

JOHN WILSON

WILSON: So he said the whistle was blowing from start to work the employment office is right down there. He said go down and talk to them. I went down and talked to them and I had a little bit of training in electrical so they put me in the electric gang. So part of the fellas worked on the ways. We had 16 ways building 16 liberty ships at one time and I worked in #12 shop. They put me in the shop rather than out on the ship and I worked there for a few weeks and I said to my boss I would like to go out on the way. He said are you sure and I said yeah I would like to try it out there. So he said ok I'll let you go out. So I went out and I was with a guy, I was helping a guy from North Carolina and every day he would lay out the work for me and then he would take off and he would go back down to shop and do a little brown nosing. So one day they came up there and I wasn't able to keep up with all the damage that was being done to the cables and so on and so they got on me and he was with them and he said well I told him what to do. And I said well you little SOB and walked off the ship and walked down and my boss asked me where are you going and I said I am going home and he said why and I said well that guy walks off every day and leaves me with all that work and then I am the one that catches the heck for it. He said ah you don't want to quit he said stay here and work. He said you want to come back in the shop and I said sure but that wouldn't be right maybe some of those other guys out there want to come into the shop and he said no the way that is some of them wouldn't come in the shop and work at all. Others don't like going out on the ships. So I said ok and he said besides you are up for a raise and I said great for a raise he said well why don't you try it a little bit longer and the next day he came to me and he said to me John would you like to go down to the number 2 shop? He said they need some help down there and I said yeah.

I went down so number 2, the fella that was in charge of the shop he was transferred or quit I don't know what happened and so the next day they put me in charge of the shop. Here I was a kid 18, the youngest guy I had working for me was 43. I knew that I was going to be called sooner or later. Drafted. At the time I was living with a couple up on Linden Avenue in Baltimore, just above North Street, 2016 I believe was the number and he was an attorney and they didn't have any children and so a lot of evenings when I would come in from work they would say hey John you want a class of wine. I would sit and talk to them and finally he said tell me are you going to have to go to the service pretty soon and I said yes I am. He said well what are you going to do? I said well I am going to enlist in the Merchant Marine because out at the shipyards here I am hearing about all this money these Merchant Marine people are making. Every time they get bombed they get a bonus and so on. Every time they are in enemy fire. He said I don't know if I would do that if I were you or not. He said you know they are losing a lot of those ships and I said yeah they are. They were having the mergence run at that time. He said why don't you just stay out and work here at the shipyard? And I said well I wouldn't feel right not going. All my buddies are having to go and I just would feel right about that. He said you are crazy. He said stay out here and make this big money. So anyway I went down and took a buddy with me and so we started through the application for Merchant Marine, Maritime Commission and so Jack Forney was my buddy and Jack said John what I put here it asked have you ever been turned down by one of the other services and he said you know I was turned down by the Air Force on account of a heart murmur and I said oh and he said should I put that down and I said no I don't think I would put that down. He said well what should I put down. I said well high blood pressure I don't think that is too serious. So he wrote high blood pressure and we go on through the examination and we get back to this one room and this doctor said to me are you John Wilson and I said yes and he said go on into the other room I

want to talk to your friend. So he was just there a moment and he came in and he said you want to go to the Merchant Marine even though your buddy isn't going? I said yeah. He said well he isn't going and I said well why not and he said he has high blood pressure for one thing. So he is not going. So Jack really took it hard and he is one of these guys that really wanted to go. He actually cried. And anyway I went back up to my room and either that night or the next day I received my draft notice so I went and told the friend in th house I have been drafted and I enlisted in the Merchant Marine. Today or yesterday whichever it was. He said John you are crazy to go in there. Stay out and make this big money. I said there is no way I can stay out. The Merchant Marines were going to send me to Sheepshead Bay, New York for officers school. He said yes there is a way. You get your draft board to transfer you to Baltimore. I am Chairman of the draft board. I didn't know that. He had never mentioned it before. He said you can stay out.

August 28, 1943 to go to the service and I went down. So I came home and I went back to Maritime Commission they told me well they can pull you they can do this. So I went back there to Clarksburg and there were three hundred and thirty of us. A lot of them were my high school friends. We had 330 of us and I walked up to this one desk and he said to me you are going to the Navy and I said I am like H I wanted to go to sea and you folks pulled me out so I am not going to sea now. I started using a few choice words and he said look there is not a thing I can do but if you go over there to that table over there that man can change it. I walked over there and started in on him and he said son you just as well shut up because when you left that last table back there you were in the Navy. They took eleven of us out of the 330 into the Navy. That was my story about that.

RON: Tell me your name, branch of service, ship you served on.

WILSON: John C. Wilson, electricians mate first class. LST 534. 1943 until 1945 after we were sunk by a Jap kamikaze.

RON: I want to go back a little. In your notes you said you felt the ship was an invincible ship. You felt it was a happy ship with a number one crew. Could you elaborate?

WILSON: Right. Going to Europe after I was one of the last people to come aboard the 534. I was one man draft out of Camp Bradford, Virginia. I finished school in Great Lakes, IL and transferred to Camp Bradford. They called us in for an interview, asked us if we, asked the whole class if we would like to attend gyro school in New York. I said no I wasn't interested in gyro school and all the other guys said yes. They would go to gyro school. So that night at about midnight they woke me up and said Wilson get your clothes in the morning and report up to headquarters your being transferred out. I said where am I going. They said we don't know we just have the order. So the next morning they had roll call and the fella taking roll call said Wilson get your clothes report up to headquarters. I said I don't have any clothes, they told me to get my clothes I said they haven't arrived yet from Great Lakes. He said well then you won't be able to go. About that time a huge tractor trailer went by loaded with C bags and I said oh maybe my clothes will be on there and he said see if you can find out. And so a lot of the fellas that I had gone to school with went down and unloaded the truck until they found my C bag and I was on my way. He said go get transportation. He said I'll take you into Norfolk. You take the ferry up to Camp May and then you will take a train on into New York and you report to Pier 92. I was at Pier 92 for three days and when you would walk up in the City everyone would yell Pier 92 at you because of your haircut. I went to the stagedoor canteen there and met Lucille Ball

and Zazu Pitts and I forget who the other gentlemen was, was serving food on the food line. I sat and talked to a Canadian sailor and Lucille Ball also talked to the two of us. He was a border what they call Corvette which is a destroyer escort.

