, he did. Well, it'd put you on your toes, but he did say, 'Yes, if we have one more...'...it was one series of explosions right after the big big boom, fire, smoke...they'd throw it in and then a boom, another one. It was...a...just a sequence(cannot understand)...and he said, "What I'm afraid of is that it'll hit all of the calcium carbide at one time and if it does," he says, "we've lost the fight."

Ron: What would have happened if it had hit it all at once?

Willie: It would have blown the whole bow off.

Ron: How many people were up on the bow?

Willie: Well over half the crew.

Ron: So this guy...you kept people there even with the threat of blowing half the bow off.

Willie: Yeah, but it was what had to be done in order to put the fire out. There was a chance of saving it, so all of us were there doing what we could. It was a calculated risk. From past experience he knew what he was doing.

Ron: If they had taken those people off of the ship, it would have blown up for sure then, because no....

Willie: It would have been out from under control then.

Ron: Uh, switching gears again. Tell us the story about you and the Captain and the name plate.

Willie: Well, there were six of us on the ship. We were keepers of the ship while it was up on the reef and it was in decrepit shape and it was already obvious that it was not salvageable. I had to stay on....I had to go back and forth every day or every couple of days back to the camp where all of us lived, but while we were six of us on the ship we had a signal man that handled the lights. We had little portable generator to generate just enough electricity to power a light. There was six of us and I was doing...working with the Captain on paperwork and getting all of the records ready and writing letters and the like. At night we had one little generator and it was the most decrepit little light you ever seen. It wasn't bright enough to read by and it was too bright to sleep by, so we stayed down in the office...in the ward room and the Captain would keep the light right on his desk and it would light up the room, but I couldn't read. My reading stopped at sundown. The Captain was over his desk one night and I just served his supper and you would never think he'd serve supper...I have served him cheese and crackers. We had made...had open cans of juice and I'd given him several glasses of grapefruit juice, which is his favorite juice. He had eaten and I had eaten and I had just cooked some Spam, so

his dinner for the night was crackers, cheese and Spam ala gun. Spam cooked on one little gas burner. We had a little gas stove on the deck of the ship. We'd fire up a little gas stove. I'm sure it was against all rules of maritime service. It would cook one little hot plate that we had under....we'd cook Spam. We could cook Spam every day, so I cooked and he'd...the Captain never complained. Whatever I brought him he ate. He was eating his Spam and he got through and...he didn't ever compliment me....compliment me on it, but he didn't complain.

Ron: Coming from him that was probably...

Willie: Coming from him that was the best compliment you could get. He was standing there and I said,...I walked over to the passageway...what we'd call a door, and above the door was this plaque and he said...uh...I said, "Captain, I would like...I'd like to have this plaque from the ship." He turned around and with that inevitable sneer said, "Don't you let me see you touch that." Then he sat down in his chair and calmly turned around facing the other way and took his cup of coffee. I took that as a signal that I might could get it down. I might not. So I already had some screwdrivers and I reached up and put me a table up and climbed up and pulled it off and took it over and put it down where I was working. In a few minutes he turned back around oblivious of anything that had happened or at least he acted oblivious. I'm sure he remembered. The topic was never broached again after that. Some of the officers broached it. They wanted to know who got it. He told him who got it. They came...some of them came to me and one of them in particular said, "I want that plaque!" I said, "You go see the Captain. If the Captain gives it to you, it's yours, but if the Captain doesn't give it to you, it's mine." So about thirty minutes later I saw him and I said, "Mr. Wilson, did the Captain give you that

plaque?” He said, “He was absolutely impolite to me.” I said, “Mr. Wilson, that’s not surprising that he was impolite to you.” I say, “What did he say?” He said, “He didn’t say anything. He said he just turned around and went back to work.” He said, “He completely ignored me when I asked him.” I said, “Well, that explains it. It’s my plaque.” So I bought the plaque back.

Ron: Do we have that here?

Willie: Gray has it.

Ron: Have we shot it already? We’re going to.

Linda: We need to shoot it.

Willie: I’ll bring it back and let you see it.

Ron: Let’s go to the typhoons and the sequence of events from the first one. What were you doing and how did you perceive that whole...those days?

Willie: Well, I stay up in the...when I wasn’t in my office I would usually go up at the wheel house where they were steering the ship and the radio room was right next to it and the radioman was a friend of mine. I would go in and we would listen to Tokyo Rose and we would listen to the armed forces radio. We’d listen to talk between ships and we would listen to talk between controllers who were controlling the airplanes that were flying all times in the air protecting us and so we listened to a lot of things. We were...the first indication that we had of it, the radioman got a message that the barometric pressure was dropping. One ship called another one. They weren’t talking to us. They were calling another one and said, “Have you noticed that the barometric pressure’s dropping?” And the other one said, “Yes, ours is dropping fast.” He told how many...we registered it in millibars. Said, “I’ve noticed it dropping”. And one of them

said,” Oh, I can’t read it. That said drop it in inches. How many inches is it?” He told him how that it had dropped something like a quarter of an inch in about 45 minutes and that sounded like it’s a little bit, but it’s an enormous drop in atmospheric pressure. He said, “Have we received any word that there’s a storm other than this gale that’s coming through?” They’d heard it was a gale, strong wind. Said, “No. Hadn’t heard of another thing.” A little while later they got...we got her second message and it said that they were alerting...there was a ComForce...the commander of the force that was there alerting all the ships to be ready to be put out to sea. Within about an hour they got a message that all ships were to raise anchor and they gave them directions which one would go out of the....Nagasaki I, Buckner Bay....proceeding out of Buckner Bay and they sent them out to sea. So we went outside and ships were just leaving by the dozens. Some of them were unloading and some of them left. Some of them were left there in the bay, but most of them went out to sea. The barometric pressure continued to drop. I went over...we had a barometer and I started watching our barometer and the officers were watching the barometer, so we soon knew that we were having a very, very strong storm, but they still hadn’t declared it a typhoon. Then we got word again, not directly, but from inner-ship talk that it was a typhoon and that it was heading straight for Okinawa and every ship was to secure all lines and close all port holes and do everything to make the ship worthy in a storm and we did the same thing. Our boasims went around and closed all the hatches. We closed all the water tight doors. We did everything that were supposed to do. I went down and closed the hatches to all of the main entrances, the four main entrances. I went around and dogged...dogged those down, so we were about as ready as we could be at that point. That was the first...on the typhoon on the 16th of September.

Ron: And how did the ship stand up under that?

