

LOUIS STOCKDALE

LINDA: Tell me your name and rank

LOUIS: When I retired?

LINDA: No when you were in the Navy

LOUIS: Well I started out an apprentice seaman and ended up a full lieutenant.

LINDA: So my name is....

LOUIS: My name is Louis Ray Stockdale.

LINDA: And I was a lieutenant

LOUIS: I ended up a lieutenant yes.

LINDA: What does a lieutenant do?

LOUIS: I really don't know.

LINDA: As little as possible.

LOUIS: I guess at times you are supposed to look important and I guess that is about it.

LINDA: If somebody walked past you on the street were they supposed to salute you.

LOUIS: Absolutely.

LINDA: How do you salute? Salute me.
How old were you when you went into the Navy?

LOUIS: 20...

LINDA: Say when I went into the Navy I was

LOUIS: When I went into the Navy I was 25 I think. 42, yeah I was 25.

LINDA: Now you were in Evansville. How did you get to Evansville, Indiana?

LOUIS: Aboard a train.

LINDA: Say I got to Evansville...

LOUIS: I got to Evansville by way of train from I don't know if it was Camp Bradford or Norfolk, one or the other. What should I say

LINDA: What was that like?

LOUIS: Oh nothing.

LINDA: Was there a whole bunch of people crowded in there? Did you know anybody? Did it have a bathroom? Did you eat?

LOUIS: No. Anybody knows how you do on a train you go if you have to.

LINDA: Well not me. I take the train from New York to Washington, and it is first class, and I get my food. I am sure that is not what you did back then.

LOUIS: No. I don't recall what the technicalities were but at one time I took a train from Tucson, Arizona and a sleeping car, pullman cars for overnight. Other than that it was just conventional sit up seats and enjoy it.

LINDA: Now when you got to Evansville what did you think? It was pretty much like a city in Iowa right?

LOUIS: Very much so, yes.

LINDA: Had you ever been to a shipyard before?

LOUIS: Yes, we had been on one at Jeffersonville, Indiana. It was much improved in Jeffersonville. We had a ramp aboard our LST which is one of the very first and a great improvement for unloading in a hurry and so forth. The first LSTs didn't have that. They had an elevator where things went up and down but it took forever to do it. That was one of the nice features about, I wouldn't be surprised if 534 was one of the very first ones.

LINDA: Now launching day you were there when they literally took the 534 off of the pulleys or whatever and dumped it into the river, right? Tell me about that. What do you remember about that.

LOUIS: Nothing in particular.

LINDA: Was it very exciting.

LOUIS: No it wasn't very exciting. Just part of the routine.

LINDA: Do you remember the lady breaking the champagne bottle over the side.

LOUIS: I don't think they would want to waste any kind of champaign on that kind of a ship.

LINDA: Were you there? Did you watch the broom raising?

LOUIS: I don't think they did that but they might have and I don't recall.

LINDA: Where were you, sitting in a bar somewhere?

LOUIS: No, I wasn't a bar hound.

LINDA: So when you were assigned to the 534 and went there, do you remember the first day you got on board?

LOUIS: No.

LINDA: Do you remember when you met Captain Olson?

LOUIS: No, not particularly.

LINDA: Do you remember who you bunked with?

LOUIS: I remember bunking with Wilson but I don't know who was bunking with me. I had a private room. There wasn't anybody else in there.

LINDA: Did all the officers have private rooms.

LOUIS: Some of them were singles, some of them were doubles but they had double facilities.

LINDA: What does that mean?

LOUIS: Well you could fit two if you wanted but if they didn't need them all one of them would be empty. There was ample bunk space for the officers and we had the British aboard so I think we crammed as many as we could. Nobody double bunked - two slept in one bunk. It never got to that.

LINDA: Did anything special happen when you took the trip down the Ohio River? I mean you left Evansville and you went down the Mississippi down to New Orleans. You were there. There wasn't that many - maybe thirty people on board at the time?

LOUIS: I think that is about right. But there was a pilot aboard that did all the navigating and he knew the flaws in the river and the changes that occurred and the depth of the water and all that sort of thing.

LINDA: So Captain Olson was not in charge at that time?

LOUIS: Well he was, I don't know.

LINDA: Probably in charge of the men but not in charge of the ship.

LOUIS: That is right. Everything was wrapped up in the pilots.

LINDA: What does shakedown mean?

LOUIS: Go out and try it.

LINDA: Say shakedown means

LOUIS: Shakedown means to go out and try things and make sure that everything is working as it was supposed to, designed to do. Make sure the anchor

chain worked and the loaders all worked except might have accident speeds. Make sure everything was in working order.

LINDA: Now you said the LST got down to New Orleans and then went over to Panama City and got prepared and things loaded on board. You were getting ready to go to war. So does shakedown happen after that?

LOUIS: No the shakedown was ahead. When we got to New Orleans the first thing we did was take on a tremendous load of diesel fuel and we had enough diesel fuel aboard that if we wanted to sail full speed for 9 months and just use that as our own but this was a cargo going over to England. When we got to England of course we had to unload it into their tanks but from then on I can't recall going into Panama City full of diesel fuel. Maybe we did. I know we loaded up in New Orleans or right in that vicinity.

LINDA: Yeah, I think you unloaded the diesel fuel. I think it said in that deck log you picked up the diesel fuel in New Orleans and took it to Panama City.\

LOUIS: It could have been. Didn't they had an Air Force base there?

LINDA: It said US Naval Base.

LOUIS: I see maybe that is what we did but I don't understand when we got reloaded with diesel fuel because that is what we carried over aboard.

LINDA: Went through according to the stuff I have been reading, you went through a lot of repairing. You know getting everything tightened up and everything and then you reloaded. Fuel, ammunition, supplies, food. Who was your best friend on the ship. Start out my best friend..

LOUIS: My best friend was Mr. Wilson I suppose because he was my assistant and we got along fine. He agreed to keep the books and do the book work and I agreed to do the leg work because I wasn't so good with those books.

LINDA: So he filled in all the books for you and you did all the errands.

LOUIS: Yeah he did the work and I did the supervision.

LINDA: You said he was your assistant. So he was second lieutenant or what?

LOUIS: I don't know. He was an ensign under me and I was an ensign at that time I guess. I don't recall. I wasn't much rank concerned.

LINDA: What was the difference between your personality and his personality?

LOUIS: I really can't explain it. He had a better one than me I suppose.

