

Larry Gray

RON: First give me your name and the ship you served on.

LARRY: Larry Adolph Gray. I served on the 534, LST534. I was a motormac. At the time of discharge I was not motormac the full time. That was a fireman first.

RON: What is a motormac?

LARRY: Motor Machinest Mate.

RON: And what did that entail?

LARRY: Diesel Engines. I went to Navy Pier in fact out here to school before I went aboard the 534.

RON: You were part of the Black Gang?

LARRY: The Black Gang. Right. That is the engineers, motor machinists, whatever. That was the black gang they called them.

RON: What were you doing at the beginning of the war.

LARRY: What was I doing before the service? I went in right after high school. Graduated out of high school in June, the first of June and went in on June 20th. Into the Navy. I volunteered two months before I was 18 so I wouldn't have to be drafted into the Army. I wanted to get in the Navy.

RON: What did your parents think of that?

LARRY: Well my dad agreed to that because he knew I would be drafted at that time you would be drafted after your 18th birth your would be drafted within two weeks. And my brother had already been drafted into the he went into the Air Force so they were willing for me to get my choice into the Navy. They didn't want me to go into the Army either. They preferred the Navy over the Army.

RON: Could you have gone to college? Were they giving deferments for College?

LARRY: No they weren't. I was already registered, had everything ready to go to Climpson University. But that disc came first and my brother was drafted right out of Ferman University and they were not deferring people at that time. Unless I believe it was in their latter portion of their education they could have been deferred if they were either in their 3rd or 4th year.

RON: Not even the best students coming out of high school they didn't defer?

LARRY: Not that I can remember. Most all of my friends, everybody had to go right into the service. Was drafted at 18.

RON: Where did you take your basic?

LARRY: Great Lakes.

RON: How long was that seven weeks.

LARRY: No I had nine weeks.

RON: They sent you where?

LARRY: From there then I went home on leave and came back and then I was assigned to a navy pier for the diesel curriculum there and I spent 9 weeks there in diesel school. Then we went from there to Camp Bradford in Virginia and in Virginia we stayed there approximately 4 weeks or pretty close I don't remember exactly waiting for our ship and we were just doing different things there to keep you busy more or less. And when our ship came down from Evansville to New Orleans then we were assigned to the ship and we picked it up in New Orleans.

RON: Where did you go?

LARRY: We went on a shakedown cruise into the gulf of Mexico and then into Panama City and that is where we did the majority of our shakedown. In Panama City we did our beaching and then out in the gulf we did our practicing of aircrafts and so forth. Shooting.

RON: What were you shooting at? What did you find?

LARRY: We were shooting at tow targets. Some of it by ship and some of it by aircraft. Most of the things we were involved with, the kind of firepower we had were all anti-aircraft. So planes were coming over that would be pulling a tow target and we would shoot at those.

RON: Live fire?

LARRY: Yes, live fire.

RON: Was that Captain Olson?

LARRY: Yes Olson was the Captain.

RON: What kind of guy was he?

LARRY: Well we had a lot of confidence in him because he was an old Navy man. He had about 18 years service. He knew what he was doing. Of course being an enlisted man down there, you know firemen at that time, that was what they called fireman was the striker rate that you would have when you were trying to make motormac. And we didn't come in contact with him too often but I thought a lot of him. I thought he was knowledgeable and knew what he was doing?

RON: How old a guy was he? Considerably older than you.

LARRY: Oh yeah. At that time he looked to be in his forties. Mid forties I guess.

RON: He is long gone by now.

LARRY: Probably, I am sure he is unless he is living one of those unusual lives.

RON: So after the shakedown cruise and they were confident you guys knew what you were doing where did you go?

LARRY: Well we went back in to New Orleans of course and then we left there and we went around up, we stopped at Bainbridge, Maryland and then we were going on up to pick up a convoy. We were to go overseas. And we went as far as I can remember we went into Quebec and loaded our cargo, what we carried over and then we left there and went around the Halifax to form the convoy to go across. To my recollection that is the way we did it.

RON: What were you carrying?

LARRY: I don't know. I just don't know what the cargo was. I am sure we had some trucks because I can remember that part because it seemed we had occasion where we had one or two to break loose. Yeah I know it was because we had a severe storm in the North Atlantic and some of the trucks broke loose on the tank deck and started shifting around. I don't know the man that did it but someone, it might have been Symanzski involved, but some of the deck force had to go down and secure those things and it was very dangerous because they were shifting in that weather and Captain Olson tried to steer the ship to some degree to try to keep it as steady as he could until they could get those secured again. I do remember that happening. So that is the kind of cargo I can remember. It was those trucks.

RON: How was the trip over generally.

