

Robert Robertson

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Robert Robertson

Today is March 30th, 1994. My name is Jim Will. I am a volunteer at Midway Village & Museum Center here in Rockford and we are cooperating with a state wide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens that participated in events surrounding World War II.

Today we are in the home of Robert Robertson who lives at 210 April Court, Machesney Park, Illinois. Mr. Robertson served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We're going to ask him some questions about his experiences in that war.

JIM: Can I call you Bob?

BOB: Yes. Please.

JIM: Would you give your full name and date and place of birth to start off with?

BOB: I was born in Detroit, Michigan, on October 19th, 1924. My full name is Robert Travis Robertson.

JIM: How about your parents' names?

BOB: My father was Alexander Robertson and he was born in Rochelle, Illinois and my mother was Maurina Travis Robertson, of course, and she was born in Westchester, Iowa.

JIM: Okay. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

BOB: No. Only child.

JIM: Any special details about your family like did they come over from the "old country" maybe or were they born—

BOB: My dad's grandfather was from Canada and they had lived in Canada. Before the Revolution, they were in North Carolina and then they stayed loyal to the king so they moved to Canada. And my—his wife, my grandmother, was born in Dublin, Ireland.. When she came over as a family, her name was Kennedy.

JIM: Not the famous one. (Laughter)

BOB: Never looked into that. Then my mother's father was born in New York state and her mother was born in Virginia.

JIM: Life, just before the war, what was it like?

BOB: I was busy going to high school in Detroit. I was taking a technical course at Cass Technical High School in Detroit and I was interested in aeronautics. I was into building aircraft models and gas models and that. I had a car. I bought an old Model A. Of course, it wasn't so old in those days, but I worked one summer down here in Illinois for my grandfather who built and repaired grain elevators. I'd saved up enough money so I bought this car and it was—\$25 is what I paid for it.

JIM: Oh my gosh.

BOB: It was in running order. It only had about 20,000 miles on it but the man that had owned it drove back and forth to work in it. The upholstery in it was really a mess inside. He apparently didn't care if he had greasy clothes or not but otherwise it was in really good shape—no rust or anything.

JIM: You tinkered with it.

BOB: Yeah. My dad worked for Ford Motor Company and he managed to get me any spare parts I wanted.

JIM: You say you went to high school in Detroit. When did you graduate from high school? What year?

BOB: When I went in the service.

JIM: Yeah. What year was that?

BOB: 1943. I—It was kind of a funny thing. I, of course, had registered in the draft and all that when I was 18 and I hadn't heard anything more from them. It was getting close to—graduation was about a month and a half away and I kind of wanted to stay for graduation so I called the draft board and asked them about it and they couldn't find any record of it.

JIM: So they put you down right a way.

BOB: I asked them—I said, “Well”.—when they called me I said, “Could I have another twenty days and graduate with my class”? and they said they’d look up my grades and I was all set. I didn’t have to take any more courses or anything so away I went.

JIM: You must have been in high school during Pearl Harbor.

BOB: Yes.

JIM: Do you remember what you were doing that day?

BOB: Yes. We went to church on Sunday morning. Got home around eleven o’clock and we heard it on the radio.

JIM: What was your opinion of what happened?

BOB: Of course, we didn’t know all about the radar follow ups and that but we was all optimistic. My mother wasn’t too happy but I think as a kid you think of the romance of it.

JIM: You betcha.

BOB: I know I had tried to get in the Air Force before you could get in the cadet and maybe even take the—you’d pass a test—a qualification test and then you could get in as an air cadet. Once you reached the age of 18 well then there was no ...

JIM: Whatever they wanted you to do.

BOB: Yeah where they wanted to put you.

JIM: So you enlisted there before you were drafted?

BOB: No. My mother wouldn’t sign for me because I was seventeen so I missed that chance.

JIM: So you were drafted then after.

BOB: Yes.

JIM: When you were drafted, how did you end up in the Navy?

BOB: They gave us a physical. A pretty good physical. That day, apparently, they asked me what branch I wanted to be in and I said Navy.

JIM: You didn’t pick the Air Force or Air Corps.

BOB: See it was the Army in those days. They hadn’t divided it up yet.

JIM: The Army Air Corps.