RON: When did you actually board the ship?

WILSON: I can't give you the exact date but it was either the last of February or in March. We left out of New York after a 48-hour pass. After I got aboard they gave me a 48-hour pass and I went home and came back and then we pulled out. And as I remember we went to Boston, and I believe Rhode Island was in there and then up to Nova Scotia, Halifax Nova Scotia and joined a 60 ship convoy.

RON: You said it was a happy ship with a number one crew. Tell me about the ship and the crew. Why was it a happy ship?

WILSON: Well everyone seemed congenial. We all seemed to get along well. I of course had not been aboard another ship but I had heard that there was sometimes controversy. I felt our ship got along fairly well with different people aboard.

RON: Did you know most of the people on board the ship.

WILSON: No I didn't know them all. I knew a good part of them. I was an electrician so of course I was all over the ship everywhere and being an electrician I came into contact with a lot of them. But not so much as a coxswain would.

RON: What was an average day like on the ship unless you were being shot at.

WILSON: An average day I would get up, go to breakfast, go back to the bathrooms, brush your teeth, etc., then go down to the electric shop. The electric shop the bath was back along the side, on the starboard side and I slept up forward on the first troop carrier compartment. Rather than sleep back in the cruise quarters where there were a lot of people I slept up forward there. I don't know how much I really thought of but I thought maybe if we went over a mine it will be over so quick it won't hit the front. It would hit someplace else. The electric shop was on the starboard side and down below the deck we carried troops on.

RON: Was life fairly mundane on the ship?

WILSON: I felt so. I always had a day that went fairly fast because we had so many things that would get corroded, points and so on and we would have to clean. The electricians were supposed to stand watch down in the auxiliary room and put the generators on line, you know furnishing the power but we didn't. The motor machines mates normally handled that so therefore we were doing other and fellas on watch up on deck we had sound powered telephones and they would mess with the wires. Break them and a lot of times it was to go get a cup of coffee. They would say well we have to go down and get a new set of headphones and they would have a wire broken off. So we put in a lot of time repairing those telephones because they were in all the lookout points aboard ship.

RON: You knew Linda father?

WILSON: I knew him but not well.

RON: Did you have any interaction with him at all?

WILSON: Other than just he would take us ashore or bring us back. Or seeing him aboard ship.

RON: He drove the LCVP. What kind of boat were they.

WILSON: They were what we used to transport people from the ship to shore when we were anchored out. Also they were used to transport troops in. They could carry a small vehicle along with some personnel. They were landing craft vehicle personnel that is what LCVP.

RON: What did the people who drove those do when they weren't doing that.

WILSON: They were with the deck, what we call the deck gang, since her father I believe was third class he would normally have the people, people with rating would normally have the other fellas doing something and whatever needed done whether it was unloading supplies off an LCVP that they had gone ashore and gotten or bringing people, transporting people with the LCVP's or maybe chipping paint, repainting. They had a pretty full day plus standing watches.

RON: You told a story about the British Flagship of your flotilla signaling that 534 your actions are disgraceful.

WILSON: Well that was after the invasion and it was on July 4th. We had all gotten these souvenirs from the Germans. So we were all up on the top deck shooting off guns and a couple of them had browning machine guns and so we were just raising a lot of noise and I thought that was a funny thing that happened. They had the big signal light now this is second hand as far as that is concerned. The signalman told me that that is what they signaled to them. I don't remember which signalman it was. Nitchy he was up on the forward compartment where I slept. Palmara I believe he

was a signalman. It was one or the other. But Nitchy and whomever the other fella were laughing telling us about the signal.

RON: The British were always more conservative.

WILSON: Yeah and well on the fourth of July at that. They don't celebrate the Fourth of the July. Our Independence.

RON: The relationships on the ship, did they form bonds?

WILSON: Well you were relying on one another so therefore it didn't pay to make everyone angry at you. I didn't. I am a friendly person. I never get real close to people normally. I have had a lot of people say to me, John you are a real friendly person but you stop us at one point. I guess that is true.

RON: Hope Betty doesn't think that way.

WILSON: No she doesn't observe any kind of a role.

RON: Let's go back to leaving Nova Scotia.

WILSON: Well as I remember it we were in a 60 ship convoy and the way I remember our procession is we were back in graveyard corner. What I call graveyard corner, a lot of people did, the last ship, last row, back in the corner. And as I remember it on April 6th at 2:00 AM in the morning we had GQ and I had to go to the auxiliary engine room that was my station so of course I wasn't up on deck to see what was going on. People had on there headphones and I said what is going on and when I got down in the auxiliary engine room they said well all we know is they said that the guy on the bow said torpedo across the bow and the guy on the stern said torpedo across the stern. My understanding from that time and I have

always stuck to the same story that I was told at the time, the ship directly in front of us was hit. The ship directly across from it was hit in the next row or column, and the ship directly across from us in the next column was hit. That is three ships around us and the torpedoes and we were drawing somewhere around 12 to 13 feet of water loaded. Torpedoes were set deeper for the merchant ships and they were going under us. Now that is the way I heard it at the time and I have always maintained it.

