

JOE SZYMANSKI INTERVIEW
TAPE 1, SIDE 1

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Ron: Let's just begin by...give me your name and...what else did you want?

Linda: Rank.

Ron: Your name and rank and the branch of service that you were in.

Joe: Alright. Joseph Szymanski. I was in the service on an LST 534 from its inception where we picked it up in Evansville, Indiana. My rank at that time was coxsin, acting....boatsims (?) mate....chief boatsims mate. I had a chief who I respected, because he has sixteen years in the Navy and everything he showed and taught me came from him and I thank God for that, because that made me very happy about knowing what I'm into. From there I had to...we had over 80 seaman aboard our ship and we had three classes where we stood watches. I happened to be chosen to be on the helm, the wheel of the ship. Evidently Captain Olsen liked the way I kept the ship on course. I had a gunner's mate who was on the annunciators. You know what the annunciators are? They're speed. Now, the Captain would give us an order. I would repeat the order, execute the order and tell him I did and that's what we did.

Ron: Let me...

Linda: Ron, stop. (Pause) Okay, Ron. Thank you.

Ron: Let's go back to Evansville, Indiana. You got your orders and there you are in Evansville and you're going to go on the 534. What was the...what was the feeling like? You were meeting new people, you were suddenly going to be on a ship and your going to go overseas. What were your thoughts at the time?

Joe: Well, at that time we were happy that we were going to get our own ship, because I did some take some training on the Chesapeake Bay on an LST, but I didn't know too

much about it. So when they took us to see the ship we couldn't get aboard yet, it wasn't quite fixed...repaired....to go, so we were all happy about it. We used to go to USO hall and...well, it was nice to meet shipmates.

Ron: What was your earliest memory of shipmates? Who were the first people that you met that you...

Joe: Well, Lt. Hillson as an officer, the gunnery officer, was one. Gunners Mate.....

Ron: That's all right.

Joe: One of his Gunners Mates who came from Philadelphia was my partner on the wheel, in the wheel house and he was on the anenciators and Slycord, he was a Pharmacist Mate, First Class, who was designated as our doctor aboard ship. Then from there we started meeting French, Lt. French....uh...Chief Neibs, the engineering officers and several cooks and bakers.

Ron: So these are the first people that you met.

Joe: These are the first people that I met in Evansville.

Ron: And how long did you stay in Evansville before you put out....?

Joe: Just about a little over a week and a half.

Ron: Doing what?

Joe: Just lounging around killing tme. Can I tell you where we slept one night?

Ron: Yeah, sure.

Joe: In a police station, because they used to shut the hall down at nine o'clock.

Where you going to get young people to go to bed at nine o'clock? So they told us to go to the police station and they put us up. And when we got up in the morning it was embarrassing, because the people are going in there for reasons that they should, you

know...they'd look at us with strange eyes and, of course, we had to go and wash ourselves up, because the USO used to shut down at nine o'clock in the evening, so we couldn't spend any time at the hall.

Ron: So when you left Evansville did you have a full compliment of men?

Joe: No. No. As we were going up the Mississippi River we were under the guidance of the...of a Coast Guardsman. Now, I was the only one who knew how to operate a LCVP. I stood watch on the wheel with Captain Olsen for a while, but he's the one that steered us up the Mississippi River. Every night we would anchor and most of the time this officer from the Coast Guard would go ashore. He knew people there and I and my boat crew used to have to take him and then wait for him. Sometimes it would be eleven...eleven thirty and then come back, hoist the boat aboard and the next morning we'd take off. When we got into Tennessee they issued liberty for some of the crew. I happened to be one. We spent most of our time in the major hotel room they had, just sitting in the lobby and chewing the fat, because we didn't have too much time. Then we got back, as we were going back....I just forget now who the coxin was on the boat. He beached it. Even though he was in the middle he tried to follow the bouy's he beached it, so I got off and backed it off and took it in the rest of the way.

Ron: Were training during this period in time when you were going up the Chesapeake?

Joe: On the Chesapeake I did that training, yes. I went to school there.

Ron: I don't mean you. Was that

Joe: No. Yes. Some of them did.

Ron: I guess I'm not clear. How many men on board had experience on an LST?

Joe: I would venture to say maybe about fifteen-twenty.

Ron: On a crew of how many?

Joe: Well, a crew of about 120 afterwards.

Ron: So those fifteen or twenty had to learn from the rest of you.

Joe: Yeah. Yes, we had a....

Ron: It was kind of like a shake down cruise.

Joe: Well, the shake down cruise started in New Orleans. When we got into New Orleans we started...we went to a shipyard. They were doing some more refitting. And there...from there we started taking on supplies and I, like I say, I had to know where all the supplies went with the Chief. See, the Chief and an executive Officer, who was Lt.....at that time, Lt. French, were very great buddies. Our Chief lived in the officers quarters and he liked him very much and he learned a lot from him too. He took responsibilities from the Chief about where we were going store it, but we took on ammunition, we took all that stuff...oil. We went to Baton Rouge, we took on oil...nine months supply of oil. Back to New Orleans. From there we went to...well, we took on Algiers.

Ron: Before we get to that, I mean, we're racing. I want to find out what the shake down cruise was like. Tell me a little about what a shake down cruise.....

Joe: Well, like I say, they took a...we were in Algiers, which is across from New Orleans shipyard. There was a training station there and we took on a lot of personnel from that training station. And, of course, what we did was put them to work. We were taking on supplies, storing supplies and all that and I remember I was designated to go ashore and get maps, charts of where we were going to go. They made me put on a .45

and this was at noon time. New Orleans was nice and warm...to go into the office where we were supposed to go, but I forget who the officer went with me. I don't know whether it was Lt. Horanson Sayers or whoever it is. Anyway, we went there and got him and we went into an oyster bar. I liked oysters, but I didn't care for them, those were the pacific oysters. So I only had one and that was it, and come back to the ship.

Primarily, all it did was...we were...from there we got our crew, we left for Panama City, Florida. In Panama City, we stayed there, they were working on our radar. From there we went to Pensacola, Florida to a small shipyard. At Pensacola they were doing most of the other refitting. At Pensacola we learned more about it. We had a commander that was in charge of our flotilla. The Chief showed me...taught me everything that I was supposed to know even though we had other...we had officers already and other crewmen with the same rate as me, but I was the leading P.O. from what he told me. He showed me how to work our bow doors in case our power failed.

Ron: So you were in charge of the bow doors?

Joe: That's correct. In charge of the bow doors, to go ahead and dog 'em, meaning lock 'em when we were going to take underway and if that failed,...the power failed, how to get 'em with our winch. We hooked up our cable....cable. And the Commander was the one that was checking us out and he gave the orders to close 'em with the winch. We had a winch on the top side deck and I was operating the winch and bringing in the one winch wire.

Ron: What was the most interesting thing about the 534? What was the thing you remember the most about the ship?

Joe: Well, it was a good clean ship. It was well organized, I would say, outside of...I'm not going to get into that. But, like everything else, there's always a little friction with officers and that. But outside of that, I really enjoyed being on a ship, because that ship was our home and we kept clean. Lt. French was a stickler on cleanness, neatness.

Ron: He was not well liked.

Joe: Because of that! You see, something about his background...he was the first Lieutenant to come here in...Southampton (?)(Unintelligible)...Smith College when they formed a Wave...Officers. He was in charge of them. So he had no seaman ships experience and that's what the crew kind of didn't like, you know, when they found out about it. But he took everything serious.

Ron: Well, they also thought that he thought of himself as better than everybody else. In other words, those were comments that were made by a lot of the people.

Joe: Yes. Yeah, that he thought that he was superior to people. He called me into his office...he was great with the Chief. They practically buddy-buddied. And one day he called me in and told me the reason why he is so neat. He had ten cottages in Minnesota on the lakes and he says, "What I did with them ten cottages, I rented them out, but every year I would take two and really go through them, neat, clean. " And he says, "Every year I did that and, Ski, I expected that you will do that here. In other words, you can't do everything at once, but piece meal do it and have it ready when I have an inspection."

Ron: But he unlike Captain Olsen, that everybody seemed to like.....

Joe: Well, Captain Olsen.... remember, they're regular Navy men. They didn't have any use for any of the reserves, because they...and, truthfully, I'll tell you right now.

None of them knew what it was all about. They were just young fellows that went to college and they...see the Navy would give them written instructions and that was it. Then they would try to carry them out. Well, you know, sometimes you can't apply written stuff to actual doing stuff. I used to have to get the crew together and tell them, "Don't take it out on me. I'm your officer. Don't take it out.... I get my orders and if I don't carry 'em out, someone else will. And I'll be damned if I'm going to have someone else take my place. That's why I'm making it on you guys."

Ron: But French served under Olsen in the....

Joe: As a...right, but he....

Ron: Did French and Olsen like each other?

Joe: Debatable. I never seen them together. I never seen French even up on the con, meaning given, you know, where a ship...excuse me....I never seen him there.

Ron: So you had all these guys that served in the Atlantic theater under Olsen and liked him and they think....you come back and now French is in charge and that's where they start t get a little....

Joe: I had two seamen, top football players at high schools in Connecticut, state of Connecticut, swore they were not going to sail with him and they didn't. They were put in prison, because I got the bulletin about it...Portsmouth (?)...Navy.

Ron: But you liked French?

Joe: I had no choice. I had no choice. He called me in...well, I guess he kind of liked me, but I think he stopped me from...see, when they were getting transferred in New York I found out that the Navy formed a shore patrol, which are police. And I did some shore patrol work in England, so I figured I could get off of this ship by telling him that I

wanted to become a shore patrolman, because in civilian life I want to be a state policeman. And he called me in and told me, "Ski, you went to school as a seaman. you learned all about boatsin and that's what you were trained for and that's what we need you for. We can't let you go, because of that."

Ron: Let's go back to New Orleans. You are in New Orleans now and the ship is outfitted and you're going to go...you're ready to run. You're going to do your shake down cruise. Take me through the next step after you leave New Orleans.

Joe: Well, that's what I said, from New Orleans we went to Panama City.

Ron: Right.

Joe: We had some work...a little work done there. We just anchored there and waited. There was a shipyard there. I took the officers to another LST that was in a Gulf of Mexico...and, with my small boat. I remember I got a sunburn, because while they were there I laid on a deck...on the engine deck and got burnt red, so I paid a little bit for that. From there we went to Pensacola, Florida. Now, Pensacola, Florida was known at that time for cadets, flying cadets...Navy. It's a big, big...and our.... especially, Hillson used to get sick of going to town, because all these cadets would salute him. He was a line officer and you got to salute back and he didn't it. We were at a bar one time drinking, the shore patrol come in, seen us....Slycord, myself and the Chief and Hillson....they got the shore patrol officer and come over and told him that he's out of uniform and he shouldn't be mixing with us. See, the Navy's got officer with officer, petty officer with petty officer, seaman with seaman. They discriminate in that fashion. He turned around and says that "this place is too good for me and not good enough for my ship mates then it's not good enough for me. Drink up boys. Let's get out." We rented a car....now, see,

here's another thing. Hillson, when we got the ship we had to pitch in. There was fifteen of us pitched in \$20 a piece to form our own store, ship store...cigarettes, razor blades and stuff like that that we could sell at 50% profit, so we all pitched in. When we wanted to rent the car he would use that money as a down payment to rent...say \$50 down...then we'd all pitch in when we come to what it had cost. We went to Mobile, Alabama, which was forty miles away from there, just on liberty. Wanted to see what it was all about. I drove all the way, because I didn't trust any of them other guys, you know? I drove up there. We got there, just with luck they were getting some freezing snow, but it turned into rain. It would melt, you know, big....so we just took around the city...go in...we used to always hit the best hotels they had and sit in the lobby and have a few drinks and come back. Then we drove back. That was exciting, if you want to call it that.

Ron: So you left Panama City and you left...I'm trying to get us out of that area now and get us in this...