Willie: Well, we stood up under it better than we thought. Our engines were in pretty....our engines were in good shape, fortunately. Now, we had one damaged rutter. An LSD has two engines, two big 900 horsepower diesels and on the stern of the ship they had one rutter over each propeller and one of our rutters had gotten to where it wouldn't....ordinarily they'd swing together...and one of them wouldn't swing with the other one. We were going to have it repaired, so we didn't have the best control over the ship, so when the wind and the water...when the water started...the waves started going up very, very high we would estimate the height of the waves by looking at a ship. We knew about how high the ship was and we'd see how the waves were over the ship and we could...when the waves got up to about 40-45 feet we started noticing things. We were a little bit concerned then. It started being a very, very...great storm. But we...we had very little control over the ship. We almost had to go the way the wind blew us. But as long as you kept the ship into the wind it was all right. If you let it...if you let it go sideways, any flat bottom boat is going to roll much more than the rest of them. Fortunately, we didn't have any cargo. It might have been better if we had more oil and more weight in it and more water.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

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Ron: Okay, I want to get back to that. Well, let's quickly just insert it. Otherwise, we'll forget it. During the typhoon...let's leave the ship for a little bit...what happened on the beach...some of those field hospitals and those tents and everything else?

Willie: Well, I was on the bridge and I was watching the flags and the wind was such a high pitch 'til it was...it was one long high moan. It wasn't a gust and it really got so loud you had to put your hand up to your mouth and yell into the mans ear next to you in order to be heard. You could not hear anything. He'd poked me and said, "Look at the shore." I took my binoculars and looked and there was a huge Quonset (sp?) hut. We recognized it, because we had gone over there earlier to pick up mail and so we new it was a mail Quonset hut. The other boy had a pair of glasses on it too and he says, "I swear unto you it looked like that building moved." I looked at it and I said, "Well, it's too big to move right now. The wind's not strong enough." And he looked and said, "Well, you better look again." He said, "That building is coming off the ground." That huge Quonset hut raised up off the ground and then just came apart. It looked like slow motion. The sides of it...it was round...the sides of it just came up, the bottom was out and it just disappeared. So the whole...and it was not only that one there. There were three other Quonset huts right immediately adjacent to those. It was...and they were located probably 100 yards from the shore. It was on what they thought was a safe place. It was flat where the waves would never get up close to it, but it completely obliterated that post office. In fact, I have some...I still have some pictures we took after the storm was over. In fact, some of us went ashore after we got off the ship. Our ship was beached and some of us went ashore, and a working party. I volunteered to go, because I thought it'd be

good to get ashore. I don't care what you were doing. We picked up mail and we picked up hundreds of letters each, hundreds of packages and...whether they would all be usable or not I doubt, but we picked them up and took them to the postal people that were trying to work with the post office.

Ron: All those tents must have been blown down.

Willie: Oh, they were gone. They just took those away like...they disappeared in the first couple of hours.

Ron: What about all the people that were on the shore? I mean, they must have found shelter some place.

Willie: They did. They...uh...everything from hiding behind heavy equipment to...uh...they had a few buildings that were braced strong enough that they didn't blow away, but they had a good many casualty. They had casualties.

Ron: Not too many casualties on the ships.

Willie: No. Not on that one. They had casualties, but usually the casualties were caused from falling, being knocked over. Now, they had several ships that were sunk even on that first one. Now, the second typhoon was much worse than the first. The first typhoon was September the 16th. The other one was October the 9th and it was the worst one.

The barometer went down where we couldn't even...we had no reading on the barometer.

Ron: Tell us about that storm.

Willie: Now, we had been damaged...the ship had been hit as we knew. The bottom of the...when you went down in the tank deck the ship had a hole from one side of the tank to other. It was better than thirty feet. We measured it. It was about 55 feet long, the hole. There was nothing but a hole there. You could look down in it and see sharks,

fishes. In fact, we got over there and even put fishing lines out. On each side of the hole there was a Cauler Dam (?). It was made out of timbers that were a foot thick and then made a wall on each side and they had raised the ship by pumping air in and pumping water out of the ship until it had become bulliant. But this hole was in the bottom of the ship and there was not a thing in the world to keep that water out except that water seeks its' own level and is not going to come up above a Cauler Dam unless something hits it. But if a Cauler Dam disappears, then the ship would disappear. So on the...and we had had that damaged rutter, badly damaged rutter, and they...between the two storms they had sent a crew over and had taken the rutter off. They were going to repair it sooner or later, so they had taken that rutter off so we were left with one rutter. So when the storm hit there was not a thing in the world. One rutter was locked in place, the other one was missing, so the ship had to steer...they had to steer the ship with the two propellers. If you stopped the port engine and the starboard went faster, then the ship would go that direction and vice versa and go forwards and backwards and left and right using just...and it really wasn't very efficient. you really didn't control your ship. You just had to aim it a little bit. We hit two ship on the second storm. We hit one ship I didn't even get the name of, but the second one that came by...he hit and tore away the gun...part of the gun tub on the first .40 millimeter on the port side. He came right on back, right by us and I could see the name of the ship. It was the MacMurray Victory. To remember the name of the ship. It was a Liberty ship. It tore away the first boat Davit (?), the LCBP Davit, it just took it away just like it was a sheet of paper. We had one man, a young man by the name of Wazalowski, and Wazalowski decided that that Liberty ship was a better place to be than an LST and he jumped from one part of the bridge...it was a little extension from

the bridge out...he jumped from there over to the Liberty ship. We started waving our hands at him and I guess he thought better of it and he did the unpredictable thing. He jumped when the ships went back up...he guessed and gauged it right. He jumped back onto our ship and he had two wonderful chances of dying. If he'd of missed the first one, he would have been dead and if he'd have missed the second one, he'd of been dead. Or if he'd jumped too fast, he would have had his legs broken and none of those things happened. That was one lucky...one lucky man.

Ron: What would have happened to him if he'd stayed on the Liberty ship?

Willie: Well, he'd probably been charged with dissertation. (Laughs) No kidding. I don't think he thought about that. I talked to him later about it and he said, "I was just sure we were sinking and I didn't think that big ship was going to sink, so I jumped." It was much more comical later than it was at the time, but that ship hit us. We hit both of them or they hit us, (a glance at both?). The Liberty ship was completely out from under control. It was coming toward us, right directly toward us and our signal man were blinking as fast as they go. You go starboard, we're going to go starboard and we'll miss. Well, they had no control whatever it was and they hit us and they hit us a good one and just came right down...right down the side. Then another one...we thought we'd been hit the final time and we looked up and there was another ship, another Liberty ship right in front of us. We were just sure we were going to pile right square into that and if we had, it would have gone. It would have sunk. The bow of our ship, the reason we in such precarious position...when the plane hit the ship it broke the ship...we had frames and it hit Frame Number 21. The ship rucked (?) bent at that point. The whole bow of the ship was...you could tell that it had been fractured, so if we'd have hit another ship head on