LINDA: It seemed like between you guys everybody immediately sort of budded up with somebody and that seemed to be the person throughout the whole ship. So Mr. Wilson was yours, huh.

LOUIS: I imagine.

LINDA: For instance you didn't feel the same way about Mr. Sarres.

LOUIS: I definitely did not. He was all right but he just wasn't quite my make up and Wilson was an all around man.

LINDA: Did you talk to Mr. Wilson after the war?

LOUIS: No. Never got after the war. I had a letter from him after he had been to Okinawa and I think that was the last I heard from him until last week. I got on the phone and I must of talked to him for about two hours.

LINDA: You got on the phone after you got the letter?

LOUIS: Yeah, after I got your letter, I got his phone number and address and he was very thrilled to hear from me again. He sounded the same as he always did.

LINDA: Did he really.

LOUIS: You bet. He had a very interesting as you can probably tell by his letter.

LINDA: So you picked up the phone and you called his number and he answered the phone.

LOUIS: He answered the phone.

LINDA: And what did you say?

LOUIS: I don't recall what I said. I guess I said can he imagine who this was.

LINDA: So he picks up the phone and did you say is this really Leo F. Wilson?

LOUIS: I think that is what I said.

LINDA: What did you say. Say it for the camera.

LOUIS: I said are you really Leo F. Wilson that was aboard the LST 534. I am sure he assured me that he was.

LINDA: Did he say is this really Louis Stockdale who was aboard the LST 534.

LOUIS: I don't recall that he said anything like that.

LINDA: What did you talk about.

LOUIS: Everything under the sun and how he got along and how he managed to get off the LST after they had been hit with a suicide plan whatever it was and he told about the worst part of the Pacific field was being hit with a typhoon and being blown out to sea when they weren't sea worthy and being caught on another reef. Sat from June until September when they got blown back the other way which was another indication of how lucky I was. I was always lucky. I was always in the right place at the right time. Avoided the wrong places to be it seemed.

LINDA: Well I would say being over in Normandy was necessarily being in the right place and you got lucky over there just because the 534 was lucky.

LOUIS: Well that was very true and in Normandy we were with the British sector and the ones that caught hell were the people on Omaha Beach. The Army, the Marines and even some of the ships. That terrain was so steep there was no way they could get up there. Whereas we were on a gradual beach and could dump things off and drive right off onto the shore.

LINDA: What beach were you on?

LOUIS: Can't recall whether they called it Unal or Utah but I think it was Unal.

LINDA: Gold Beach was it?

LOUIS: No.

LINDA: Were you in the first wave?

LOUIS: Very first wave, yes.

LINDA: So say yes we were in the very first wave.

LOUIS: Yes, we were in the very first wave.

LINDA: Now when you sailed after you got outfitted and everything in Panama City, St. Andrews Bay, sailed up to Nova Scotia and over to England, anything special happen.

LOUIS: No we went from Panama City down around the end of Florida and back up the East Coast and back up to New York. And then we got outfitted and filled with all the supplies and fresh water and diesel fuel. Then we went from there on up to Halifax Nova Scotia as I recall and somewhere along in there why we were designated a flag ship. There was a high ranking Naval official there, I don't know whether he was supposed to be in a forward corner or taking up the rear or whether they had four admirals aboard that were each in the corner of the fleet but there was about 65 ships in that convoy and I understand it was the second to last convoy that went over to England prior to the invasion.

LINDA: From Nova Scotia to England is where this convoy was or England to France?

LOUIS : No, No. From Nova Scotia to we head to go clear on up to the North Sea as far as we could get before we hit the icebergs and that is when we were hit, or when we were in the submarine attack. After the submarine attack

it was one day before then the sea was so rough that we had no more worry about them. I could never have imagined that any water could get such tremendous high waves and the ships would be out of the front end out of the water and the back end sunk way under and then bounce over and then the mass would jiggle back and forth. Fact of the matter is we had to repair some of those masts as soon as we got over from England but I don't remember when that plane broke the insulator on there. They just jug a jug and I don't know how those ships didn't break apart from the big loads they had in them. We carried I think 19 Sherman Tanks and then we had a landing craft for tanks aboard deck and we sailed way on up into the North Sea and we eventually went down to England from the North and sailed around the west side and down into Plymouth England.

LINDA: Tell me about the attack on the convoy.

LOUIS: Well the attack was around midnight as I recall and the submarine was obviously up from the Northwest as we were going north. He hit us from the west side. Shot right into a bunch of the main ships and he got the two right ahead of us and till this day I swear he must have sent a torpedo underneath us or behind us or just ahead of us and they got the ship on our starboard quarters. And as we sailed through I recall saying it was dark and nobody dared have any lights on because that would be a giveaway as to our position, while we went by the two ships that were sinking they were hollering for help and there was nothing we could do and I asked the Captain if we weren't going to pick up survivors and he looked at me and said - Do you want to go down with them - and I said No I don't want to do that. Well he said that is what the escort vessels are for. That is their job. Escort vessels weren't worth a torpedo and they sort of sailed around the outside of the convoy and picked them up. Of course the reports came that all the survivors had been picked up and it didn't really amount to anything. They didn't want to get anybody excited. You don't know how

true it was or whether it was a make up like we have today make everything all power political and sound right. But we were just mighty lucky and then we were at general quarters from then until daylight by that time it was getting rougher and we were getting up in the North Sea where not too far from icebergs. That was the next thing we had to worry about - not hitting them. I didn't realize how large those chunks of ice were up in there.

LINDA: Its an iceberg and the hull on the LSTs weren't that thick.

LOUIS: No if they hit a sharp jagged edge they could very well put a hole in it. But another thing was when it was so rough our ship might be down in a lower part of a swell as it hit, as it went down there the bow was under water. Pretty soon it turned around and the next thing it was out of water and going up over a swell and when it got top heavy bang it went with the front end down with a nose dive down under another low place and back up and over. I don't know how those ships took it. I really don't.

LINDA: Did you ever think you were going to hit another ship or...

LOUIS: No we were far enough apart that we could maneuver that all right. But it was, you could see maybe a ship ahead if you happen to be up on the top. One of these you can see You could see the propeller floating around in air. It was clear out of the water. Of course you would hear the governors rev up when it hit in the water and had to pull something again so it was.. some of those other ships were much bigger than we were and they would be up there on a crash too and I seen a time when you couldn't it was so rough you could see over three or four of the other ships otherwise when it was calm you could look over the whole convoy. It was rough. It was really rough. It was cold too by the time we got up in there but that was a

blessing because when it got that rough we knew the submarines couldn't operate either so that was a big relief.