LARRY: Well it was good. We went through the North Atlantic. Very cold water. being in the engine room I was bale to check the water temperature all the time because we had to take those readings and the water temperature in the North Atlantic was about 5 degrees so everything was uneventful for a while and then we got further along into the North Atlantic there and we ran into some ice and iceburgs. That we got to the point where we had the submarine attack. And at that point I was on watch in the engine room at the time. Midnight watch because it happened around two o'clock or so in the morning and when I came out of the hatch, a beautiful night, water just like glass. You couldn't see a ripple on it. Moon coming out across the water. Just beautiful in that direction because we were on coffin corner so nothing was on the north side of us. But then when I looked in the other direction I looked just in time to see the second ship over from us explode. It was a tanker and of course he didn't stay afloat but five minutes. Short

period. I don't know exactly but a very short time. So then and that was of course after we had general quarters when it came up, when it sounded.

RON: Did they shoot at you at all.

LARRY: We don't know. We think it did because Captain Olson when we received orders into general quarters he would change speeds every few minutes. He would either speed up or slow down and we were told that it made it harder for a submarine commander to set up his shot to shoot because it takes so long for them to get that set up so all of us always felt like when they got the second ship over from us was meant for us on this corner. But we had no way of knowing that but we felt it either got right in front of us. I don't believe it would have went under us because we were pretty low in the water. I don't believe they would have been that low but I think it went across the front of us personally. But I have no way of knowing that.

RON: How many ships did they take out?

LARRY: They took three. I remember three. I think that was all there was. That one, then we had a freighter right up in front, two or three ships in front of us that was just broken in half and we had to go around it in the water.

RON: What about survivors?

LARRY: Well the survivors some of them were in the water and of course they wouldn't last but five minutes with the temperature of that water. But there was one guy that was on the stern of that ship walking around with a flashlight but we had a rescue ship that was to come back and pick up survivors. None of the ships in the convoy could stop to pick up survivors. But they had certain ships assigned to do that and they would

come back and do that. So I am sure that they got some of them and got them off the ship but we just went around and had to go home.

RON: So there was no stopping to pick anybody up.

LARRY: No not by the ships in the convoy other than the ones that were assigned for that duty.

RON: You could have hit some of them.

LARRY: We could have possibly because we could see the objects floating in the water as we went through there but I don't know that I saw any men involved. Of course we were still on watch and we were looking for submarines as much as we could even though it was night but it was a very moonlit night. There was very little light.

RON: Did you hear any cries in the water?

LARRY: No. Sure didn't. I don't know if they would have been able to by the time we got to them because we were on coffin corner if you know where that is. That is the very last ship in line on the north side of the convoy. Well this ship that broke up was up ahead of us so the men in the water probably might have if there was any there they might have already been beyond calling for help because we do know that temperature is normally about five minutes that those men could last.

RON: It wasn't eventful from thereon?

LARRY: From then on the next thing that was eventful was the fact that we got into a three-day storm and that was really rough. It was so bad we couldn't go topside. Afraid we would be washed overboard because some of the

waves were actually so high they were coming over the stern of the ship. Because the waves were going the same direction we were. It helped us along getting to London because it was pushing us but it was a severe storm because the waves were so high some of the ships beside us would actually go down out of sight between the waves and come back up. It was a severe storm. That was the next eventful thing that happened. After that there was nothing else going on until we got across.

RON: What was more frightening the storm or the submarine.

LARRY: The submarine attack. That hits you all at once and you see these things happening and you know it can happen to you at any minute so you get fairly scared there and it is frightening.

RON: How did that experience, you were a bunch of young kids on that LST first experience and it is a dramatic one, how did it affect everybody?

LARRY: Well I don't think it had any lasting effect. It was right at the time it was frightening and so forth but after it was all over everybody could joke about it. Just like young people you know well it is not going to happen to me really. You know how that goes so everybody seemed to get over it without any particular problems. We were just there when it happened but nothing happened to us so we were thankful for that.

RON: Did you have a lot of seasickness?

LARRY: Oh man when I left New Orleans I got sick by the time we got out of the Mississippi River and then I was sick for ten days when we left New Orleans all the way up to New York no to Bainbridge Maryland. All I could eat was saltine crackers and water. But we had to stand our duty. We still had to stand our watch and so forth even though we were sick.

But you get to the point there is nothing there you know just dry heaves.
But after that I was never sick again.

RON: So that big storm didn't bother you?

LARRY: No never again was I sick. Rode out the typhoons and everything in the Pacific and all but never got sick.

RON: That is interesting. Did you arrive in Plymouth or Portsmouth?

LARRY: Plymouth I believe it was. See I am not too sure because at that age it didn't mean a lot to me where I was. I think it was Plymouth it could have been Port Wymeth.

RON: How long were you there before you left to join the invasion?

LARRY: I don't know those dates exactly when we got into England.

RON: Two weeks, a week, three?