such as it was, it would have broken that bow off without a doubt, but then the Liberty ship turned sideways and we turned sideways and just whopped and then separated and then went down. We were tied up next...when the typhoon started we were anchored next to this ship called the SS INCA, which had been torpedoed. It had a hole in the side big enough to drive a locomotive through and they had pumped the water out and had pumped all the water in one side so the ship was at an angle about like this to raise the hole up above the water. It was loaded with clothes. It was carrying clothing for the winter months. We were tied up next to that and we thought we were pretty well satisfied that those ships would hold together, because we had them ties with cables and with heavy ropes, heavy lines. When they started going up and down the stress was so great you'd hear a cable...when you snap a cable that is an enormous force...and a cable snapped. It sounded just like a 30 alt six shooting and when it shot their cable came across our deck. It looked like a live snake and went back and forth. If anybody had been there, it would have killed them. Then we started kind of clearing the decks and the big hoses...the hoses were about nine inches in diameter and it snapped those hoses one after the other, just snapped them in two until we were completely free from the INCA. Now, the INCA had a heavy anchor and it stayed anchored. It blew everything on the ship and it just went round and round and it stayed anchored. It's anchor kept it right there, but many of the ships anchors were dragged and it would push the ship side. But for ours we dropped a stern anchor first and we had a...other LST had an anchor in the back...the stern of the ship...that we were going to the beach and the anchor would be dropped about 2-300 hundred yards out, and we'd go to the beach then when we got ready to go off the beach they would reverse the engines and start pulling that cable in

and you'd go off. Then we had an anchor on the bow, on the port side. Well, we dropped the anchor in the back and we were going toward the waves and it snapped. Then we had dropped the forward anchor and thought we had it under control and then the forward anchor. I was talking to Mr. Fielder last night and I asked him, "Did he know who was on duty when the cables dropped when the anchors were snapped?" He said he thought he remembered. I said, "Is it Mr. Green? Judson Green.", who was a Lieutenant JG. Mr. Green thought that the engines had been running so hard...we were anchored going into the storm and he thought the engines were overworking themselves, so he called down and told them to reduce the power on the engines. When they reduced the power on the engines it just snapped the bow anchor just like it was a string. It took all the pressure and then went to the anchor....the ship had been pushing against the anchor, so we were stable, but once that anchor was broke we were free to go anywhere we wanted to go. Now, our danger and the danger that the Quarter Master's feared, if we had gone out to sea another mile, we would have been in open ocean. Buckner Bay was shaped like this on that side. It was a big bay, but it was not a completely enclosed bay. If we had ever gotten outside of this big bay, we'd have been right at the mercy of the wind and the waves and it would have blown us out to sea. We would have sunk. Not much doubt about that. But the wave....I read accounts...some accounts say the winds got as high as 200 miles an hour. Some say about 175 miles an hour. But the barometer, we know from looking at ours, you could not read the bottom of the barometer. It dropped down to where there was no....

Ron: How long did one of those last? How long did that typhoon last?

Willie: Well, the typhoon...the major part of the typhoon...you know it passed when the eye passed over. The eye went almost not quite over us...directly over us. We figured it might have missed us a little bit. It got deathly quiet when that eye went over us and the men started saying 'Hooray! Hooray! We're safe! The typhoon's over' Some of us who knew better would say, "Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope. It's going to come back and the winds are going to be going in the other direction. It's going to be as strong or stronger than ever when it starts blowing. We had already blown up on one little reef and when the wind started blowing the second time after the eye passed then it blew us right back off and twisted us around. We went....I tried to count the number of times we went around. I believe it was three times maybe four. It might have been two and a half. It didn't matter. But we just started going in circles. We had no direction, no control, so that meant that any waves...we ever got into a big trough just at the wrong time, it would have probably capsized it. We had a....Mr. Fielder and I were talking last night. They sent a tug, a big sea going tug, to watch us. They were afraid that we were in eminent danger and the tug was turned straight up and down in the water. Mr. Fielder was there. He saw it. I saw it. It turned it over and a few minutes later a big raft came by our ship and it had a few men on it. That's...we never knew what the name of the ship was and how many were killed, but it sank. It turned it over, just turned it over bottom side up.

Ron: You mean, even when those winds, those gale winds people could get in boats and go from one place to another?

Willie: They didn't have a choice. This is a big boat. Now, this is an ocean going tug. This was a good size...good size ship that they sent to rescue us. But the men that came by, they were in a raft. They wasn't in a boat. They were in a life raft. They were

paddling. One peculiar thing. We were watching and a destroyer escort came by us. It came by us at full speed. We couldn't understand it. We were being pushed back and all of a sudden this little destroyer escort just came barreling past us and the last we saw it...you couldn't see very far...and it just disappeared in the rain and the wind, because you could neither hear nor see. So it went up...and after the storm was over that destroyer escort had gone straight into the beach and had gone so high that they couldn't get it off the beach. It was over the high part of the dunes sticking up with its props up into the air, so once they got up there they were safe. But how long did the storm last? The storm lasted...they would normally...the major part that would hit you would be something in the neighborhood of twelve hours from start to finish. Now, that didn't mean that you had winds before and you had gale force winds later, but the major part of the storm would go about twelve. It's according to how fast it was going. We figured this one was going about...traveling from the eye...it was going about 15-20 miles an hour, so you could tell about how long that it would take to go across, but twelve...about twelve hours of the worst weather and then it'd start to abate.

Ron: So when it was all over you were up on a reef.

Willie: It pushed us up on the reef the last time and that...that was...the Captain wanted to take it off the reef, but we didn't fortunately. It would have...the damage was too great that time. The propellers had been damaged. The hull...because Mr. Fielder and I went down and he may have related it to you....he and I went down and I went with them when they were checking over part of the ship to see if had...the water integrity had been destroyed. We decided...he decided...he's an engineer. I didn't anything about it. He decided that the ship was not water tight. The integrity had been destroyed, so it was in

danger of....it would have been in danger of sinking if we'd come off that reef. So they decided not to try and take it off the reef.

Ron: What...what....

Linda: Ron, he needs to repeat that, because you leaned down into the camera...

Ron: I'm sorry. Let's talk about the water integrity. The two of you going ...

Linda: That Mr. Fielder determined that...

Willie: Well, Mr. Fielder and I....well, a group of officers went down. A group of officers went over the ship and I went down. I followed them down in case they wanted any notes taken or anything and they looked at the hull of the ship...the 'hold', not the 'hole'....the hold of the ship to see if they could see any cracks in the hull and they saw no real cracks, but they saw places that were obviously stressed. We made a tour up near the bow where that...the place was the weakest and they decided then and there that their recommendation to the Captain would be that the LST should not be moved from that reef. There's another reason. As I told you, that bay went like this and had a little loop down at the bottom and we were right down here. If we had come off that reef with this hull thing here, with the reef here, we would have been right in danger of going right out to sea. We'd of had no more control. It was the...the poor man's decision...mine...that all you could do was accept it. I would say it was a wise decision to leave it where it was.

