

JIM SARRES

RON: Why are you here?

JIM: Convention. Reunion of the LST Association of the United States.

RON: Why are you sitting in this chair?

JIM: I am sitting in this chair because I couldn't afford a room or something. Better than the lobby.

RON: That is one reason but what are the other reasons you are here?

JIM: Why I am here. Well after fifty years or so you miss your buddies. You will never see some of them again and every year we are getting fewer and fewer and to get together and break bread and talk and reminisce is very important to all of us.

RON: What are the things that you talk about when you come to the convention.

JIM: Amazingly it isn't too much about what happened. Very seldom although I notice in my latter years as the years go by I start talking about here and there. We talk about the good times. The lunches or dinners we had overseas. The funny experiences in Okinawa. Anything that comes to mind. We tell jokes. I told my engineering officer the same joke every year and when I start it he is laughing. He has heard it a hundred times but he is laughing. I don't know what it is but to get together is important.

RON: Do you think the relationships you had when you were young in the military are stronger than most other bonds between people.

JIM: I think so.

RON: Why do you think that is true.

JIM: Because we went through a lot of things together. We suffered together, we laughed together, we separated together. It is hard to understand if you haven't been in that position. Two years on a ship continuously. The bond is very strong.

RON: What did you feel about the war when you were drafted.

JIM: I wasn't drafted. I was going to Marquette Law School and I had a couple of semesters to go and I wanted to finish but they were after me, the draft, so I finished my last exam at Marquette University about 11 o'clock, I went down and joined the Navy. I didn't want to be on land. I wanted to be someplace where they had warm food, a bunk to sleep in, showers and so on. Because the Army/Marines it is a tough job being on alert all the time.

RON: So you went from training at the Great Lakes

JIM: I went from Great Lakes. I tried to get a commission; I couldn't do it even though I had a BA from Lawrence University and a year and half at Marquette Law School. So they sent me to signal school on Christmas eve which would be another 200 miles further away from my home town of Oshkosh and when I walked in those guys were showing off playing the semi-fours and the morse code and I thought I will never learn that. But in about four months I had learned it and I applied for a commission. My

Captain said you can apply, I will sign your commission papers but don't get your hopes up nobody has ever made it from here. So I went down to the Yeoman to get the papers and he wouldn't give them to me so at night I got up and took them. Filled them out and gave them to the Captain and he says no hopes. I was commissioned in 30 days and then I went to Ft. Schylers, New York for Officers Training School and then to the Amphibious base a Norfolk.

RON: Why did they send you to an amphibious base?

JIM: To get the officers. Some go here and some go there wherever the need was at that time. The need was for LST's amphibians.

RON: How do you think your personality changed from the time you went in till the time you got out. What did it do to you that changed you as a person?

JIM: I don't think anything. My shipmates tell me I still have the same humor only lousier and I don't know I guess I was just hoping to get thorough so I could come back and go to law school. I wasn't better than anybody. I didn't like being there but you are acclimated. They train you. They drill you every day so you do things automatically and we did them.

RON: Were you married at the time?

JIM: No.

RON: So you were just another single guy.

JIM: Yeah I was a single guy going to Marquest Law School.

RON: Tell me a little bit about the trip across Nova Scotia to England.

JIM: Nova Scotia. I was a communications officer so I had to get the go ahead by train or jeep someplace until the next port to get the sailing instructions. A morse code book for deciphering messages and so on. And also I was the first one to land to get the mail for the boys. So it always took me about 4-6 hours to get the mail because I had a little freedom. The captain would say wait and I would say well you know Captain a lot of guys are waiting for their mail they had to wait in line. And mail call was the most important thing. Did I lose the question?

RON: I was trying to get to the physical crossing of over to England. Your experience on the trip.

JIM: Well I'll tell you as a convoy we were over 100 ships. Five in each row. One, two, three, four, five. We were in the first row. The four ships ahead of us were big mammoth ships. Liberty ships, Cargo Ships. We were sailing and sailing and then we had a fire aboard ship and there were submarines around but we got the fire out and then one time the hellaman lost control and we held back two days of travel to catch up at nine ten knots a mile an hour. And then one night I was up on the watch, quick Thursday, beautiful moon, water was calm and I said I wish I was back in Oshkosh to fish and then I heard a puff and another noise and another puff and finally I saw this ship ahead of me, big ships going down. So I called the captain and he came up and before I called the captain I went to get the berry pistol that shoots a flare to light the submarine, the escorts, where the submarine is coming from. The last thing I heard from the man in the bow is torpedo on the port side. We got a very shallow draft. So I got that thing the gun and I looked up and the flag was flying. Real nicely. Boy I was a different man. Changed man. I have the courage to do something that I had to do anyhow and I called the captain and he came up, took over the ship because there were guys in the water hollering for help and we

can't stop because we might get here and for three or four days before he got to England there were times when somebody would shut one of those metal doors we would all jump.

