

LINDA: Name & Rank.

JIM: My name is James Miller and my rank was pharmacists mate first class USNR.

LINDA: How old were you when you went into the Navy?

JIM: I went into the Navy when I was about 20 years old.

LINDA: Did you get drafted or did you enlist?

JIM: I enlisted.

LINDA: What year was that?

JIM: 1940.

LINDA: Where did you enlist?

JIM: I enlisted at Utica, NY

LINDA: Where you automatically put into the Navy.

JIM: I went to boot camp. I went to Newport, Rhode Island. I was there 12 weeks and then I was sent to a hospital as a hospital apprentice and the reason I believe I was sent there was because I used to work in drug store when I was in high school and being a soldier they said we need you for the Navy. So I think that is how I got there.

LINDA: When did you board the LST534?

JIM: I boarded it in January 13, 1945.

LINDA: Where did you board it at?

JIM: In Norfolk, VA.

LINDA: So the 534 has already been over in the European theater and came back.

JIM: That is right. I missed the European cruise they call it. I joined it in Norfolk and we headed North. It was pretty rough. It had been the first time I had been aboard a ship and I remember that we had big pork chops for supper and all the guys were up on top side after supper and they were heaving over. I guess I was luck I never got seasick.

LINDA: Do you remember Jim Sarres?

JIM: Yeah, he was a Lt. I got to know all the officers because I spent quite a bit of time up in officers country and got to know most of them.

LINDA: Jim Sarres said he was sick the whole two years.

JIM: Quite a few of them were. I guess I was luck.

LINDA: So in Norfolk was that the first time you had seen an LST?

JIM: Well I had seen them but being in the CB's I left that and was sent to an Independent Duties School in Norfolk and that was getting ready for an LST. Independent duty. So that is how I got on that LST.

LINDA: That training tape that you saw had you ever seen that before? The one you saw this morning?

JIM: No. I didn't get into too much of that type of training. Mostly medical.

Saving lives.

LINDA: Did the LST look big or little to you?

JIM: To me it looked like a huge ship because the first time you go up the gangplank you wonder what is going to happen. How is it going to ride. The usual things about those things and when it took off I knew. The rocking. It was kind of rock and roll all the way and it happened to have been very rough day going from Norfolk to New York but we survived it and got used to it after a while.

LINDA: Do you remember meeting the Captain? Who was the Captain.

JIM: Captain Olsen was on when I went aboard the ship but then Captain French took over. I didn't get to know him until Captain Olsen left and Captain French took over. He was a pretty nice guy I thought. You know I mean he had to do his duty. Sometimes we didn't agree with it but most of the times he was okay.

LINDA: So you were on the LST534 all the way over until the decommissioning?

JIM: No I was on the LST until it was hit by the kamikaze and then I was taken off and then we went into tents on the island. And then I was put on an old liberty ship which had a big hole in the middle and no engine. They were handing out medical supplies from the ship for the small boats that came alongside from other ships. And that was my duty until I was discharged from the Navy.

LINDA: A pharmacists mate, as soon as you got on at Norfolk, you were the pharmacists mate?

JIM: That is correct.

LINDA: So where was your office?

JIM: Well we had a nice sick bay down on the starboard side of the ship. It was a nice one but it wasn't too far from when the bomb hit. It was pretty close to the sick bay and luckily I wasn't there. They had fixed it up pretty nice. Six inch mattress, nice desk, and a safe and all kinds of medical supplies. It was really up to date for that type of ship. It was really a nice one.

LINDA: How did you get medical supplies?

JIM: Well when you pull into port you go over to the warehouse, medical warehouse and you ordered what you needed and they would send it over or you bring it back and put it back in the sick bay.

LINDA: So sometimes one of the coxswains would take you over to

JIM: Oh yes. Maybe your dad took me over. The small boats always took you over there and picked up the supplies and then came back here on ship. Put them away and got ready for the rush from the sailors.,

LINDA: What kinds of things did these guys have?

JIM: Well we were pretty lucky on board. They weren't too sick. We had the usual colds and sore throats. Sometimes a hit of the thumb with a hammer or maybe fall down the latter or something like that but it was pretty easy going really. It was a good crew and they never really got hurt too much until we got hit. I would say that my duties were pretty easy.

LINDA: Were you like the doctor?