BOB: Yeah. The Army Air Corps. I didn’t particularly want to go in the Army. I had an uncle that lived with us—my mother’s brother—and he had been in the first World War in the Navy.

JIM: So he recommended it kind of.

BOB: Uh Huh. And he had done very well in the Navy.

JIM: When you were drafted into the Navy—after your physical—where were you sent?

BOB: They gave us nine days off after we were officially in ...

JIM: After your physical.

BOB: Uh huh. After the physical. We had nine days then. And then we had to report at the post office there in Detroit for induction. Then they marched us down to the railroad station and we took the train over to Great Lakes.

JIM: Oh okay. In Chicago.

BOB: North of Chicago.

JIM: Do you have any special memories of basic training?

BOB: I had kind of funny deal. The first night I was there—it was kind of—kind of was—of course, most of us there was—you was either 18 or 19 or else you was 38 or 40. I meant it was just the way they had taken ...

JIM: A big gap.

BOB: The eligible ones you know, so there was a lot of us there that was pretty young. And we—I remember the first night there, I drew guard duty. It wasn’t guard duty. It was a fire watch they called it. And you had to patrol the barracks to look for fire I guess. I think it was just inaugurated to give us something to do.

JIM: What did they train you to do there?

BOB: They trained us to row a boat, rifle practice, marching primarily but there again I got out of that because I had worked in a library—in the Wayne County Library in Michigan there in Detroit before I went in the service and they post things. If you have special qualifications, they post it. I saw on the bulletin board that they wanted a helper for the librarian at Green Bay Station there. I applied for it you know, and everybody said, “Oh heck, you’ll be washing dishes or some—not as nice as it sounded” and, gee, it turned out to be really a nice job. The girl that I worked for was—I suppose she’s in her mid twenties but she was a civilian and she would take the books around to the different hospital wards for guys to read. I’d drive the truck and unload the books and that and then she’d take them around. So I’d just wait ‘til she came back. That got me out of all the marching. All I went to were the “musts”. They call it “musts”, M-U-S-T-S. You would miss everything but—oh, like seamanship, knot tying, and rifle practice, the essentials. So that turned out to be a good deal. Plus I think she really put in a good word for me because when it came to service school, there was only two of us out of that whole company of probably around a hundred people that got to go to service school. Right at that particular time they were really anxious for looking for armed guards on the civilian ships, the Liberty ships and that, cargo ships and they really took a lot of people into that branch which wasn’t very lucrative.

JIM: Immediately in demand.

BOB: Yes, because they were sinking so many of our ships, I suppose.

JIM: After your training at Great Lakes, where were you sent or what did you do?

BOB: I got a—I think I got an eight day leave after boot camp. I think we got eight days and then I went to diesel school at Navy Pier in Chicago. I suppose the school—I imagine it started in August and I went there seven weeks and by that time it was cold—well not real cold—but Navy Pier, if you know where that is, sticking out in the lake. I got pneumonia and they put me in the hospital over at Northwestern University Hospital. I was in there a couple weeks and I was feeling better and then I came down with scarlet fever. That’s contagious so they transported me up to Great Lakes Naval Hospital.

JIM: How long were you there?

BOB: About thirty days.

JIM: About thirty days.

BOB: Anyway it ended up— when I got sent back to Navy Pier, it was about a week before Christmas.

JIM: 1943?

BOB: I got back to Navy Pier. In the meantime, my class had graduated but I did get pretty good grades so I got a rating upgrade to __?__ Machinist’s Mate, 3rd Class. That’s the lowest pay office there is. They asked me if I wanted to stay on their ships company. I said I didn’t know if I could or not, you know the way I felt in the cold weather. They said, “Why don’t you try it.” So I did. I was just making up booklets for the people, introducing them to diesel engines and that. Just a matter of stapling different sheets together. I was there a couple weeks but boy I started—it got cold again. Funny thing, when you’d go to bed at night everybody just went to bed with all their clothes on.

JIM: Didn’t have any heat in the place?

BOB: The wind would blow through. It was all glass like a factory. So then you always hear about—it’s like the library deal. You hear about the chaplains, you know. If you got troubles you take it to him. So I went—I went down to see him but I told him that I just felt that I was gonna—not going to make it without getting sick again. So I don’t know if he had somebody in mind for the job I had or not but—what he give me—he fixed me up and gee, I think it was about three days I got my orders. And so I went out of the frying pan into the fire.