LARRY: Probably in the neighborhood of, well we moved. We didn't stay in one location. We were in South Hampton. We were in Portland Wymouth and finally we got on up to London and I believe it was Horwitz where we left from for the Normandy invasion. We were over the probably about 4 months before the invasion. About 3 months I guess before the invasion just moving from place to place. Didn't do a whole lot other than just regular sea duty and going through our general quarter drills and those types of things. I don't remember doing any kind of cargo moving or anything like that during that period of time.

RON: Did you get a lot of leave?

LARRY: Yes we had a lot of liberty. Didn't have any leaves but we did have liberties and we might stay in one port a couple of weeks and then we go someplace else for a little while. Just moving around like that.

RON: The B1's and B2's. Were the Germans sending them over at that time?

LARRY: Well yes we were in West Indian docks near as I could remember that was the first time they turned the B1's what we called the flying buzz bombs they turned those loose in the West Indian docks but I don't remember exactly what time or which months or dates that was because I didn't register all that at that age.

RON: Could you see them coming.

LARRY: Oh yes. They were coming over and we had general quarters as a matter of fact. We thought it was air raids and we were shooting at those things and then when they would start down we thought we were shooting planes down. Of course it wasn't long before the Captain got word of what it was and so forth and we pulled out of West Indian docks to get back out into the Thames River because they had all those things aimed at the docks because that is where the cargo is being loaded and all and they wanted to stop that type of situation there. But I believe that occurred right after the Normandy invasion rather than before.

RON: Did you have any idea that this invasion was imminent at any time? Did they talk to you about that?

LARRY: Well yes scuttlebutt we knew it was coming but we didn't know when it was coming exactly. No one knew that but we knew it was coming. Only time we knew it was when we got up and the location where we saw all of

the troops and the personnel and all of the trucks and tanks and cargo gathered right there at that location. We knew something was coming then. Then they started loading the ships with all that type stuff so we knew it was coming but we hadn't received word yet.

RON: But you knew you were going to be part of the invasion?

LARRY: Oh yeah. We were told that before the invasion started because they were getting us loaded up to go so we knew we were going to be part of the invasion force.

RON: Murphy process from the time you left

LARRY: Well like I said I am not sure of the name of the town I think it was Horwich. Seems like that was the name of it. It was right there on the English Channel. We loaded there and then we sat there because it was bad weather for several days and we stayed loaded there until we finally got word to leave. But we left on June 6 early that morning. Went across the channel and of course learned that the invasion had started. It didn't take long to get across there. By late afternoon we were just laying off the coast there. And all the ships. There were just hundred and hundreds of ships there and with the barrage balloons hanging up to protect against scraping planes that would come in low or what not.

RON: Were you attacked?

LARRY: Well we had air attacks later after dark. We did not have any air attacks in the afternoon that I remember but I do remember after dark we had some air attacks. Of course a lot of times the Americans, no not the Americans but the Allied planes would come over and they all had a particular blinking light under the bottom to identify them as friendly because in the

beginning some of them were getting friendly fire coming back at them and we didn't know which one was which right at the beginning. We didn't have an awful lot of air attacks because there weren't many, the Luftwasa there weren't many of them left at the time because they had been working on them so heavily before the invasion.

RON: So you weren't in the initial assault?

LARRY: No we did not carry assault troops. All of our stuff was logistical type of equipment. Trucks and things to support them after they secured the beaches. Being on the British beachhead they didn't advance as far as they did on the American beachhead. They just went in so far. There were still Germans just twelve miles away a couple of months after the invasion from us.

RON: When you came in after the initial assault to land additional support. Were they still firing on the beach?

LARRY: The firing had moved inland. We were not under fire when we beached because they had already advanced and the Germans were back. The only thing we had was a few planes would still come over with air attacks but we didn't have any cannon fire, or anything like that at that time. We did at a later time. Small crafts like the LCPV boats because a little while after the invasion we had to leave two of those boats over there for dispatch duty and what not off of our ship. We were shelled when we were on those. We had to go into a little canal one night where they unload barges when they take the cargo off the ships and they would go into this little canal in order to unload the trucks and whatnot. But the weather got so bad one night we had to get all small craft after the gooseberry. I don't know if anybody told you what that is or not but the English channel was very rough and small craft had to have some

protection so they brought in several old ships that were decommissioned probably not of use in anything and they sunk them close in to the beach and make a circle of them in order to make a breakwater for all small craft to get behind it. But the storm got so bad one night we had to leave there and all of us go into that canal to get out of the rough weather and we were shelled while we were in that canal that night. And after the tide went out we were high and dry and then you couldn't move and this particular night when they were shelling we heard all the shelling going on. The explosions going off and we thought it was our guns shooting until they hit a truck about a 100 yards from us and that truck exploded and then we found out we were being shelled and luckily for us we didn't get about two more shells come in because we were frightened at that point knowing we were being shelled and there was nothing we could do about it. But we didn't have anymore damage around us but they were trying to stop the work in the canal if they could have sunk stuff in there then they could have slowed down the supplies coming in that particular location.