JIM: Yes. That is why they sent me to an independent duty school. We replaced a doctor. I think in the flotilla of the ships they had one doctor in about 8 or 9 ships and the pharmacists mate takes the place of the doctor for that ship.

LINDA: When you got out of the Navy did you go be a doctor?

JIM: No. I always wanted to be in accounting and business administration and so the doctoring went out the window.

LINDA: Who was your best friend on board?

JIM: My best friend became the bosanmate. We had a little argument and I went aboard and we got to be good friends after that.

LINDA: Who?

JIM: Symanski. He tried to get me to do something, load supplies which the medical people don't do aboard ships and I guess he didn't understand the rules and regulations and so we had a little argument but he went up to the Captain's office and they got it straightened out up there and we became good friends. Played a lot of cards with him and another pal was the storekeeper and then the water tender. We used to play cards all the time. That was about the best friends I had aboard.

LINDA: Did you go in shifts? Were there three pharmacists mates?

JIM: Yes there was myself, and a second class pharmacists mate and then we had a third class and we took shifts. As I said we weren't very busy but we did have sick call. I think it was 8 in the morning till 9 and at night time 6-8. And then anytime during the day if anybody was sick they would find us somewhere on the ship. We had I would say open office hours or on call.

LINDA: Do you remember having liberty.

JIM: Oh yeah. When the ship was in New Jersey, Hoboken, that was where Frank Sinatra lived, we used to have every other day off and we could go to town or do what we wanted to. We usually went up to New York and went to movies and plays and that. It worked out really nice.

LINDA: Where were you born?

JIM: Utica, New York. It is upstate New York.

LINDA: Here is this fella from upstate New York going into the city and being the big cheese on the ship. What was that like?

JIM: I was a wheel. No. Looking back I was about 22 years old when I went aboard and I thought I was a big shot really but looking back I think maybe I wasn't a big shot after all but I did my job or try to do it anyway.

LINDA: You must have met every single crew member at some point of time.

JIM: Oh at some time yes. It is hard to remember who they were now but I know aboard ship I was friendly with everybody really because you know they all talk to you and you listen to their problems. A lot of men had problems. I remember when my second class assistant he had a girl problem and her name was Sarah and that is all he talked about was writing to Sarah and he would tell me about Sarah and I found out after he got out of the service there was no Sarah. So evidently either he dumped her or she dumped him and married somebody else. But was one of the problems. Everybody had some problems. That type of thing.

LINDA: Do you remember my dad?

JIM: Well you know as I said there were so many sailors aboard and there were a lot of coxswains and a lot of seamen that it is hard to pinpoint a certain person unless you really had contact and not being in a very good division and living with the all the time it is hard to remember. I probably talked to him and he probably had some kind of an ailment at some time. I would have liked to have known him.

LINDA: I remember my dad telling me about getting sunburned when he was on board. Was that something you would have treated?

JIM: Oh yes. We had calamine lotion I think we put on the sun burn those days and it usually cures that person who had it. I got kind of tanned. I used to wear shorts without a shirt most of the time because it gets pretty warm out there. Not out on the ocean but if you are in port and you are on the deck most of the time. It is pretty hot.

LINDA: So when you got on board you were over here in the safety of the America shores, at least what was seemingly safe at that time and you were in Hoboken for a while, while they were re-outfitting and then you went down sailed around Pensacola and around through the Panama Canal and over to San Diego and then to Hawaii. This was not war really for you was it?

JIM: No. I was trained with the CB's. We had a lot of maneuvers but only on our shore and I already when I went aboard ship and headed out that way I really didn't think too much about it at that time until we got into action. Then you think about it. But up until that time it didn't bother me too much.

LINDA: When is the first time you can remember being scared or afraid?

JIM: When we got hit by the kamikaze I wasn't scared right away. It is the afterwards. What could have happened. And what happened and why didn't it

happen. I was up in the ward room. That was my general quarters. That is the officers board room and I was listening to Tokyo Rose. She was playing good music. Music of the 40's and she was telling us why are you out there or why aren't you home with your sweetheart and I said keep quiet and play more good music and so she did and then all of a sudden whamo. I knew we were in action when the twin 40's went off I knew we were in action. But it is funny I didn't feel scared or anything but afterwards I was thinking it could have been me. I guess that is the way it is.

LINDA: Were you around helping with the fires that started afterwards.