Joe: Okay. We leave Panama City. We're headed north. We're coming into New York City. We get into New York City, we anchored an overnight. From there we went to Rhode Island. There they let us go ashore and I bought a wristwatch and a Ronson cigarette lighter, which lasted me throughout the whole service. That's how good they were then, but for a few bucks. From there we went to Boston, anchored...we went through the Cape Cod Canal, which was very interesting. Nice. Anchored in Boston. The next day we left for Nova Scotia. We were in Nova Scotia for about a...oh, I'd say about a week, a week and a half. And all the while they always sent me, because a small boat...to get supplies and for some reason or another I always managed to get 'em, but that's where I found out what this Lend/Lease was all about. Fellow there told me,

“Lend/Lease is great! You give it to us and then we charge you for it.” And I says, “What!” He says, “Lend/lease!” I come back and I says, “Hey, this is pretty god. We give our stuff away and then they charge us for it.” But I always managed to get the supplies we needed, because when I went to Boatsim school this officer told me, “A good boatsman will have supplies. In the middle of the ocean if you break down, you don’t go to the store and get supplies, you got to have them.” He said, “A good boatsim makes a good crook, because if he’s got to get it, he’ll steal it to make sure you’re supplied well.” So I always went to shore...they always sent me ashore to get supplies whether they was for boatsim materials or whether it was supplies for food. I always...they’d give me the voucher and all that. Once you leave a ship in a boat...you get order from the deck officer....you are the Captain and you are responsible for it coming and going, so in that respect they had me always going until we got to England. Oh, from there....

Ron: Well that's all right. Was the crew pretty well trained by the time you hit Nova Scotia?

Joe: Yes. Well, to the best of it’s abilities. Yes. They stood watches. There were three watches. They stood watches four on, eight off. When you’re off...to....and...

Ron: Did they operate as a team?

Joe: As a team. Yeah. Yeah. We finally got it settled to where everybody knew what they were doing. Gunners Mates would Gunners mate, but, see, the Gunners Mates would always want help and they would get them from me. I would supply them with a seaman, because a seaman had nothing much to do but stand watches and keep the ship in order. So we left Nova Scotia and we’re out about a week and a half, I was on an eight to twelve watch with my crew. I just got into bed, on my cot, seems like I just fell asleep

and all of a sudden I'm General Quarters. What is this? Christ! I just got to bed. I thought it was a drill. So I grabbed....French was noted for that, to pull drills. He'd even start a fire and get us out there to fight fire to see if they were ready. We had to...like a....they call a Hillbilly, where you dropped it andhose and draw water. Then, of course, we could...our own supply. I pick up my Mae West, which is a lifesaver and I'm dragging myself and I says, "I'll go to officers country to the radio. Just as I got in the radio shack I look and there's a ship a fire. This is for real, so my station was on the wheel. I get in on the wheel, called myself in. Hoight was our gunner's mate that was on the annunciators. And I'm trying to see something, but you can't, it's dark. Now, we were in what they call a coffin corner. As...there were sixty ships....but we were in the extreme last ship in a column on the left and they called that coffin corner, because you were way in the back there. All of a sudden I got an order 'All engines emergency reverse, hard right on the wheel'. So I answered what he said and then executed it and as we were going I looked out the port, a ship a head of us got torpedoed and it was built down and there was sailors, merchants sailors trying to lower a small boat with a flashlight. SOS. SOS. We went by it. Otherwise we would have rammed them. We went by 'em and straightened out. The next day we changed courses. We started going five degrees more to the port side and ten degrees to the right side and we went so far north that I even seen icebergs floating by. Submarines can't operate in waters like that.

Ron: Not in those days they couldn't. They can now.

Joe: No. That's right.

Ron: How many...how many ships got hit that day?

Joe: Two.

Ron: What were they?

Joe: I think one small tanker and then this Liberty ship, but they told us...a report that they have somebody always designated to stay back and pick up survivors that they didn't lose anybody. But we did have a Russian ship to our starboard, right side of us and they had women on there, because they handed their panties out. We could see, you know, but that was it. We just followed all the way in. We were told we're going to pick up the aircraft ranger, which we never did. Finally, before we got to England a couple of bombers flew over, but they were British and what a relief. We pulled into Southampton, England. There we anchored for a couple of days. From there...see, we had supplies on there and we took over two coast guard crews....

Ron: Before we get...before we get to England.

Voice: Ron, I'm sorry.....very sensitive...sorry about that.....

Joe: Hi, Bob! Linda. My son. See, I forgot to tell you we took on...

Ron: Let's hold it until we get there.

Joe: Oh.

Linda: Go ahead, Ron.

Ron: Okay. Were you frightened that night when all of this is going on or were you too young to be frightened, to be scared of the....?

Joe: Well, didn't know what was going on. We knew there was submarine action and you would just get on a ship.... I mean, on the wheel and you just execute what your suppose to. I had no other different thoughts. Like I stayed on that wheel until daylight.

Ron: Did you have any sense of danger?

Joe: No. For some reason or other, no. I should of, but no, because I'm at the helm of the ship. Now, remember our ship was quite a trick to keep that ship on helm, because it was a flat bottomed. It would only go to the left and to the right and up and down very little, but the waters were very rough and north Atlantic can be very bad. So I'm fighting the ship, because you can go two degrees...five degrees this way, but you're suppose to be on this degree, so you fight it back that way. So actually you don't have much time to think of it and only to steer the ship right. At least that's the way I felt on it. We had two coast guard crews that we took with us and they were supposed to go on what they called the 400 boats to patrol...make the invasion to shores.

Ron: When it was all over...when you got past the submarines and you had a chance to think about what had happened how did you think about it?

Joe: Well, in a way, we considered ourselves lucky that we weren't deep. See, some of those ships were...are deeper than us. We had ballism where we could make ourselves lighter, see, and being flat you don't cut down that deep. If we went four feet, that's it, but the submarine's got to go down a little deeper. That was more or less a consolation to us that...hey, could have been false, I don't know, but that was the thought that we all had. We survived it.

Ron: Did you....did you make you more aware of the danger of submarines for the rest of the trip?

Joe: Definitely. Definitely.

Ron: Did that change how the ship was run then?

Joe: Well, we.....no. The ship was run well. Everybody....well, yes. It made....more alert. It made 'em more conscientious. And I always said to them....and this was....that

we're all teammates. One mistake by somebody can cost all our lives. Everybody's got to toe their mark. That's what I used to instill to all my shipmates. Let's work together. Don't hold grudges against anybody, because anyone of us can cause a mishap and we can sink. And a long way to swim and that waters cold. I mean, this is what you had to....that was the fear that I instilled in 'em and myself.

Ron: But it must have made them more alert looking for submarines....watches...

Joe: Definitely. They were supposed to report everything they seen. At one time when we were going through, you know, Straights of Dover, an object dead ahead was one of our pilots shot down. Captain gave orders to stop and then he'd go ahead, because somebody must have told him, 'What good's stopping to pick him up when a submarine can torpedo us or something.', which was true. He was dead already. That always stuck in my mind. You can't help those that are dead.

Ron: Did you have any other experiences on that trip over to England where you had General Quarters, somebody thought they saw a submarine....?

Joe: No. No. That was just it. That was just it. But we had two Canadian corvettes, what they called, small ship. Boy, I felt sorry for them, because they would be cutting in and out and that north Atlantic is....IS rough. I mean, on the wheel a wave would pick you up and you're way up high and the next thing you know you come down and you don't see a ship at all. That's how far down you come. That's how them waves are and you would rock the side to side...one time.... even a small boat as high as it was would almost hit the water. Nobody was topside. Nobody stood watches. If anybody wanted to go out, we had to tie a rope around them, so we wouldn't lose 'em. But the orders were 'No Watches!' when it was that rough. That can be rough, that north Atlantic.

Ron: Is it fall weather along with high seas?

Joe: Well, it rained and stuff like that, yeah. A little foul weather. But we had fall weather gear. Everybody was well protected on that, so when it scooted out some they all went back out on watch.

Ron: How many guys on the ship had problems with keeping their ...uh.....

Joe: Throwing up?

Ron: Yeah.

Joe: Well, Lt. Sayers...I call him Lieutenant, now, he was an ensign. He was the worse that I know of. Our Captain would...didn't come out. If he was sick, he would never show up.

Linda: Can you say that again about Sayers? Okay. Change tape.

Ron: Change of tape? Okay.

END TAPE

SZYMANSKI INTERVIEW (Continued)

Tape 1, Side 2

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Ron: I guess....let's go back. I guess what...uh...seasick problems were....were a problem, especially in those heavy seas and the boats were...

Joe: Seasickness, yes. I would get seasick, I would go lie down and my head would clear up. I wouldn't get a headache. Just lay down for a little bit then I could go. They always urged to eat...if you throw up a lot, to eat, but the worst one that I remember is ensign or Lt. Sayers. He had it so bad that he took a bucket with him to stand watches and you got to stand watches, because nobody is going to stand more than, you know, their share. But I'll never forget this one time I'm in the stern, there's a .20 millimeter gun...that's the one I used to have to fire and it has a shield to protect you from oncoming bullets, but I propped my feet against the gunnel, which is the sider and put my back against there and I'm breathing air, clear air. He come out of the hatch and he's leaning over and he's throwing up for God's sake and I'm looking at him and I says to him, "Hey, what are you standing there for?" Where he was standing the exhaust from the ship was coming that way. He's inhaling exhaust of diesel. He looked at me sickly and I says, "Move over towards me. Get away from that.", which he did and he kind of _____ and kind of....see, that I do remember, but he used to have to bucket to go and stand. They kind of made a joke of it too, you know, that he showed the most of it.

Ron: How many people in the crew had problems with seasickness.

Joe: Well, I couldn't tell you exactly in figures, but I know there were a lot of them that did, but none of them in my group had it so bad that they didn't stand watches, because I insisted they got to stand watch. If they're going to throw up, throw up on a watch, but stay there. You get a group like that together they all got to be alert and you

may see something, but someone else may see it and report it. Regardless of what you see you must report to the Con or the officer in charge and they make a determination what to do.

Ron: Was the captain ever seasick?

Joe: Well, we never knew whether he...I know the Chief was never seasick. I don't know about the other officers, because remember they had their own quarters, so I couldn't tell you. But the Captain didn't come out. They didn't see him for a couple of days, so we assumed that he had...but he...that's the prerogative he had. He was the skipper of the ship. We used to call him 'little round man', because he was short and fat or husky, so we used to call him the 'little round man', captain Olsen. but he had a beautiful, wonderful personality. never bothered anybody. What was nice about him, when we questioned whether he's gonna get somebody from the outside he says, "No, I'm going to promote my own men.", which was a boom for us, because you was striving for something and you would get rewarded by getting a pro...now, we had fourteen coxins, we're only allowed six. But he didn't care, just go ahead. Course, the Navy...the government was paying for it, so we didn't care either. You know what I mean? But that's the kind of a guy he was. He was very well liked. But after we got to England, like I say, Southampton, Hoight, evidently, my buddy, I don't know if I should tell you this, he developed a disease, sexual disease in New Orleans. Penicillin didn't cure him on the ship, so they sent him to the hospital there and we went to visit him and he said, "Boy, they're never going to give me another needle like that!" But they cured him and he come back. he was a very good...good sailor, good gunners mate. Smart. He knew his guns.

Ron: He didn't fool around as much after that I imagine.

Joe: No, I don't think he did. So from there we went to Plymouth, England. And when we...see, we killed...carried an LCT, that's a little smaller boat on top of our deck. There we were supposed to launch and get rid of it. At that time the Germans were bombing, doing a lot of bombing, but right to the port of us was a big cruiser and battleship Italian that we captured or they sailed in to get away from Hitler. And what was to me the most nicest thing that I've ever seen is seeing eight of our destroyer come in rotation. How beautiful they come in and circled around and anchored side by side. Excuse me.

(Yawns?) That made me proud me of my Navy, because you should have seen the British ships, how filthy they looked, uncared for. But the British used to do this, if they had problem with a ship, you know what they would do, they'd go in a ship yard, leave the ship and pick another one up. We didn't. You were stuck with that ship until they cleaned it. And our ships were battleship grey. Neat. How nice they looked. So from Plymouth, England...

Ron: When you were in Plymouth was there....were the Germans bombing England?

Joe: Yes, they...that's what we were susceptible to, the bombs, bombing. But the way we were anchored it was like a slope from....and we would like go up against it, so they would come...they'd have to come over low and we didn't think that they would do that. We were hoping they wouldn't do it, which they didn't.