JIM: Where did they send you?

BOB: Solomon, Maryland. Which is about, oh probably eighty miles from Washington, D. C.

JIM: Were you attached to any special Naval unit then?

BOB: Yes. I—we went well it was a school there. They had a school there for diesel mechanics on the particular types of engines they had there for the landing craft. So I went to school there and then, I think it was just a week but it was just on a General Motors six cylinder diesel engines.

JIM: Just certain ones.

BOB: Mm hm. And I went to school there for a week and then they assigned me to a crew and what they did—I was destined for an LCT Landing Craft Tanks and ...

JIM: What was the training like?

BOB: It was hands on actually—worked on the engines tearing them apart and putting them back together again. They formed a crew there of a—everybody wasn't rated but they had one for a boatswain mate, quarter master, a gunner's mate and a Motor Machinists Mate. So there were four of us in the basic crew. So we went ...

JIM: So you were the Motor Machinists Mate?

BOB: Yes. They assigned us then to an LCT which was a training crew and for two weeks we were the trainees. They'd be training us. The next two weeks we'd train another crew.

JIM: Passed down to somebody else. Training was like hands on actual out on the water.

BOB: Yes. We'd go on maneuvers __?__ all the time Then when it became our turn to teach, they moved us down to Little Creek, Virginia, which is right outside of Norfolk. Then we really went on maneuvers all the time. We'd go out into the ocean and there was an amusement park there. I don't know what the name of it was. They had roller coasters there. Of course, this was during the winter so they weren't opened. They'd have their army maneuvers where they'd be shooting off tear gas and stuff like that. Then we staid—It was a total of four weeks—two weeks as a trainee and two weeks as the trainer. Then soon as that was finished they shipped us up to New York, Pier 92 in New York.

JIM: New York City?

BOB: New York City. Then they moved us out to Lido Beach, Long Island, to take training and for shooting all the small arms and anti-aircraft guns that those ships were carrying.

JIM: Where about on Long Islands? The far eastern portion?

BOB: It was in the southeast part of Long Island. Lido Beach was a real snazzy resort, I guess, during non-war times. It was probably a 10 or 12 story building.

JIM: Training for small arms. Did everybody have to take them.

BOB: Mm hm.

JIM: Everybody participated.

BOB: Mm hm. They had towed targets by airplanes. Fire 20 mm is what we fired.

JIM: Oh. I see. How about ship targets?

BOB: No, just aircraft. And they hit, of course, you just had one chance, you know. So you'd—one day the pilots quit because they started out too close to hitting them. And then they issued us gear. They issued us winter clothing. Up 'til then they'd given you no idea if you was going to go to the Pacific or Europe. They issued us all clothing what we called foul weather gear, all lined—really, really good clothing. They issued us each a carbine—the regular standard army 30 caliber carbine. Then they took us back to Pier 92. I don't think that was such a funny place. The Admiral that ran it was really a nut. I guess him and Walter Winchell was ...

JIM: That was in New York.

BOB: Mm hm. They made us have a bag inspection. A bag inspection was all your clothing and gear and, of course, in those days we had a mattress, two blankets and a pillow issued to us and a hammock and we had to keep that with us all the time. Well, we had the darn bag layout and like if you were short anything like a hair brush, and they issued you a hair brush in the first place and you didn't have a hair brush, you had to buy another one and all that paraphernalia. Then they made us wear—instead of wearing dungarees which were overalls we had to wear dress blue uniforms which was __?__. We had to wear boots and they had leggings that you lace up. They took us and marched us over to __?__ and in these funny uniforms from what people usually see sailors you know. We didn't have any of the white striping or anything on them. Then we had to march over to—I can't tell you the pier number but it was where the LST was docked. It was really funny because people would really stare at us because they wanted to know what army it was or what Navy it was.

JIM: The enemy. During any of this training did you ever get leaves or passes?

BOB: No.

JIM: They kept you right there. Did you meet any friends or make any friends?

BOB: Not really. Not really.

JIM: Nobody that you still keep contact with.

BOB: Now that isn't true. I guess, after they formed the nucleus crew, I kept in contact with the gunner's mate.

JIM: What was his name?

BOB: Frank Moore.