JIM: No I was on the dock when the fires broke out and they were tough. I give those firemen a lot of credit. They go right in there. We were carrying ammunition too and we were afraid that was going to blow but they are good people and they worked hard on that fire. I kept away from there. I didn't want to get burned. Wasn't my job really. Let them take care of it.

LINDA: When you were headed over to the Pacific had you heard about the suicide missions that were going on and stuff.

JIM: Well you hear a little bit about it but when I got into Okinawa and I saw some of those ships that were sitting out there with holes in them hit by a kamikaze I knew it was no picnic. Of course there is nothing you can do really unless you shoot them down and if you don't shoot them they get you because they leave home and they have a big celebration and drink to the death and all that stuff. If you don't get them they will get you so it is good to have good gunners aboard.

LINDA: Did you eat good aboard the ship?

JIM: Excellent. We had good cooks. We had Harry Steward who as a really good man and he gave us good food. We ate good on the LST534.

LINDA: Do you remember Drew, Mr. Drew? He was a cook.

JIM: Yes. I knew most of the cooks. Before anybody else was fed I used to have to go check the food and taste it and all that stuff. I never got too many complaints about the food. It was really good.

LINDA: Mr. Drew told me about sneaking food into the people who were in the brigg.

JIM; Yes. We didn't have too many guys in there. It was a little bitty place. Our guys were good. We didn't have too much trouble.

LINDA: Okay so the ship gets hit by a kamaikaze plane, there is a big hole in it, it is on fire, and Captain French decides he is going to raise it backup and repair and sail it again. Then what happened?

JIM: Well when you had the fire my sick bay was the starboard side where the fire was and I lost everything because that was my station. I lost all the pictures I had, my clothes, everything. So they took us off there and put us

in tents on the island and we stayed in tents two or three weeks I guess. As I remember and then some of the fellas went back on the LST and stayed on there till they sunk it and then they put me on this other big ship the CP8, the medical ship.

LINDA: Were you ever in the typhoons?

JIM: Oh boy that was worse then the kamikaze was. I remember the first one and I thought that was bad. It starts out like a breeze and we were tied up to other ships. We didn't have any engine or nothing really. The breeze started upping and then it got stronger and stronger and then all at once it hits it. What could you do? You had nothing. You can't do a thing. Can't run, can't hide or do anything. So the first one went by pretty fast. All the ships waved on their way out - the ones that could get out of the harbor because they ride the storms out in the sea but you are stuck there and just waiting for something to happen. The second typhoon I went through was worse then the first one and the ship that I was on broke loose from the mooring next to the other ships and we were just running around the harbor hitting other ships. I was scared. I really was and I think everybody aboard the ship was scared though we did have an experience of seeing a man out there tied on a raft. He fell overboard from one of the ships and they threw a life raft out there and he was out there all during the typhoon which is about 2 1/2 days. How he survived I will never know but he was sitting out there holding on. It was a really rough one.

LINDA: Were you on the LST534 then?

JIM: No I was on this old tub I called it. We had about maybe 15 or 20 personnel aboard. But it was a tough one.

LINDA: Did you realize that while you were being tossed around by the typhoon that the 534 was being tossed around.

JIM: No I really kind of lost track of the 534. In fact I was trying to find out where it went. I didn't know if they moved it out or whatever happened to it till I found out later that it was pretty close by and they were having the same problem we were having. I thought we were the only one having that problem. It was a tough deal.

LINDA: Some of the guys actually say that the typhoons were scarier then anything in war that they had been through.

JIM: They are. You know when you get living in Arizona and we hear about a lot of these monsoons that come in there in the summer time and the wind starts blowing you remember back to those days and there is nothing you can do about it. Being aboard this old tub I called it, what could you do, pray a lot. It was tough.

LINDA: Do you have times now in your life that you think about, you know

you may hear a sound or smell a smell or have an experience like a wind stirring up that reminds you of your days in the Navy?

JIM: Oh yeah. When I got out of the Navy I tried to put it behind me but you get little things like watching the History Channel and you see a ship landing and you say gee maybe that is the 534. You know. You think about it for a few minutes and then it just blows away.

LINDA: Watching the History Channel tell me about one afternoon when you were watching it the History Channel.