RON: How many U Boats were in the area.

WILSON: We don't know. But one laying off to our port quarter, rear quarter, could have done this.

RON: The ships blew up evidently.

WILSON: Yes and to my recollection we had five corvettes escorting us and that was our escort. Now if there were more than that I didn't know about them.

RON: What happened to all the people that were on those ships.

WILSON: We didn't slow up. We kept right on going. You don't last long out there in the North Atlantic and that is where that happened.

RON: Did you see survivors?

WILSON: No. They said that the corvettes came around and picked up a few. That is all I know about that.

RON: So the rest of the trip was uneventful.

WILSON: No. When we got over fairly close to England, I don't know this for a fact because I did not see it, but they said that the Captain had been boozing. I don't know and that we were in this real deep fog and I was instructed to put a big flood light on the back of our ship to keep the ships from running together. I thought it was a stupid move to put a big flood light up there when you were still out at sea. Yes I put it up because I was ordered to.

RON: Nothing happened?

WILSON: No. They story always was that he got us into a minefield going in.

RON: That was Captain Olson. What did you think about him?

WILSON: I liked him. He was stern. He was old Navy. I thought he ran a good ship other than those two times. I thought it was stupid to put a light up there.

RON: He was an older man?

WILSON: Yes relatively and my engineering officer was a little older also. He had come up through the ranks and had started as a seaman and came up to engineering officer.

RON: Most of you were 17, 18 and 19. The Captain was how old?

WILSON: I would guess he was somewhere between 35-45. Maybe 45-48. People looked a lot older to me in those days.

RON: And your engineering office?

WILSON: Coles I would guess at least 42-45 maybe. Maybe a little older because well I'll wait till you ask me some more questions before I tell you why.

RON: But these were career men.

WILSON: Yes, they were career men. Had come up through the ranks and worked their way up. They were old line Navy men and the rest of the officers were what we called 90 day wonders.

RON: So where did you come into Plymouth?

WILSON: No we came into South Hampton. Well actually we came by Ireland and Isle White now I don't know that much about Isle White but I had some pictures made like Linda sent of her father there and I don't know where they are but I still have them. One of them I had a pipe in my mouth, putting on and of course sent these home to the family. Then we went to the South Hampton where we actually landed.

RON: How long did you stay there before the invasion.

WILSON: At South Hampton. Well lets see April we arrived the I think around April 16th or somewhere in that area and then we were there at different ports and went out on the channel on maneuvers and so on and this one day Eberly and I, Eberly was a member of the crew of electricians, we are standing up looking across the rail and this pilot was floating there in the water and it looked like an American pilot and so we went and told the Captain and he had a wire sent or a signal to someone, flotilla commander I guess. They said you leave that body alone. I thought it should be picked up but they said no leave that body alone was the orders. But we went out on maneuvers there and we actually went up to Horowtich or Ipswitch and Horowitch to be loaded up for the invasion.

RON: How long. What was the last time?

WILSON: Well from approximately April 16, 1944 until the invasion on June 6th.

RON: Tell me about the events the day you start to load up

WILSON: Well as I remember we were up in Horowitch and we had the degauser onboard ship and they told us to go send our watches and so on ashore and I did not go into Ipswich and I believe it was Horowitch that we actually loaded. We were at Ipswich and we loaded at Horowitch.

RON: Could I get you to start that question again.

WILSON: Well we sent our watches to shore and I don't remember if there was any other piece of equipment that we were supposed to take off or not but any way I sent my watch ashore and I remember we were loading and a lot of the equipment that the British had wasn't too strong in the motor part. Any thing we put up on the top deck some of them would make it and some of them were winch up. I didn't do the actual work but that crew did. I am sure some of them would remember that they had to winch them to get them on the top deck. The Captain as I remember said well 13 trips into France and you get to go home. As I remember we made 32 trips.

RON: Still didn't go home. So you are on this boat and you are heading toward

WILSON: Yes we are going towards France. We were going down through the White Cliffs of Dover or in that area where it is closest to cross from France to England and again I wasn't up on top because of the nature of my job. But they said, this fella he was one of the older enlisted men aboard, Ginjinay, who was about 38 years old, voicing to me like he had a sour disposition. I guess he was unhappy being in the service at that age and the rest of us just a bunch of kids. But they said he was an enunciator

watch up in the wheel house and of course I wasn't up there to see who was on watch up there unless I was called up there to change a lamp or something. We had special lamps that we had to put at different instruments there that would not show outside so that we could be bombed. But we have airplane recognition lights up on top of the mast there were two of them. One on each side. They said that he took off his jacket and hung they way you make the airplane recognition lights work is there is a little crank like this well they say he took off his foul weather jacket and hung it on there and so of course it swung down and made contact and they said that the lights came on up there and the Captain came running down and said who in the hell did that and said Ginjinay started edging towards the hatch, ungald it and took off running. I wasn't there but I could imagine but I was down below and I didn't here it but they said that the Germans opened up on us.

RON: Where were you and the ship.

WILSON: I was down below and we were going through the White Cliffs of Dover we were between France and England.

RON: It never hit the ship?

WILSON: No it didn't hit the ship but they said they opened up on the convoy that was heading for France.

RON: Now you were in the landing on the British Beaches.

WILSON: Yes, gold. We went to gold I am sure I am not pronouncing it right but Answer Mesier of this nature. It was a little village. When we went in of course we had balloons aboard as did most of the ships had them aboard

and there was a lot of activity. You could hear a lot of firing and so on. Like I say I was still down underneath.