Ron: That in effect was the end of the life of the LST.

Willie: That was the....that was the final blow.

Ron: So, they came back and did what? They just stripped the ship?

Willie: They came back and they declared that it was going to be decommissioned. We got a letter stating that it was going to be decommissioned. They started taking off usable

items off the ship. They...whatever they needed for other LST's. They removed one eng...one motor, one big motor. I remember them taking one big motor that was anchored to the deck. They took that motor off. Probably took it to another LST that needed a replacement motor. We kept all of our armourmant. We kept all of our machine guns and rifles and pistols. Camilla and I inventoried all of the guns and when we finished we had one box of .45's, twelve .45's in a box, angled down in a box. We opened up the box and Camilla said, "I've already finished my records." He picked up the box of .45's and threw them over the side. Threw one box of brand new .45's over the side.

Ron: Why?

Willie: We'd had to re-done all the records. We declared them lost. And they were. They were lost. I brought my carbine home with me. I have a carbine and I put it in my sea bag. If you'd have been caught with it, you'd have been court marshaled, but everyone wanted one. So I brought my carbine home with me, one that I'd had on the island. Everywhere we went we'd carry a carbine or pistol...or some people carried carbines, some pistols. I liked...I liked the carbines, so I carried it and I brought mine home. Unfortunately, I traded it off. I know the man that's got it.

Ron: I got one.

Willie: Did you? I would love to have mine back. I bought another one just for good measure, but I'd like to have my original.

Ron: Well, it's nice, because it's small, it's semi-automatic.

Willie: Thirty-six inches.

Ron: Thirty caliber shorts.

Willie: Shoots like a .22.

Ron: It's a great rifle. I like it.

Willie: One of the best ones ever made.

Ron: So now the ship is stripped, being decommissioned, but it's still sitting on this reef. Do you know it ultimately was...what they did with it?

Willie: Yes. We left the ship. We left six men on the ship. We left six seaman first class on the ship including Camella. That was the young man who was a storekeeper.

Ron: And the Captain.

Willie: And the Captain. And, but no, the Captain came with us. Captain left at the same time I left. We left six men to help with the ship and they decommissioned the ship and according to the best records that I have, they took it out into the bay on the 9th of November and opened up the Sea Cox in the bottom and let it slowly sink. Our men, some of the six men that...I talked to Camella in New York. I met Camella...I was stationed in....after the war I was stationed at Lido Beach Navel Base in Long Island. When I...I was at the discharge center working as a Yeoman and I looked in the chow line and there was Camella and that was sometimes in January or early February of 1946. I went up and spoke to him and it was like seeing a long lost buddy sure enough and he said they took into Buckner Bay and sank it.

Ron: He never said how deep the water was or where in Buckner Bay....?

Willie: Well, I looked on the map and I believe it's in no more than a hundred feet of water from where he told me. I had maps. I had the hydrographic maps of Buckner Bay and if it sank where he said it did, it was about a hundred feet deep, which is not very deep.

Ron: They hauled it off the reef...

Willie: They pulled it off the reef, yes.

Ron: But they sunk it in a hundred feet of water. That means the top of it must be only 40-50 feet of water.

Willie: Hmm...if what...what parts still there is probably crumbled away now. They may have cut....so often when they were scuttling ships they would cut the main mast off. They would just take....just take it and cut it, take a torch...

Ron: Acetylene torch.

Willie: Take a acetylene...they just take the torch and just cut it off and let it drop and just let it fall right over the side. So probably, I would say, nothing but soup structure is there and it's plenty deep for ships to....it's no navigation...no chance of harming navigation there.

Ron: Did they sink many of the ships in the....

Willie: Quite a number, yes. I knew...I knew of three or...I knew of four that they scheduled for sinking...scheduled for disposal.

Ron: Let's go back to the beginning. How did you wind up on the 534?

Willie: Well, I'd been on...I'd been originally assigned to LST 600. It was a training ship. I stayed on there only a few weeks. I requested transfer, because it was about the most monotonous duty training crews that were of the same, so they took me....I was at a place called Camp Bradford, Virginia. It was right out from little creek. This is where they trained LST crews. So I was assigned an LST #1116 and it was being built in Seneca, Illinois. I went to Seneca. They sent us...I was part of the initial crew that would go and make arrangements for the crew to be housed and necessary things. I got there

very early and they were...before the ship had been even...they had the bottom part of the ship in place and when we got there we watched them built the LST 1116. It was built in about a week. The whole thing was more than two week, but just the major part of the work putting it together. They had the bow prefabricated. They brought in on one section. They just brought the whole bow in a big car, took a crane, welded it in place. They welded the middle section in place. They brought in the stern in one unit, put it in place. They brought in all of the housing over the deck. They brought in....it had the offices in it, the doors in it, all the electrical they put in place, welded it and it was a absolutely marvel. So we...I was assigned the 1116 and we went down the Illinois River then the Mississippi, Gulf of Mexico. We did the shake down down at Panama City like most LST's, came around Jacksonville and they decided to make that ship a ARL, an amphibious repair landing. I had a choice of staying on the ship or being reassigned. I hated to be there in Jacksonville for 3 months or 6 months while they were converting it, so I requested transfer. Had a wonderful Captain. I loved the man. He and I corresponded for a number of years, a Captain Davis. He understood my...it was nothing personal. He gave me the transfer. It wouldn't have gone through had he not signed it or wanted it. I went back to Norfolk and was reassigned. A fella named Guthrie, who was a fire control man....a fire control man is a man who directs the .40 millimeters not a fire. Guthrie and I were assigned to go to the 534.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

=====
Ron: So you are now being transferred to the 533...on the 534. What was the initial impression when you were aboard the 534?

Willie: Well, there was a....I was already familiar with LST's, so I knew what to expect. I'd already been on two LST's, so it was no shock. I had no surprises whatsoever. I was surprised when I went in the office. The Yeoman before me, a man by the name of Parkin, I never did meet him, had been gone from the ship about six...apparently about six weeks and had left reams and reams of work to be done. I walked into my office and I had my work pretty well laid out, what I was going to have to do, which I didn't mind doing.

Ron: What was your first encounter with Captain French?