LINDA: Did that scare you? When you were in the convoy and you got attacked did that scare you?

LOUIS: Scare us. Why sure it scared you but what was there to do about it. I think at that time the psychological effect it had on me if I ever get through this I'll never worry about things again. If I get through this and not go under why I am not going to let other things bother me and I was I held this tradition through my entire life after that. I gamble somewhat on markets and so on and so forth and of course when they get bad it is hard on the nerves but I always figure we get through it somehow make it back next year with something else.

LINDA: You must be thrilled the stock market is over 9,000.

LOUIS: It is?

LINDA: I saw a Wall Street Journal laying there. I know you know what the market is.

LOUIS: It has been very good to me in the last year.

LINDA: So back to this convoy. Were you the kind of person saw these people around you their ships had been blown up and they were in the water

LOUIS: Well it was dark enough you could pick up any individual in there but I do recall seeing one or two. We were close enough to the ship he wasn't a hundred feet off of our port side we slide by help help. Didn't see many people because their ships were dark too and they were half under. I didn't

see any fire on the two that we went past but there was a fire on the one on our starboard quarter.

LINDA: That must be scary. All you could think is it could have been us.

LOUIS: Yeah that is about what it amounted to. We were really in it now. This is the real stuff. This is no play games anymore.

LINDA: So when you were down in New Orleans practicing your beaching and practicing your gunnery and practicing you shooting and practicing your disabled and abandoning ship stuff now you are in it.

LOUIS: That is right. That is correct. It was all somewhat boring, drills and somewhat and so. It didn't amount to much but this is the real thing and we were just fortunate enough not to have been hit. That is all I can say and we had the most disadvantageous position in the whole convoy. Coffin corner they called it.

LINDA: Why was that? So you said you had the most disadvantageous corner so start the story off with we were at a disadvantage

LOUIS: We were the most accessible to the submarines

LINDA: No start over. We were at

LOUIS: We were at the most dis or one of the most disadvantageous positions in the convoy because we were on the outer extremities where we could easily be exposed to the torpedoes and the submarine obviously wasn't operating directly under the convoy because then they would be subject to depth charges but I always likened it to they were shooting into a flock of ducks. You try to just get off to the side and then shoot into the main

mast. If you didn't get one you would get something else. And it was rough enough that they had to run those torpedoes down deep enough. If you had a lot of draft they would hit the lower part of the ship. If they had it higher they would jump around and miss their targets or do anything. So we were not one of the ships that had such a terribly deep draft. I think even loaded I think about 7 or 8 feet in the water in the bow and maybe 12 or 14 in the stern. Whereas some of those tankers would be 20-25 feet in the water and much more prone to getting torpedoed.

LINDA: Did you ever think about being in that disadvantage position before the attack?

LOUIS: No. Weren't given any, that was just our position and assumed to do what you are ordered to do. I don't recall whether we had an Admiral about that time when it happened or whether Captain Olson was strictly in charge. It seemed like we had an Admiral aboard up to Halifax and then after that we were on our own but I wouldn't guarantee that. I don't recall those particulars.

LINDA: So you joined the convoy and you are heading up North to Nova Scotia and you run into icebergs. Did you say what next?

LOUIS: No I just assumed they knew where they were going and they veered off to the east and we are circling around and eventually come back down south. By that time we were way up north of England in the North Sea.

LINDA: What division were you in on board ship?

LOUIS: Deck Division. That is what I was supposed to be in charge of the deck division. Security of all the cargo and make sure it was battened down properly and the operation of the bow doors and in charge of the anchor

when it was needed or just general maintenance aboard the ship on the outside.

LINDA: So you would have had people under you like Symanszki?

LOUIS: Right.

LINDA: Mederios, Lagano

LOUIS: Yes

LINDA: My father?

LOUIS: Yes, you bet.

LINDA: Repeat some of those names - I had people under me like

LOUIS: Oh I had people under me like your father, Symanszki, and Annington, and Lagano and technical I guess the runners mates were under my command too but they were strictly in charge - they were strictly directed by Mr. Hillson who was the gunnery officer. He had to make sure the guns were covered properly with canvas and properly greased and so forth. In that climate they had to be taken apart and cleaned all up and re-greased and so on and so forth. There was more to them than you thought. Broken down, taken apart, put back together and that is what they did on the calm days so on and so forth. The rest of the time they I don't recall ever using any of the gunner people as watch. Having to go on watch. There would be somebody on the bow station and somebody on the stern station and other spots like that.

LINDA: Were you were issued general quarters what position would you usually be at?

LOUIS: Mine was under

LINDA: Say when we went into

LOUIS: When we went into general quarters it was very difficult because the line was way in the very front left hand side of the ship and we had to go out up over the deck and that is where all the chains were holding onto that other ship. We skinned our shins. It was terrible and in the dark you couldn't see and you had to feel your way up and you are trying to hurry and most of the time when you got over one you hit them again with another. My shins were terribly scarred up and I don't think they show any more today but they were real sore for a long time because you bump them. You didn't mean to but trying to get up and over and get to your station and there you sat. You were supposed to be able to grab some mattresses or plug up a whole if you got shot at or what have you. That was up there near where the anchor was. But why I don't know but that was the way it was.

LINDA: So you landed where did you end up Thalmouth England or

LOUIS: I can't recall exactly. We were in Weymouth and Thalmouth but it seemed like they were on the east side of England instead of the west side. We went down around and got to Plymouth that I do recall. Plymouth is in the south end of the British Isles. And where we dropped off that landing craft I can't recall it seems like we were over ont he east side but we were going to be near the channel they didn't have to take it so far.

LINDA: So you got over to England some time around

LOUIS: End of March. I think almost our entire trip was during March.

LINDA: So end of March until June you were....

LOUIS: April, May and June we were sitting in tense conditions. We did have some liberties as I recall but it was so dark. I never saw it so dark in my life as around those British Isles. If you went somewhere you had to feel with your feet if you were out on a path. No way you could see. It was just black. Absolutely black. I have never seen it so black back in the United States anywhere. There is something about that climate over there. You remember when you left how you went and felt your way back. You didn't want to miss a corner and go somewhere else. And people I could remember hearing a bicycle come and you stepped off to the side to let him by and you couldn't even see him you just know he went by that is all. I never saw it so absolutely black.

LINDA: Actually it wasn't too much fun going on leave.