RON: Your ship didn't bring in the first wave of troops.

WILSON: I thought we were in the first wave. We had aboard what was called the desert rats. They had been in North Africa fighting Rommel and these guys were pretty rough and tough and dirty. I was up in the forward compartment where I slept and I would have to go through the troop compartments to go back for breakfast and meals and of course working and going down into the electric shop and I had to go through them and the odor was pretty

RON: Gray said yesterday the Asian troops were the ones who hit the beaches first carried the assault troops. Your ship came in after that carrying mostly support personnel.

WILSON: I thought we went in first group. Like I said we were hauling the desert rats. We had a few tanks, some trucks and jeeps and that is about all I remember. The troops on the way over were working on putting the water proofing around everything on them. I can remember stepping off the ship after everything was secure right there and first thing I saw was a sailor laying there in a water puddle where the tide had gone out. Dead. And by that time they were starting to line them up on the shore and they were in three rows and just as far down the shore as I could see standing there. They were lining up and they were coming by and I walked along and was looking at some of the fellas and they came along and was taking their dog tags and writing them down and so on and this one boy had his arm up like this and when they worked on getting his dog tag his arm was shaking like that and that is something I will never forget. And the odor on the beach I will never forget. It was a peculiar odor. I have smelled it since at times

but it was mostly exhaust and all that from the equipment that was going ashore and so on but anyway going up to that little village of course we didn't read German. I don't know if there was anyone aboard that did. There were several of us and I forget the way the sign was worded but it said Verboten - you know not to go in there mine fields. We could make out that much but anyway we went up through them and the one thing I remember up in the village was that this farmer had a cow and it had its first joint of his knee joint. Some of us were going to shoot it and he said or you know he let us know by motion talking very excited let him get it into his home and he pointed where and so on. So we let him get it in there.

RON: How many trips did you make across the channel.

WILSON: 32 by my recollection.

RON: And what were you doing.

WILSON: Mostly we were taking supplies and troops. We went to Gold as I remembered and I forget which other Juneau or Sword.

RON: Guam.

WILSON: Well we started going there later. We went before the British and Canadians and so on hit for 8 trips as I remember and we would pull back into London, Queen Victoria Docks to pick them up.

RON: You never took any fire during that?

WILSON: No sir. The only thing is when we were in the Queen Victoria Docks rockets were coming across and this one evening it came across and as I

remember the rockets they would have a trailing ball of fire you know and then there would be a ball of fire and the engine would shut off and then they would start coming down. I never saw one that actually came straight down. It either went to the right or the left. I know that this one time it went across the street and chips were over here and we were over here and it actually it swevered and went across over here. The force they said I believe it was the gunners mate was blown over right there in the water but I didn't see it.

RON: Did you do any R & R in London. Anything to talk about?

WILSON: Yes I was the first one to go off the ship and go up into London and Piccadilly Circus and all that stuff. So I came back to the ship and was telling all the guys about what went on up in London. I was sort of an adventuresome type. I would go off on my own. I didn't have to be with someone to go someplace. Anyway this one particular incident we came back and that time we were into what they call Quay and Eberly and I had been in London, you know up in the city and we got back to the ship just a couple of minutes late. We were supposed to be back by 0800 or something of this nature but anyway we were running late and they still have the bow doors open and we ran ramp down and we just jumped out of the taxi and ran aboard. They closed up and started backing out and there was one of these bombs hit just where the ship had been. We had backed off by them. One of the rockets hit where we had been.

RON: You left there and went back to the States? Were you on the LST534 the entire time.

WILSON: From New York yes till we went to.

RON: Did you serve on any other ships?

WILSON: No. We made 32 trips as I remember and we went to Rouen up the Rueon on one trip we took the free French back. They were over in England and we took them up the Rouen. Then we went down to St. Michelle. That was where the ships would go in and that was recreation area. Beautiful beach. They left their anchors out to far and had the cable cut off and they would lose their anchors and have to get them hooked back up to the ship and help pull them back out. It wasn't just our ship.

RON: So you ultimately got back for refitting.

WILSON: We came back. We were in Plymouth before starting back to the United States on Christmas Day. Then Van Hoosier who was an electrician and I went ashore. A family had invited us to have Christmas with them. Of course we were having Christmas with CHIP also. But we went ashore there in Plymouth and ate dinner with them and Van Hoosier was telling them yes we will be back. But I knew that we were going out the next day and heading back to the States.

RON: You sustain injuries in the service?

WILSON: Yes, a leg injury. Knee. Well going GQ and I thought I was at the - well it happened more than once. First time was on the way to Europe - it happened other times. We had to go down a ladder, escape ladder to get the auxiliary engine room and a lot of times you would be woken in the middle night and you would be about half asleep and you would think you were at the bottom of the ladder and you would let go and you weren't. You end up with quite a bang and I caused my knee to get so that it would slip out of joint and it happened in the Pacific also. But that was my injury.

RON: And your arm?

WILSON: This came about after I was out of the service. I was going to the University and taking some time off working. I was married at that time. I took a job with the railroad. I had other jobs also. Betty's mother was in the hospital having her lung removed and we had been up at the hospital and then I went from there to work. It was about 11:55 at night I went to work. Just finishing up the next morning. I was the flagman on the crew, the railroad and we were shoving into Arch Right Mine, which was a huge mine there near Morgantown or just outside Morgantown. So they kept shoving and I was riding the cars in and placing them at the mine and I would swing down on them and they would stop. They just kept coming. They just about knocked me off each time and finally I got off of the train and I walked up to the conductor and I said what the H is going on here. You are shoving me in there too hard. He said Wilson I am swinging down on the engineer and he is not taking the signal. But anyway we finally got the mine placed up. They went up the track to get over on this over track to switch over to this other track. When they came back down I started to board the engine and I grabbed a hold and was starting to step out and my knee went out and I went in underneath and I was run over. I lost part of this foot, this arm here and my leg there.