RON: What happened to the men in the water?

JIM: I don't know. Probably drowned. The escort said that torpedo was either meant for us went half way across and hit an oil tanker and blew up. I thought smoke flames were red but they were orange. They said they saved everybody. I know they could not have saved everybody in that water.

RON: But you weren't allowed to stop.

JIM: No we had to keep going.

RON: So you had to go right through them. How did that make everybody feel? Was that sense of

JIM: Oh yeah, we were frightened. We were scared. That was our first action. It hardened you later on to do things you had to do but to see those ships go down so fast with those torpedoes was amazing.

RON: Did the fear that you experienced at that time increase over periods of time. You were young.

JIM: No. That was a hazing experience and that kind of formed my mold to be you know I am not thinking about it so much. We are there to do a job and we had to do it to the best of our ability.

RON: Did different people respond differently.

JIM: We don't ever talk about it. I never talked about it. I know that we had an officer on top of my bunk and when we went to rest a couple of hours he would take all his clothes off and shoes and so on. I would leave all my clothes on except my shoes so I would be ready to get out there. Well when the alarm came he would jump down put on his shoes, put on his pants, put on a life jacket. He was gone and I am trying to fumble with a pair of shoes. I couldn't believe it. I did the best I could.

RON: You were in the Normandy invasion. Tell me a little bit about that. That was one of the major European events. I would just like to hear a little about the preliminary things that led up to it from your perspective and the perspective of the 534.

JIM: Well the Normandy we were in England for 5 or 6 months training going towards Europe and coming back and trying to throw the enemy off que. All of a sudden we are going and we knew it was it. It was rough weather but we knew it was it. And these people on the wharfs and the land were going like this to us. Very encouraging. And we went and got there at night. 2 or 3 in the morning. It was dark and you couldn't see anything. And then when the dawn broke I looked around. Five thousand ships out there. It looked like a city. Five thousand and I felt pretty good about that and then the boats started taking the people in. We went as far as we could and when the tide went out we unloaded tanks and soldiers and I never knew what happened to them. We could see they made the beach. We were not at Omaha or Udonum the most terrifying place to be at that time. I think we were at Juneau. We were with the British. It was terrible fighting. Ships went down. The Germans their bunkers were so deeply embedded and cemented, cement, hard to knock out. Next day we got a foothold there and the next day I said Captain can I go ashore and pick up some souvenirs. He said no. He said I'll bring you back a gun. I said

Okay, okay. So I went and I came back with a helmet, German helmet with a hole in it, guns, and ammunition and few other things and when the crew saw me they all went ashore except a couple of officers and me and the captain but that was the result of the war. You wanted something as a memento.

RON: Were there a lot of people killed that you know on that day.

JIM: I really couldn't tell because once they got on the beach and they got up the sand and so on you couldn't see them. But I am sure there were casualties.

RON: None of them were killed immediately?

JIM: No. But I noticed one thing that upset me. A lot of the LST's did not go in as far as they should have. They laid back and the tide is not out yet and that means that some of these guys going in small boats to get ashore the water was too deep for them. If we had been in further it would have been a lot easier for them to go. But that is just whatever happened depending upon the captain.

RON: Some of them must have drowned.

JIM: Yes, I saw a few bodies there.

RON: After the invasion what did the ship do?

JIM: The ship went back to the United States I think it was December. Half of the crew got thirty days leave and when I came back from my 30 day leave the other half of the crew went and they were replaced by someday else. So we had a half a crew that was new. Then they fixed the ship up

and they went through the Panama Canal and then over to San Diego and later on we started out for Okinawa.

RON: You went back to Europe after the invasion. You transported things back and forth across the channel?

JIM: Yes we had about 30 or 35 trips of going back and forth.

RON: Transporting what?

JIM: Supplies, mostly supplies.

RON: Any wounded people. Were those part of it?

JIM: No. Just supplies. Maybe soldiers and sailors and tanks and gasoline and whatever we had.

RON: They were milk runs.

JIM: Yes. But then you could see the B2 bombers going over between Germany, France and England. They would fly over there and there would be nobody in them and when the fuel ran out they would fall and wherever they fell there would be a big explosion. A lot of innocent were killed at carpentry school and so on. They were terrible things.

RON: When you were land based in England you were at Portsmouth

JIM: Portsmouth, and Tholmop, Southampton too.

RON: Did the Germans bomb those cities while you were there?