JIM: Okay. Did the Navy have assigned unit numbers or names like the Army had for different groups?

BOB: You don't mean the serial number.

JIM: No. I mean like the 3rd Army.

BOB: No.

JIM: The Navy didn't have designated names.

BOB: No.

JIM: Okay. When you were in New York were you assigned to an LCT?

BOB: Yes, we had received our—that we'd be on LCT 663.

JIM: Then what happened after that? Where'd you go.

BOB: Well, we got on board the LST and they gave us an option if we wanted to become a part of the ships crew the LST crew that is, we'd be able to have a better place to sleep and that and we'd eat the same food as everybody. Otherwise they—when they were carrying troops—and they had some troops on board, that they ate at a mess after us.

JIM: You showed me a picture early of the ship that carried the LCT. What was the name of that ship?

BOB: The LST?

JIM: No. The ship that carried it—Remember the photo...

BOB: See, I was assigned to an LCT and the ship that carried us over was an LST. They're a commissioned ship but they didn't have names. Just numbers.

JIM: You were telling me early that ship was—Tell me a little bit more about that ship.

BOB: When we got over to—The ship going over carried—I don't know how many—a bunch of trucks inside what they called the tank deck which was an enclosed area. It also carried oil. They used the oil for ballast. When we got over to England they took the oil off, you know. Then they could use it. We went up first to Scotland and they had to form a convoy to go back down because I guess there were subs in the Irish Sea—German subs. So we had to wait for a convoy for a couple of days and then there were some other landing craft there by that time. We went down then to Wales to ___?___ and then we went around the very tip of England to ___?___ and then we went up the ___?___ River and they launched our LCT from the deck of the LST.

JIM: Do you remember about when this was? Do you remember the dates? Was it early in '44 maybe?

BOB: Oh, yes! We left Boston Harbor on March 10th, put into Halifax, Nova Scotia for a day and then they formed a convoy March 12th. Then, as I was saying, on March 28th and the next morning we entered the ___?___.

JIM: Okay.

BOB: And went to Rosa (?) Scotland. We stayed at anchor there for two days and then went to Port Talbot in Wales.

JIM: This was just a stop over?

BOB: Mm hm. And then we went to the Rall (?) River on April 7th, and the LCT was launched from the deck of the LST. On April 19th _____?_____our engines were started for the first time and on April 21st she had her trial run and compasses were set.

JIM: You had a lot to do then to get everything started up.

BOB: Yes.

JIM: What were your duties on board?

BOB: Take care of all the mechanical equipment.

JIM: Like for instance. Can you describe what daily work on the ship was?

BOB: Since we got aboard we painted our engine room. The LCT was propelled by three six cylinder diesel engines and we had two—almost like a big lawn mower to raise the ramp. They had a ramp, the bow ramp. We had a pump, a water pump on a single cylinder Briggs and Stratton engine and then we had two fire engines. They were outboard motors is what they were but they had a high pressure steam—it had an intake. You put a hose over the side and it was high pressure but they were temperamental because—and they were Johnson outboard motors.

JIM: You maintained them.

BOB: Yeah, we had to start them about every day to see that they run alright. And then besides that one of the important things was the anchor. What we'd do with this anchor—when it was going in to hit the beach, we'd drop the anchor on the way and then when you left and it was maybe a quarter mile or so you'd stop it and service it and this... to pull yourself off the beach. It had six-cylinder continental (?) gasoline engines.

JIM: It had a lot of engines on it.

BOB: Yes, like I say, we had two generators.

JIM: Over in England—when you were over in England, they didn't give you any idea what was ahead.

BOB: Yes.

JIM: They did?

BOB: Mm hm.

JIM: When did they tell you their plans?

BOB: Well, they never did tell us until we were actually at sea.

JIM: Just before D-Day. How long did it take to organize that—get all their ships together in the channel?

BOB: Really not long. They came from different places. One interesting thing was, prior to the invasion, we would go on maneuvers. We went one

time when it was getting close to D-Day we'd take the soldiers out and go down and they had a beach there that they had explosives rigged in the ground and they'd be shooting machine guns.

JIM: Give them ...

BOB: And gas. Know that we, our shippers, the captains of these LCTs were mostly young college graduates and ours was a little older. He was around 28. And we went in and hit the beach and when this Colonel wanted us to __?__, Army Major, wanted us to land was __?__. You could see the guys were going off in really deep water.