Willie: As soon as I went down the ship had....when Guthrie and I had got to the dock they had already thrown off the stern lines. They didn't think we were going to make it and they had nothing over the side but a Jacobs Ladder. They threw me a line down and I tied the line around my seabag and my gear and they just pulled that up over the side. They threw the rope down and I tied it around Guthrie's and they took that up. The ship was already a yard and a half from the dock and I grabbed the Jacobs Ladder and told Guthrie to crawl up it and I held the bottom of the ladder while he was putting his feet on to go up the ladder. I forgot that when he got up there, there was nobody to hold the ladder for me. We had two men over there and they were dock workers and they had no sympathy, apparently, to save us. I hollered, 'Come here! Hold this ladder while I go up.' They acted as if they had never heard. They may not have understood English, so I reached over and grabbed the Jacobs Ladder and the ships hull goes down like this and

the ladder was coming down the side, so when you put your feet on the ladder your feet go in. So I was...I couldn't see anything...I couldn't even see the top of the ship. All I was seeing was the ladder going up and I was grabbing my hands and then my feet slipped off of the runner. There was nothing to push it to and I climbed up about three rungs pulling myself up by my hands until I could get my feet on. By the time I got on the ship where they grabbed me and pulled me on they were casting off the bow lines ready to...it was that close to leaving, so when I got on board first thing they said, "Just put your gear down and let's go eat." A man by the name of Overstate, that you all I hope will meet. Overstate thought that I had never been on a ship before, so he said, "Let's go down and eat. I'll take you down to the galley and get you something to eat." Got down and he said...first thing he said, 'We got some of the juiciest, greasiest pork chops you've ever seen. We've got some potatoes and, "said, "got plenty of butter on 'em." I said, "Boy, that sounds good." Guthrie and I hadn't eaten anything all day. All the time we were eating he was telling me how greasy and asked me if I was queasy at my stomach. _____ me I thought he was being kind and considerate. Later, I found out he wasn't. He was trying to make....see if I was going to get sick. Well, I ate a big supper and he said, "Well, we better go up topside." , said, "You don't want to stay down here." I said, "Well, we'll do it. We'll go up top side." So I went up topside and he said, "You had better stand next to this rail." I said, "Why, particularly?" He said, "Well, don't you feel bad?" I said, "No. I feel fine." Finally, he gave up and went on back up and later he told me, he said, "I was really disgusted that you didn't get sick." Well, I went to my office right then and there. I still had my uniform on and when the ship got out far enough from the dock, it's a routine they were going out, and I got a little buzz

and....I didn't even know what the buzzer was for, because on our other ship we had a voice communication. If you ever wanted me in my office, they'd call down through a little tube and tell me to come to the Captain's office, but this one had the old...nothing but a buzzer. It was an old ship that had a buzzer. The other man said, "You had better get up and go", said, "the Captain's calling you." Well, I got up and went to the Captain. I knew where the Captain's office was. I went into the Captain's office and my first encounter with him and he was sitting at his desk with a kind of a sneer on his face and he said, "Oh,...", he looked at my record and said, "we got another"...and I'll just use the 'blank-blank' "rebel. I have another rebel on my hands." I said, "Yes sir. You sure do. One from Georgia." He let into a tirade on rebels, let me know right quick that rebels weren't in high repute in his office. I made a determination right then. I said, 'That man will get the best service he's ever gotten.' He says 'Type a letter.' It will be done immediately. It will be done right. There will be no errors. Anticipate what he's going to need. I said, 'I'm going to show him that he doesn't have to think about individuals, such as he is he might have had a bad experience. Each time I went in I tried...I made a special effort to do a good job for him. I would have done it anyway, but I had had two good Captain's before. I'd heard about men like him, so it didn't bother me a whole lot.

Ron: You...uh...on the trip over were there any major events from your perspective from...from...to the South Pacific?

Willie: You mean on the way? Well, we enjoyed going through the Panama Canal. We stopped at Cocasola and had a liberty. I had not had a banana in three years and all I could think of was a banana and on the...I went out and saw this man with bananas and I said, "Give me a dimes worth of bananas." I thought I'd get two bananas. He cut off the

whole stalk and gave me a whole stalk of bananas. Here I was walking over the streets of Cocosola with one whole bunch of bananas. I got more bananas to eat that night and finally I met another sailor and I said.....didn't even know him and I said, "Hey, Mac!" That was a common appellation that you applied to all sailors. Macs were Macs. I said, "Hey, Mac! You want a banana?" I handed it to him and a persons instinct is take anything you hand to them whether you know them or not. I handed it to him and he held it and I jumped up on this little horse drawn cart that was going through town and my buddies were already on it, so we jumped up on the cart and got a tour of the sights of Cocosola, but I didn't get it with my bananas. We saw the...the one sight that we went through...the red light section of town and they said, "You've got to see it to believe it." Being from a puritanical society that we came from....I don't mean my family is puritanical, but they...puritanical compared to these. They had the prices over the door on what services were being offered and how much each one would cost. We thought that was rather hilarious that we'd always heard about the red light district, but we'd never known that the red light district had the price tag on...on what they had. We had no cases of venereal disease after we left that cesspot. Got to San Diego, came back on board and the pharmacist...the _____ always had to inspect them to see if they had any diseases. We had several incidences of venereal disease. The crawling creatures, the infectious type and here we had gone into the worst place in the world where all of the trade of prostitutes was legal and no cases of infection and went to Sand Diego...there was a beautiful civilized place and we had several incidences of disease.

Ron: What's the moral of that story?

Willie: The moral is, I guess, I'd go to Panama. (Laughs)

Ron: (Laughing) Let me just give you some names and just respond to the names however you feel about them or think about from this list of people. Fielder, Alex.

Willie: I'd say he's...uh....Mr. Fielder was one of the most respected officers on the ship and I would say 'the most', but anytime anybody lists...tells you to say 'number one' you'd better be careful, but he was surely one of the most respected officers on the ship. I know from my friends that still live that that's a case. We liked him. He was a plain talking man. He was not above associating with the enlisted men and I don't mean 'buddy, buddy'...we respected the rank, but you still could talk to him. He would do you kind favors when some of the others would be rather reticent to do. He was always a gentleman and I liked that. He had excellent rapport with his gang. He was in charge of the black gang. The men absolutely adored him and that speaks volumes for him.

Ron: Frank Frame.

Willie: Frank is a slow talking, deep bassed Texan and was always slow moving, never...he had plenty of energy, but Frank just doesn't get in a hurry. A man of absolutely impeccable traits. His reputation is just as good today as it was then. He was a good ship mate. He'd been a good friend.

Ron: Sarries.

Willie: Mr. Sarries was our communications officer and he was...you've met him recently. He was a joker. He told jokes. Most of the time with a moral. He didn't particularly just tell...and never told dirty stories, not that I ever heard. All of them were just good plain fun. Mr. Sarries was the communications officer and I had to type up all of his communications on his...we had a special typewriter that we typed those things up on and so I did all of his typing. He did his homework. He did his work. Stayed sick a

lot. He was not a man that could take the sea. Some people get accustomed to it. He couldn't. But Mr. Sarries was a good friend. Still is.

Ron: Mr. Wright.