LOUIS: No there wasn't much fun on going on liberty. There wasn't anything to see. There weren't any entertainments and anything else. You just want to see the countryside. I had one time after had made several passes across, I think we had between 14 and 18 trips we made between the Channel and the mainland. I got a three day pass and took a train on up to Stratford on Avon. I had always heard of Shakespeare and always wondered what it was like and so forth. I wanted to see the country while I had a chance and got into London fog one time and that was just as bad as day time. You could hardly see your hand in front of your face. I didn't realize that fog could get that thick but you heard of the London fog and it is there. Where was that one main manufacturing town up in there that I went on through and how we got over to the edge of the road and you could hardly

see across the street. You didn't know where you were going or what is what. Followed orders when you could find somebody there, get to the train station or wherever it was you were going.

LINDA: You said you were pretty tense during that April, May and June

LOUIS: Well yes because you didn't know when, they didn't let any word out as to when the invasion was. They didn't want the Germans to know or they would be on the alert. That was very secretive. You knew it was coming but you didn't know when. They might start out in the middle of the night or they might start out in the middle of the day. You didn't know what. I think we started out in the middle of the night and got clear on down by the time it was nine, ten o'clock in the morning before we got on over to our loading position. And that was near Calai in France. I have since been back there and that is where what do they call them now, they had propellers on them, and rubber bottoms and they go and land up on the beach and unload. They had as high as 60 cars on that.

LINDA: Oh like a ferry.

LOUIS: Yeah it was a ferry but it is not propelled screws it is propelled with airplane propellers up on the neck and about two of them and you couldn't imagine that they would have that much power that they could get you across in the time they did and so forth. Fantastic development. They didn't have those during the war yet.

LINDA: Did you know what, I mean you knew you were going to invade, did you know at the time that it would be Normandy? Did you know that it would have such an impact for the world forever and a day.

LOUIS:

You didn't worry about the future that much . You just wanted to get your cargo off of there and get out of there. But we were assured there were so many ships we were going through ship, ship, ship. I didn't know there were that many in the world. There were all kinds from soup to nuts. There were tankers, there were freighters, there were drag lines, there were everything in there. So many. And then the airplanes overhead when they came and droned over to take charge. They had the entire coast with a walkway dug through it and the Germans could all walk in there. They were about 5 foot deep I would say or 4 1/2 and they could walk in these and they were maybe three foot wide and they could look and shoot with nothing but their heads we suppose so they could shoot on anybody invaders and that entire coast of France had that trench along there. And our airplanes had done enough blasting and strifes along there where they had most of that cleaned out. They claimed they had one old boy in the Omaha area. He was a sharpshooter and the other guys just kept loading the guns for him and he killed 70 or 80 men easily because that is what they were supposed to do. But they also had the beach planted with obstacles that would tear a hole in the bottom of any large thing that came in there too close in certain places and they had most of that cleared out by the time we got there. We didn't happen to hit any of those. One of the times when we unloaded, we beached and we were out to seas and we had to wait for the tide to go out and man low and behold when the tide went out somebody dropped a big bomb right exactly in front of where we were and if they don't let it out well everything goes down in a big hole. And we had to wait till they got the bulldozer there to fill that hole before we could unload and after they did of course that sand wasn't near as solid as some of it and it was real rough and these poor British guys went off the end of theirs and man oh man the wheels dropped about two feet or some such matter after several of them had gone and the rut kept getting deeper. One poor guy his false teeth flew out. We didn't have anybody with false teeth in the American Navy but the British did and it was so funny to see

those teeth flying through the air. I can hear Commander Olson saying it isn't funny Mr. Right that poor man won't be able to eat for a week. Of course we realized it wasn't anything we could do and it wasn't anything we had done but he hit that bump so hard his teeth went flying out of his mouth.

LINDA: Did people get seasick going back and forth?

LOUIS: They did when it was rough but it wasn't always that rough. Sometimes you had pretty nice sailing. As a whole the Channel is really not smooth. It is active with small waves but there were times of somewhat stormy conditions and it was very rough. That is the time this British or American Officer came and thanked us because we got them over there and nothing had broken and nothing had been mishap and he was so thankful that we had done such a good job he felt so sorry for us and I couldn't imagine him feeling sorry for us when we were feeling sorry for them and here all the bombs are going off all night long. They were very far away from the shore. This was one of the first trips or two or three but it went on for roughly a week where you could still here all the rumbling. It took about two days to get over and back.

SHUT OFF FOR A SECOND - Take his medicine.

LINDA: I want to ask you about if you remember the time the tanks got loose?

LOUIS: Well the time the tanks got loose was the time I was on this trip up to Stratford Avon. I had a three day pass and when I got back Mr. Wilson told me about this. I don't know if there was some negligence on the part of the First Class Boatsman Mate and the Chief and maybe the First Lieutenant who would have been him. But this was one of the .
The braces were made out of great big links of steel, this big, and they

weren't the best steel and at one time they used some of these things to pull a stalled tank. One tank got added to the other one to pull it and those darn big things just stretched. But then they got some good steel chain and pulled him on out so these might have had a tendency under strain coming a little bit loose. It was mighty poor equipment. Mighty poor. I couldn't imagine steel being that soft to stretch those chains. But we had normal log chains out here and we found out the same thing there is an awful difference in the quality of the steel and the electric welding and you can get a lot of pull out of a small chain now if it is good steel and that is what happened there and the next thing they were one bumping against the other and I know Mr. Wilson said one of the boys I think it was Potter that jumped in there and then jumped back out when he saw the ship was rolling the other way or they would have got together and squeezed him. He managed to get some of those chains out of the way and rescue them so they had something finally to nail down. That was no joke either. I think that was the next trip after when I was complimented for doing such a good job with a rough sea. It might have been even rougher at that time.

LINDA: Were you married when you were in the service?

LOUIS: Yes, I was married.

LINDA: Did you ever get homesick?

LOUIS: I can't say that really that I did

LINDA: Say you really what

LOUIS: I can't say that I really ever got homesick. Mastered that by saying there isn't a damn thing I can do about it so. Sure I would rather be home but this is where we are let's accept it. And that is all you did.

LINDA: Did you write letters?