Ron: Did you see any of the planes, any of the bombing?

Joe: No. No. No. Not there. No, but I did see the destruction that they did, especially churches in Plymouth, a lot of rubble all over the place.

Ron: Why you were there was never any....

Joe: No. Nothing of that sort.

Ron: ...rockets....

Joe: No. Well, coming to that later. See, this was early. This was already March, first of April. So from there we sailed for this little town of Dover Court. Well, we went through the White Cliffs of Dover, which was Con...twelve miles away they say the Germans controlled that. So they made all of our sailors lay on a deck flat down with their legs extended outward in case we did get bombed they would landed feet first into the sea. We had the British command with us at the time, but we hugged them cliffs very close. They were sending over, we called 'buzz bombs' then and we could see that the British fighters would chase them to knock them down. From there we landed into this little town I told you about, Dover Court, and we stayed there for about...well, off and on for three or four weeks, but something we found out later....like I told you, we'd load up, they'd time us and we'd go out to sea to shoot at a target the plane would carry and we'd come back in. There were eight LST's that went out to do that and got attacked by Ebalds (?). That was equivalent to our PT boats and they sunk quite a few of them and a lot of lives were lost there. We were supposed to be in that from what they tell us, but we missed out on it for some reason or other, maybe because of the British that we were taking. And some of them did land ashore to save themselves, but that we got scuttlebutt later and then I read about it after the war that that really happened, but the government kind of kept it quiet. In other words, lost...if you lost your life, you lost in the service and they didn't tell you how.

Ron: So during that six week...four to six week period of time you were mostly training and going out....

Joe: Training. Going in and out and getting liberty, yeah. Going ashore. 'Cause I remember there was one hotel they dared the British...they had a hotel combination theater/dance hall and then rooms and all that. My buddy's Slycord and I went ashore and we were sitting at this hotel having a drink and our Captain and his...not...his engineering officer...I told you, the regular Navy men, they kept close together. They were having a couple of drinks. I said to Slycord, "Think we should"... "Who the hell are you send them drinks? They're making more money then we are." "Okay, Sly!" that was it. So they left and later on when we had our...we got a small boat and we left back to the ship. And then, like I told you, from there loading on and loading off, but one thing I do remember distinctly, the thirtieth (third?) of May, Slycord and I decided we're going to go swimming. So we took our little Navy suits, we're laying on a beach and, boy, our planes are going over. Now, this is early afternoon. Squadron after squadron headed out for Germany to bomb. See, we'd bomb during the day. The British had slower bombers, so they bombed at night. And, boy, what a....softening 'em up, we says, "Oh, God, they're going." Then like I told you we started from there, they loaded us up, thought it was another drill, but this time we didn't returned back. We headed for the beach.

Ron: So you had no idea when you left...

Joe: That we were headed for the beach? No.

Ron: ...that there was an invasion going on. You had absolutely no idea? When did they tell you?

Joe: No idea. It was another exercise. After we were gone a day and a half they come over the micro...over our P.A. system and announced it. Roosevelt spoke, had a tape it

and Eisenhower, that this is it, this is what we waited for. We are hitting the French...the Germans at their beaches, so we prepared for it.

Ron: You were at sea at this time.

Joe: Pardon?

Ron: You were at sea.

Joe: We were at sea. And they had a lot of camouflage from little boats anchored that looked like LCT's and LST's, you know, just nothing but netting, but camouflage, you know, that it was more ships coming in...in a channel, but it wasn't. Then we hit the beach.

Ron: How many...you landed at Sword.

Joe: Pardon?

Ron: You landed at Sword, the beach. I'm talking about Normandy now, no?

Joe: We hit Normandy, but it was the British side of the...Gold, I think it was...they called it Gold.

Ron: Okay. Gold and Sword were the British.

Joe: Yes.

Ron: You know, Omaha and....

Joe: Were U.S. Well, we hit them later.

Ron: Right. No. Well, actually they were hit simultaneously.

Joe: But, I mean, D-Day, no, we hit the British Gold.

Ron: Did you have British soldiers on board or...?

Joe: Yes. British tanks. There were Churchill tanks and they weighed over 200,000 pounds. They were big. Clumsy things, but they could...they had the fire power. So we

had them on, we had four of them. Those we could take four of. Like I say, we hit the....I told you how I seen that light...and Christ....'you put that light out or I'll knock it....or I'll shoot it out.'" I mean, I was...we were scared. We knew that was it. Furthermore, like I told Linda before, Slycord had a few in us, you know, from that Scotch, so, you know, you get a little bravery, but still...and waited until day time to unload.

Linda: Ron, he has to say that story again about how the....

Ron: Yeah, you need to tell the story about the light, because you just....

Joe: You needn't?

Ron: I'm sorry?

Joe: Did you say not to tell it?

Ron: We need you to tell it the way you did before, because you just said about the light, and nobody looking at this tape would know what you're talking about.

Joe: Oh.

Ron: So you have to go back and repeat the story.

Joe: From a ship that was next to us...

Ron: Pick it up from, 'The ship that was next to us had....'

Joe: Yeah. the ship that was next to us...we were all supposed to be black out...they were showing a light. And we heard German planes coming over. I got so angry about it that I got behind my gun and I shouted over, "Put them lights out or I'll shoot 'em out!" And they did knock 'em off. So we waited 'til daytime and we opened our bow doors, ramp down and tanks went out first. What...we already had...we already had some prisoners, see, the Army that hit there they had a few prisoners there. I got ashore...

Ron: The infantry went in before you.

Joe: Pardon?

Ron: The infantry went in before you?

Joe: No. The...uh...the guys that jump from the planes.

Ron: Okay. Airborne.

Joe: Airborne, they hit the beach first or behind the beach. They did their job, because we picked up one kid from Vermont and had, you know...once they land there's nobody that can govern them or tell them anything...come over and bummed a ride with us back to England. he was a French kid too. I can't remember his name...from Vermont.

Ron: When you landed on the beach at Gold were you taking any fire?

Joe: No. No. We took no fire. But what we found out after the day time, that they had a building there, which was an ammunition store, but on top of the roof they had a redcross making our planes think that that was a hospital and they had little tracks with cars that they would shoot the ammunition over, 'cause see, as you know, on a shore you have it a severe slope where the ocean brings the soils up and behind there and you should have seen the nice...they had dugouts inside, nice cookies and everything.

Machine guns were there and it says 'Mining', you know...mines and all that, and some prisoners. So I went over, talked to the prisoners, because some of the other LST's, they were American...were taking wings and stuff off some of the prisoners and I happened to hit a Polish fellow that was...Poland...and I can speak Polish good. I asked him, "What the hell are you doing here?" He had a rifle. I took his rifle away. It was made in Czechoslovakia stamped. And I got a helmet from another prisoner. He was a Corporeal, a German Corporeal. "What are you guys doing here?" And he says to me,

“Sir, what would you do? When they walked into our village, asked who was wanting to volunteer to fight and if you didn’t step forward, those that didn’t they got shot. They killed them right there.” Showed me a picture of his wife. He was home for Easter at Easter time, of his wife and two children and he says....and most of them were either Russian, Czechoslovakian...they were foreigners that the Germans captured and used as a front line. Behind them they had Hitler’s children. And there was one kid there, a little wounded with an elderly German and they’re sitting there and looking at all the equipment, because remember, Hitler, the Germans told them that we had nothing, that they’re superior and how...with a surprise on his face to see all this equipment going off. this is British. So we get back on, the tide come in, closed our ramp, closed our bow doors, back to England.

Ron: Now, Normandy was probably more bloody than....

Joe: Yes, it was. There were more ships sunk there, purposely though, we sunk a lot of ships so we could get in. Openings, you know.

Ron: They also...they also at Normandy had a lot of men that never made the beaches.

Joe: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Ron: You didn’t have that experience?

Joe: Not at that time. We hit Normandy maybe about two weeks later, three weeks later, because our next crew...

Ron: The beach hammer (?) was already set and they were already in, so...

Joe: Yeah. The next crew we picked up were Canadians under the British rule, Canadian. Finally, from there we landed into Weymouth...no, England...London....outside London, Nettly. We start taking on our own troops and

that's when those buzz bombs were flying left and right over, you know? So we start hitting the American beaches and I remember that we were...I forget the name of the town. The British couldn't take...the way we were told, the British landed here, we landed here and we landed there and what they were supposed to do was enter one another. Well, they had a hell of a time...I forget the name of the town. We could see it 15-20 miles away from us, you know, so the British battleship, Rodney, her majesty's Rodney, was firing the shells to blast it, you know. And my buddy and I are sitting at _____ that night, all the guns started firing, so he and I are looking. We'll never see fireworks like this, because the ships were firing, the Germans were trying to send over planes, you know, nuisance planes and all that. It was quite a fire going on, you know, so it was Fourth of July for us. So we backed out of there and we kept operating back and forth, it would be ten hours to go in from Weymouth, Portland or...mostly Weymouth. All the troops would be waiting there to get aboard ship and they had their invasion money. then we went to Laharve (?). This was later on already. And to get loaded....see, my job was also to see when they put the tanks on we had...the ship was already there...they had hooks, we had a lot of chains and that to put around...and turn buckles to tighten up, so they wouldn't move, because if we...you can't smoke (?), you know, so the tanks wouldn't be moving. So after a while I got fed up having all our boys do all that and then taking care of them. You got to oil them, make sure they don't rust. I got the troops to come and do it. I would tell them how...show them how to do it not knowing this soldier is a soldier standing there. I tap him on the shoulder and I says, "Hey, start turning that turn buckle." "Oh, yeah?" I says, "Yeah, turn it that way." and I walked away from him. A Sargent comes up to me and says, "Hey, sailor, do you know who you

were talking to?" I says, "No. What?" He says, "That's Major..."and I forget his name. He owned the New York Yankees and he was married to Lana Turner. Now, maybe you'd remember who he was. He was a young fellow. He was a major, but he owned New York Yankees, because he told me that. He says, "He's married to Lana Turner." Well, I wasn't going to go back and apologize. I just wanted him to do it and make sure they'd do it. It was his tanks that he was in charge of that were taken to Laharve. Going into Laharve...now, again I'm going to...hope you don't think I'm boasting. They put me back on the wheel, because what the Germans did is sunk a few openings to get in there, a couple of ships. It was a narrow opening to go through there. The Captain insisted that I'm on the wheel. So when we got into Laharve and then we had to make a sharp turn, head at the beach to let them out. But you should have seen in the mountains that the Germans had to watch that port, the guns they had there. But, of course, we already took over Laharve, so as his tanks were going off I stood at the bottom there, the ramp and I apologized to him, "Major, I didn't know..." "That's alright. Think nothing of it. I'm just a regular guy." Then we backed off. We had a French guide that usually takes you in. The poor old guy as we were leaving, backing out again, going off, they sent an army...a little tug to pick him up and the water was a little rough. The poor guy would go down the ladder try to get his foot in there, it would rock him back up again and he's swearing in French. Want to get in..he doesn't want to, you know, go to England with us. Finally, it just steadied itself enough to where he could jump in there. We laughed at that, because the Captain should have stopped. But, no way, he's going.

Ron: Linda, why don't you make a note to find out who Lana Turner was married to around '44-'45.

Joe: Yeah. At that time.

Ron: Might be a picture of the two of them or something, you know, that would be nice to...

Joe: He was a young fellow and he was married to Lana Turner and he owned the New York Yankees.

Ron: Well, we'll find that out.

Joe: I knew it, but hey...memories...fifty years. He was major.

Ron: Army or Marine?

Joe: Oh, no. Army. Those were tanks. Those tanks were his.

Ron: How long did you stay in England after the Normandy invasion?

Joe: Eleven months in all and we come back...we left the day after Christmas from Plymouth, England. Now, I was in....

Ron: What was your routine duty after that eleven months after

Joe: Well, no. I landed in the hospital in Foulmonth. See, they put us on R&R in August, on R&R at the Foulmonth, which is supposed to be they claimed like our Florida. And I...three of us...some got it in their face and in their ears and in their body. I got it in my legs. They swelled up, so the Pharmacist's mate would put me in, I don't know what it is, but you soak 'em in and they turn purple. They claimed that the embalmers use that whatever...whatever it is. My swelled up and I got this stuff, so they took me off the ship and put me in a hospital there. And the ship left. All I did in that hospital is just soak 'em in epsom salts and then just laid there and dry 'em. In three or four days it cured. In the meantime, there was a boatsim's mate in there that was more or less in charge of the area. Says to me, "Hey, boats! you want to stay..", because I was second class then.