RON: Let's go back to the trip from New York to Okinawa.

WILSON: As I remember when we came from Europe we hit Norfolk. We took fresh milk aboard which was great. Then we went on up to New York. Those of us that were going to stay on the ship were given leave for 30 days and we all went home. We came back the engineering office called me up and said Wilson I would like to show you some of the new stuff that we put aboard like the evaporators and so on. Evaporators were put aboard to make water. Wherein in Europe we could pull in and fill out

tanks with water. But in the Pacific you can't do that. So we make water from salt water. So he took me around over the ship. This was the old engineering officer. He took me down into the gyro room and the various gyro people were there, engineers, checking the gyro out and they said here we want to show you how to start and stop this thing. I said I had that all torn apart there. They hit the ceiling. The engineering officer said what the H are you supposed to do when you are out in the middle of the ocean and it is not working. We don't have any engineers with us there so Wilson took care of it. From that we were in Hoboken having this work down and I had had free gangway in Europe. I don't know if this is of any interest to you or not. I had had free gangway meaning I could come and go any time we were in port and I made sure that we had supplies and they would ask me to get a lot of the supplies rather than having the storekeeper getting them because I had pretty good luck getting things. Anyway I had gone to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and got a projector, 35mm projector and so on for us to have aboard ship. Leading up to that though I was telling you I had free gangway well when the old crew went off and by that time the Executive Officer French took over as Captain.

RON: What did you think of him?

WILSON: I just accepted him. I can't say I was real thrilled about it. He seemed like such a nervous individual to me. I think when the Captain is secure in himself you sense this. Had nothing against him at all. Didn't have any problems with him. But he was a very nervous individual and someone who would walk up and down and people sometimes like that bother you.

RON: Was he dramatically different from Captain Olson.

WILSON: I would say so. Olson was very quiet and laid back. Whereas this guy would pace.

RON: French was the Executive Officer on the European Theater?

WILSON: Yes and he moved up to Captain.

RON: Did he and Olson get along?

WILSON: As far as I know. Coles, the engineering officer, when he called me in he said Wilson I transferred Eberly and Van Hoosier off and we have some new electricians aboard but I left you aboard because I couldn't send him out there without letting him have one that knew something. I said well thanks a lot. Eberly by the way got put on this LST that had a jungle rigged up in the tank deck and they took it on sightseeing and came up the mississippi and were stopping at all these towns. They really had a great liberty while we were going to the Pacific.

RON: How long did it take you to get from New York to Okinawa?

WILSON: I can't tell you the exact time but what we did we came down by Norfolk and Florida and Gulf Stream. We went to Cuba. While we were in New York I had tried ordering 20 gallons of 190 proof to clean the gyro with and they sent me 20 gallons of denatured. So I order 20 more gallons and they sent me 20 more gallons of denatured and I put it down in the shaft room that is where the shafts go back to the props. I just stored it down there and never opened it.

RON: So you made stops along the way.

WILSON: We stopped at Cuba. We finally got some grain alcohol at Cuba. Then we went through the Canal. We stopped at Colon. We went up to San Diego, and there the Captain got pretty upset with us because when

evening meal time came around we had all slipped off the ship and were up eating sandwiches and the coldest beer I ever had was packed in saw dust. It was so cold. They had cooling but it was packed in sawdust. There weren't enough people aboard to eat what the cooks had prepared and from there we went to Hawaii and

RON: Did you get your picture taken with those hula girls.

WILSON: Yes. Then from there we touched Guam, Saipan. I stopped in Saipan there were some boys who went to high school with me and I went ashore to see them and I got to see a couple of them and they brought me back down to catch the LCVP back. Our ship was anchored out and I invited them out to the ship for Sunday dinner but in the meantime we pulled out and headed for Okinawa. And when we pulled into Okinawa Bill Buyers who was a motor machinist mate

RON: You were in Okinawa for how long?

WILSON: I don't remember what date we pulled in there but Bill Buyers was on another ship. He was from Sax City, Iowa and he had been transferred off in New York and he came over to our ship and he and I were hitting the 190 and we were showing movies that night and we had five air raids and I say the movie was the Constant Nymph but Jim Sarres says it wasn't but any way that is what I remember, the Constant Nymph movie.

RON: What time did the attacks start?

WILSON: I don't know. They started fairly late and went on. I don't remember what time the last one was over but it was sometime about 3 or 4 o'clock. Then about 9 AM a GQ was rung again and I had not gone to my regular bunk. I just laid down in one of the troop bunks. Bill climbed in the bunk above

me and so when I woke up he was gone he had gone back to ship and GQ was ringing and I just laid there because I wasn't feeling too hot They dogged down all the hatches and so finally I got up and went down to the auxiliary engine room and I was down there and that was my GQ station. We were laying a smoke screen. Smoke started backing up and coming in down there and I was feeling sick anyway and it was making me sicker and I went out and started up the ladder. I was going down to the electric shop and lie down on the workbench that I had down there. I had done this before. I had started down there and Robert Goldsmith came out. You stepped out of the auxiliary engine room and then the ladder went up and he called me back. He wanted to ask me something. It wasn't anything of much importance. He was just curious about something. I walked in and we had a desk in the auxiliary room and I leaned against it while answering him so when we finished I just laid down on the desk, tossed my feet on an air valve so whenever the ship got hit then it just tilted over like that and settled out straight. I rolled off of the desk onto the floor and I said in the H happened and they said we are hit. So we were down there for a short time and when we started coming up the escape hatch the ladders were hot. I can remember standing there and taking a hold of it with one hand and then the other. They were uncomfortable to put your hand on it and hold it.