RON: When you went on the beach were there still dead around?

LARRY: Yes. They hadn't been moved yet. There were several bodies. There were a lot of bodies on the beach and they were just like they fell. And some of them were laying there with their face buried in the sand and different positions. But there is always something that stands out to you that you remember and I think I told Willie this, there was one soldier there, he was a British soldier but he was laying on his face that way but his hand was stretched out in front of him and it looked like about the size of an 88 shell had gone through his hand and just right across the knuckles and right up through the wrist and all of that was missing. And the water having come in and washing back out no blood was on him and all you could see was little tendons of meat hanging everywhere. That stuck in my mind. I have always remembered that hanging. A lot of the other

guys around that weren't submerged in water they still had the blood and what not and I couldn't drink tea because the blood turned so dark it just got me to the point that I just couldn't enjoy drinking tea. So I probably didn't want tea for at least two months after that. That is the kind of impression it got me on that part.

RON: Did the sight of those kinds of things change you at all?

LARRY: Did they what?

RON: Did the sight of those things change your way of thinking?

LARRY: No. Well there is one thing about it when you see all these things happen, you see this, you come to the realization that life can be short. You think more along that line that you are in danger and these things can happen. Because in the beginning you see all this as all a big fun thing in one degree when you first go in the service but that brings home reality of where you are and what can happen to you. It changes you in that respect.

RON: What did they do with all those bodies.

LARRY: Well they had a burial detail that came by and tagged all these people to take them off. But they were in the process of doing that then but they hadn't got to them yet. But they were doing some of the work on the beach. Burial details that pick up the bodies because they have to pick them up and log all those bodies in as to who they are and so forth.

RON: They put them in bags and ship them.

LARRY: Well I didn't see them doing that to any of the bags. They were right where we were. The bodies were still there but they were up the beach

from us and they were still also clearing mines on the beach. And I did see one bulldozer run into a mine while we were there. He just scraped in front. That was what they were using to clear them because that protected him from the mine and it didn't really do any damage to that old bulldozer with those front loader scraps. So that is what they were using but mines were still around and they warned us about that. About going out on the beaches that it could be dangerous or what not. But still and all some of us felt that is what we wanted to do and we did.

RON: Now thereafter you made some runs back and forth?

LARRY: Going back and forth from London. We would go back to England, load with more supplies and what not and come back. I only did that a couple of times because then I was assigned to the small craft as a motormac on the LCPV to stay on the beach and there was two boats that stayed on the beach. And each boat had three men, it had a coxswain, a motormac and a seaman. And we stayed there and we stayed in that gooseberry and we were assigned to the well I guess not assigned but I guess you can say assigned to the British Command because they were the ones that gave us our orders each day as to what we were to do and we would have a day on duty twenty-fours and then we would have 24 hours off duty. And off duty we would do whatever we wanted to. We had access to fuel and we would just run up and down the beach. Just play that other day more or less. You know we even made an aquaplane and put it out behind our LCPV and rode that thing some of those times. It was a lot of fun in that respect you know at that age we did it. But we were there to run the specs duty and carry people back and forth to the ships and whatnot that were anchored off the coast. So we were there probably a couple of months or so while the ship was going back and forth.

RON: And eventually you left to go back to the States?

LARRY: Yes. We came back to the States December I believe it was. We got back into Hoboken, NJ because we were going to be refitted to go to the Pacific and they did all the camouflage work, changed our anti-aircraft gun because there was far more aircraft in the Pacific than we had had in the Atlantic. So they changed from single forty anti-aircraft to a twin forty anti-aircraft. And also installed the directors and what not which could be a little more accurate on shooting down a plane.

RON: So you had some leave time?

LARRY: We had a 30 day leave. We went home for a while, while it was being done. We stayed in dry dock. You come home there Willie at that time and I guess we were in New York probably two and half months. Something like that all told.

RON: Went to Hawaii I assume?

LARRY: Yeah. We went around through the Panama Canal up to San Diego and while we were in San Diego we were going on to Hawaii and that is when we got the word that President Roosevelt had died. It was at that and then we did

RON: How did that affect you. How was he thought of.

LARRY: He was thought of kind of like I thought about our Captain you know, on the ship Captain Olson. Had a lot of confidence in him. And all of us did President Roosevelt. I know I did and all the people I knew close enough to discuss anything like that were really upset that he had died that close to the end of the war and what not. Hated that he didn't live long enough to see everything finalized.

RON: Did you ever think that his death might change the course of the war?

LARRY: No. I thought the war had moved far enough in that direction I didn't think it would change the outcome of the war or anything. I didn't see that. But I just thought about in the respect that I hated for him not to be living when it was over because he had directed pretty well all the way through there and had a lot of confidence in him. Always thought he was a great president.