“You want me to get you fixed up to stay here?” I says, “Yeah!” He had me all fixed up to stay there for duty, but when I got my orders good old Slycord put it in there ‘Request Return to LST 534’. So I’m riding all over England to pick up my ship. I finally get into this little town and the ship left from there and is supposed to come back and who do I see in the barracks there, but this Hemalouski, Polish kid off our ship. They sent him to school there to learn how to operate a crane, because we had two big hatches, one forward and one aft. We never used the one aft. So they’re going to mount this crane and he was to operate to take stores that we could open up and drop ‘em that way, which we never did get. But he did go to school there for three weeks, so he....”Hey, Hem! You’re here” Well, I figured I got to go with him. They’re going to have to send the both of us back to our ship, which they did.

Ron: Did you know that Linda’s father was in the hospital in France. He sort of went blind for a period of time?

Joe: No, I didn’t.

Ron: You didn’t know about that?

Joe: No, but I’ll tell you what we did...

Ron: He said...what he said, you know, sometime ago was that he was down in someplace or another and the Captain...and he said, “I can’t see anything.”

Joe: That I didn’t know. That I didn’t, but I remember using him as my boatman, ‘cause when you go on an LCP...on a BP there, you got to have a Motor Mack machinist and the one I had was good. We had...what do you call it on the motors...and he took it off where I had the fastest boat going. I wondered why we were passing all the other boats, you know, so he took that off.

Ron: Governor?

Joe: Governor. Speeded it up for me and then I'd always have to have a seaman in a bow, so when we go in to tie it he'd always go in head first to get the lines to jump on there and put the lines...and then be the last one to take the lines off. We went to a deck or even to a ship he would always help out. So I know I used him a couple of times, because he was a coxin..._____ others, you know, but we also went up the same river to Ruon, France forty miles outside of Paris. You see, we took the first free French over there after Paris was liberated and they were dressed regular Army uniforms that we had. The only distinction was they carried a little Cross of Lorraine badge on here and their officers had the red tams or whatever you want to call them, you know, and they had Indian motorcycles, 'cause one of them was going down the ramp and he hit a little puddle there and he kind of fell out. Boy, you should have seen him get a rag, shine it up and all that and off they went. So we went up to Roun, France. Now, this happens only once approximately ten or twenty years where, as you know, the river flows into the ocean. And this time it backfired us. The ocean flows into the river, which is something that the stars and the moon got and what happens if you anchored this way, you're going to get turned around automatically by the tides. So I had to stay up, me and a few seaman to help our ship turn around and some officer with the motor to help it. Others didn't. You should have seen them in the morning. Oh, what a mess. They were right up against. But, no, not us. We helped it along and straightened out and then come back out of there. But what was surprising about it, one of our P-40's....see, were told never to fire on a plane that had white on the wings, white stripes. That's ours. He come buzzing down, of course, it was narrow and one of the kids got excited and fired. Boy, he turned

around and come back and he just let a salbo (?) go along, you know, away from the ship just to let us know 'you fire at me, I'll fire at you'. But he got...that kid got his fanny chewed by the Captain, because nobody gave orders to fire. He could knock one of his own off.

Ron: The trip back to the states from England.

Joe: Yeah.

Ron: Uneventful?

Joe: Well, we went the southern route and we did have a destroyer...two destroyers through Portugal that way to bring us in. The only thing we didn't want...we heard we were supposed to go to Virginia, used to call it 'Shit City'....Norfolk. We didn't want Norfolk, so instead we landed in New York. From there we got our thirty days. those that stayed with the ship stayed, those that didn't went ashore like I did and then'd come back. We...took us to Hoboken Navy yard to repaint us, refit us, put more stuff on for the Pacific.

Ron: But the trip back...I mean, you had no submarines.

Joe: No problems, no. Coming back it was all right.

Ron: Were you scared that there might be?

Joe: And the seas were...well, you never knew...you never knew where they were. Hell, we knew they were almost in New York Harbor, so we never knew where they was going to be. But like I say, the one consolation we had is that we were light, because while we were in England the British had a torpedo station and they were shooting torpedoes, wooden torpedoes and retrieving 'em, you know, checking 'em out to see how they....and when I got liberty I went up there and asked them how deep did them

torpedoes go and how deep do they have to be set. They told me at least from two phantoms, which is twelve feet or lower, you know, in order to hit most of the ships.

Ron: Now, this is a little different. When you are on leave, you're in New York City and you're on liberty, right? What did you guys do?

Joe: Well, I'll tell you what I would always do, come home, because it would only take me a couple hours. Oh, I'll tell you a fast one I pulled off. When we...before we went to England...in New York City I had a liberty from twelve o'clock Saturday noon 'til eight o'clock Monday. But I'm out Friday from four o'clock 'til midnight, so I says, "Jesus Christ! Why can't I go home?" and I have more time to spend at home. So the Yeoman, a great friend, and officer Hillson got together with me and they said, "Well, tell you what. We'll make out two liberty slips for you." He says, "I'm going to be on watch when you go and when you come back." And he says....so he made one out for me that liberty was from Friday 'til Monday and then the original from Saturday to Monday, so I come home. See, I would ride...take me about eight hours to get home, because it was a slow boat, you know, and I'd get to Springfield and I'd bum rides home from Springfield and during the war days, hey, wearing a uniform man, everybody'd pick you up even though their gas was rationed. And I got home. I did that. I get back Monday morning and the boys are telling me, "Hey, my officer Stockdale looked all over for you. Where were you?" "He did?" I made nothing of it. I get into quarters. I change up. "Hey, Ski, where were you? I looked for you all over." I said, "Where'd you look?" "All over." I said, "Well, what do you mean all over?" I said, "Well you looked over here or over there, I was in a boatsim locker." I said, "I like to go in the boatsim locker and do some extra work. Well, when you looked maybe out there I was probably out

here.” She’s a long ship, you know. Well, I can’t prove nothing, because you logged in and out. That’s how Hillson fixed me up. That’s why I try to tell you we were buddies until we got to England. There the Captain made him not to bother with the enlisted...well, an enlisted person like myself, a petty officer and all that.

Ron: How long did you have when you came back when the ship was being reoutfitted? How much time did you have off? A month or three weeks or a period of time?

Joe: What do you mean ‘off’?

Ron: Well, I mean, before you went to the Pacific. In other words, you came back...you went to New York...

Joe: Got thirty days off to go...

Ron: Thirty days leave?

Joe: Yes.

Ron: So you came home.

Joe: Yeah, I came home.

Ron: Most people went home?

Joe: Well, yeah...yeah...most...half...the gang that was getting transf....staying stayed aboard ship. the gang that was transferred went home, so evidently, Linda’s father must have went home. You can ask your mom if she remembers it.

Linda: Tape change.

Ron: You remember that Marion? Marion?

Linda: Tape change.

Ron: Yeah, I know. I’m just asking...

END TAPE

SZYMANSKI INTERVIEW (Continued)

Tape 2, Side 1

=====
Ron: Ready? Well, you had spent thirty days leave in New York and the transfer the Pacific and the Atlantic theater...the Pacific, so you went back to New York and you board the LST once again to the Pacific.

Joe: Right.

Ron: Was the ship any different?

Joe: Well, it was painted different, if that's what you mean. It was more camouflaged. See, in the Atlantic we were all what they called Battleship grey. At the Pacific we had four different colors to blend with the islands. The deck was painted green, the sides were four different types of greens, so as far as different, yes, they put an extra two small boats on. We got a P.A. system different where we could call one another and they would hear us and about the only...that's about the only difference. Well, they put...they made twin 40's where we had single 40 in the Atlantic they put twin gun...40 millimeter guns bow and stern.

Ron: Did they upgrade the ship at all?

Joe: Not any other way that they could. No, there was nothing different about it. Well, they put rails on there and we carried these pontoons and that was about it.

Ron: So take me through the trip. You leave Norfolk...you were in Norfolk...

Joe: Well, we went to Norfolk from New Jersey and while we were in Norfolk what really got us, they had us anchored, we're taking on some C.B. equipment. But we could see next to us was a prisoner camp and it was Italian prisoners and they had 'em dressed in a nice blue type of uniforms, you know what I mean? We find out that they're prisoners and Sunday buses load of people coming with bundles and all that and we're

looking over and I says, “Those guys are prisoners. They’re better off than we are. We’re going out to get killed. Look at what the hell is happening with this.” You know, that makes you kind of bitter. Well, anyway, from there we sailed. We hit Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Warned us ahead of time, go easy on their beer. We were getting 3.2 beer, their beer was 35 point strong. Grebenzo. Never forget it. And only two to a person. Well, you know what happens, some of these 17-18 year old kids didn’t drink. ‘Hey, I’ll take your share.’ Because they didn’t appreciate....whether age or not they didn’t care. You got two, you got two. Well, overimbibed a little bit. I took three and, boy, did I throw up when I got back to the ship. The heat and that beer strong, so that taught me a lesson. No more. So from there we left, we’re heading...

Ron: What did you do in Cuba? What we’re you doing in Guantanamo?

Joe: In Cuba. Just anchored there and couldn’t get to Havana. No way. Just anchored there. And what happened...our Captain...well, this is Captain French...they made him charge of the flotilla. There was six of us and he was experienced supposedly, a head. I gave orders, because, see, when I got Lt. Green...the first day he came aboard.... now, there was a man that was a lawyer. He was 42 years old. “Skik, I’ve never been on a ship. I don’t even know what they look like.” He was from Thourohart....did I say that right? Tharahoot, Indiana. Thourohart, I don’t know.

Linda: Tarahote.

Joe: He shook hands with me and told me, “I’m at your mercy, at your service. I know nothing about the ships, so whatever you have to do....” Now, see, when we anchor I...he was suppose to be as a first Lieutenant. I had to give a sounding how deep we were and how much chain our anchor had a drop. At least he was man enough to admit

that. Now, don't get me wrong. I didn't feel myself superior to him, because like I said, I hated some of the other officers and I told them I did, but only I had to admire their Gold where I didn't have it. But outside of that as humans I had my opinion, period. But he was nice about it. He told me how he...showed me how he had different...the government would always send him different letters to educate him about this and about that. Well, anyway, we anchored. Now, I told him how much anchor chain we needed and he's in charge. And as you drop anchor every six fathoms...different paintings so you know how many fathoms. As it's coming up you'd make a report. We have....and then when the anchor breaks you say, 'Anchors Away!', meaning the anchor had come up. We're pulling up. The other ships are ready, they're all waiting for us to go and lead. I look, our chain is wrapped around the anchor. 'Falled Anchor!', I yell. "How come?", he's yelling back at me. "Well, I don't know. You got a falled anchor." So we dropped it again. Thought maybe we'd shake it off. We couldn't, so they called for a tug to come over, pick the anchor up, drop it on the back of the tug and they unsnagged us and finally we got...and right...this is what I didn't like. The crew knew that he was not fit to be a Captain. I mean, that was number one Fall-up, but what are you going to do? You're on there. You got to do it. So we're headed for Panama Canal. We get to the Canal and we stop in Panama City, which is on the other side of the Canal. And he gives us some liberty. From there we're headed for San Deigo. And we get into San Diego, thank God that we didn't have to drop anchor anymore, because that I was figured on....'Jesus, he's going to screw up again.' We tied up to a dock. We took on more crews, recruits. We were there for a couple of weeks. We're taking off for Hawaii. And what had got me is we're going ground swellers...you know what a ground swell....this young sailer, 'Hey,

boatsin! Is this what you call rough?' The ship isn't even rocking a little bit. I says, "Son, you don't know what rough is." I'm thinking about the Atlantic. I says, "No. This is nothing. Why, are you getting seasick?" "Well, I feel a little queasy." I says, "Well, go downstairs, sit down somewheres where you can throw up if you have to. But, no, this is not and you better get used to it." That struck me, because that's how the kids...the kind of kids we had. And we'd take off and we head for Hawaii. We get into Hawaii. I'm giving orders, open up the bow doors, drop the ramp, because we're taking some of the C.B. equipment that we took over with us. And there's a storekeeper down below a C.B., a kid from East Stanton, a fella from East Stanton. His name is Stefanski. I'm Szymanski. His name is Stefanski. As I'm telling him how to tie this...and I go down..."Tony, how are you?" "Hey!" We shook hands. It was nice to see somebody from my home town. So then from there we go and we anchor out. We get liberty, so...the waters are so loaded with oil. You put on whites...well, you seen the pictures I had there. We took a liberty and we went to the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and I meet this neighbor kid of mine. he's got a camera. now, hotel was strictly for kids, sailors from submarines. There they lived, because remember a sub would go out for four or five months. There they lived a life of reilly. And I heard of Waikiki Beach going to the movies and all that. This was my...but there was nothing on the beach. But this kids got a camera and I'm posing against trees, you know, palm trees and all that. He's snapping and snapping. "Good!", I says, "my wife...don't forget, if you ever get home, show 'em to my wife." That's it. So from there I didn't take anymore, but we went around to see how the ships were wrecked, you know, that California and all them. Like I say, I had the small boat...