RON: What did you see when you got up on deck.

WILSON: Smoke and fire and people milling around. Hoses squirting over from the small ship there the 1022. I think it was the 1022 that was beside us and there was another ship small boats that were squirting water from hoses.

RON: Were there men directly in the area where the plane came in.

WILSON: No because that is where I had headed down to the electric shop. The engine actually ended up right where the workbench is. That is where the engine ended. The bomb went through the deck of the electric shop and through the water tank below and sort of out under the tank deck and then exploded and brought a 40 to 45 foot hole.

RON: If you had continued on your journey

WILSON: I would have been down on that workbench.

RON: How far away were you from where the plane went in.

WILSON: Well the electric shop was here on the starboard side and I was probably 30 feet back this way and down in the lower part of the ship. The engine rooms were right down on the bottom of the ship.

RON: So you weren't too far away but there were no people in that place where the plane hit.

WILSON: Not to my knowledge. My understanding is that the fellas that had been unloading us from the base that there were 3 right in that vicinity and were killed. Plus the 1022 swung their guns around into our ready boxes and the rear gun turds and shot up some of our guys.

RON: Did any crewmembers die?

WILSON: No crewmembers. Three from base.

RON: What were your immediate orders after that. It might change a whole bunch of you.

WILSON: Yeah it did. We had no communications from the bridge down to the engine room. My work went on because divers came aboard and filled a cofferdam on each side of the hole, pumped out the water.

RON: What is a cofferdam?

WILSON: Just a wood wall that would hold water. One on each side of the hole and then we pumped out the water. We had watertight tiger D in the engine rooms and in steering and so on. Pumped water out, raised the ship and then they towed us back alongside I believe it was a liberty ship, but any way it was a merchant ship that had been torpedoed in the engine room. We furnished them electric power. And we were tied up along side of them until Sunday afternoon about 3 PM a typhoon came along. We broke every line that we had, every line they had trying to stay alongside and it even pulled the electric cable loose cause I didn't get it loose in time. The lined up from ridge down to engine room relaying orders. We sideswiped an APRL. We got underway under our own power but we only had one rudder. They had robbed us of a rudder for another ship and we had this huge hole in us with coffer dams and pumping water out of and we were on our way and we sideswiped this ARPL and then we dropped bell anchor and it held for something like two hours and then the chain snapped and then rear anchor was dropped and it didn't hold for me than 30 minutes and then a big sand line snapped and as I remember it was coming dusk and were going sideways

RON: So did you sideswipe them.

WILSON: No we were coming broadside into the bow of this APA which is a very sharp bow on a ship and I thought it was just going to chop us in two, it was just hitting dusk, and just as we got back against we slid right back along the side and we kept going and hit this coral reef and kept engines

going full speed ahead and held ourselves up on that coral reef and then we rode out four more typhoons there.

RON: How did you spend your last weeks there?

WILSON: Living in a tent. At first I was in a pup tent. Henry Stewart Gray, who was a motor machinist like I, shared a pup tent and I remember Tex Ritter was one of the acts they brought to show us and so you had to go down this hill. We were living up on this hill with all the tombs next to us. So I would take roll call each day and then I moved into a large tent with Larry Gray, Robert Goldsmith and I can't think of who else.

RON: Larry Gray was a carpenter so he probably built it.

WILSON: I don't know. The tent was already set up when I moved in there. But I know I went down to what we called the food dump and that is where the food was placed until the food was taken to the mess hall and I asked the guard down there to turn his head and we took some food and we took it back to the tent and Larry was quite a good cook on this little hot plate I had brought off from the ship. The only trouble was when we turned on that hot plate we would knock all the power off of the whole hill. Boy could he make turnovers or popovers or whatever you call them. Make a little bit of dough and we would fill them up with whatever we had, apples, spam, whatever and he would put this dough around them and deep fry them you know on this hot plate and Chief Master of Arms, he was first class, he would come up because everybody was raising H about the power and he would say what are you people doing up here you knocked all the power off all over the hillside. And I said well we are cooking these popovers or turnovers and I would say just take it easy now and I taken a mattress, an inner spring mattress off this ship and brought it ashore to sleep on and we had cots but I had this innerspring on it. I said

now when we leave here you just leave us alone. Don't bother us and I will give you this stuff when we leave so I got along with him.

RON: Did you leave it to him when you left?

JOHN: Yes I did.

RON: No encounters on the Island with the Japanese?

JOHN: One night, I believe it was first or second night that we were ashore after we left the ship. They said, I wasn't up in the tent, not that particular tent but a different tent and they said a big Japanese Marine was killed just over two tents or somewhere in that neighborhood but I didn't go out that night.

RON: Were you and Betty together before, did you know each other before you went.

JOHN: Betty and I met when we were approximately ten years old. My brother dated her sister. She lived in a little adjoining town to where I was. So he took me over with him one day and I took her a big lollipop, one of these about like this and gave it to her. I had seen her before. He father was the druggist in this little town. Then I was visiting a friend of hers and went to bible school with this church and she was in the bible school class and we learned the 21st psalms there together.

RON: Were you sweethearts by the time you went into the service?