LOUIS: Absolutely. But it was a long time I found out afterwards. The mail was held up for a good six weeks prior to the invasion and everyone was wondering what was going on. There was a long period that they held the mail up and then they didn't want anyone telling what they were doing or want any word getting out. They didn't want the opposition to get any valuable information that way. How they found out where those convoys were going and all that this I don't know but they had their ways of doing it. And there were sunken ships around the British Isles you cannot believe. They would be in water just deep enough that just the mast would be sticking out one thing or another and I recall when we went down around the south end of there they had a British pilot aboard and they cleared some of them out so we could get through because otherwise our ship would be scraping over the deck of another one that was there if you didn't know it was there. They smoked a lot of cigars or pipes or what have you. You could tell the old Captain and the Pilot was pretty nervous too. But then the worst, the worst of it all was when we were hauling stuff out of London and up the Thames River and they had these so called buzz bombs that were sent over from France and they were pilotless planes powered by diesel motors and they sounded like a tremendous caterpillar coming across and they just put in so much gas. They knew just how much they could go and they would drop over London and all over the area there and the funny part was you never knew whether they were going to drop straight down, glide on for two, three, four miles or rear off to the side so that we would have to catch him just right or what. We had those drop all around us very close. In fact not over a 100 feet away we were in there hurrying around and being so tired I remember waking up one morning and seeing gravel all over the deck. A lot of it. I said how did all that gravel get on here. And I said something and he said you mean

you didn't hear that thing last night and I said Oh now I do I remember it hitting it and then it dropped here right beside us. There was 3,000 pounds of dynamite in there and it drilled hole or whatever it was housed in but we were in various docks and channels and so forth and it hadn't been from here to across the road over there so I was about 150 feet away. It blew a hole in the side of us but it missed us. It really raised cane with those docks but I was so tired you say well that didn't hit us and you drop right back off to sleep. I was tired. I was never so tired in my life as when we were living., and Captain Olson said I sure am glad we got out of that mess and the funny part of it was the first night that they came over they were putting them over very regularly. The airplanes were up trying to shoot them down. They didn't get very many because they were so fast our planes couldn't even keep up with them. So then they got smart and they had the planes going over toward them and when they saw one coming they circled around and got behind the darned thing and let him go by them and just as he got by they were close and they would shoot him in the butt and would get just about all them go down. And everybody was hooping and hollering - sure glad they got him. And they would be done in the channel. They wouldn't last long once they found out how to handle them. But the first night or two it was devastating. They really got a lot of them. I don't recall whether that went on for a week or two weeks or just how it was but I know that was one of the worst things we had to content with. Captain Olson said - I sure am glad to get out of the way of those.

LINDA: Did you like Captain Olson?

LOUIS: I felt very secure with him. I felt he knew what he was doing. He sure knew more than I thought. I didn't know enough, I sure wouldn't have wanted his job.

LINDA: You have to say Captain Olson

LOUIS: Captain Olson was a very good man. He was all Navy. He had the experience and the know how and very self assured and I don't know what else you would say about the man. He had a job to do and he did it. What was the deal here being aboard there when...oh on one of these occasions I had been left ashore somehow. I was in West Minster Abbey when another one of those things came down. Man did that place rattle. Did it ever rattle. I don't know how far away it was I suppose three or four blocks away but the concussion from one of those was tremendous. Another time remember being out on the deck while we weren't loading yet and one of them came over and I looked up at him and his motor shut off and he was heading down heading right straight for us. I never saw anything so and I was up in the bow and I ran as fast as I could to the stern got behind some protection you know and pretty quick I heard kabam and he went off but must have been about the time I left instead of diving down like this the wind caught him and he went almost straight down where he was at. Missed us by about two blocks. They were nerve wrecking. You didn't just take them lightly. But fortunately we got through so that was that.

LINDA: It seems like the 534 had a lot of near misses.

LOUIS: It did.

LINDA: Had a charm over it or something.

LOUIS: I felt the same way. There was one time as time went on they cleared the Channel with mine sweepers. We met a mine sweeper and his paramain was out. Had to pull that in so he could pass us real close and as soon as he got by us he through the paramain out again and he hadn't gone over I

don't suppose over two hundred yards and bang up went a depth charge but we had been demagnetized and this mine sweeper had this paramain stuck out about 100 feet each side of the ship he was on and it was dragging metal something or other that would detonate those depth charges. This depth charge went right up in our wake. Not much was said that is why I was wonder on that thing you had if anything was ever mentioned about that. Should have been on the watch whoever had it and another time we were sitting in the harbor there somewhere I don't recall whether that was around oh what was that called Shurburg. I was just sitting there and I heard one go off and there was this great big liberty ship or crater of some kind he went straight up the middle

TAPE STOPPED

LINDA: Now lets see I wanted to ask. Did you get letters from your wife. Did you look forward to mail.

LOUIS: Oh absolutely. That was great

LINDA: Say getting mail..

LOUIS: Getting mail was the only pleasure or biggest pleasure or appreciated things that broke the monotony. You bet.

LINDA: How often did you get mail?

LOUIS: I can't recall. You usually had to be in a port somewhere that they knew we were going to be when they get it. One thing I remember about getting mail was my folks sending me a half a gallon syrup pail and dad sealed it up in hog grade and said it contained fudge candy but it looked like it had

been banged around. It was dented so bad and everything else and by that time it was even moldy and I wrote back and told them not to waste their points and so forth because we had plenty of good food and it wasn't fit to eat after it got there and I hated to tell them here they wasted all their good sugar. Whoever handled it in the mail must have had a football game with that can.

LINDA: That was nice of them though to think about you.

LOUIS: Oh absolutely. My Aunt sent me some deviled ham. It was the first time I had ever eaten any devil ham. It came in a little box and I don't recall what else came in there I suppose so cookies or something.

LINDA: You were kind of a big guy weren't you.

LOUIS: Oh I wasn't so big. I think I weighed 180 pounds at the maximum when I was in the Navy and I think I weighed about a 130 or 40 when I first enlisted.

LINDA: Because you are tall.

LOUIS: No I am not very tall. 5 foot 11 or so.

LINDA: In that picture you look kind of bigger than a lot of those guys.

LOUIS: Well I am broader I suppose.

LINDA: Some of the guys talked about when they were landing at Normandy that people around them were dead and things like that. Did you see any dead.

LOUIS: Yes we saw some must have got shot. Must have been about 6, 8 or ten up there and they were still breathing, and one thing or another they hadn't been picked yet I don't know where they were shot but the corpsman worked on them giving them morphine and so forth. That was the first day of course. After that we didn't any of those.

LINDA: They were Army personnel right?

LOUIS: No they were Germans.

LINDA: Any of our people shot?