Ron: They're still lying there? Nothing had been done.

Joe: Oh, yeah. Nothing had been done. Well, no! This is '45. Come on! You know. Got to keep going.

Ron: What did it look like?

Joe: Oh, a mess. The aircraft carrier....I get the name of it now...got hit and there was nothing but a shell. Went to the dock and looked at it...oh, what a mess. Suicide planes hit 'em. So I took a ride. We went to the submarine base just for R&R, but I went in dungarees. No sense in dressing up, because little splashes of oil got you all wet, you know, I mean, dirty. And as I'm sitting there this sailor is sitting across from me and I'm looking at him and looking at him. A young fellow that lived just up the street here, Gus Spastilla. I remember when I played ball he went to trade school and when he graduated he had the uniform, whatever. And I was playing local ball. He let me use his uniform one time, because we were short of uniforms. So I says, "Gus". He says, "Yeah!" C.B., carpenters, first class. "Where are you headed for?" He says, "I don't know, but the scuttlebutt is Okinawa. Where are you heading?" I says, "I don't know. We're headed for the Pacific somewhere." And anyway, we loaded up our equipment and we take off. We go to Guam...well, and a week dock, little island. Go ashore to Pick up our mail. And, boy, I got scared to hell. The Japs, we took it away from them, but this piece of grass opens up underground tunnels that the Japs built...one of our Marines comes up. Holy, Geez, what a scare, you know. And I retrieve our mail. We went back to the ship. From there we head to Guam. From Guam we hit Saipan. We had liberty at Saipan and the Angola Gay was there, the one that dropped the first atom bomb, so my buddy and I bummed a ride from an officer in a jeep and he told us, he says, "Don't trust any of these

natives. You never know whether they're Japs or not."because Japs would never...and they showed us pictures of Japs where they wouldn't surrender. They'd just assume commit suicide then surrender. "Don't bother with them, because their working on a fields." I says, "Okay." So we go up top and there's the Ignola Gay. There again I get scared. There's this bunker, so my buddy says let's get some souvenirs. So we sees this little opening. Stick my hand in there and Jesus, there's somebody crawling. By the way, what he said, 'Don't trust.' Well, he was a Marine. He's picking...aw, what a relief to see him. So we went over to touch the Ignola Gay, that we knew that that's the one that dropped....and got back and it was way up on top of the hill. Looked like a regular aircraft carrier place on top of the mountain where they had the airfield. The Japs built that, you know, and we naturally took over. So I'm looking down at our ship, come back, got permission for the boys to go swimming, because the water was 80 degrees. So we took our small boat to ride it back and forth and discourage sharks, if there're any there. From there we were heading for Okinawa.

Ron: Now, you were on Saipan after...after the...

Joe: Invasion.

Ron: After the Ignola Gay had dropped....so you saw the plane there after it came back from it's run?

Joe: Yeah, after it came...yeah, that's how we knew what it was, you know.

Ron: Did you meet any of the crew from the Ignola Gay?

Joe: No. No. No. We just went there, like I say to observe stuff, because he scared us when he says, "Don't trust anybody." I says, "This is a hell of a way for me to loose my life, you know." So we get down, get back tot he ship. From there we pulled out and we

went by Hirojima, didn't make a stop...for Okinawa. As we're getting into Okinawa we dropped anchor. In the meantime, we were painting our ship. Captain French wouldn't allow anybody to loaf around. Keep 'em paintng. Keep a nice clean ship. So I had 'em over the side in boatsim's chairs painting...and I had a mix....one color, because they gave me some colors in Hoboken, but ne they didn't that I had 'em...told me how to mix it to blend, you know. We had the cleanest outdoor ship and like Linda said, "They're going to die for it." If the ocean didn't do any damage to it, you'll find a very clean 534.

Anyway, we anchored and the Japs we're cornered...the USS Massachusetts battleship and a couple of LCI's, which they made racks on 'em to fire rockets at 'em. Going back and forth. They had 'em cornered in one corner of the island. But we laid there and finally they told us to pull anchor and go unload. So we pull up to these pontoons, see, a little bit away from the shore...pontoons. Tied in there, open the bow doors, like I say, the ramp and the bow doors. We're unloading. Happened to be that this fellow, friend of mine here, was his outfit. So he come in there to truck to get stuff and I says to him, "Gus!" So I asked permission from Lt. Green. "Hey, can I ride with them to see where they're landing, where they're going to stay? He says, "Sure." So, in the meantime, I had him stay and fed him. We had good meals, you know what I mean? What they...they were eating K-rations, C-rations, but with us he had a good meal. And I went to see what they were doing, where they were dropping the stuff off. The native woman doing all the work, that had the babies tied to their back...the men would just squat there...and the men...the woman had some kind, like a little whole and their digging....looked like potatoes. And they're working like hell, because these guys ain't waiting for them. They're just dropping this stuff, you know. And I watched that, come

back to my ship and I says to him, "Gus, why don't you stay over?" I says, "Take a shower." He says, "I can't. I got the 12 to 4 watch." The following...well, that night the Captain says, "Ski, let's stay up, watch a movie and we'll have revelry late in the morning." "Fine,." We just started showing the movie... I think it was 'A Constant Nymph', the name of the picture. All of a sudden we got air raid. See, we were on this...Buckner Bay was on this side of the island where Naha, the capital, was on the other side and that's where all the big ships were. You know, destroyers, cruisers and that. The Japs we're attacking it. Can't show the movie. Waiting for it...so we're listening to the radio. One pilot was thirty miles out to sea, one of our pilots, and says, "Look, put the lights on. I want to come an land." They says, "Bail out!" They're not putting any lights on, because the Jap planes would see it and just bomb the rest of the field, you know. So we don't know what ever happened to that guy. And we're listening and finally, about 2:30-3:00 it let up and the Captain says to me, "Let the boys sleep in. We'll have a late breakfast." "Okay, Captain." Well, eight o'clock in the morning we went on G.Q. Eight-forty comes that Jap plane and he bombed...hit us.

Ron: What time would you normally get up in the morning?

Joe: Six o'clock. They'd wake me up first and I'd go around and hit.

Ron: So if you had your normal revelry...what would.....

Joe: It would be six in the morning.

Ron: Okay, but would the difference...uh...what would you all be doing at eight o'clock normally that you weren't this morning?

Joe: Well, on certain ships they'd get 'em on a main deck and exercise. I got over that. I said, "They get plenty of exercise doing things." With Captain French, he liked to hear

chipping paint, if he heard that noise, the boys would turn into....see, he was a stickler on neatness, you know, so what I used to do...he couldn't see up in the bow, too far in the bow. I'd get three or four of them ther an tell them take to chances. 'Just bang away'...you heard what Frank Faye said, "I did more chipping and painting", because that's what I would have 'em sit there and chip away where there others clean sweep down for and aft. I mean, that's the first thing you'd do, you know, and then they had to clean the quarters down below and then help unload the ship. That's all. Just routine when you're that way, see. And we couldn't do anymore painting. We had finished the outside painting, so in the bow...'just chip away, chip away.' That even happened after we had a ship pulled away from there with the forty-foot hole. No, the pulled us up next to a liberty ship that had a torpedo and a guy on that ship happened to be commander of that area and we fed them oil and power. We had small ships like minesweepers _____ pull along aside of us, 'cause see, out of salt water we made fresh water. We had evaporators. So we had one fellow in charge of the evaporators, but I had to give him seaman help to clean the slat off and all that and keep the water fresh all the time, you know. So we were getting rid of our oil. We were getting rid of water, because they'd come in to tie up, we'd give it to 'em. And I'll never forget, one little boat come in and we were eating dehydrated potatoes and all that and I says to him, "Hey, what can I swap with you? Got any potatoes?" He says, "Yeah, we got a few fresh potatoes." I says, "How many you got?" So he gave me eight fresh potatoes. I says, "What do you want?" So I gave him some chains and turn buckles and stuff that they could use and a couple pounds of butter. That night the pharmacist mate and I went up tot he cooks, got a big container of lard, and he had little pots and he had a little electric stove in what we called

sick bay, hospital. We peeled the potatoes, melted the lard and had fries, but didn't know that the aroma's going to go through the ship. Everybody's going round smelling. We're eating like hell. Well, eight potatoes! How much can you have. But even some of the officers got a little put out about it. I said, "Well, that's tough. That's all we had was eight and we come first." So we pulled that joke on 'em, you know. But we usually used to have like ice cream...we'd make ice cream and have movies and shows. Well, after that we just floated around.

Ron: Tell me a little bit about the kamikaze attack from your perspective. How did it happen?

Joe: Well, like I say, we were tied up at the pontoons unloading. There was another LST our port side...port is left...to our port side. And he come out of the rear, aft, out of the sky. How he got that way or not I don't know, but, like I say, I was in charge of the aft fire party. And I look up there and I see him coming in weaving and I'm waiting for the boys to shoot. Finally, we got a little closer, they did open up without no order. That's where we made a mistake. The Captain should have said 'Fire!', but he didn't know either if it was one of our planes or what. He just kept weaving, weaving and the next thing I know he just circled and he hit us amid ship, meaning in the middle of the ship, which was great. He put a forty-foot hole in there and the plate just went up against the wall. You might think it was welded to be that way, but there was the hole. So they put a dam there and they had to refloat us. They called it a cofferdam. I don't know how they did it, because I was in the hospital at the time, but fortunately enough he did not hit our ammunition, which was a little forward of that. Otherwise, that ship would have went sky high. Oh, something I forgot to tell you, if I can return back to the Atlantic.

Ron: Sure.

Joe: Everytime you come into port in New York City you got to go to Red Bank, New Jersey, unload your ammunition and the crew would have to work to unload the ammunition, because they wouldn't let you into the port with ammunition, because you could blow up part of the city or so, you know. And that would be...when you're leaving you back and pick up your...and load up your ammunition. That was also some of my work that I had to do.

Ron: What was the immediate aftermath of the kamikaze attack? I mean, how did people respond to it? What went on? Did anybody die?

Joe: Well, no...no...nobody from the ship that I know of. Some got transferred off. Naturally, they were hurt. Like her father, Mr. Alvers, Mr. Jens....I'm trying to think of some of the other boys that did really get bagged up bad. They got transferred completely off the ship. Where they went to I don't know, but we didn't take on any more recruits. We didn't need 'em. So we were next tot his ship and the crew was kind of, you know, working seven days a week, because that guy....in charge....you know, Captain French wasn't man enough to stand up for his men. So I says to him, "Look, come Sunday let's leave, go to pray, go to mass." There was...go ashore...and they had chapels and that. "Let's go there and pray." And that's what, you know, a little rest bite for the kids, myself too, to go ashore. But outside of that it was...until the typhoon came. When the typhoon came eight inch houser like that into little treads broke us away. I had a boat tied up with a one inch cable and it wharfed during the night, 'cause when I got up...I used to always get up early, have my coffee....we had coffee 24 hours a day. Somebody would make it if it wasn't, but usually the cooks made sure they had coffee.