RON: So you went to Hawaii and then to Okinawa?

LARRY: Yeah. We also stopped at Guam and Saipan.

RON: Any memorable experiences in that voyage.

LARRY: No nothing memorable happened there. We stopped. I don't really know why we stopped there. We just stopped over for a few days. Willie might be able to give you more information since he was involved with the officers on the ship and he knew more about the business going on. But all I remember is Guam there. We did have swimming parties. I remember that.

RON: So your job was to take materials to Okinawa. That is what you were carrying.

LARRY: Well that was what we were doing. We did carry some personnel to Okinawa. We had some men on there. I don't know the exact number. Willie you would remember that. But we had personnel and equipment that we did carry to Okinawa.

RON: So how long, how soon did the Japanese plane attack after you had arrived in Okinawa.

LARRY: well probably attacked within the first week that we were there.

RON: Really. So you hadn't even offloaded all your stuff.

LARRY: No we hadn't unloaded any of our equipment as far as I know. We hadn't unloaded anything. We went into the dock, it was one of those floating docks out into the water and that is where we had to dock there to unload everything. It was a very short period of time after we were there that we were attacked.

RON: Give me how did the process begin.

LARRY: Well there was we had several warnings before hand that we were general quarters and then we would be off and then we would be back at general quarters and I think we had been on this particular time we had been on general quarters most of the night I think. We knew that was coming and we knew that the planes were coming in but they were being intercepted before they would get to us. Then after we would be our general quarters so long they would I forget the command for what they called this when we could get off of our guns but not leave the guns. We were still on general quarters but not in ready position and we did that on and off some. So when that plane came in that finally one got through when they had knocked down everything else. There were several they had gotten and they did hit some ships in other areas I understand but this one plane came right in over the mountain top behind us and right down on the water level and I was on a twin-forty gun at the stern of the ship and he was coming right at us. But we were not given any orders at that time or anything to fire.

RON: So you have this Japanese plane coming at you and you can't fire at it?

LARRY: We didn't receive any orders. We were not to fire until we received orders to fire. It was a short period of time because it wasn't that far that he was out there coming at us. I don't imagine that would have amount to more than a minute and a half after he came over that mountain because it wasn't very far to come across that bay, Buckner Bay till he was on us so we didn't have any command to fire or whatnot. One of the guns we think, Oscar Cris, I always thought it was Oscar, and he said he fired, one of the guns hit him with a twenty millimeter which didn't knock him down but we saw puffs of smoke come out of the plane. Then he banked off to the right and went down and banked back in to the side of the ship. But he went down behind the ship more or less right above the water. And there is a ship next to us 1022 they were firing at the plane also. Or they were firing at the plane I say also we never got orders to fire but anyway when he went down around us one of the fellas on that ship froze on his gun and he just sprayed down on our ship when that plane went behind us and he wounded more men on our ship than the plane did because on the gun tub that I was in we have 40 millimeter shells that are clipped around the wall of the inside of the gun tub. About 300 rounds of 40 millimeter ammunitions. Four shells to a clip. But when he scrapped us he hit the side of our tub. Well when he did it bent that in enough it set off a shell and three shells exploded inside our tub. There were six of us there and four out of the six of us did get shrapnel. Medereous was one. He got wounded pretty bad in the back. He was one of the loaders on the gun. And I can't remember the other guys names that were in there with us but I just know Mederous was in there and I was in there but he might remember the names more that I do. It's been a long time.

RON: What happened to you.

LARRY: I didn't get any shrapnel at all. I was on the opposite side of the gun. I was the pointer. Pointer being the one that matches the trigger. Points one way up and down and a trainer then is going laterally and they work together to put on target. But we were on the control of the director which was behind us which he directs our gun from that range finder and the director of the heat head. Then all I had to do was fire when we got the command to fire. I was on the opposite side of the gun when the shells exploded.

RON: What happened after the attack?

LARRY: Well there was a lot of confusion going on of course. And they started coming aboard trying to cut away some of the jagged metal and things. I can remember about it. That was what I understood about it but yet some of the men who was that (talking to Willie Gun) CB's who was that, that was willing to off the shore. We lost three men but they were ships company. They were on the ship either working or to unload or whatnot. I don't know what their job was. But anyway during that time when they were cutting some metal away or whatnot, settling torches set off some gases that were generated from some of the cargo we had and started the fire. Now some others may have a different version of how it was but not knowing exactly all was in there and what not but I understand that some of the cargo we had when water go to it or whatever it would generate gasses that were explosive to the point that they would burn. And anyway this fire started and it burned for several hours before it finally got under control. That was a pretty hectic time. Different things. We had the little handy billies going that would call them to pump water and trying to put foam and what not in there to contain the fire. But there was some of the things, we had ammunition of course and we had to flood the ammunition lockers to protect against anything there exploding.