JIM: Not when we were in those little ports but in London they bombed pretty often. I spent one night leave in bomb shelters all night long. I had felt bad because I had paid for my room in advance.

RON: So lets go back to going through the Panama Canal and you are on your way to Okinawa. What that trip uneventful?

JIM: We had no trouble. We got to Hawaii and had some supplies put on and we went on over to Saipan, Quam, Mariannos, Inoweda and we finally came to Okinawa and the invasion had already started and we were about a month after the invasion started. We were at the Pond Toon docks unloading gasoline and other supplies.

RON: Just one trip?

JIM: No. We were supposed to, we didn't know. We figured we were going to go to Japan and at Pond Toon dock we had a little accident.

RON: Which was?

JIM: Well for 2 or 3 days we had general alarms. Kamikazes were coming in like flies. I guess they were in desperation. We couldn't even have a good lunch or dinner. We couldn't get to it. This one beautiful day kamikazes were coming in and we were lined up and we were the last ship by the Pond Too docks and they were all to our port side American Ships and LST's. And the plan got through and they are all firing and as it came around towards us to make a turn to hit us the ship next door gave us a lot of friendly fire. It was darn close. And then the kamikaze came around the stern of our ship and the boys in the back were not firing so I hollered fire, fire. They let some shots go and it diverted that plane and then he went right by me. I could see his grinning face. I will never forget that. I

could have hit him with a revolver and he went forward about three hundred feet and then he crashed into the starboard side of the LST and the bow. At that time the bow doors were open. A couple of guys flew out from the concussion of the explosion.

RON: How many died?

JIM: Different reports. The most official had about 24 that were not all from our ships some were dockworkers.

RON: Did you know any of the people that were killed?

JIM: I don't remember any more.

RON: Is that selective memory or is it you just didn't know them that well to begin with.

JIM: You are so busy on the helm doing what you have to do and I never went out and looked at, I saw the damage but I didn't go out looking for souvenirs or anything. I was more concerned about staying where I was supposed to stay and doing my job and be available when the captain called me.

RON: The Japanese kamikaze pilot was smiling?

JIM: Grinning.

RON: Is that a picture embedded in your mind.

JIM: No. It flashes back and forth once in awhile.

RON: Do you ever dream about these things?

JIM: I don't think I ever dreamt about the war. A little duller than my mind. You're laughing.

RON: Tell me a little bit about the aftermath of the kamikaze attack.

JIM: Well the ship was at the dock like I said. We were supposed to leave the ship when there was an alarm but when the tide was in it is a long jump to get down to the Pond Too dock to go ashore and I gave it up. I slept there. There was mildew all over my clothes it was so humid and damp. I was too tired to jump down there and come back. Eventually we left the ship. Eventually the ship had a fire too from the gasoline. They got the fire out and then we were told to go out and tie up with a ship, a big cargo ship. And then the typhoons were coming. We were bumping. The ships were bumping. Their ship was high and we were lower. And then they started throwing us life jackets. All the lines broke. Heavy hauler lines, metal lines, all wire lines, all broke and away we go and now we have a big hole on the starboard side. So we dropped anchor, the rear anchor, and the force of that typhoon broke the anchor and we started going back and forth and we aren't steering very well because of the explosion, the accident so our Engineering Officer finally got us going and we landed on a reef. We dropped the bow anchor and that broke. And then we go swerving around again. We ended up on a reef and we stayed there for four or five, we stayed there forever and the engineering kept the motor going to keep us there. Then we left the ship except a few personnel. We went ashore and lived on the island. And if you drank water on the island whatever the temperature was outside was the temperature of the water. It was hot.

RON: They scuttled the ship then?

JIM: No the ship wasn't scuttled. The last I heard it was decommissioned and salvaged. Some say it went back to work. No that ship could never be repaired. It would have been too costly. It was decommissioned.

RON: Then broken up in parts or just sunk?

JIM: I don't know because I left about a month later and went back to the states.

RON: So you were in Okinawa for a month?

JIM: No we were in Okinawa from April until November or December. How much is that five or six months?

RON: What did you do?

JIM: On the island? Nothing. We used to go from one part of the island to a place where they had hot food and I remember the Captain said that anybody that doesn't belong to this post either get out of here or you will be shot for eating their hot food.

RON: Americans?

JIM: See we had just so much food to serve their own post instead of other guys coming in. You were hungry.

RON: What was the chain of command while you were on this island?

JIM: I don't know. They had a Captain there of the Okinawa. I never saw him. And other places where they had their people they had different lower rank officers to take care of that. Some were Army, some were Navy, some were Marines.

RON: When they put you out on the island after they took you off the ship what did they say to you?