LOUIS: I didn't see any of ours that were there. I think they cleared one of these trenches that I was telling you about and they had about 6 or 8 of them there wondering what was going on. Maybe they were some of ours I don't recall that. I just thought well it aint me. So....

LINDA: I am going to use you. I want you to say I felt the 534 had a charm about it or something. Start that story again. Tell me about it.

LOUIS: Well I always felt that we were an exclusive ship. Things don't happen to us that happen to the others. We are either charmed or protected or something. I never had the thought that we were going to be the next one to go down just didn't enter other than the night the torpedoes hit, you wonder how many seconds anything can happen and those seconds last into minutes and the minutes into the hours and we sat there till daylight. I remember that. It was the longest damn night I ever spent in my life. You couldn't sleep of course and here we missed those and then we missed the ashcan with the mine sweeper and missed all over there with those buzz bombs and we were fortunate enough not to get banged with scrapping, going around the Channel and going through there where so

many ships had been sunk and I supposed you could see at least a dozen ships here, there and so forth and you stayed as close to shore and yet as far out as they dared where it was deep and when they went down the masts invariably showed where they were. And that is all you knew about it. There has to be a ship down there that is nothing more than a mast. Yeah all this time we came back and we never had any motor trouble. The deck gang performed well in keeping everything up to shape and keeping everything greased and so forth. Yeah I think it had a certain amount of charm about it. At least it survived. And I am almost sure we were one of the first ones to have that ramp on there. That was the greatest improvement they made on those LSTs. We had heard that some of the first ones went over were loaded too heavy and broke in half. I don't know I never found out who, what, where or when. But they reinforced it somewhat by the time we got there. I know the one made in Jeffersonville didn't look near as sturdy or as good as the one made in Evansville. I see on the map Evansville is what a couple of hundred miles up the Ohio River?

LINDA: Tell me about my Dad.

LOUIS: Well he was just a nice little fella

LINDA: You have to say Alvers

LOUIS: Henry Alvers was one of the outstanding men. He seemed to have an understanding and knowledge and comprehension much above average and when I asked for a volunteer to go over the side he was the only one that volunteered. Of course I was taught never volunteer for anything myself, still he did. I took advantage of it I felt I thought he deserved maybe special attention. He was always agreeable. He wasn't in trouble other than the time he came in late. And I never felt that was his fault in

as much as the Captain was determined to take those other three guys over there who had jumped ship before this made it special he wasn't going to have any horse play about not being on time and not living up to his rules. It was a good experience. Good experience.

LINDA: When you left England and you were coming back and they said we were going home - it was on Christmas day actually

LOUIS: Was it.

LINDA: Yes. December 25 you left England headed back to New York.

LOUIS: I don't recall that. I remember eating a turkey leg or some such a matter. I have a picture of myself on the deck doing that. But I wasn't aware that we were on our way home at that time. Probably were. I thought it was a little later than not but maybe not.

LINDA: So when you were on the way home what were you thinking. Do you remember.

LOUIS: Keep this thing rolling, keep this thing rolling and then as we got near the Azures we were down south you could smell them. You could smell land. I never knew you could do that. We were several miles away and there was a difference. An aroma in the air. It wasn't a fancy thing but you could smell land. I never knew that you could happen and we got on back without any further events. Thank God Bonner knew where he was because he was the navigator and I wouldn't have been any good at that.

LINDA: So you got into New York Harbor and some of you took leave and some of you stayed on board.

LOUIS: 90% got to

LINDA: When we got to New York Harbor...

LOUIS : When we got to New York Harbor why very shortly thereafter 90% of the crew got to go home on a 30 day leave and 10% of us of which I was one stayed for another 30 days till they got back and then we got a 30 day leave. And when we came back from leave we reported to Brooklyn Navy Yard as I recall and I was assigned to LST 335 which was a group of fourteen older ships. The last to go over and the first to come back. Went over to France. We were the second to last convoy that went over. And so when we came back we were the second convoy to come back because we were the most modern and up-to-date ships and ready to go to the Pacific. So after we got back I don't recall maybe we were in the Brooklyn Navy Yard for another six weeks or some such matter. It seems it was down into late May or June by the time I got assigned to Yorktown Virginia to haul out so called defective ammunition and dump it in the ocean which was an easy job but very precarious and very careful and I remember some of these fellas telling us now these kind are particularly sensitive. You don't have to have a detonator in there. A bad jolt and they can blow you up. I don't know what they had in them but we were very careful. They lined the whole ship deck with boards and then between each and every ash can why there were more wooden boards. They were only there so if they did have to rock and roll they didn't cause any sparks. But it wasn't any duty. It was kind of boring. All the time we were waiting for the civilians to get them loaded back on because we had nothing to do with that.

LINDA: Did you miss the 534.

LOUIS: I did not exactly miss the 534 but it was a better ship by far than the 335 but however as long as it had good food and a good bed I guess that was all we could complain about and be thankful for. There was nothing to do in Yorktown Virginia. There was a college there but that didn't mean anything to us. It was either fish or play golf and that is where I got my fill of playing golf to the point that I hate the damn game to this day. I despise anybody who hits that ball and then goes chase it. I always felt if you want to do something worthwhile why not dig a six by six and then throw the dirt back in.

LINDA: Well did you miss the people on the ship.

LOUIS: Oh no not particularly. Particularly when you got home and met people that you waited for. And I couldn't wait to get back and get to work.

LINDA: When you came home from the war did they have a party for you or anything?

LOUIS: I don't recall that, no. I don't recall that.

LINDA: But you know when you were coming from Normandy back to New York you all knew that the 534 was going to go to the Pacific.

LOUIS: We assumed that that what was for. That was what they were anxious to do because you see the war was pretty well secured over there in Europe and the Japs were still pretty active over there in the Pacific so they were going to have to trim them up next. Yeah that was really something how we managed to hold our own and get everything back in order. And if you stop to realize those countries were in such desperate straights that they were going to break down America and make them share all our good fortunes and provisions and our resources with them you really couldn't

blame them. Twice when I have been back over their once with a German guide and one time we had a Swiss guide and both gave the same story that you folks realize what a rascal Hitler was but you must remember there were a million unemployed in Germany and there was just absolutely nothing for them to do and they were in desperate straights and times were not good before the war either and a friend of mine who had all his male relatives over there were all killed during the war and they all admitted to their wives and families that at least when Hitler was in charge the first thing he did was get rid of all the lawyers and judges and they had law and order. There wasn't any of this horsing around in politics like we have today where you begin to wonder who is in charge.

LINDA: Did you know that French took over as Captain in the Pacific?