RON: The ship was essentially abandoned after that?

LARRY: That ship yeah we were on bottom very short period of time. The only thing that saved us was we were in shallow water and because when that plane, when that bomb exploded after he got inside the ship and it blew out the top deck and everything down and also the keel of the ship. When we finally floated that ship out of there you could stand topside and look out through the water on the bottom. It was wide open all the way through. And the bow literally was almost blown off of the ship. The port side was the only thing holding it. It dropped to nothing and made crinkles in the metal on the left side where it dropped. But we did build a cofferdam across the thing when they floated it out of there to pump the water out enough to where it would float. Then part of us did live on that boat for a while after they did that. The whole ships company couldn't do it but some of us could stay there to live on it after they tied us up to an old liberty ship out there that had the engine room blown out of it. But we were literally out of the water then. There wasn't anything we could do at all.

RON: Were you the last ship to be hit by a kamikaze in the war?

LARRY: I don't know. I don't know which was the last. According to some information I got this was the last kamikaze attack of the war. But I am not sure whether we were or was it one of those others that were hit during that time. I understand that there were some other ships hit during that attack but it is possible we could have been the last one sunk. I don't really know that.

RON: So you didn't have to get a tent and live on the island? You were able to live on the ship?

LARRY: We lived on the ship for a while until the typhoon. Some of us had to go over and help be mess cooks on this other ship. (What was the name of that ship, Willie). Vesco? We went on to that ship and were mess cooks in order for what we had of our crew to go over there to eat and the first typhoon came out and I went out there on that ship to ride out the typhoon. Boy you talk about seasick that bunch got seasick but it didn't bother us because we were used to the old LST and they are about as rough a riding thing as you will ever find. But after that we were still tied up and when the big typhoon came and we broke lose that is when we finally ended up sunk on a reef. Then all of us did leave the ship and go over on the island and we lived in tents over there until we came back home.

RON: Were you okay with that.

LARRY: Yeah I enjoyed it. We were just like camping out. But it was kind of rough camping out. We had a shortage of food. Had a lot of K rations after that typhoon. I never ate so much cheese in my life as I did then. It likely killed me but I ate cheese. And the other thing was that old pork and egg yolk that we had in those little cans. But if I got that I would trade it for cheese. It was just a time you made out. The war was over. During that time the war was over there about August 11th or something was the first time we heard about I don't remember the exact dates, but it was pretty close around that time, so we were on the island knowing the war was over and whatnot and knowing we would be coming home before long.

RON: You had a girlfriend back home?

LARRY: Oh yeah. Sure did. Opal.

RON: You were a couple before the war?

LARRY: Well we started going together in high school. Ninth grade. We dated on up through high school until I went in the service. But she moved away my last year of high school. Moved up to the big city because ours was a little small town down there but we still stayed in contact and this and that and the other and when I got out of the service and got home, three months later we were married. So I seem like I have been with her all my life.

Turned over the tape and this is where it starts:

LARRY: But my doctor thought it was time for some reason he, because I stress myself pretty hard when I go at it and listening to that he could hear it and he felt that I needed another catherization just to see where I was. But it all turned out good. I am in good shape.

RON: Good for another 20 years.

LARRY : I hope so. I am going to try.

RON: Okay lets get back to "old Opal" here. So during the war did you communicate with each other.

LARRY: Oh yes. Oh yeah we communicated. She would write letters to me and I would write letters to her.

RON: Were they love letters or just friends?

LARRY: Oh they were love letters. We'd tell information but it wasn't just real mushy mushy love letters but it was love letters.

RON: Do you think the war drew you two closer together?

LARRY: Well no I wouldn't say it made us any closer together. Not from my viewpoint anyway. We were separated but I was dating other girls while I was away from home and she would date. They had a lot of dances and so forth. She used to like to dance the jitterbug and all that stuff. And one particular boy that she did quite a bit of that with in Greenville there, but that was just our age and all. We hadn't dried up and died but when I got home though that was all over. In fact we dated every night for three months till we got married. We had to get married to get some rest.

RON: So you didn't have any trouble adjusting when you got back.

LARRY: Well yes to some degree. It was hard for me to adjust down to that lifestyle. I had been in the service to where I still wanted to be on leave and being doing things. Like when you were in the service everytime you went on leave you wanted to do things but when I got home I wanted to be doing things all the time. It was hard for me to settle down to the fact of just living. It took probably a year. I don't know Willie if you had that problem or not but it took a couple of years for me to get settled down to really get serious in trying to get ahead somewhere and what I wanted to be. I was still wanting to have a good time.

RON: 19 years old.