JIM: Nothing. We went off and stole a table from a different tent and stole chairs and so on and bunks to put up our own tent. We would take from one and somebody else would take it back.

RON: Who did you report to?

JIM: Nobody. My Captain. I would go back every so often and report to my Captain.

RON: Where was he?

JIM: Watching the ship. You know the Captain is the last one to leave the ship. I think he is still there.

RON: So they just had you on this island. Who knew where you were?

JIM: I never thought of that until now. I was still attached to the LST 534 and that is where I got my orders from. And then I had enough points to go home and I went back to the ship and asked the Captain to sign my papers and he said no not until you get the communications books and code books all boxed up to go back you know to be shipped back. I boxed them up and he signed my papers. It was dusk and nobody would come pick me up. The swamp always go by but we are in a bad position on a reef. They wouldn't pick me up so I got a wet suit and jumped off the ship because I didn't want to be with the Captain I wanted to go home. Buckner Bay is to my right but that was too far to wait and to my left was maybe five six long blocks so I got in the water and I felt the current and I went back and sat down and thought it over and I started over again. All I had was a wet

suit and a pocketknife. I got across and it took me a long time because I didn't know where the holes were or anything and I am all alone in a jungle. And I heard noises here and there and I am walking and walking all night long down a road and finally about five in the morning a jeep picked me up and took me back towards the base and I jumped off and I got back to where I was staying and picked up my stuff and I went down to get my orders and I went away that morning on a big transport ship.

RON: You had orders though. You had all the proper documents.

JIM: I had them all yes.

RON: Are you saying a lot of the people, a lot of the guys on that island if you were not purposely stationed there or part of the Army were just sort of coming and going as they pleased.

JIM: I am sure something came in for them and they would be notified by either our Captain through the Commander of the Island.

RON: But nobody provided for you the basic necessities.

JIM: No. I loved the rations. I loved the beef. I miss that the most. Nobody else claimed it. You wonder if you are normal.

RON: What would you say was the most frightening experience that you had on the LST?

JIM: I think the submarine attack.

RON: More so than the kamikaze? Why?

JIM: Because you can see the kamikaze. Can you see a grinning U boat commander? You can't see him. That is like dirty tactics. Unfair.

RON: So it was fear of the unknown.

JIM: Yes.

RON: Whereas if someone is above you they are there and you deal with it.

JIM: If you see what you are fighting is a lot better. Not the best thing but it is more fair.

RON: Then you didn't get involved with the typhoon did you.

JIM: Five. Five typhoons I tell you those ships, big ships, post office, house were all blown away. You are like a matchbox in the water. You give up. You say well what is going to happen is going to happen and you keep on going. But they are terrible. I think people in this country are finding out from the hurricanes and the eastern coast. The devastation.

RON: So you were on the ship when it was beached?

JIM: Yes.

RON: How long did it run.

JIM: The typhoons? Well between four or five of them a month a month and a half.

RON: Was the war still going on then?

JIM: Yes. And then there would be a lot of false rumors that the war is over. Everybody would be firing from the ship. I don't know. It was dangerous to fire from the ship whether the war was over or not and I guess the war was over in December and I was on my way home.

RON: Tell me a little bit about life on the ship. Did everybody know everybody else?

JIM: We knew who they were. I was mostly on top deck and I knew my people on the top deck. That is how I know Alvers. I see him I say hello Lt. and so on. Nice man. Young man. But as the years went by you can remember faces and some names but the rest I can't remember.

RON: So there were clicks. If you were an officer you probably tended

JIM: Yeah but I loved those guys. I had more fun with the men than I did with the Officers.

RON: What I am getting at is people whoever they are tend to find their own friends and did they tend to become groups of people.

JIM: I am sure. I am sure the engineering guys down there were stuck together and the coxswains and so on and the signalmen.

RON: So there are probably 20 or 30 guys who all knew each other well in different sections of the ship.

JIM: After two years they knew from down, they all slept downstairs and they ate down below.

RON: And it was a good crew.



JIM: Oh yeah they were a tremendous crew.

RON: Give us the difference between Captain Olson and Captain French.

JIM: Well Captain Olson was a Navy regular. He was a quartermaster and he knew about piloting a ship. French was very nervous. Very nervous. I used to tease him once in a while but he never got it. Nervous. Well you know it was a big responsibility. He was a reserve. He was an older man and he knew he couldn't leave the ship. He has to do the best he can and report back all the time. You know that is a big pressure on him.

RON: I remember Mr. Alvers talked about liking Captain Olson a great deal. I don't think he had such kind words about Captain French.

JIM: He did not have.