Willie: Mr. Wright was our executive officer and Mr. Wright and I developed a close rapport very early. I worked for him. If I did a good job, it reflected well on him. If I did a poor job, it reflected poorly on him. I did a good job for him and he and I had a lot...he was a school teacher and I used to talk to him about...I told him...I said, "When I was in the fourth grade I decided I wanted to be a school teacher." And I told him that. We talked about teaching and he told me about college and what he had to take and I was planning to go to college and I was interested in that. So MR. Wright and I had an excellent relationship the whole time. A good man. He tried to do what the Captain wanted him to do.

Ron: Dick Drew.

Willie: Dick was enigmatic. He was thin and was as tough as nails. He was a ships cook. He had used no foul language. He was just like Frank. Never heard either one of them mention a bad word. He was a very dedicated man to his purpose and he was good to us, because he kept us some good steaks occasionally, which we would cook down in sick bay. I was friends with Dick, because he was from Georgia for one thing, but I just liked him. Dick was a boxer. We went on a liberty on an island, it was on Sypan. I think it was Sypan. I'm not sure whether it was Sypan, but they had a boxing match and they weighed everybody and he was in the lightest division that they would have. Well, the next man that was in the division fighting him was about forty pounds more than he was, but that was the only thing they could pair up. I just knew Dick was going to get his head

beaten off. Well, they stripped down to the shorts, the little old shorts and here Dick was boxing that man and the other man never laid a glove on Drew. He was much bigger and Drew literally beat the man to pieces. And they got through...Drew came out of the ring and said, "Well,..." said, "I showed him, didn't I?" I said, "Yeah, you showed him." He said, "But let's go pick up my prize." Well, we went over and they had given him a case of beer. That was the prize for winning the boxing match. So I carried...I didn't know a case of beer was as heavy as it was, so I was going to carry the beer. I decided right off quickly it wasn't the job for me, so I passed it over to...I believe it was Frame. And I don't know what happened to the beer, 'cause I wasn't a beer drinker. But that was Drew. He was a good productive citizen even after he left the service.

Ron: Johnny Medeiros.

Willie: Johnny Medeiros. Johnny was like a very tightly wound spring and if you hit the spring just right, the spring would come completely unsprung. Johnny's spring was sprung dozens of times. How he ever survived being killed I don't know, but he had encounters with dozens of people. His appearance, his nature is jovial, but yet he was just pugnacious. But for me, I kind of liked those individuals like that. He had some bad feelings toward a Yeoman occasionally, but he was still a good fellow.

Ron: Chief Henry Most.

Willie: Oh, Chief Most was absolutely the epitome of a sailor. He'd been in the navy approximately seventeen years. When Chief Most came on the ship he was the only Chief Petty Officer we had. Chief Most came on the ship...everybody reported to my officer to bring their records, service records and health records and he did that...came in. He was absolutely the most disgusted man you've ever seen. He had been on air craft

carriers, battleships or cruiser....he had two ships sunk. It was evident in his record....they had two ships that were sunk. And he said...I came on...he said, "I guess you know this gals going to sink." I said, "No, Chief, I didn't know that. How are you know that?" He said, "Well, I've been on two much better ships then this and they were sunk and this one is bound to be sunk." But it was a fluke. He should not have been assigned an LST. After his ship was sunk they sent him to Treasure Island after they had given him thirty days survivors leave. Somewhere along the line they just took a name off of a list and...if a ship needed a chief cook, they sent him and he was assigned. It was not...it was not vindictive the way they did it, but he hated it for the whole life that he was on it. He never did get accustomed to being on a scow.

Ron: Joe Szymanski.

Willie: Ah, Joe. I admired Joe. Joe was a big Pollock. I guess he was. He looked like it. Might be saying like...uh...he looked like a rebel, who knows. But I liked Joe. He was a good strong man. He was...he was our first class Boasim Mate. In that he was number one in the 'deck gang'. Mr. Green was head of the division, but Joe ran it. Not a doubt. Joe told everybody on his gang what to do. He kept in that ship in about as pristine condition as a ship could be kept in and he kept...he did it...he did it in a civilized way. Many boasims were people that were not as...they could be uncouth. They were strong. They dealt with working men. They dealt with hard fighting men and undoubtedly that rubbed up on....didn't happen to Joe. Joe could speak as civilly as any educated individual that you had ever see and I had a great deal of respect for Joe Szymanski. Still do.

Ron: James Miller.

Willie: Miller was one of my best friends. He was a pharmacist, second class. Miller was jovial every time you met him. He took care of his duties. We had three pharmacists on the ship. He was the lead pharmacist. There's a second class, a third class and a striker...a man who was going to be a pharmacist. He ran a good...he ran a good sick bay. I had an ingrown toe nail and I went down to Miller. He said, "It's got to come off." "What do you mean my toe nail's got to come off?" He said, "You're going to have blood poisoning, if I don't take my nail out." He said, "I've never put a man to sleep." I said, "Well, that's encouraging." He said, "Secondly, I don't have anything to put anyone to sleep with." I said, "Well, that's more encouraging." He said, "But we're going to have to take your nail off." I said, "Are you trying to tell me it's going to hurt?" He said, "Yes, It's going to hurt." I said, "Well, let's schedule it for tomorrow." He said, "Now!" He had already called in two big burly seaman. One held one ankle. The other one held the other ankle. The other coreman held my shoulders down and he proceeded to take my toe nail off. And he did. He took my toe nail off. Not even an aspirin. He said, "Now, I'll give you a shot of brandy." I said, "Man, I don't drink. It wouldn't do me any good. I'd probably vomit it if I took it." He said, "Well, you'll be...won't be sorry if you took it." I said, "No, Doc. Just work." So they cut my toe nail out, just holding my toe nail and cutting around it and removed my toe nail. I had....get in my hands a cringe today when I think about...don't ever have a toe nail taken off, especially with no anesthetic. But it had to be done and they treated it. He wrapped my toe up. They took my shoe and cut the whole end of my shoe out. It was the only pair of shoes I had too. Cut my whole shoe out and left that old blob of a toe hanging up there. But Doc Miller and Pascacella, the ships...the ships storekeeper ...and Docs, my striker, and Drew would

go down to the sick bay and Drew would store the best cuts of meats. He'd bring two or three steaks down and we would cook steaks on Doc Miller's hot plate and we'd have nothing but two pieces of home made bread cut about an inch thick with a piece of steak in it and as long as I live I don't think I'll ever eat a better steak...then one steak with nothing to drink, nothing to eat, no salad, just a good steak. So we enjoyed quiet moments of a good time.

Ron: When you talk about the personality of the ship what are you really talking about?

Willie: The personality of a ship....and I think you're right. I think a ship does have personality, but the personality relates to the men. The men make the personality. If you hit just the right mix of officers and men, the ship will develop an excellent personality.