LARRY: 20. I got out of the service I was 20 years old. Opal was 19. And we had a good time. We did a lot of running around here and there and we really had a lot of fun. We didn't have any children. I only have one son and he didn't come along until I was 35 years old. So that 15 years all we did was both of us working and we just traveled around and had a good time. We enjoyed it.

RON: Tell me the goat story.

LARRY: Well that is back to Okinawa. Well a lot of goats were all over the island of Okinawa and we knew that some of the Japs were still back in the hill area there and in the woods and what not and around the base there they had to have guards up on the perimeter area. Well first thing we knew some of the guards were up there and they were a little bit trigger happy because they were scared being up on the mountain there on guard duty by themselves knowing those Japs were around and they were trying to slip in and out of the base and so forth. Well it was to the point that those goats come around there and some of the Japs would even hop along through there like goats, so we were told. But those guys got worried that the minute anything started jumping they shot it. They shot as many goats around there as there was anything else. Shooting at those goats. I can't blame them. If you didn't know what it was you were going to shoot at it. But that got to be a big joke. You might know more about Willie than I did. But I remember that part about the goats up there. It was comical.

RON: I remember during basic training I was carrying a loaded M1 and it was dark at night and I walked around the building a couple of times and I heard noises coming from a can and the third time the top off of this ash can blew off and I emptied a clip. I killed a cat so I understand.

If you had to sum up your entire war time experience, kind of put it into the context of the experience as a whole how would you do that. What would you say?

LARRY: Well to me I came from a small town. I was a homebody. Never really went anywhere else. My dad kept us pretty close around and so forth so I would say going away from home the first time at that age it was a

growing up experience and really some of the things that you come in contact with as well as just living, coming in contact with the female gender, and all of that, that we came in contact with you learn lots that I probably would not have known otherwise. And some of it was amazing. But overall I would say there is just growing up experience. To really learn a lot from that to the fact of value of what really life is all about.

RON: Do you think you would be a different person today if you had not had that experience?

LARRY: Well I don't really know that. I think that experience has been beneficial for me. I do think that. I wouldn't take a million dollars for it. I wouldn't want to do it again for a million dollars but I wouldn't take a million dollars for my experiences there. I have lots of good times that I remember. I made a lot of good friends over the years through there. And that is the good thing about this LST organization. I hadn't seen Willie in 50 years before this and really it brings back a lot of the time in your life that gets old to you until you see your friends again and you start talking and discussing these things. It brings it all back to life to you and it is a very important thing that happened in our lifetime. It is a memorable time that you would never forget. And there are things that you would not have done normally.

RON: Does it bring some emotional aspects.

LARRY: Oh yes. There are some emotions involved there. I don't know just how you would describe the emotions you are feeling about that situation but there are some ties in there with people that you did certain things with. I have a pretty close tie with Oscar Cris. Now he is not in our group here but he is one of the sailors, he was from Ben Hur, West Virginia. He and I were the same size. Well Oscar and I got pretty close. He and I were the

same size. We could wear each others clothes. Sometimes I would go to town if my uniform wasn't ready on liberty I would wear his or he would wear mine. We discussed a lot of personal things. He had his girlfriend that he was going with there in Virginia. And you get to the point that you discuss a lot of personal things with some people and they remain close friends. When we got married I went to West Virginia. We went to Oscar's house. His mother cooked a dinner for us up there. We enjoyed it. But we had just gotten married and after later on two or three years later he came to our house down in South Carolina. But you get a tie to people that you probably would not have gotten tied to except through those circumstances. You seem to always feel like that there are things that happened there that brings you closer together than you would just being an acquaintance some where. Another thing talking about emotions, at the time that plane was coming in and I was looking right at it and I was thinking any minute he is going to start machine gunning. And it scares you. Sometimes your life starts to flash before you at that time and through these experiences to me it made me more aware that there is a god and that there is a hereafter and we have to answer by our conditions. So that brings that closer to me through that one experience right there. And I was afraid I wasn't going to get back home. But in the long run that does make you stronger spiritually as well as physically in that respect. SO all through the experience of the was it has made me more aware of what life really is I guess.

RON: Tell me a little bit about Captain French.

LARRY: I didn't know a lot about him other than I wasn't crazy about him. See I was, he was on with us in the Pacific, I mean in the Atlantic as well but he was the Exec. and when Captain Olson was transferred off and Captain French was made Captain well the whole crew didn't think much of Captain French. And there were several of the crew that jumped ship.

Had to replace several. That is when Willie came aboard at that time when we were having several new personnel come on. So we didn't really think a whole lot about Captain French and he wasn't the type of person that could communicate and relate to people. I never did have any personal contact with him to amount to anything. I just didn't have confidence in him. I didn't think a lot of him.

RON: What medals did you receive?

LARRY: Nothing other than the battle stars that we got for the European Theater war and for the Asiatic Stars for that. Those ribbons were the only two actual combats we were involved in our theaters of war so we didn't get any other medals other than that.