RON: He never talked about him. He always talked about Captain Olson.

JIM: Well that is how we got our indoctrination going over. He was capable. He ran a pretty good ship unless he had a few drinks. Then he ran it better.

RON: The time you served on the 534.

JIM: Well I remember when we went down the river from Evansville down the Mississippi River to New Orleans we had pilot aboard because of the winding river and we stopped every night and turned the ship around facing North and then part of the crew could go to town with a small boat. Another officer and I went through Memphis by boat from the ship. Went

to the Hotel Peabody which was a big experience for me. I had never eaten in a hotel before. We saw the walking ducks in the lobby going back to their roost upstairs and we were having soup and a big platter and the officer I was with was from Boston and he had manners and I went pst pst and David Rose and his orchestra was playing. I don't know that song on strings. Beautiful song. Theme song. It was sort of I will never forget that night. The peacefulness. The white table linen clothes, regal service we got. We just had enough money to pay for the soup. But I never forgot that night. And then the boat came and picked us up and then the next time we stopped somebody else went ashore.

RON: If you could go back and do it over again would you do it differently?

JIM: Yes, I would say my age was 90. No I tell you I wouldn't want to go. If somebody asked me would you join the Navy and go back, sure I would go back.

Japanese were hidden in jungles and in the caves and I saw where the US Army were using the flame-throwers to get them out and some where committing suicide by jumping off the cliff to the ocean and the rocks below. I know Al Fielder, the Engineering Officer and I were standing in line and behind us was a Japanese guy who was so hungry he was standing in line too.

RON: Let me get this straight you are telling me that you are still at war and you have a chow line with some Japanese soldiers in it?

JIM: Well they were Japanese that in the dark they would stand in line to get some food. They were hungry.

RON: They were the enemy.

JIM: You know what Socrates said. I don't remember either. I didn't know they were Japanese until Fielder told me.

RON: That is unbelievable. They were shooting at you during the day?

JIM: At that time the only action we had was from the kamikazes not too much on the land except trying to get these surviving Japanese out of the caves.

RON: You weren't involved in that?

JIM: No but I watched once in a while. I never saw anybody hop planes

RON: You obviously survived the war. Do you think that war and experience changed you dramatically as a person?

JIM: Well I never drank, I never smoked. I got in the service. When I came back I did a little too much drinking and I couldn't settle down to cope. I went back to law school but I had a hard time. I was too restless and then I met my fiancée, she didn't know it at the time, but I just cut out the drinking and the smoking.

RON: So you were a little high strung.

JIM: Restless. Wild.

RON: Do you think most of the men were affected that way.

JIM: I'm sure.

RON: Did you ever keep in contact with guys right after the war.

JIM: No. I dropped my hat in the ocean from the small boat and I went to pick it up and I lost my address book. When you get through a war like that you want to go back and resume your life. Do what you have to do. Go to school and so on and you didn't have too much interest in it until about twenty years later.

RON: Did the war give you a deeper appreciation either at the time or thereafter about this country. Why you were there.

JIM: Well I think we had a good reason for being there and I did not mind being there. I was kind of very proud to be part of it.

RON: Did it change your perception of what this country is?

JIM: No. Because my parents were immigrants and I was born here and to get the opportunities in this country, free schooling and this and that and a lot of things that you could get from the government. No it didn't change it. I was always proud of the United States.

LINDA: You heard the war ended. Where were you? Were you on the island when it ended?

JIM: When did the European War end?

LINDA: Well I read things when Japan surrendered you guys were on the island. But people were celebrating. It was a day when you hear Japan surrendered. I mean everything you fought for

JIM: Didn't they surrender in 45 sometime.

LINDA: June.

JIM: June. I can't believe it was June. You probably know better. I can't remember anymore. I know they surrendered but I don't know where it was. If it was in June I was in Okinawa. I am sure I left around sometime in December to go back to the States.

LINDA: My father drove an LCDD. Do you ever remember seeing him taking the troops or the people in. The LCDD is a smaller boat.

JIM: No. I saw boats going from a lot of boats including ours going towards the beach. They would land and then come back. But I don't know who was driving the boats because I was busy up on the top deck with the Captain.

As communications officer I had charge of the radio, the codebooks but the degaussing, degaussing is a place where it is a small area secured where you use the degaussing to neutralize the mines in case you run over one of them. I don't know. I think maybe that wasn't, I think that could have been injurious to a person's health. I really do. The degaussing, the electricity, and current and so on.

RON: Do you think it did you injury?

JIM: Well I never had any kids. I always wondered.

RON: Did you have to literally go in the water to dig out the mines?