I'm out there in the stern. Captain come to me says, 'Ski, where's our boat?' I said, "There it goes." It just wore the cable from friction away and our boat left and I'm having my coffee. We broke away from that ship that we were feeding and we're stumbling along in the dark, because typhoons over there are 100 miles an hour winds and rain and...daytime, there is no daytime. It's night time. We come across troop ship. We had our troops on there, that was also floating in there, because normally before that all orders came...all ships out to sea, if you can. Those that could ride out, like destroyers or whatever did...get out to sea and ride out to sea. Well, I understand that the cruiser Pittsburgh lost it's bow in that typhoon. That's how powerful it was. It broke the bow in half. Well, anyway, we're...we come...now we had....every ship has what we call fenders or bumpers that you put along side so that you don't wreck your sides when you pull up against a dock or against another ship. This ship was already getting a little lighter. We come aside of them and just touched slightly. And, of course, they were going and so were we, but a word came to me that one of our sailors jumped from our ship...panicked...aboard their ship and then back and when they told me that I went up to see him. It was a kid by the name of Flynn, I think. He's standing there and he's shaking and his lips are working. I says to him, "What in the hell are you trying to do?" So I slapped him in the face to get him out of it and he started crying. I said, "Do you realize that you ever missed and fell between the ships you're gone? Do you know what you were trying to do? You're safer on our ship then you'd be on their ship." And he kind of came out it and he started crying. I remember he grabbed...shook my hand. "Thanks for saving my life", he said. I said, "Well, those are the risks you take." Don't get me...I'm not trying to make a hero out of myself, but this is what I had to do? What was I going to

do? The kids can kill himself trying to get in between if he ever fell and missed the rails, you know. And both ships are rocking, so from there we just wandered off. And like I told you, with this receded, when I seen that Japanese Betty between us and the dry dock and I got down on my...and started praying. The boys come running up, "Ski, what was that?" I says, "Take a look." And I prayed. That rebelled the officers and everybody to get off that ship, because I think Captain French didn't want us....he still wanted to hang onto a ship with a forty foot hole in it. Well, I know, like I said, the tug pulled up, asked if I was Captain French and then telling him they come here to sink it and he says, "See the penant? Until that comes down." So, anyway, I let....we left the ship then to live on shore and we picked a situation to where they took our camera off our ship to show movies, they built a little like a wreck stage and we were just above that so we could sit there at night, if we wanted to and see what was going on, if they had any floor shows like USO shows or something, we could here and see and watch movies from there in a tents. Of course, I took a double tent for myself. Hey, you know, I got the rate I'm starting to pull it.

Ron: Let me go back to the kamikaze attack again for a moment. Plane comes in....you were taking some fire from one of your own ships at that time.

Joe: That's right. The ship that was to the port of us they were trying to hit him, but fortunately enough none of the bullets killed anybody or hurt anybody on our ship. But, you know, it's common sense...look, these kids...remember they are kids. Even though they're trained, they're still jittery. That's the way I always looked at it. You know, some of them were older, they were smarter, they wouldn't. But the younger ones were kind of panic and that's what I think happened on that ship. They see him coming, so

they're going to fire. Now, whether they got orders to fire or not, I don't know. We don't know what ever happened, but they did fire at the plane, but they did a little more damage to us. They didn't hurt us that much, because nobody got hit.

Ron: What was it liked immediately after the plane hit?

Joe: I couldn't tell you too much, because like I say, I collapsed and they took me off the ship. I do know prior to that Captain French wanted to open up a bottle....what he...medicinal purposes...liquor to pass around. He couldn't open his safe in his quarters. I don't know. Whether they ever opened it or not, I don't know, because like I say, the pharmacist, my friend took me off the ship, put me in a jeep, send me to...

Ron: What happened to you?

Joe: What happened to me?

Ron: How did you get sick? What was the problem? How did you collapse?

Joe: Internal injuries.

Ron: From the...?

Joe: From the jar. I didn't get 'em...I fell, but I didn't get...and then, of course, bodily anxiety or whatever. I don't know. But all of a sudden I just got sick and I just passed out and he seen it, so right away he come help, picked me up and he says, "Come on. You're going ashore." Got me in a jeep and took me out and brought into the Army field hospital.

Ron: What did they tell you had happened to you?

Joe: Internal injuries and plus the shrapnel in the hand...in the arm. And then when I was getting discharged in Boston the doctor that was examining me, he says to me, "How would you like to go to Chelsea Naval Hospital for a couple of weeks?" Now, what does

he want with me I don't know. I says to him, "Hey, Doc. How many points have you got?" He says, "Well, I got a couple more weeks." I said, "Well, I got my points right now. I'm going home tomorrow." And that was the end....that's where I made a mistake. I come home. I have big pallups in my nose. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't eat, so I went to the vets. They cut 'em out for me and, like I say, I had a wife and a son...Hey, do you know they give us fifty-two twenty? I didn't go under that. I had more money working coming, because I made pretty good money before I went in and I figured I'm not going to collect....I got a wife I want to support, so I went to work immediately making more money. I didn't care for that fifty-two twenty. You know, it's alright when you're single. A lot of my friends were single and all that. They took it and sat around, gambled, played the horses and what have you. Not me. I broke off all relations from my friends. My wife and son came first.

Ron: Tell me about life on the island after you got off the ship.

Joe: Well, on the island, like I told you, after we got off the ship...I'm the Senior Petty Officer. I'm supposed to take muster(?) every morning, make sure that they're all there. Hey, I don't care where the kids went as long as they...their old enough to know better, so I would just get up in the morning and say, "All you guys here?" I'd go to the ship and report, "All accounted for, sir." They took my word for it. The Pharmacist and I started bumming rides. Now, with him, we went to C.B. camps to get fed, because they hauled all the stuff. You should have seen. I never seen a...hey, butter right on the table, ice cream, apple pie. Them guys ate good, because they hauled this stuff. They took care first. They built a theater with the seats bent back to where, you know, you'd relax. So we hit the island, but with him we hit the hospitals, because the hospitals always fed

good. And he'd go in there and say, "I'm from LST 534." Prompt to show his badge. And we'd stay and get fed. So we took around to the islands. Bum a ride here, see some of them caves that Japs...remember, we lost a lot of people on that island, the Marines did, when they landed. See, some of their _____ seen a native wedding, but the troops wouldn't let us go see it. They all lined up and, you know, bow and all that. "How about...what are they doing?" "They're getting married, but you guys can't go in there." And just made the days of it, you know, kill time until...

Ron: Some of the guys that were on the ship said that life on the island could be pretty tough for them...uh...with mud and rain this side of the....

Joe: Oh, you....well, if it rained where we were, we'd take one step up and come down three. Coral (?) gets wet and it's very icy. Dry, it's like cement, but when it got wet...hey, I know. I used to have a hard time trying to get to my tent too. But you had a....yes, you're right. We used to get rains, but you had to live.

Linda: Ron, tape change.

Ron: Living is important.

Joe: Definitely. Then I seen some pictures.....(tape ends)

END OF TAPE.

SZYMANSKI INTERVIEW (Continued)
TAPE 2, SIDE 2

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Ron: I wanted to finish up the....did you serve...were you on the boat in the typhoons?

Joe: Yes.

Ron: Tell me a little bit about that experience.

Joe: On the ship, you man?

Ron: On the ship, yeah.

Joe: Well, we got the word there's a typhoon coming and the word was that all ships that are available to leave the port to get out to sea to ride out the typhoon. Well, we couldn't. We had a forty-foot hole. Like I told you, we were tied up to and supplying this ship with the commander of that area aboard it. Well, when the typhoon came there was no holding back. It took our lines and broke 'em up and we had...floating away. We had power, but with a forty-foot hole in, what do you do? So we just tried to keep out of anybody's way.

Ron: Hold a second.

Linda: Sorry. Something's going...

Joe: Broke away from them...

Voice:I'm sorry. Okay.

Joe: We broke away from that ship. We're floating around. Dark. Trying to do the best we can. Put everybody on alert. And, like I said, we hit along side of this one ship, trying to pull away from them normally. They were and we were. One of our sailors jumped over and then jumped back and when I heard about it...he panicked....very.....so, anyway, I straightened him out on that. And we finally landed....see, the Army was dredging to making the channel deeper, so the ships could go into shore. We landed

against a little island that they created by dredging and there we stayed. Prior to that, as we were drifting, like I told you, and the typhoon was letting up is when I seen this 'Betty', 'cause we were...identified their ships. Betty was a small bomber. With this pilot, I can picture him right now just sitting straight up between us and a dry dock that we had that had a destroyer in it, and went out to sea looking maybe for bigger bait. I don't know. But it was just letting up. that's when we got on our hands and knees, I did, and then the crew and then the officers...they kind of rebelled some. Some of them went ashore to find...to do something. They were, you know, just hibernating and that's when they found out that there were orders issued for 534 crew to be evacuated to Hawaii for reassignment and that's when they came back and told Captain French what was happening. So he decided the pressure was on him, so he says, "Who wants to leave?" So the crew...I heard one, "Let's get off this thing. We're safer on a shore." Well, it was already towards the end of the war anyway, so we did. he wanted definitely to have a cook, an electrician and a motor machinist to help him, if he got...and a yeoman. Well, the war ended. They started evacuating. I mean, people....so I went and told him how I had so many points that I needed to go, would he waiver them and he says, "Sure." So November, around the first of November, he let me leave the island. What happened there after I lost track completely. I don't anything about it and I was very disappointed that never heard anything until I heard from Linda that there is a revival about our ship. As soon as she mentioned Alvers, believe me, I remembered that name.

Ron: Tell me about him.

Joe: Well, he was a type a serious person. He never gave me back talk. He questioned orders. Naturally, who wouldn't? But like I told them all, I get my orders and I got to

see to them that they are carried out, 'cause I was told that if I didn't do it, somebody else would do it. I had no reason to have anybody take over for me. I had family to worry about besides myself. He was very good. Like I say, he was one of the good....well, a lot of them. There all good. Don't get me wrong. But he was one that you could go up to and ask him to do something and he would do it with no questions asked. "Okay." Just tell him what you want done, how to do it and it was done, among others. Of course, there were a lot of kids that were a little awkward. Now, I told Linda over the phone about this rebel we had....I call them rebels. Well, there were several aboard there. Now, you got a Shell there, so you have to give these guys something to do, what you thought that they were best to do. Shell....we used to call him 'Smell'...he'd get mad as all hell. He had a record, 'A Jolly Caballero', and he played that over and over again. We...I assigned him to wash our clothes. We had a washing machine and a dryer for him to do that for us and it would be by numbers. He had officers one day, so many deck here, so many then. That was his assignment. Now, the scullery, that's to clean our pot, pans, forks. That had to be done well, because the outside were wooden, inside were steel, where you dropped the cups and all that, to make sure that they were sterilized. So I asked first for volunteers and told them, "That's all you would do. That would be your job to take care of them. I wouldn't have you stand watches. Only do that." So I had some that volunteered to do it permanently and they satisfied...well, Captain French's, but at the time Lt. French. There were others like Berbano. This is in the Atlantic. He worked himself in. He was a little older guy. He worked for the Philadelphia Inquirer and when we went to gamble shooting dice he wanted to be a booky. I don't know if you know what a booky is, where he wouldn't pick the dice up, but....and one time we had a

little Hawaiian, Kelque Kamea. George. Kelque means George. Had some relatives here in Mass and he was mad as hell that he was fighting here in the Atlantic when he should be fighting in the Pacific, because the Japs...what they did to Pearl Harbor.... didn't know anything about dice and I says, "Go ahead, shoot and I'll be with you. You've got a hot hand." He took Berber for over \$300. And I told him how to do....because that was my dice. And he worked himself in. See, you had to clean the quarters...not only the quarters, the sides, wash the floors, toilets, showers. Everything had to be done every morning. The rest of the crew would be on watch or top side doing work. And he worked himself up. How he....I don't know...brownosing or whatever to where he became, finally, a second class boatsim. Well, a boatsim is supposed to know seamanship. That astonished me how that he did....but he did it with French, I guess. And, of course, Slycord....not Slycord, but the first Lieutenant that I had. So, anyway,...

Ron: He was a smart guy.