JOHN: No I lost track of her. I went to a school in a different place. She went to high school over there. By the way she was valedictorian of her class. Anyway after I was home from the service just a few days we were over at

this place that was popular in her town for dancing and sitting around and having a beer or something and I knew her cousin better than I knew her at the time so this boy that was with me he had gone to the Navy with me and had gotten submarine duty and he was torpedo man on the submarine. I had volunteered for submarine in the great lakes but the three with the highest grades got submarine duty but anyway he would ask her cousin to go out so I asked her cousin to ask her if she would go with me. And so we went to a neighboring town and at that time they had lots of private clubs and we went to a private club where you could get drinks. West Virginia was what you call dry for a lot of years. They wouldn't allow them to serve hard liquor.

RON: When did you know that this was the woman for you.

JOHN: We dated for two years and I got her a diamond after the first year at Christmas time. From January to Christmas and then I bought her a diamond.

RON: So you get married and the rest is history.

JOHN: The rest is history. We have five children. We have four girls and one son. We are very proud of them. They have all done quite well in life. Have turned out well.

RON: What was Christmas like?

JOHN: In England like I said I had saved all my gifts and I didn't open them until Christmas Day and then I had my own little private opening down there in the electrician's office. And looked everything over. Ate my candy and my cookies and so on and then I gave some of them away. That was in Plymouth, England. Then went ashore and we had been invited I don't

know how I would run into some member of this family and they invited us and they said I could bring a friend along for Christmas dinner. And we had dinner and they had little tarts and tea and so on afterwards and we played games there and even played some post office. They were very nice. One of the fellas was a chief in the British Navy that belonged to the family and he was there and we talked.

RON: What happened on the ship?

JOHN: Well they had turkey dinner and some other things. Traditional.

RON: Did they put up a tree?

JOHN: No. I don't remember a tree at all. I won't say there wasn't one there but I don't remember it. They had a nice layout. I am not a fowl person, I don't eat turkey or chicken I didn't mind missing their meal. I always ate the other stuff. I had a nice meal.

LINDA: Do you remember anything about the storm?

JOHN: Yes going across the channel? Going across the channel we had a load of American troops at that time, like I told you we made 8 trips with the English troops and then we started carrying American troops. That was a great day. I hated to see the Americans going over but when they would come up to the ramp to go up to top deck and so on they would just floor it and right on up they would go. There was none of this stuff of having to hold anything. Of course our equipment I thought was a lot better than the British. But anyway we were out in the channel and we were supposed to go into beach and we were loaded and the storm was so bad that we dropped our bow anchor and it held for a time and then we dropped our stern and it held for a time and broke. And so then we just cruised around

out there as I remember for about three days. The tanks, we had sherman tanks they called them 40 tons aboard, and they were on the outer edges of the tank deck. See my electric shop was right next to the tank deck and I had hatch that I could go out into the tank deck and these tanks broke loose and were sliding back and forth and we had a row of 6 by 6 trucks, what they call 6 by 6 trucks in the center and these tanks all day long and all night long were sliding. Ours wasn't near any ship this happened to but ours was bad because it was happening to us. And the soldiers were all sick. A lot of the sailors also. Vomiting. We really had a ship that was in a mess. I'll tell you. And these 6 x 6's were just squished up like accordions when we were finally able to go in to the beach and unload them.

RON: Were they serviceable?

JOHN: No. Not that I remember.

RON: The tanks were okay?

JOHN: Yeah the tanks were okay. And we had dents inside the tank deck but it looked like for rub reels they had take big pipes and cut them in two and welded them onto the tank deck on the side and that was reinforcement.

RON: What did they do with the trucks, just dump them?

JOHN: Yeah as far as I know.

LINDA: Did it create any danger for anyone?

JOHN: Yes because some fellas went into the tank deck and were trying to secure them, hook them back and yes it was dangerous at that time. But they

quite that fairly soon and at night you would wake up and the water would be wooshing over the top deck because it was a real storm. That channel gets real rough and you would hear that water coming on and you would hear that caroom caroom and you would think the ship was breaking up.

LINDA: What did you do the day the war ended?

JOHN: Well I had the 190 where I could get to it. I broke it out and several of the fellas got pretty high I along with them. That night I remember all the shrapnel the ships were shooting off and of course the shore guns were also shooting and I had an excellent picture of it and I am sure someone in the group still had a picture of it. Mine got burned up I think that is what happened to it but I am not positive.

RON: Is that the one from up on the hill looking down?

JOHN: No. This was I think taken from the ship and all the shrapnel going in the sky, treasure boats and it showed them all. It was much more pronounced than that one. I know the picture you are talking about. No that is not the same picture.

LINDA: What about your medals?

JOHN: Well I understand they passed out some yesterday. I didn't know. I had forgotten. I should have gone done and gotten it I guess. French passed out some medals.

RON: Comemorative medals. But what medals did you get.

JOHN: Just for being in Europe and being in the invasion there. The North American medal or whatever. I never sent for my medals. I just have the ribbons like I wore on my uniform.

LINDA: What was it like getting mail.

JOHN: It was wonderful. Going to, I got quite a bit of mail. My mother was very good to write. My brother. I had friends that wrote me. I had a girl that wrote to me and she wrote excellent letters. Very interesting. I don't think a day didn't go by that she didn't mail me a letter.

RON: Love letters.

JOHN: No they were down in the electric shop in the C bag and were gotten wet and I put them up on the tail, up on the rear deck to dry them out, I don't know maybe some of the fellas on the ship have some of my letters. She always perfumed them and they always smelled real good.

LINDA: What is the story of the 534 leaving you at Waymouth?