JIM: Yes they were mostly around the English Channel there. And then we had the gales. I remember one night we were going up four or five miles and back to avoid the mines. Back and forth in a gale because those things

would move around. You know a big responsibility to make sure you did the right job to neutralize them or if I was wrong nobody would know about it. But you know you take that in stride. That is just another little thing in your way.

RON: What do you have to do to degauss them.

JIM: I don't remember any more but I know I used to set the waves on the machine that told you what to do. That was a long time ago.

RON: But the mines are in the water. Did you see them and then go to them?

JIM: No you did everything in the little degaussing room by twisting knobs and dials.

RON: So it degaussed anything that was within a reasonable area

JIM: It should have degaussed. It worked for us.

RON: Did you ever hit any?

JIM: No. They had a brilliant communications officer.

LINDA: You know there has been a lot of talk about the LST the workhorse of the Navy. During that time. Talk about the value.

RON: What do you think the contribution of the LST was during the war effort.

JIM: Very large. There was one way of getting into the beaches without coming in with small boats from a distance. You go in before the tide went out as far as you could to the beach. The tide would go out and you

would land your sailors, soldiers, and all the jeeps and tanks. We were trained to get those things off in record time. I think it would have been pretty tough to win a war without them. And tough too for the Marines to go in there and the soldiers to follow up. It wasn't children's play. They were well trained. We should never lose respect for what the vets in World War I, II, Korean and Vietnam War guys did. Never forget.

LINDA: So here is this LST and it has this huge hull, these big ramps that come down. Where you ever around when you would have to go to a beach and hurry up and get up there and get it set for the tanks and the people to come out.

JIM: All we did was open the doors, lower the ramp and unload. They would go on the wet sand on the beach. Very seldom did we have anything else in front of the ramp for them to go in.

LINDA: Well I saw pictures where they had barges on the side. Did you have to go up sometime and pull that barge and lay it down.

JIM: No. The water hadn't receded far enough and we had to get them off because you have to get out of there to let another ship come in.

LINDA: Was that fast?

JIM: Fast.

LINDA: How many men were on board. 120?

JIM: At least. 120 men, six or seven officers and they did everything.

LINDA: I saw some pictures of the garage balloons. Did you have them?

JIM: Yes. Everybody had them. That was to keep the planes away from you. They don't want to hit that balloon. And then at that time they had the buzz bombs. If they hit that balloon it would explode. That was a protection from the air from the Germans.

LINDA: What does it mean when you would carry another ship on the LST like the LCT

JIM: It is either LCT or LCP. We had one aboard when we got hit and I don't know what happened to it. I wasn't very close to those people because there are only four or five in a complement and they were away from the top deck.

LINDA: But you were the communications officer. Who did you communicate to?

JIM: Well the message would come in to the radioman in code. Then he would take it to the Captain and the Captain says Sarres decode that. And sometimes you work your head off and you weren't feeling good because of seasickness and we would decode it and this was supposed to be an important message and one message said ships coming in to Norfolk keep to starboard side and here we are in Normandy fighting. You never knew which was important and which wasn't. You had to do it.

LINDA: Were they secret codes.

JIM: Yes. Secret codes and sometimes they were garbled in the transmission from one place to the other.

LINDA: Did you ever do anything for fun.



JIM: For fun? Well some of the boys played poker and down below they played poker too. They weren't supposed to and I suppose we weren't either but I never stopped them. I let them have fun.

LINDA: I can't imagine like you said there were thousands of ships in the English Channel. I cannot imagine the feeling. You must have been very excited. It must have been an incredible scene. Incredible picture. You must have been terribly scared because it would be a frightening moment. You must have been thinking I will do my best but I might die.

JIM: No. I had my baptism in the submarine attack. The rest when I saw those ships out there was a sign of confidence that I was not alone. Years later I met in my office in Oshkosh, Wisconsin when I was a divorce counselor a German who was in one of those bunkers. I couldn't believe I talked to my enemy. Well I thought he shouldn't be my enemy because he was getting a divorce so he had enough enemies. And he told me when he was looking out the bunker and the dawn broke and he saw all those ships he got scared. People are human. Some get scared, some don't. It didn't bother me any more. That one big splurge in the Atlantic was enough to keep me going. I never thought I would be up on the beaches. At least not mined.

LINDA: I guess you can't afford to thing those things.

JIM: Well they trained us so diligently for fire drills, for air drills, for firing this and that, that you did it automatically. You went to your position until it was over.

LINDA: That is an interesting point because I have also read that the training was so quick for people, now you were an officer so you probably got more diligent training than many of the other men, but at one point I read that

the was eating up, both sides of our country were fighting, and the war was eating up supplies and men. There weren't enough. They were training you know get in, get out.