Joe: Well, yes. You know what I mean. I didn't go for this underhanded stuff, because you see, he used to call me in every month and ask me who would I want to promote. Now, when he came aboard our ship he was in a crew where he had this fellow by the name f Jennings. They were buddy-buddy. I didn't know, but he took him as a buddy and was kind of jealous that I was superior, because I was the only one rated at that time, coxin, next to the Chief. So he rated him quick and he even rated him later on second class, but he had nothing over me, because this is the way I was superior over them. I was first rated. He would...Berber did a good job. I can't knock it. I mean, he cleaned well, but I didn't like some of his methods, the way he would treat some of the guys if they wanted into their locker or something. He would kick them out. "No way!

When I'm ready...." and stuff like that, you know. So when we went to the Pacific...second class boatsim. I says to him, "Buddy, you're going to stand watches. I'll assign somebody else to do the cleaning. You got the rate, live up to it." "Well, I don't know how to spl...." "That's tough. you got the rate, do it or you're going to lose it." So I remember when we got into San Francisco, wanted to go ashore with me, kind of play up to me, buy drinks. I wanted no part of him, tried to lose him. He got a little bit inebriated and he's following me around like a dog and so my buddy and I both shook him. I said, "I want nothing to do with it.", 'cause that's what got me is he got the rate that somebody else could have got. Her father could have gotten that rate as a second class, but you only could have so many second class rates.

Ron: Now, her father...when he was wounded on the ship during the kamikaze attack and he was taken to a field hospital, I understand you used to carry him back and forth or help him....tell me about that.

Joe: Well, I don't remember too much about it, but like I say, I was here and there. We were all kind of shook up about things. We didn't know where we were going to stand. When they put that forty foot cofferdam in there....I even slept next to it. I'd see the big fish going by, I'd try to catch 'em, you know. But that was it. Well, I looked after him to a degree. That's all I could do to try to help him out, help anybody out. I felt that it was my job. I mean, they were my....I'll say 'my boys'....to take care of 'em, because we were all in it together. I've always had that feeling that one for all not one for one. All for one.

Ron: You think there's a special relationship between men in the service that probably only happens only in that environment?

Joe: It does. It does. there is. With certain people. There are people and there are people, you know. There are feelings and so forth and so on. Slycord and I had a wonderful, wonderful relation on the Atlantic side, but we got into New York, he was getting transferred, he made Chief. The same thing with our cook. he made Chief. So listen to this, we pick up another cook. He got 20 years in the reserve, Chicago, but never was on a ship. He'd go on a ship that floated around a buoy in Chicago on the lake and that was the extent of his sailing. When we left for our thirty day leave those guys that lived...that stayed aboard that ship took the ship \$4,000 under. They ordered bakery stuff. They didn't do any cooking. They're living their life a reilly, but every ship has got a budget. I found that out later. So we inherit this guy to straighten out the budget. Well, who's going to eat navy beans everyday. He started cutting down on food, so when I found out...we found out that he was just...never sailed...never. You know what we did? We get into Guantanamo Bay, transfer off the ship. Chronic seasickness. He can't sail. Got rid of him. In the meantime, we don't have a commissary Chief. We get into San Francisco, this Chief comes aboard, so actually I show him quarters. He's unpacking and he takes a big, big picture, drops it on the bed and I take a look. It's him. He gets a commendation from Captain Bat from training station in New York where I took my training. I says, "Whew!" And that's when he explained to me, he says, "You know, you guys are \$4,000 overboard and we got to make that up some way. You're not going to get the supplies we used to until I can make it up." So four of us got together. He says to us, "Why's this complaining? Make out a menu." Well,...by the way, I sit down and make out a Polish menu. The other guy makes out a...he says, "Okay. We've got as far as Wednesday. What are you going to do the rest of the month?" That's when we

realized you've got to space yourself. You can't have steak today, steak tomorrow. You only got so much aboard that you got to....so we appreciated him for letting us know about that. That was kind of interesting, because you learn as you go along, you know?

Ron: What kind of metal did you get? What did you wind up with?

Joe: Purple Heart. I got a little star for the invasion in Europe and a star for Invassionaire. You mean a Fruit Salad?

Ron: Yeah.

Joe: Oh, I just had a little bit and I never wanted to wear it to be honest with you.

Ron: Do you still have it?

Joe: No. I had boatsims whistles. My son inherited all that stuff. Forget where it is. I bought stuff....oh, they made me a Barber. That's the European. "Ski, want to be a barber?" Them days they'd give you hand clippers. I don't know if you ever no....no you guys wouldn't know what a hand clipper is, but that's how they used to give you haircuts, so I'm going to be a barber. I get \$30 more. So here's another thing that we were bitter about. The officers got \$35 a month extra money that they could eat whatever they wanted. No, they chose crew meals. They were getting the same meals as we were and pocketing that money. So there's a little....but they're officers. There's nothing you can do about it. So they're going to give me \$30 a month more to give haircuts. So we had this Italian, Spedelotzio. "Give me a haircut", he says. Well, when you're out to sea riding, you know, you're not smooth. I go in to clip him. You should have seen what a job I did on him. "Give me them God Damned clippers", he says. He became our barber. And you tip him a dine, fifteen cents. But he became our barber. Of course, there was nothing fancy about it, but they made me...I wanted to become athletic.....well,

all our athletic stuff I was in charge of. Let's put it that way. We had a big box there. Baseballs, footballs, basketballs, all that....bats and all that....stored there and I was getting \$30 a month for being in charge of that.

Ron: You remember going over and taking the award away from the 1022 for the one that shot down a kamikaze? You were....

Joe: No. That I don't remember.

Ron: Password....what password, Linda?

Linda: They said that on Okinawa you had to have a password.

Voice:Oklahoma....

Joe: Well, they say that all the passwords were with the letter 'L', because the Japs....it's not in their vocabulary. 'L'. So it could be anything with the word 'L'. If you left and couldn't get back to your ship....oh, here's another thing that happened to me in Okinawa. We were radioing to get different films. So a couple ships further down had a film that we haven't seen, we'd trade films. So were going to send one of our coxins after it and I says, "Naa, I'll go after it. I can operate the boat faster maybe then him." So I took the crew and we went to pick up the film, but as I'm going I'm counting the different ships in a row, so I'll when it's going to get dark or so where our ship is. Well, in the meantime, not knowing, a Coast Guard ship came and anchored on that side. So I'm counting the ships....let's say seven...and there's eight. The orders were...the guys were on watch with rifles to shoot anything, because the Japs used to tie hand grenades to themselves, get out on a little raft or boat against a ship and blow it up, you know....to fire at anything that's floating. Unbeknown to me I'm going to that ship, the eighth ship and it wasn't ours and they're firing. So finally, our ship put the big spotlight on them and

yelled at them to stop firing, that it was us. We got around. I didn't even know that they were firing. I _____ heard anything. We got around to our side to get aboard and hear Rod yelling, "Anybody hurt? Anybody shot?" We get up on top, that they were firing at us. I says, "Holy God! I'm not guaranteeing...I'm not doing any of this baloney anymore." No way. Here I'm going to get killed, because by our own fire, you know. So we did that. No, it wasn't inter.....but it...now, that I went through it.

Ron: How about the tattoos?

Joe: Oh, the picture that she seen there, the guy with the mustache....we went....that's what I told you, the first whites, we went ashore to Hawaii. I mean...and Pearl Harbor, so what we're doing is we're walking, I got my hat up and he's got his the regular way. That's the way you're supposed to have it down. And he wanted a battleship. "Well, I'm going to have a tattoo..." and we had other kids get it and boy, they festered up in them days. They would be sore and with the heat and all that. But he wants a battleship on his chest. Happened to turn around and there's a shore patrol car coming. He says, "Ski, the shore patrol." Well, you know what they would do, you're out of uniform, pick you up, bring you to the ship and insist that you get a Captain's mast. Now, I could lose one rate and all that, you know. So what I did is...there was a tent there, they're tattooing. We went into there. So he went in the back to get his battleship and I'm sitting there and they pulled over and I had my hat off already talking to the young lady. I don't know if you want to call her Hawaiian or Chinese or whatever. She wants to tattoo me and the shore patrol stopped and I had my hat off, so he couldn't do anything. She says, "Come on, I'll give you a deal. Fifty cents a letter." I says, "Fifty..." She says, "I'll give you fifty cents off." "Okay." What am I going to put on? So I put on 'True Love - Gene and Bob'.

That was my wife and son. So she did. So I got the Tattoo for fifty cents, but I was lucky. I didn't fester or anything, you know. But some of the guys had their tattoos of the girlfriends they had and then they broke up with their girlfriends. Oh, and Elbonesio....

Ron: So you've got...that's the original tattoo on there?

Joe: That's the original. It's hard to tell though after all them years, but that's what it is. You can tell 'Gene and Bob', my son. My wife and my son.

Ron: So it stayed.

Joe: Yeah.

Ron: Wow. That's amazing. What was the funniest experience you ever had on the....?

Joe: The what?

Ron: Funniest.

Joe: Funniest experience?

Ron: Nothing special?

Joe: I mean,...uh...I don't know. I was kind of serious about everything and fun....what the heck did we do that was funny?

Ron: Well, funny things happen in life everywhere.

Joe: Yes, they do, but I'm just trying to think what...what could have happened to me, you know, that I would really recall that was very funny. Well, the funny thing is when we're hitting the beach and he and I are drinking the Scotch and he....I'm trying to think of the name of that....Peragoric! That ring a bell? Peragoric. He said, "That's Peragoric!" "I don't believe you." So he went in, filled a little cup for him. He drank it. "Ooooh, Yeah.", he said, "That could be it." That _____ a little bit. They use that

for colds, I guess. So we put one over on him. That I would say would be funny, because here we were using the real stuff and he thinks that we're

Ron: How was the crossing of the International Dateline?

Joe: Well, some ships didn't go into it. Our Captain did and we are...just fortunate....we had some, like I told you, C.B.'s and the Captain...."Let's have it." So we took the Canvas off of our real hatch and rigged up a pool, because usually what you do, there were only two guys that went through...regular Navy men aboard there...that went through that once before, so what they do is they borrow a barber, they take a towel, they take paint and grease, mix it together and they use that to put around your neck to give you a haircut. Then they take you and throw you into the water that we make the pool that cleans you of sins, that's to make sure that that stuck. then they line up on a deck on a side and opened their legs and you got to go through the channel smacking you on the fanny. We had this....so I was lucky. I followed...I think I was number four to go through there. Some of the other officers we're a little scary, but they had to go through. Everybody had to go through. I went through. Well, I got paddled too. I didn't mind it, you know. But you get so greasy that you slide through, see, and the more guys that went through the sloppier, but all the guys are lining up. Once you go through you line up. Whack!, you know. We had this one C.B., big husky, fat guy. He reneged and somebody found him in a compartment and they squealed. He had to come through. So, you know, the cooks...big vats we had that had paddles. They took one of them paddles out, because he reneged. A matter a fact, his officer, C.B. officer says, "Give it to him but good." So he went through. So help me God, for three or four days he could not sit. That's how much they paddled his fanny, so maybe if you want to call that funny....but it

wasn't because the ship was so filthy and dirty that it took almost a week to clean....we had the crew cleaning everything up. you had to, because, you know, you'd be walking, you got grease on your hands and all that, you got everything greasy and you put on good clean clothes.....so we had to keep the ship clean.

Ron: It was a right of passage.

Joe: Pardon?

Ron: It was a right of passage going through the Dateline.

Joe: Yeah. Yeah. Then they'd give you, you know....I don't know, all these Naval names that you went through....I forgot 'em.

Ron: If you had to summarize your experience on the 534 for that two years...was it? or a year and a half on the ship....how would it be? How would you sum up the entire experience?