JOHN: Well I had gone ashore to draw supplies and we had not been able to get certain things being there in Europe. Some supplies came through quickly and others didn't come through. So this day I went ashore and I went ashore in work blues and didn't have any money with me or anything. I just thought I was going over to pick up the supplies and get right back aboard ship. I took a fella with me I don't remember exactly who. I believe it was a fella named Striker from Philadelphia or somewhere in the neighborhood with me. So we were able to get a lot of supplies that we hadn't been able to get up to that point. I was wanting fuse polars, soap, and that kind of stuff, so I got a big truckload of it. Three quarters weapons carriers is what I got and I had practically enough to fill the

whole truck and so I took it down to the Catchy LCVP. We were anchored out in Waymouth Bay, between Waymouth and Portland, and I said signal through the ships and then an LCVP to pick me up. And they said well your ship has left. I said where is it going and at first they wouldn't tell me anything. I said look I am ashore and I got all these supplies and I want to get them back to the ship. So they finally said they are going to South Hampton. Well I didn't know how to get to South Hampton. I had been there. I went back to base where I had drawn the supplies and there were a couple of drivers there that were weapons carriers, driving weapon carriers and they had brought a load of new recruits up to Waymouth they had just come from the states and they brought them up there to serve. So I talked to these drivers and I said hey would you haul this stuff to Plymouth for me and they said if you load it we will haul it. I said Okay. So the other fella and I we loaded all this back onto the trucks and we took off with them. We would go through those villages and they would floor those trucks. They were dodge three quarter ton trucks that they called weapons carriers and they just floored them and I don't think they ever let up on the gas the whole way and we would go through those villages just flying up on the sidewalks and people would be riding bikes and they would be climbing out of the way. So no wonder they get angry at us. Anyway we got to Plymouth in the even and I went in to the base there and I said I have a load of supplies. I am off the LST 534 and what did I say South Hampton I meant Valmouth. I said I need to get these supplies to Valmouth. Well he said I won't give you a truck tonight but I will give you a truck tomorrow. I said I don't have any money, I don't have any identification or anything with me. I said I would like a carton of cigarettes. So he gave me a carton of cigarettes and he said you go over and get bunking, he told me where to go. He said you go over there and tomorrow I will give you a driver and give you some cash and they will take you to Valmouth. So the next I reported back over and he gave me a little bit of cash to buy dinner for the driver and the two of us

and gave me the cigarettes the night before and we went to Valmouth and I was standing. We had just unloaded the trucks and LCVP came in with the captain. I don't know maybe Sarres was aboard. I don't remember whom else was aboard and the Captain walked up on there and said Wilson he says hell I didn't think I would see you for two weeks. I was just sure that as soon as we left you would take off for London. I said I would have if I had any money and identification. But anyway I got the supplies back to the ship. That was Olsen.

LINDA: Didn't you say there was something about boarding the LST 534 in Hoboken.

JOHN: Yes. I started to get into that awhile ago and he side tracked me. I started telling you about having free gangway. Well when the old crew left and the new crew was taking over and of course I was old crew, but the old crew had left the ship at Hoboken and Alexis that is waiting out there now he was the engineering officer coming on new. So my free gangway had been taken away for a period there and I went ashore anyway at night down in Hoboken, Union City and so on. So when I came back to board the ship normally I could get aboard by just walking up or waiting until the officer had left the gangway. Then I could walk on board. But this night it was one of the new officers and he was standing right there at the gangway. Well I wasn't supposed to be off the ship so you know there are these huge shipyard cranes that you have to climb ladders to get up in. Well I was standing beside one of them and everytime he would move up I would walk along side of it and everytime he moved back I would walk alongside of it. They were working on the ship across from us and they weren't working on our ship at all at that point. Finally the operator looked down and he saw me down there and he went like this and I climbed up the ladder got in the operating crane and he said what's the matter can't you get aboard? I said no that officer won't leave the

gangway. He said I'll get you aboard. I said okay. So he backs up and he yells for the guys that are up on this ship across that they were working on. He says come on down here and I said what do you want? They swore and said what do you want? He said never mind get down here. So they came down off about four or five of them and he said alright hook me on to that big box and it was a huge box about ten by ten or twelve by twelve, something of this nature and about this high and they use it to put equipment aboard a ship. You know this crane that is aboard lifts it and puts it aboard. So he said okay now you go down there and he told one of the workers now you get in there to the worker and the guy said what for? He said never mind get in there so he got in and then he said now you go down and get in. So I went down and got in and he ran back up and set it down on the bow bar ship. Now this is about three o'clock in the morning. Well the guy jumps out of the box and says you stay here and I will go see if the coast is clear. So I waited and waited and he didn't come back. So finally I got out and when I got out right here was this officer standing there looking straight at me. He said just what the --- do you think you are pulling. I said I am not pulling anything. I am coming aboard ship. How did you think you would get away with this. They aren't even working on this ship and you set a box down on this ship at three o'clock in the morning and I knew something was up. He said why did you come in this way. Well I said I couldn't get aboard you were standing at the gangway. He said why were you ashore. I said I wanted to go ashore to have liberty. Boy he exploded. He said my wife is over there sitting in a hotel and I have to stay here on watch and then people like you walk off this ship and go. I said well that is what I did. So the next morning they called me up and Lt. Right was the Executive Officer by this point and he said Fielder as I remember went in with me to have a little hearing and Right said Wilson what were you doing ashore. I said well I just took liberty and went ashore. He said well why did you think you should. Well because I always had free gangway. I said it has been changed since these other

guys have come aboard. He said well I am going to restrict you to the ship for three days. I said yes sir. I felt I was getting off fairly good. The next morning he called me up and he said Wilson I want you to go to Brooklyn Navy yard and get a movie projector. I said I can't. He said why not. I said I am restricted to ship. He said get the hell out of here and get that movie projector. So that's the story.

LINDA: So what are you going to do for your fiftieth wedding anniversary next year.

JOHN: Well I thought we would import a movie crew and