JIM: What a shock. I usually watch the History Channel quite often and one day I went in the living room and I sat down in the chair and I flipped on the TV and I looked up and there was 534. I knew it was sunk. They put it in the bottom of the Buckner Bay. I said Sandy look come here and she came over and I said there is my ship what is it doing out there? So we said well it is on the History Channel maybe they will repeat it. You know usually they repeat those stories a couple of times a week so I looked it up in the TV Guide and it would be redone the next Saturday morning so I said I will tape it. So I taped it and I couldn't believe the guys aboard. It is hard you know to remember it was 55 years ago but it was a really good day and then I got a hold of the producer a Linda Alvers and she straightened me out and straightened my day out and has been great ever since.

LINDA: There was Szymanski up there big as life.

JIM: Yeah I saw him. I saw him in his uniform when he was younger and then when he was older. He looked the same. You know not when he was older but when he was younger. I said that is the guy. I saw quite few other ones that I remembered. But I have talked to quite a few of them thanks you to you and some that have called me - Willie Gun and Leroy Spencer - reminded me of some of the stuff we used to do - had fun. So starting all over again.

LINDA: When do you remember first meeting Joe Szymanski?

JIM: Like I said when I went aboard. I say again we became good friends. Got along real well.

LINDA: I can't imagine you looking at the History Channel and there are your buddies.

JIM: It is way, I still can't get over it after 55 years you know you look back and see somebody and say gee I wondered when they showed the pictures of them when they were younger that is when I really picked them up. It was out of my mind. Never thought I would see anybody again and there they were.

LINDA: Would you ever go back to Buckner Bay or anything.

JIM: Well you know every place I have been it is always different. If I went back there it probably wouldn't look the same. Probably all built up I guess

from the Japanese taking over the island. I don't think it would be the same. I would like to see the old ship maybe and that is it.

LINDA: You know where the ship is now.

JIM: I heard it is down at the bottom of the bay. When I heard about that when I left the island someone had said that they had pulled the plug on the ship and that they had sunk it. So I thought well that is it. The days are over. New life starts. And it started in 1999.

LINDA: When you got out of the service did you go back to Utica?

JIM: Yes. I was married. I got married in 1944, December of 44 and my wife was waiting for me back there. I went back there and went to school and we had a baby boy and after that we had 3 other ones. Made my life there until one day I was watching the Rose Bowl. I had built a house back there. I was watching a Rose Bowl game in California and the snow was up to the eaves there and I said gee I would like to go to California. Look at those people out there in shirt sleeves. So I had quite a time talking my wife into moving, you know sell the house and move but we did. And that is where I was for about 20 years. Out in the sunshine. Then after that I got divorced in 73 and I met a nice girl and Sandy is her name and we got married and I had a heart attack in 79 and I asked the doctor and I retired from the company I was working for, and I asked the doctor if I could do some traveling and take it easy and everything. He said fine - he said come back here in 6 months or three months to check you over. So for 6 or 7 years we just roamed the country with a trailer and a truck and saw the whole United States. That was great. Loved it. Then we finally retired down in Arizona.

LINDA: What do you think now in 1999 about a being a part of World War II. How does that make you feel?

JIM: Well I think wars are silly. Really a waste of time, money and especially waste lives. I know we had to do something when Hitler was running rampant but if we had stopped him earlier I probably wouldn't have been over there. So I think when these characters start trying to conquer the world we should do it then. Stop them then. We may lose a few lives but in the long run we are going to save a lot of lives.

LINDA: I don't think I had a thorough appreciation of World War until I started doing this project.

JIM: Many fellas lost their lives and there are many cripples out there too. A lot of people are still sick living in hospitals and so on. I was lucky. Really lucky. No scratches. Thank the Lord. All these wars that we are fighting now I think it is so bad. So useless for what? Money maybe? Power. Not worth it.

LINDA: Do you pay attention to politics.

JIM: Not really. I am not a registered Republican or Democrat. I rather consider myself an Independent. I have to like the man in the office. I will say that my favorite President was Truman. He saved their lives when he dropped that bomb. It seemed kind of unhuman to drop a bomb like that but think of all the lives he saved of the Americans because we were scheduled I saw the maps where we were going to land in Japan on the island before it got it. We probably wouldn't be here today. I think Truman was one of our better Presidents and I am not a Democrat either. I think he was a great guy.

LINDA: If we were here today we probably wouldn't be living the same kind of life if we had been without him.

JIM: No. No way. In fact when I was in our trailer we went to this museum and I talked to one of the ladies that he knew when he was a younger man and she was pretty old. She said what a great man he was and I believe her. I think he did a good job.