JIM: I had six weeks at Great Lakes learning how to carry a rifle and hit the guy the enemy and I had two months at Fort Skyler, Officers Training, navigation and so on and then I went to Norfolk Virginia Beach for a couple of more months and that is all the training I had. Except we drilled almost every day on the ship. Every day so people get to know where to go and what to do.

LINDA: Is that what they call general quarters?

JIM: Yes and you know something else what is amazing to me how our country can fight a war on two fronts and get all the equipment there on both sides. You have to see the tires, piles and miles of tires, and fuels and jeeps and how they got it to one side and to the other side to have it ready for the invasions. We did a terrific job.

LINDA: It is amazing, but the whole country was behind you. Every city had plans for making things which reminds me of Evansville. How did you get to Evansville. You were in Norfolk when you had to go? Was that your training and then they said "Sarres you are going on an LST". You have to go down and get that ship".

JIM: Yes I got orders to go through Evansville and I went and I had to report the next morning on the ship and I stayed at a hotel. The bathroom in the hotel was red. I had never seen a red bathroom. I went out and nearby was a theatre and next door was a restaurant. I went in and had a porterhouse steak for a dollar or so. And I said after the show I might have another one and I went to the theatre and saw a movie Claire Blair

some Gas Light and the darn restaurant was closed. I was a big blow. So the next day I went in and reported to my ship and everybody is new and trying to get together and we floated down to New Orleans and we got manned, went on our practice cruise and up the coast.

LINDA: Were you in uniform when you went to that place marching down to that place on the Ohio River and looked at that big old boat were you in uniform and standing tall and proud.

JIM: Yes you had to wear some clothes. I was an ensign. It was strange but we were all in the same pickle. The captain also wasn't crazy about naval reserves because he was a regular Navy.

LINDA: But almost everybody was naval reserves.

JIM: I said Captain I agree with you send me home.

LINDA: And he said well we better not do that.

JIM: Well you know in the reserves who is going to do it. There aren't enough regular Navy.

LINDA: What did Captain Olson look like.

JIM: He was small, a little shorter than I. Cocky. He sometimes would try to put you down. I said on the convoy I said see that ship over there it has four davids that is what the little boats put up and we only had two. Now that was four days on a convoy and he said you just notice it now? I said yes Captain I am sorry. You never argue with the Captain.

LINDA: Well the davids were what the LCDP's were lowered on so the 534 only had two?

JIM: Two till later on. Later on they put two more on.

LINDA: Later on in the Atlantic.

JIM: Someplace along the line. Maybe when we came back from the Atlantic when we came back from the Normandy.

LINDA: So you know that my father was on the 534. He boarded I guess in Norfolk to go over to the Atlantic so he was in Normandy. So there was only two when he first came on board. He was a coxswain so he would have been assigned to the deck division.

JIM: I remember too and I was talking to John Wilson from the 534 and he said there were two and they put two more on later and he would know he was down there. I wasn't a Navy man. I was never interested in motors or all that stuff. I am a simple man. I like cruise control.

RON: They said you were a ladies man in those days.

JIM: Yeah well, we never volunteered.

RON: You said that there were momentous. You asked if you could go get a souvenir and they brought back a gun and helmets and stuff. Do you have any of that stuff now?

JIM: I had it. The bullets they come like a roll ribbon. I threw it off before we got to Norfolk in case we had an explosion or something. The rifle and all that I sent to my brother. He had it for a long time and then about three or

four years ago I went up in the attic in my brother and sister's house and there was my duffel bag and I opened it up and I didn't want to open it up because all those years and there was a Japanese ragged flag with some Japanese on it, the helmet was there, the gun was there, a few other things were there and we didn't have museums at that time like you have now, maybe ten years ago, so I dumped it. I have had regrets and I don't have regrets.

LINDA: You can today regret it but you did what you felt at the moment.

JIM: I wish I could do that now.

LINDA: What do you feel like doing at the moment.

JIM: Well you know you have obligations as you get older. You can't go running around the beaches. Any kind of a beach. I am a man of responsibility right now.

LINDA: Tell me about Captain French. He was on the ship

JIM: He was with us all the time and then when Captain Olson was transferred in New York he became from Executive Officer to Captain. He was like a lonely man. He wasn't close with the crew. I think he didn't have the confidence that Captain Olson had. He was a civilian who came back and did all right.

LINDA: He watched Olson all during the Atlantic theatre and then when he was assigned he must of learned from it.

JIM: You know Captains usually pick on their Executive Officers when something goes wrong or even when they don't. I am not sure about that

but with a small compliment of officers I was lucky I went in my decoding room, did the work and gave it to the Captain.