Joe: Well, fighting with other ships went through....I thought we had a much more....not much like a chicken type of a ship. We were more lax. I've seen other LST's get up in the morning at 8:00 and they're out there doing exercises. Really strict. You know what I mean, about things? And you talked with different sailors that were on other ships and exchange, you know...what they had to do, what we did. I thought we were pretty strict, but we were lax in a lot of things. We allowed more for the sailors to relax more where some of them were real, real tough. Now, one ship pulled up along side of us and it was a Coast Guard ship. Next door to where I used to live, where I was born, used to be a bakery. the name of the bakery was German, Oberlander's. they had a son, Junior they called. So this ship tied up along side of us, very filthy, but they made the invasion in Italy. They made the invasion in Southern France and they also hit the

beach. They'd been at sea for eighteen months, which is a lot. That's why everybody on that ship had a rate, so who's going to do the work? The rated men had to do the work, so were lax on it. But I found out about Junior Oberlander and he was a baker. "Hey, Junior!".....(Unintelligible)....I says to him,he says to me, "I'll bake you a pie. What kind...what do you want?" I says, "Cherry." "We don't have any cherries." "How about peach?" I said, "Make a peach pie." He did. He baked a pie. gave it to me. I ate it, but then two days later we pulled out for the states and it was from Plymouth, England and we left them there. I don't know what the hell they did when they left. But anyway, that was pretty nice to meet somebody that, you know, you knew as a kid. We were growing up together.

Ron: In that circumstance. What else do you need, Linda?

Linda: The dog on board.

Ron: You had a dog on board the ship?

Joe: No. Not to my knowledge.

Linda: There's pictures of....

Joe: Oh, wait a minute. I think they did....I think he had...they brought a puppy and we had to get rid of him. Yeah. You're right. We did have a puppy that somebody stole the ship, brought on the ship, but when they found out we had to get rid of him, because see, we'd have inspections once in a while. We never knew when we were going to get them. Now,.....they were coming from...from France...and you know our tank deck, with the tanks and all that, got kind of beat up and they were scarred that we were going to get an inspection, so we got a paint it. Now, that was with Battleship Blue. So you know what we did? Took brooms, cut 'em down, dip the paint in there, swabbed it on. How else

you gonna, by hand? You know. For Christ, take a year. We swabbed it on. Opened up the hatches so it'd dry out. Well, we didn't get the inspection, but in the meantime it did dry out before we took another crew of tanks.

Ron: What else? The legacy of the 534 is, in your mind?

Joe: Well, to me being that I served all my Naval life on it I thought it was a very good ship. We had some good crews. We had our ups and downs like everybody else, you know, a family is never perfect, because you have people from different wicks of life. But all in all, that I survived it, the only thing I was disappointed in that I've never heard anything more about it after I left the island.

Ron: How did it...how did serving in the Navy and on the ship change how you lived the rest of your life? The experience of that.

Joe: Well, when I came home I...my wife...see, I use Naval terms, overhead, hatch instead of door, deck on the floors. I had a sort of a rough way of explaining myself. My wife would say, "Wait a minute! You're not in the Navy anymore." 'Cause you'd get accustomed to doing it that way. You know, you can't talk like you do in civilian life, "Please, kaduda."...oh, no. "Do it!" See, you had to get that...and this is the way I was told to do, if I wanted to hold my rank. So about the only thing that really mattered. I mean,...and I....to me, it made me more family oriented. I cared more, because prior to that I used to be a baseball player. I'll say fair, a good ball player, I guess. I would go out with the gang, my gang. You know, you get married, you still got friends and all that and alot of them were single. Gene used to kind of resent that, you know. But I want to go see other teams play, stuff like that. Well, once I come home after the service, I went

down a few times to see the boys...I just cut it out. Hey, I got a family! I stuck with that. And I still had all them friends. Don't get me wrong.

Ron: So you think the war taught you that, gave you a deeper appreciation for family?

Joe: Yes. Of what I have and what I own, yes, and that I'm alive. That I'm alive, because on the beach when you see bodies and just torso's floating and then you see the evacuation of your soldiers....see, we were...we were not...we were supposed to haul wounded back. That's another thing that got me kind of teed off. That's here's a guy, this Berber, were supposed to make slings to put the what do you call it on? And he didn't know how. And here I'm going up there and I got a couple of boys showing him how to, you know, splice, so you could put the things on...knot.

Ron: Did you take wounded back or dead or both?

Joe: We didn't. We were supposed to, which we never did. But when you stand on that beach....when I first got there and I seen the wounded and evacuated I cried. 'What in the heck am I doing here? Why am I here? We don't need this.' See, against the Brit...against the Germans. That they're wounding our boys, because they were patched up, but you could see no legs, bloodied up and all that. Some LST's took 'em back. We never had to, but we were told that we may and that's why I made slings for the stretchers, to lay on, you know. But after we made them and all that we never got the orders....

Ron: How did you make you feel seeing both those dead and people floating in the water?

Joe: Oh, I cried. I said, "What am I doing here?" You know, it makes you feel sorry. Come on! These are your buddies. I considered everybody a friend even though they were soldiers, you know.

Ron: Did it change how you think about life?

Joe: Yes. Definitely.

Ron: How so?

Joe: You appreciate it more.

Ron: In what way?

Joe: Well, appreciate the good Lord that you got up in the morning. Don't forget in the service you never knew when you were going to get it and when you're not and it could come from the sea, it could come from the air. So it makes you....you know, I'd go to bed and say my prayer, get up in the morning and thank the good Lord that I'm still around. I really did. I got a little more.....(Tape fast forwards)...

Ron: You were about 24-25.

Joe: I was 25 when I...yes. I went in at 24, but 25 immediately...

Ron: Did the younger guys respond that way as well? I mean, do you think that they mature and grew up faster than any one of us?

Joe: Yes, a lot of them did. Yes, a lot of them did grow up much faster. They realized the seriousness of it, especially the Atlantic side of it, because there you see more. You see the bombers, you seen the buzz bombs flying and you see the wounded being evacuated and you took soldiers. You know, this is what makes you feel good that some of these guys would leave Fort Dixie here in New York, get over to England and live in trucks for a week, two weeks at a time before they could go to France and....rough life.

And we'd feed 'em and they were living....I called it cracker jack boxes. What else could they live, C-rations or K-rations and we'd give them real meals, you know, and then you'd say to yourself, "Jesus, we're getting rid of them and they may never come back." I mean, those thoughts...in my mind, because I felt sorry for them.

Ron: But the guys that you...on the 534 after the invasion, when you saw those dead bodies and whatever, did they ever talk about it with each other?

Joe: No. No. All we did was back and forth. Go ahead. Load up and go. Go. Bring 'em.

Ron: But you never discussed, no one ever shared their feelings?

Joe: No. Not to my knowledge. Of course, like Slycord and I, we knew, you know, but....no, not to my knowledge. Oh, I was mentioning about this King. _____ Revele....he'd always be, "Last guy, he..." this and that, you know. So one day I go through there...I used to make the rounds and you have to, because, you see, they feed you and then you go on watch. You got things to do. Like I told you, we weren't these 8:00 exercisers. I'm going through again and he's in his bunk, middle bunk.

Ron: You got a thing about this guy, don't you?

Joe: Well, I'm trying to, you know....and he's kind of like....well, I don't know whether he's fighting me or what. So he's in the middle bunk sleeping. I told her about it. Our bunks were chained. Three bunks, you know. So I just went up, lifted one end up, unhooked it, went to the other side, unhooked it and dropped him and he rolled off and he hit the deck. "Oooh, my leg!" "King, I told you before Revele. It's my second time here. What happened?" "My leg! Me leg! My leg!" "Oh, lay there. I'm going to go get Doc Slycord." So I told Slycord what happened. Okay. So Slycord come over,

looked him over, we put the chains back on there. "Get in your bunk. Stay there. Just lay there. Don't move." He gave him a couple of ACP pills, which are aspirin. "We'll get to you." I gave orders nobody go into that compartment, shut it off. Nobody. And I made sure. I made my rounds to make sure that nobody did. But I would check on him every hour or two, you know. Finally, he comes in 4:00 in the afternoon, and we have feeding at 5:00....see, I've using our time now. Otherwise, it would be hundreds. It'd be 1500 or something like that, you know. "Hey, boatsim! I'm hungry." "Yeah, but you can't walk." "I can walk." "Well, show me." Sure enough, he got off the bunk and he's walking. "Oh,..." I says, "good. Don't oversleep anymore. When I wake you up you get up." "I will. I will." And that cured him from then on. Then we had another fellow I didn't know limped. When he came aboard the ship he limped. He was from Mudlock, Kentucky. That's what he says, "I'm from Mutlock, Kentucky." We try to fix up the limp. "What's wrong with the limp?" "Oh, nothing. Nothing. I'm alright." We get to England. Finally, some of the ship mates told me. Well, he told me himself. He says, "My dad used to dream. Wake up in a dream and whip my mother with a...thought she was a mule." "What?" "Yep." In the barracks where he was training he slept on a top bunk. he thought he was swimming and that's how he hurt his leg. He jumped off of there and hurt his leg. Never went to report it instead kept limping. I said to Slycord, "What are we going to do with him now?" He said, "The hell with him. If he...already 8-9 months doing it, let him keep on doing it. So another time the boats are gone ashore. My officer had what they call....he was the O.D., so I took a cup of coffee. I'm over on....waiting for a small boat to come back. I'm drinking. This kid comes up, seaman....see, in the Navy...didn't have clothesline, but they give you little lines like this

to hang your clothes, if you had to. He's got these lines hanging over him and he's leaning over the rail. I looked at him. To me it seemed like his name was Peolore or something like that. I says to him, "What are you doing?" "Oh, he woke up." All the while he's a walker, a sleepwalker. The boys would tie him down in his bunk so he wouldn't walk. This time he untied himself and there's my officer. Well, the first thing that came to me, this guy could jump off the ship, nobody would know...and disappear. So what do you do, Joe? You got to report him. I mean, let...I can't hide this, so I went over to Stagdale and said, "Stocky, come on over. See what he's doing?" The kid started crying. "Don't transfer me off. I want to stay in the Navy." See, they had it bad at home, alot of them. This is exactly what they wanted. Like this Mudlock, he didn't want to get discharged. Well, turned around, "Stocky, it's up to you." Well, we kept him and then we got to the states. He got transferred. I don't know whatever happened to him. Now, we got another one on there, Shirk's, and he made a second class boatsim. I don't know get it. But Shirk's was only 16. He used to be in a circus, he travelled with a circus, so he told us. We got to England and we find out he's only 16, but he only had a month or so to become 17, so Captain Olsen went ahead and said, "Okay. Let him stay in." He became 17. She sends me a list...he was a sharp card player. The guy...the kid, for 16 was around quite a bit, was pretty sharp, but he was a good sailor. Don't get me wrong. he never gave me problems or anything. But he made second class boatsim, but he didn't make it aboard my ship. So he stayed in longer and evidently, she got in touch with him that he made boatsin, so...

Linda: ...you think fifty years later we're sitting in his living room talking about this.....(Off mic)...

Ron: Did you hear it?

Joe: No.

Ron: She said, what do you think about this...we're sitting here doing this interview now fifty years later and a story might be done about it, what do you think about all that?

Joe: What do I think about it? I think it's great and thankful to Linda Alvers for doing this, because in my estimation when you don't hear that...I don't know, whatever happened to that crew. I knew the ship was going to be sunk, because we were stripping it while I was still there. Oh, incidently, like I told you, when that plane went we couldn't of fired, because our guns were already stripped, half of them. So what were we going to shoot, peas at 'em? But...what do I think about it? I think it's great. Of course, that a lot of them expired. I'm lucky that I'm still alive and I can get in touch with some of them. It's hard to remember them after all, fifty years, fifty-two years people do change. I won't say for the worse, for the best, because we're too old to get bad. But thanks to Linda Alvers, believe me, it was a shock when she asked me my name and I says, "Yes, I did serve on it." Well, it's like a needle went through me. I mean it. A shock. And then she explained who she was and all that. As soon as she mentioned her dad, name came to me immediately. Al Bensio was another name that came to me. He was with me, he served with me, but I'm not going to say what happened there, because you're taping this, but he was a good friend of mine also aboard ship. But Alvers was a good sailor and a human being. That's all I can say. And I'm not saying this because I want to boast him, they know what their father was like. Linda says that he was her best man that she could have, taught her everything, did everything for her and that's the type of a person he was. You don't change overnight.

Ron: That about it?

Linda: That's it.

Ron: We got ya.

Joe: Al Bensio he got a Dear John letter from his wife.

Linda: Oh, yeah, you told me that.

Voice: Don't say that on a tape.

Ron: No, we don't need that.

Joe: And he was broken hearted about it, you know. See, I picked him up in New York when we're going to pick up the ship, see...because our.....(Tape end)

END OF INTERVIEW