LINDA: Do you remember the day Roosevelt died?

JIM: Yes. I think I when Roosevelt died it was in November, I was in Norfolk, VA going through hospital training. When they said that he died, you know he had been President for so long and we all said boy what are we going to do now. Who do we have to look forward to? He said Truman and I didn't know too much about him, I guess no one did and he said we are in trouble now. Well Truman proved we weren't in trouble.

LINDA: Were you nervous coming to this reunion.

JIM: In a way I was. What are they going to do, what do they, who am I going to meet. Some of the old guys I won't know. That bothered me more than anything and I said who is this Linda Alvers. I am sure glad I came.

LINDA: When you saw the guys I mean is it all starting to come back to you?

JIM: Oh yes, it really did. You look at them and you know they changed. You know everybody changes. But you still see something there that you remember them by and that is what happened today. I didn't remember anything but some of the things they say you look at them and expressions and it comes back to you. I am sure glad I came.

LINDA: I think they like to get the guys back together and kind of relive some of that is fun.

JIM: Wonderful job you are doing to do this. Not many daughters would do this really. Sure glad you are doing this. Making a lot of guys happy. A lot of wives happy probably too.

LINDA: Wish my dad was here.

JIM: I do too. I am sure he would like it. Another thing that I didn't know

about and I looked when I got out of the service for a while, reunions. I thought maybe we might have a reunion but I never did find anything until you know just recently. Missed all that. Thanks again.

LINDA: You are welcome. Were you ever in contact again with any of your shipments?

JIM: I lived in Utica, NY. The only one that came to see me, that I had got in contact with was Willie Docks. He was working and he came over to see me and we had a good chat in the afternoon and I never saw him after that until about two or three weeks ago and he still remembers that. Hope to see him today. I hear he is here.

LINDA: He is here.

JIM: You know spin some old stories again.

LINDA: He was a yeoman right?

JIM: Yeoman. He was Willie Gunn's assistant. Spent a lot of time up in officers country. He told me a lot of stories. Things that went on and so on. I had my spies up there. You have to have them up there.

LINDA: Would you recommend that one of your sons do what you did in World War II.

JIM: Not really. I had a son in Viet Nam and he is a helicopter pilot. But it is a different and different times and he was kind of discouraged over there because they wouldn't let him do what he was supposed to do. Had to get permission to do anything. To shoot a plane down or anything. You had to get an okay from the head man or whoever is in charge and we didn't have to do that. There was a job to be done and we did it. I wouldn't want to send anybody to go through that again. It was too tough.

LINDA: So is there anything you want to tell me that you haven't told me.

JIM: Not really. Glad this thing is over with, the war, not the reunion. I am glad it is over with and I hope we don't have to go through it again. Once is enough. I am glad I was there and I am glad I am out.

LINDA: Yes we were lucky. Nobody died from combat from combat on the 534.

JIM: No as I say all that bombing or that bomb that dropped and blew that big hole in the ship. I think three men lost their lives, I think they were CB's I am not sure but it could be worse. We were lucky and then the typhoon we did alright. The old Lord was looking after us.

LINDA: Did any of the guys talk about the European theater and some of them had been on board for a while.

JIM: Oh yes they talked about the landing and going across the channel. We talked about the buzz bombs.

LINDA: Did you write letters to your wife.

JIM: Oh yes. I had a little scheme that no one knew about. I had the longitude on the map, longitude and latitude and I used the time of day. If we were at 1236 or 1542 she knew exactly where I was at all times just by putting the time and you have to, the officers had to read all your mail. But knowing the time they didn't question that but she knew where I was at all times so she knew I was in Okinawa. Good. Really good. One of my tricks.

LINDA: Were your parents alive?

JIM: No my dad died when I was 15 but my mother was alive but she was getting along in years. My dad died when I was 15 and he never served in the service. My mother didn't want me to go in the service. She is from the old school afraid her little boy is going to get hurt. They took you anyway or you enlisted.

LINDA: Did you have brothers and sisters.

JIM: One sister and she is 88 years old now. She is along in years. Fair health. Five children. Three girls and two boys. All grown. Left the nest thank goodness. But they were good kids. Done well.

LINDA: So you fought for freedom and we are enjoying it today.

JIM: You're welcome but as I said I wouldn't want to do it again.