Now, I was...the 534 had it when I came on board. It was already set. You had Camella that was the hard working storekeeper. You had Miller the jovial pharmacist. you had Szymanski, the big burly boasmate. You had the Henry Alver's that were the too cultured for what they were doing, smooth, good men that were doing a good job. you had men like Shirks that had come out of Hazard, Kentucky and lived a hard life.

Hazard, with it's reputation and Shirks had gone in very early, so we had the boyish boys and we had the men like Chief Most that was very mature with many years of experience.

You had people such as Cushow, the radar man that was an intellect, had an intellect that was extraordinarily bright, but never fit into the Navy mold. We took all those together and made a tight knit organization with very little bit of disruption. Now, we had some fights and we had some people get drunk, like Cane got drunk. We had this one man named Shipe from Tennessee. Good part of the thing...Shipe wanted to grow a beard worst than anybody I've ever seen. The best he could do was isolated hairs. He let those

grow and grow and each one you count. They were hanging all down his thing and he had...his mustache consisted of a few lone hairs trying to find a way down. He was as strong as any ox and as gentle as any lamb. We had a battery that was about this long....if you've ever picked up a car battery, you know how heavy they are. Well, this was a boat battery for an LCBP. Well, I was taking a typewriter into shore to have it repaired and they had three of those batteries that they were going to take ashore in the LCBP and have them recharged or replaced and when we got to the dock it was a low tide and the LCBP was lower than the dock. The dock was well, well, well six...almost...I'd say a half head high above the boat. I handed up my typewriter to Shipe. Shipe just took it like a feather and set it up on the dock and then I had to crawl up n the LCBP, pull myself up on the dock and there were those three batteries in the bottom of the boat. The coxin said they've already anchored...they'd already tied the LCBP up. And Said, "Shipe. I want you to unload these batteries while I'm gone." Knew that Shipe couldn't do it, because they were too heavy. They was...two men had a hard time. We got back to the boat...I took my typewriter and came right back and when I came back there the batteries were on the dock. The other coxsin came up and said, "Gun did you have him unload those?" I said, "No. I left to carry my typewriter." I said, "Ask him." Shipe was walking back toward the boat and came up there and the coxin shaid, "Shipe, who helped you move those batteries." He said, "I had to put them up by myself." Said, "you told me to put them up there." He picked each one of those batteries up, one man doing it, raising them head high, crawled up on the side of the boat and pushed them up on the dock. That was the strength of the man, but as gentle as anybody would ever be. We had the hardest time. Mr. Wright told me, he said, "Now, you...he's not in your division, but you've got

to talk to him.” He said, “Every time I look around he’s going bare footed. He cannot go bare footed.” I’d say, “Shipe, go put your shoes on.” Shipe would say, “They hurt my feet.” I said, “You’ve got to wear them. You’ve got to wear shoes.” He’d say, “Well, I’ll wear them, but they hurt my feet.” So he wore shoes, but he didn’t like them. He must have gone barefooted a long time and I could still envision him right now probably going bare footed, but he’s probably educated _____.....sophisticated individual today. I hope she can contact him to see if that’s true.

Ron: You never really engaged in combat the way...let’s say the Marines or the Army and yet it is traditional that men in...particularly in combat situations or scenarios tend to bond closer. Many men...matter of fact, somebody last night was mentioning this...many men bond closer and have closer relationships then they have with their own wives or, you know, mothers. Did you find any of that?

Willie: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Linda:change the tape at that point.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 2

TAPE 3, SIDE 1

NOTE: THIS PORTION OF THE INTERVIEW DOES NOT PICK UP WHERE THE LAST TAPE LEFT OFF. SOUNDS LIKE A DIFFERENT TRACT.

Willie: (Tape picks up in middle of sentence)...your nostrils and you...I smelled it for a couple days, just smelled. It was...smell'll linger. I agree on the characterization that he gave for Mr. Green. I agree on the characterization that he gave for Mr. Wright, their parts that they played in it. He did mention a couple more that I would have mentioned had I been there, but since I was not privy to the first class matter I wouldn't comment, because it would be strictly inappropriate. I knew the Captain was outside. I knew that he was badly perturbed and I came back to my office immediately. I heard the...it was a kind of thing that you don't want to think ever happens. And I'm not sure that it'd be the best to let it be known that it happened, but somewhere, some time, somebody will write it. It was just one of those unfortunate things that could happen. But the decision was...the decision that had to be made was so crucial that it would affect the life and safety of every man on the ship. For that reason I listened. I didn't...usually when they were talking about something that I did not want to hear I would just leave my office rather than talking. I told Mr. Wright, until this came up I had never mentioned this apparent mutiny before.

Ron: (Cannot understand)

Willie: Well, they were just going to disregard...it was a Captain Quaid type thing...they were going to disregard his orders. He wanted to take the ship off the reef, start the engines when the tide came up and...we'd already been over to the ship. The officers had been. I had been, taking notes whenever they'd been going. Mr. Fielder had forgotten

that I went down there. Well, he was...he was so concerned at that time. He was the number one man. He was the only one that really stood for what he had to believe. It was a very difficult decision that he had to make. He was really not even aware of all the rest of the people hardly there. It was a life and death decision. It was a career. He could have been ruined for the rest of his life with that one decision. He had the support of Mr. Green. Mr. Green was a lawyer from Indiana, a very stable man. He had his support. He didn't have the support of many other.. the younger insons(sp?)...you could imagine, did not want to get involved.

Ron: I guess that the real question is what kinds of relationships evolve out of those circumstances that might not otherwise have happened....

Willie: Well, there is a very strong bond and sometimes between three or four individuals. In my case, I had a very special, hard bond with the Drew, Dick Drew, with William Docs, with Michael Pascacella and with Doc Miller. They were the four that I really felt strongest attachment. If I needed a favor done or if they wanted a favor done, we would do it immediately. We had a loyalty that did not have to be questioned. It was a love and affection of a manly type that you respected the individual for what he was. We still have it. I don't think you could compare it with the love for a wife. That's a... I think a different thing altogether, but it was a love just as strong as that. You bonded _____ the people that were in my tent on the island. Well, we got the tent and got it up and we had a good life. We enjoyed the camaraderie that we had there. But even with the men that weren't that close you still develop a kinship with them. I had a good kinship with Mr. Wright, with Mr. Fielder, although Mr. Fielder worked with the black gang and I didn't work with him as much as I did Mr. Wright. The we had a young inson

lord that I particularly liked. I always said he ought to be a preacher. He acted like...I always told him that he ought...he'd missed his calling. He should have been a preacher instead of...or a priest, whatever religion he was. I don't even know....I think he was Protestant. I'm not....yeah, I know he was Protestant, because he led the Protestant services on the...on the ship. He and I got along very, very well together. I enjoyed Mr. Sarries, but never bonded. There was no bond. I enjoyed his talking, but there was not a bond. That happens too. You meet some where there is no bond. Medeiros. No bond. Was others....with Wilson, we were friends, but he led his life and I led mine. No bond. If you hadnow, we are probably closer bonded today than we were then.