RON: You were never wounded.

LARRY: No I was never wounded.

RON: Came close.

LARRY: Oh yeah came close one time in particular. When you said that it brings to mind we were in West India docks and there was another time when the buzz bombs were coming over. One had hit there the night before. And a lot of the shrapnel was around there in that warehouse. But it blew the warehouse to pot but we were tied up at the other dock next to it and we got off the ship and went over there to hunt souvenirs from the buzz bomb. And I was bent over picking up stuff there and one of them hollered here he comes because we heard one coming and they said here is comes he is coming down and everybody went to run it. Well you know how it is if you are not looking and everybody is running you go arunning too. Well I went running to the edge of the dock and jumped off the dock to get down

behind the concrete. Well there was a bunch of big square long pieces of like two by fours whatnot, but it was big stuff floating in the water right up against each other. Everybody jumped off that to get behind the concrete. I jumped off there and it was where two pieces didn't go together and there was a hole there so big and I hit right in that hole of water. I never did know when that thing hit. I was underwater coming back up. Didn't think about the fact at the time if you had hid in water out there a concussion probably would have killed me. But I thought at the time when I hit that water and I saw the hole and I didn't mind going in it because I would be out of the way of shrapnel but I fell into that hole of water and I will never forget that. That was my closest.

RON: What did you do to celebrate?

LARRY: Well when the war was over we had naturally we wanted to really party around and what not and down in the engine room we got a hold of some pure grain alcohol and we were mixing alcohol with water and lemon powder and sugar and make us, it didn't taste bad, make up that drink. The guys would come down one ladder into the engine room, get their drink mixed up and go up the other ladder. We got a big number of the crew got pretty tipsy over that. Some got out of hand really. So that is the kind of party we had going on there and we got some from this liberty ship we were tied up beside. They had made a big batch of raisen jack. Fermented raisins and other stuff they put in it you know. So we were partying around with that stuff at that particular time when the war was over. That is how we were celebrating. Some got in trouble with it.

RON: Did you?

LARRY: No I really didn't get in trouble. I managed to stay clear of it. I was guilty along with the others but I didn't get them any problem but we had some

though. I got in trouble one time over in France. On the beach. We had a screw on our boat was bent. Well it was my responsibility to replace that screw. We had to, I am jumping from one thing to another but that came to mind along that type stuff, so we had to go down the beach and beach the boat. Tide would go out and then they would come down with a truck with a horse on it to lift it up. Well while we were down there waiting for it killing time nothing doing we were in an isolated part of the beach nothing around us. So we all pulled out what firepower we had around there you know. We had a sub thompson machine gun, several 45's and rifles and we started rolling tin cans and all that playing around there. Sounded like a little war going on and it happened to be that somebody reported it and Captain Lighty who was the commander of all American personnel on that naval beach head, they came down in a jeep. I don't know if you know what an LCPV is or not but it is very small. And here he comes down and why we did this but everybody jumped in the boat like they were going to hide in one of those little boats. All he had to do is stand there and say get out which we did and he told us report aboard his ship and he gave us all a captain's mess for that. Said we were endangering these people on the ships out there. They were about ten miles out on the water. No way we could ever hit them but he did that. Said we shouldn't have been shooting the guns but we didn't think there was really anything wrong with it. We were just having fun. So he gave us a captain's mess and gave us five days bread and water in the brig. We didn't have a brig so they locked us in a paint blocker. You could stand in the middle of it and touch all four walls. It was that small. But we had five days in there and one of the guys that said he wasn't guilty they court martialled him and took his rank away. So that was the only trouble I ever got into if you call that trouble but that don't go on your records as far as court martial or anything like that would. A captain's mess is just a reprimand more than anything else. But it was right there on the coast of France and at night when air raids would occur they would bring us out of

the paint locker so we wouldn't be locked up till the air raid was over and then they would lock us back in there. But it was comical during that five days.

RON: You must have been hungry.

LARRY: Yeah we got hungry. We were getting two slices of bread each meal and then they would march us out and give a drink of water. It was fresh baked bread about that thick. And one of the guys that was in there was a baker off our ship and had asked just to go on to the LCVP just to get off the ship for a little while and they let him do it. He was one of them. He said he wasn't going to eat their baked bread. Held his bread from him and gave him two dollars and it was in Francs but it was a value of two dollars for those two slices of bread. But that was the only two he gave up. He ate them after that.

LINDA: What about at night. I heard they had to turn all the lights out. Is that true.

LARRY: Where are you talking about when you turn all the lights out.

LINDA: When you were in a convoy or something.

LARRY: Oh yes. You were in blackout. You were always in blackout in convoys while we underway at sea. You didn't have any lights showing whatsoever. You had to because you didn't want to be seen by a submarine or anything like that at night. So you were always in blackout condition like that underway.