LINDA: What kind of food did you eat. Did you get hungry?

JIM: We ate pretty well. Sunday and holidays we had turkey and whatever.

LINDA: How did they get food. If you are out on the ocean how did

JIM: Well we had big refrigerators and freezers down below someplace and I gather around the galley there and they stocked enough food and then when we go like Hawaii from New York and then we stock up there and then you get down to someplace else and a ship with food would give us some. We always had food but unfortunately on the way from Hawaii to Okinawa the Captain was frugal with the food, the steaks and so on and then when we got hit we had to throw all that meat away. Tons of it.

LINDA: It must of went under.

JIM: Well it was contaminated with the smoke.

LINDA: That must of been a wild day. I mean your sitting there and somebody heard over the radio that a kamikaze had come through the barriers and you were the Communications Officer did you hear that next in line to the Captain? Did it happen so fast.

JIM: Everybody knew it. Because one ship would pick it up and before you knew it they were all at battlestations. When you got the radio message you got going to your general quarters position.

LINDA: Your hit, there is a fire, there is a big hole, there is a torpedo in there, there is debris from the Japanese plane falling all over the place it must have been chaotic.

JIM: It was.

LINDA: Fearful chaotic, exciting chaotic.

JIM: My recreation officer, Jens, he was thrown out of the hole and the ship when the bow doors are open with a very dangling leg. He met a nurse in Hawaii and he married her. Beautiful family and he became a nuclear scientist and traveled all over the world. But at the convention at Norfolk he finally came to one and as he was walking away he turned around to Florence and I, my wife and he said war is hell because he couldn't dance and so on and all the pain and keeping his leg. Handsome young man. He was handsome.

LINDA: My father when the kamikaze hit he was thrown. Szymanski told me. He said he would tell me all about it. He was apparently thrown and landed in one of the LCP or LCDP's and hurt his knee. He was in the field hospital and stuff but anyway he gets back home, he is married and I was about 7 or 8 years old and we were walking one day in the parking lot and just collapsed and I mean my mother thought he had a heart attack but it was his knee from that injury and it just gave out.

JIM: And he made light about that injury when he wrote to the family. Remember.

LINDA: I remember. He was trying to comfort my mother. What really got me about that letter was he says something along the line they, they meaning

Captain and higher ups, they are going to raise it back up and repair it and sail it again. I hope so. The camaraderie that left the men on that ship.

JIM: That is your ship. You are one group.

LINDA: They would do anything for each other.

JIM: I was close to the men. In fact when we got back from Normandy I found a note on my desk that says Lt. Jones and I, three of them are going to go to Chicago to get some books for the ship's library. And I covered for them for about two and half weeks before they got back otherwise they would have been court marshalled. But I couldn't do that to them.

LINDA: So they went to get reading material.

JIM: Well they went back to see their parents. They were lonesome. They were young kids.

LINDA: When you were sailing out in the ocean going from somewhere to somewhere what did you do on board. Clean? You only eat, clean and sleep so much. Did you play cards, read, listen to the radio?

JIM: We didn't play cards during the daytime but you had the Captain didn't stand a watch unless it was under, when we were going to one point to another the officers were well trained to do it. So we would (tap stopped)

So around the corner and I hail them and I am walking, I don't know there was a slipper spot there and I stumble and I am trying to catch remember I am in the street now and the cab is nearby and I am trying to hold onto the cab and I tore my pants and got a scrape here. A little bit here. I am very lucky.



LINDA: Was it raining.

JIM: Not running, walking.

LINDA: No the weather, was it raining?

JIM: No. It was nice. I said to my doctor can I go to Chicago. He says no I don't want you falling down breaking a hip and besides Chicago is a fun city. Boy his prediction came true almost.

LINDA: You'll have to tell him. You need to look at me and tell me my name is, my rank is and my service number.

JIM: My name is James G. Sarres, and I come from Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and I started out as a seaman and worked my way up to Lt. Senior Grade. My serial number I don't remember. I know it ends with 79 the other four figures I don't remember.

LINDA: You were talking about in the English Channel the English would do a sign like that. Could you say that again?

JIM: Sure. When we started sailing we kind of knew that we were going for the real thing and somehow the British must have known too because along the wharves and shoreline they would hold their hand up like this, V for victory like Churchill and that made us feel pretty good. They were with us.

LINDA: What else would you like to tell us.

JIM: Well I am glad I am here. I am glad that I have a lovely wife. I am glad that we are blessed with a lot of things. I really don't have any complaints. We are really blessed my wife and I, especially her.

RON: She said she doesn't know how she wound up with you with all the women chasing you.

JIM: She is honest.