Ron: You have something? (To Linda) Just your name and rank.....

Willie: My name is Willie David Gunn and on the LST 534 I went on board as the Yeoman third class and while I was on board I was promoted to Yeoman second class. I left the ship in the winter, in December of 1945 as Yeoman second class. I was discharged as a Yeoman second.

Ron: (Special instructions) Yeah, just take them item by item and.....

Willie: Are you ready?

Linda: Hold them up kind of closer to your chin. Yes, that's good.

Willie: When the ship was raised I went down to my compartment, which was right adjacent to where the ship...the airplane went in and my compartment was destroyed and the door was burst open in the compartment where the remains of the airplane were. I started searching around just seeing if there was anything left. Parts of the pilots body were still there. I picked up this piece. This had special significance. This is a portion of a parachute. It's still burned on the ends from the impact, but the main reason that I

wanted to get this was that according to the literature that we had given to us in World War II, the kamikaze pilots were usually young pilots that were untrained and they made a one way mission. They didn't have to have enough gas but for one way and they never wore parachutes. Well, this pilot and the plane that hit us was a Zeke, a modification of a Zero. This piece of parachute is an indication that the man that hit our ship was probably a squadron leader and may have had a hopes or directions to fly back to Japan, if he could make it after he had led the flight of suicide planes. The group of planes that hit us that morning, there were about a hundred of them that started, a little better than a hundred that started out and almost all of them were shot down except five that came into our immediate area. Five got right into our midst. We believe...I believe that the man that was flying the plane was the leader and he probably...he may have gotten caught up in the furry of battle. He may have been wounded. Our guns may have hit him, but unless he had decided to commit hari kari and dive on our ship and be killed he wouldn't have come down where he did, so I think he deliberately crashed into our ship, but I think that he was caught up in the end of the war and he wanted to contribute his part. This showed that he really planned to go back to Japan. he was supposed to go back to Japan. I took...I took these two small pieces of metal from the airplane and they undoubtedly were right...instructions in the cockpit of the airplane. When I picked these up they were covered up with blood and tissue and I had to take these back and give them a good washing and soaking down and it would be interesting to know what these words...it's been suggested that we might find what these were. It was interesting. He did carry...he had at least had two coins. I got a number of coins off of him. I got more then this. This is all that I...all that I saved. I gave the rest of it to other crewman, but...they're two coins

that he had. I took off every...I think I pried off eight of ten of these and I gave them to the various crew members to carry back, but the pilots body was in complete...had been completely destroyed. You've seen the picture...seen the ring and the pilots finger was still in it when one of the men got it and...got it just before I did and took it off. These are important memorabilia as far as the actual attack is concerned.

Linda: You want to explain what some of those little cards are, so that when we shoot them....

Willie: Many of the men received this little card here. This is...on the back is USS LST 534, Willie D. Gunn, Yeoman Second Glass. This is the Order of the Setting Sun, the Okinawa Chapter. It was kind of ludicrous affair that somebody printed up and issued to some of us. It reads, 'Order of the Setting Sun, Okinawa Chapter. To Whom it May Concern: Willie D. Gunn, Yeoman Second having served in the Armed Forces of the United States of America in the Okinawa area during it's transition from an island of the Japanese Empire to a conquest of the United States, is found to be fully qualified for membership in the Order of the Setting Sun.' So it was interesting. There was a little island off the coast of the Japan called Kamramaretta. Some of us who went over on Kamramaretta and took part in that little escapade, they issued us the Kamramaretta Beach Combers. 'This certifies that Willie D. Gunn, Yeoman Second Class has been on the beach of Zamumi Shima, Kamramaretta and in such entitled to membership in the Kamramaretta Beach Combers Association by order of his royal highness, ruler of Zamumi Shima.' So I am a member of that exclusive club. Then the six of us who were on the ship, the Captain and five men and I were on the ship and we were under...lived under about as poor condition as could be and the Captain issued this card to each of the

six of us. 'USS LST 534. Fellowship in the Rugged Life. It is hereby certified that Willie D. Gunn, Yeoman Second Class, USNR is a qualified inhabitant of a wreck and possesses all those faculties necessary to live by his ingenuity and wits. He is a master of the arts of scrounging and making ends meet by devious means. R.J. French, Lieutenant USNR commanding.' "Willie", he said, "we got to put the ship seal on it in, so that it will be authentic." So authentic it is and I still remember the wreck. This was a interesting.. this was a...and you can't see it, I'm sure, on camera, but this is a little news release...newspaper put out by the Kubasaki receiving station. It was a little tent city where new men came in and went out. The name of it is the Kamikaze and here it's got the 534. If you look carefully, you can see the ship 534 and a suicide plane coming in. They named this after the 534, which is probably the only thing ever named after it, interesting though it might be.

Linda: Is there anything else you want to say?

Willie: It's been a great experience. I've had a good life. Rough one in some cases, hard work and enjoyed every minute of it. Had a good family. We've had...we have three grown children. We have six grandchildren. All of the children are very successful. Never a problem. Never had to tell them to study or get their homework. Never had to reprimand them. Never had to tell them when to get in. Never told them to be careful, because I always told them, I said, "You will be careful." Had a good career. Met some wonderful students that I remember and I still go to reunions from many classes that I taught. I just went to one last week, Class of 1952. I taught in High School a number of years before I taught at West Georgia College. I was a professor of biology. Then I became Dean of a brand new college at Swineboro, had about 1,100 students. Then I

became President in 1976, so I could not complain about one thing in life. Been healthy. Never sick. Not many days. My total career I was out four days. Forty-four and a half years, so that was one day every ten years. So I have been blessed with everything in the world with a good wife, good children and marvelous friends. If my life ended today, I have done what I wanted to do, but I look forward to many more though. I deeply appreciate...this has been the best reunion we've ever had. All of you four right here and Linda Alvers in particular and your mother have made it possible. It has...you talk about bonding, it made a new bond. It's a new spirit that prevailed last...men and the women. Now, the women bond too. They have learned the same thing and they...inherently, my wife knows...Mrs. Phillis. She knows Mrs. Sarries. She knows Dick Drews wife. She knows all the wives of...that came with us. Frank Frames and Larry Graves. So they bond much the same way that men do. They hear the tales so much that it almost becomes real to them. So it's been....you've heard the old thing, 'It's been a wonderful life!' It has been. And we were educated along the line. We're still making friends. I still..And I look forward to seeing all of you again. It's great to see real professional at work. It gives us hope for the future. Absolutely.

Ron: Thank you. Very nice. Very nice.

END OF INTERVIEW