LOUIS: Yes. I knew that. But I don't know what happened to Mr. Coles or Mr. Olson. I just don't know whatever happened to them. George B. Olson that was absolutely his name and he lived some thirty or forty miles north of San Francisco. Whatever sound that might have been. And I don't know what he did because he would have been of retirement age. Being in the Navy all his life I don't know what he would have done to spend his time. Retirement isn't the answer to the ultimate.

LINDA: What did you do when you retirement to spend your time.

LOUIS: I just got lazier and lazier. Ate more and got fatter. I didn't play golf and I despise fishing and what else is there to do. Go to dances. I don't know what else we did.

LINDA: What did you think after I called you?

LOUIS: I thought my god

LOUIS: What did I think when you called me I thought fifty-five years ago I immediately got to figuring out, from forty-five up to ninety-eight my God that was over fifty years ago and get the names and addresses of Hillson, not Hillson but Wilson and some people that I had been so close to and lost track of to think they would ever come back to memory it really stirred me up. it was quite an emotional experience I can say. And I hope to see them again. I hope to hear from him some more. But he has lived a charmed life. I was not as fortunate as he. He got right into a good company. I was so unconcerned with being back and being back and doing what I wanted and being with the meat packing business so I didn't ask him if I could have my job back that was fine, never asked him what wages would be or what I was expected of me or what I was going to do and the wages were so stinking small that I just about couldn't believe what I saw. Here I had been drawing with all our subsidies nearly four hundred a month and here I was working for \$45 a week and the worst of it was no places to live. Fortunately my father-in-law found us an apartment. You take what you can get. We were very close to the_____ house in those days where the steam engines got cleaned up and converted and so forth. The air was polluted with soot and our apartment was so damn black and dirty it wasn't fit to live and the next thing my wife got busy cleaning those walls and we were so proud of it to think that and then the damn landlord turned around and said well if you want to paint it now I will pay for the paint and I was dumb enough not to realize that was his clue that he improved the apartment so he raised the rent another \$10 and he raised it from \$55 up to \$65 and I always heard that rent shouldn't be over one week's salary out of the month and I hated his guts like everybody else did. He was a miserly old devil. But I was three years there in Waterloo and then I got a break and got sent to Southern Iowa for three years and then to Webster City for four more and then the guy I

worked with in Southern Iowa he and I got together and bought a business in Humboldt and I have been here for 43 years now.

LINDA: You know everybody in town.

LOUIS: No not everybody but a lot of them. This has been a very fine place to live it is one of the better towns in Iowa and it is one of the most, I don't know we have had a lot of odd things go on here. There have been a young fella here whose dad was a banker absconded 16 million dollars out of our bank here and they eventually got him and put him away for a while but he eventually got out and he is back in the business. He is in the brokerage business and I don't know what. His name is Louella. Know his folks very well. I don't know what they think of it.

LINDA: Let me ask you a question. You have five sons. Would you want any of your five sons to go through the war like you went through the war.

LOUIS: Well

LINDA Start out with I wouldn't

LOUIS: I wouldn't want them to have to do all this sort of thing but it is like the man with a large family who says I wouldn't give two cents for another one but I wouldn't take a million for any one of them that I got and my five sons were all very well devoted and I had a good wife. Very family oriented. They are all very compatible between the three out of five of them today. And I am very thankful for that but I think my training in the Navy when I told them something that is what I meant. I didn't harp at them all the time. They enjoyed what they wanted. They helped me out at the farm all the time. We tended a tremendous amount of life stock and they had a lot of chores to do and two of them never even went out for

athletics because they had too much work to do when they got back. And it sort of helped set me on my feet and I have been able to reward them fortunately many times over but no I wouldn't want anybody to go through that not even my worst enemy. I wouldn't wish any more damn war. I don't know I always feel favorable to those boys that are over there in that Gulf in Iran. I want them to get every benefit they possibly could. They sacrificed enough while the others are back here getting their feet on the ground and getting good jobs and so forth. Took me a long time to work up to a good paying job. I was mainly a livestock buyer which I thoroughly enjoyed and it was competitive and going to the auctions why I defied the others to get the bargains and me get took.

LINDA: But did this happen too often?

LOUIS: No it didn't. I was very well thought of and left with good graces. Made some real good deals and usually the man that sold them to me it was his fault. Because if he didn't know enough when he had them sold to get them in there and over to the scales.

LINDA: When you were on the ship was it different being an officer versus the non officers.

LOUIS: We had finer quarters

LINDA: Say being an officer

LOUIS: Being an officer we naturally had finer quarters and less tedious work and privileged I guess you would say. I always felt sorry for the engine crew because down there was so hot and so stuffy and if there was ever a time when you want to be sea sick is when it is hot and stuffy. Three of my sons by the way were in the Navy for four years apiece. And one of them

was on a destroyer and he said there were times when he stood the entire watch at 114 degrees and stripped to the waist but said we made it. I don't know how he could help from being sick because if there is anything when you used to have to go check the engine room for anything the minute you hit the shaft and those diesel fumes coming on up along with it, it almost makes you want to get sick right away. So we were up above the deck line and our quarters and the crew underneath were actually crowded and living under suffocating conditions more or less. They were as nearly well ventilated so we had advantages. Our food was basically the same but served in a different manner. We ate off of china and silverware and they ate off of trays and they had to carry their own. We had stewards mates to wait on us. We had one there and I can't remember what his name was. He was a very good man. He used to be a porter on a train.

LINDA: James Jack?

LOUIS: Could have been him. He was rather slender older fellow. You have his picture there? Then we had one by the name of Gainey. They had colored folks there for stewards mates.

LINDA: Stewart Session?

LOUIS: Session now that sound like - what records have you got there.

LINDA: I haven't found any. I heard that the three quarters mates were Talmudge Billings, Hayward Session and Amos Jack.

LOUIS: Well they weren't all there because I remember Gainey as one them. He was one on the 534 I am sure. He was a younger guy.

LINDA: Could officers go to the brig. Could officers get in trouble?

LOUIS: Sure they could get in trouble like anybody else.

LINDA: Did you ever get in trouble?

LOUIS: No.

LINDA: Did you ever get sick. Did you ever have to go to the hospital?

LOUIS: No only the time when I was in elementary training and all I wanted was an alkazelher and they said oh no you might have enteritis you have go to the hospital. That was in basic training. I didn't need to go to the hospital no more than nothing.

LINDA: So if you had to sum up your time on the 534 how would you sum it up?

LOUIS: How would I sum it up. How did they manage to get all those records off the 534 and did they sink it there or what was the ultimate end to it?

LINDA: You will have to read the next newsletter.

LOUIS: That will be good. I will seriously do that. I will surely do that. But as far as going to the whatever you want to call it - the reunion, I just can't take it anymore - getting too old. I am too tired.

LINDA: Well if you could say something to everybody at the reunion what would it be. Think of a message right now. Send them a message right now.

LOUIS: My best wishes to all of you. Sorry to see that so many have already expired. But I will probably soon be with you. Hopefully not any sooner than it has to be.

LINDA: It would be nice to see all your old buddies huh.

LOUIS: That part would be fine that would be great. I don't know so much buddy buddy and we didn't have any amenity that I remember. Everybody realized they were in there for a purpose and we got to get it over with and the war is done and we are living a pretty high life here now. I have a grandson that is fifteen years old and I was telling him it just seems incredible that before the war we were still farming with horses and I always liked horses. It was always a challenge to break them and make them mine and get them broke right so they knew what was what. Now you go out here and you see these 16 and 24 row planters. By the way we went by a corn planter that was folded up. It was 16 row corn planter this morning and there is one just out north here and he isn't quite ready to go but 24 rows at a time. And then you wonder why or how we ever got along with a two row planter and horses back there and back in the days of horses you had to raise another 50% to feed the horses. You didn't put it through gasoline. Such a change in times and then the biggest thing in the last ten years is the use of herbicides that don't affect the productivity of the corn or the beans you got but kills all the weeds. It wasn't less than 10 years ago that we went through and walked all these things and pick out the superfoulous weeds. Wanted to keep things clean. Of course there was a difference in attitude. There was a lot of pride up here in this Iowa area. In Missouri oh hell those weeds will go through the combine. That was their attitude and on further south they would just do it in a slap happy way or a haphazard way and up here everybody poor old women and their kids and the families walked the beans and made sure there weren't any weeds in them. They didn't get any bonus for having nice clean beans any better than anybody else.

LINDA: Anything you want to say about that ship?

LOUIS: Yeah I wonder whether they are going to sink it over there or have they sunk it.

LINDA: It got sunk. After the typhoon it broke all to pieces they beached it and came along and decommissioned it and in January of 1946 they pulled it off of the beach in Buckner Bay, tugboat pulled it out and took it out about a mile and sunk it. We were going to dive for it but it is at 300 fathoms of water. So we are not going to dive for it.

LOUIS: That is deep. A little bit on the same level as this I often wondered there were some years, maybe 10 or 15 years after the war that they had some terrific booms out on the east coast. Do you ever recall that? I think it is before your time and they couldn't figure out what these great booms were and I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't some of those extra potent, maybe they were on the verge of being nuclear bombs that we hauled off and dumped and as they corroded and finally the salt water got into them and so forth and maybe that is what set them off. And then one went off we just parked. We weren't on the move. We just went to a certain spot and dumped them all. Which wasn't so smart either because well they weren't so heavy they went down slow and so forth and settled on the bottom of the ocean somewhere. I still maintain that is what those big booms were. And how deep it was I couldn't tell you. I know we had to go out in deep water about 150 miles from shore.

LINDA: Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life after the war?

LOUIS: I think I did

LINDA: I think I did have trouble adjusting...

LOUIS: I think I had, I was very disgusted in many ways. Disillusioned because it wasn't easy. Then my family started coming two at a time and no place to live. Finally the company sent me down to a smaller town and that was a big relief. Then I was happy and then things started to roll. It took a good three years to get that going because I was working down in the yards with the livestock and one thing and another and learn how to grade them, buy them and appraise them and weigh them and so on and so forth and that was my pride and joy. I was basically a farmer or live stock man. I didn't much give a damn about raising grain. I wasn't a ground man I was a livestock man.

LINDA: And you still are.

LOUIS: I still like. I just like to go to a sale and watch it sell.

LINDA TALKING:

LOUIS: I have a letter here from Leo Wilson that I received after I had received his address and written to him dated March 4th. It goes as such: What a real pleasure it was to receive your letter yesterday. After so many years surprises such as this don't happen very often. Yes R. J. French did command the old 534 to Okinawa to answer your last question first. Enclosed baseball card autographed no less and probably worth millions twenty years from now is 8 years of last January. As I am now 76 I don't believe it. Fortunately Barbara and I are in good health and enjoy life. The other picture is a blown up copy of a smaller print with a good looking guy in the back row. Before delving into a little historical background let me take a moment to recall the day that Purvis Bonner, remember him, and I picked up our ship 534 six miles outside Pensacola Florida. The tall husky blond - OOD Stockdale greeted us with these

immortal words - Ah more men for the watch. I have never forgot that as my Naval career started.

SOMETHING HAPPENED WITH MATT

LOUIS: Before delving into a little historical background let me take a moment to recall the day the Purvis Bonner and I picked up our ship 534 six miles out of Pensacola Florida. A tall husky blond OOD Stockdale greeted us with these immortal words - Ah more men for the watch. I have never forgot that as my naval career started. The log reads as follows: after my taking over the supply division Hoboken New Jersey, Norfolk Virginia, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Colin Panama Canal Zone, San Diego California, Pearl Harbor Hawaii and Anawetak Marshall Islands, Guam, Mariannis Islands, Saipan, Mariannis Islands, Okinawa, Riukus Islands, June 22, 1945 9:30 AM Kamikaze. August battered by two typhoons on reef. Skelton crew 25. September to October tending on Okinawa with goats and so forth. On November 6 we said goodbye to Okinawa. Two typhoons and tents, it is mud and movies and accepted a thirty day survivor leave to the States. In January I was assigned as 1st Lt. on the US LST 551 as I lacked six months of points to leave the Navy. Picked up the ship at Norfolk and cruised the Caribbean, plus Guantanamo Beach, Cuba. Was discharged in May. One thing I didn't mention here in all this was the fact that I stayed in the Naval Reserves for 3 years or two years. They didn't have them right away when I got back. But I stayed in the reserves in Waterloo and enjoyed that and got to have a nice pleasure cruise down the Guantanamo Bay too, down the Mississippi and Cuba. Lets see where did we go - Havana Cuba and above all we left New Orleans on a Monday at noon and we had a big dinner and we didn't eat again until Wednesday night. That was the sickest I ever was when we went out the mouth of the Mississippi and hit the main ocean out there. It was sicker than any time in the Navy.