JIM: This was on D-Day?

BOB: No. No. This Major—our skipper wouldn't do it. He __?__—they could walk off and only get wet up to their knees and the Major, he jumped out and the Skipper said, "Well, I'm in charge of this vessel and I'll do it my way." He really stood up to the Major.

JIM: Now how many on the crew of the LCT?

BOB: Well, normally it was twelve but they increased it to around sixteen on the invasion. They must have had about sixteen.

JIM: Why the extra?

BOB: Well, it gave you—if you could have three men like diesel men—whenever we were under way they had to __?__ and that way you get your watches so you wouldn't have so much time.

JIM: Okay.

BOB: We did a lot of interesting things on maneuvers because these were relatively new type of craft—the type six and they were designed to make bridges out of because they had an open stern end with the ramp down you could put the ramp of our ship on to the back end of another one and you could lash them together.

JIM: Single file?

BOB: Right. I don't know if they ever used it or not. We never did. Then we went out on night maneuvers one time. The soldiers all had been issued ammunition and we figured we was going ...

JIM: That it was the real thing.

BOB: Yeah. Because it was at night, you know, and that's terrible when you're out there with no lights

JIM: How did you feel at that time?

BOB: ___?___. Because they seemed to be doing such dumb things from my standpoint—of course, you look back and think they was preparing you ...

JIM: At that time.

BOB: Yeah. And then they came and they issued us all army clothing because I guess they had trouble at Anzio where the Germans would try to pick off the sailors, you know. I guess that was the reason. They gave us regular wool and all these clothes that we got had gas protectors.

JIM: Flammable or flame proof.

BOB: No They just—well like the shirts were regular buttons and then there was a flap inside and I think that they must have really planned on the German's using gas. Because we, besides that, they gave us another like a coverall and we had to wear that over all the other stuff. Then we were issued a—these were like big garbage bags that was clear on one end and then khaki on the other. If we got gassed you had—it gave you a chance to pull this thing on before you put the rest of your clothes on. So we had that . Then we had to wear a life jacket which —they're really cumbersome. Big old Mae West things, you know and boy you really got warm with the gas protective clothing. It wouldn't breath like regular clothing.

JIM: Is there anything else happen on maneuvers that might come to mind?

BOB: Well, the LST 507 and two others were sunk by German torpedo boats. We were there but we didn't know what was happening. You could see the fires and the shells exploding in the air. Some of them looked like they were coming our way.

JIM: They had troops out there?

BOB: Yes. They lost a lot of men. That was called Operation Tiger.

JIM: Is that why they never said anything about it? Never recorded it or anything until afterwards?

BOB: Yeah.

JIM: They really kept that a secret?

BOB: Our commander thought that probably we were still listed as being in the crew of that LST 507. They advised us to wire home. All it said was disregard the information. Nothing else about it.

JIM: Talk about writing home or wiring home—how about mail or packages. Did you get a lot?

BOB: We were prepared then for the invasion. Then they take you out and you're just following the guy ahead of you so you really don't know what direction you're in all the time 'cause you're always changing directions.

JIM: The guy in front had to know where he was going.

BOB: Yeah. He had probably—Most of the time he had like a small vehicle—small warship ahead of us like a patrol craft or a PT Boat or something like that—something to kind of keep you in line. Then in May, we went about every day some place.

JIM: On maneuvers.

BOB: Mm hm. We got the extra crew aboard then. We got this even before then but then with additional ones plus the other ones we'd gotten earlier we had a total of fifteen men. Now I got these dates from the ships log. I wrote this menu; down so I know I'm right on the dates. When we got the extra guys we had another ensign. Up to the time we just had the one officer. Then we had an ensign. His name was George Edwards and he came from down by Peoria, Fairfield, Illinois. My uncle ran a grocery store in Fairfield, which is a town of 200 people and, of course, he knew my uncle.

JIM: No kidding.

BOB: Anyway, on May 23rd, we began to load the LSTs with supplies.

JIM: For the crossing.

BOB: Mm hm.

JIM: That was pretty early wasn't it?

BOB: Mm hm

JIM: When did you find out you were going to France?

BOB: When they handed out the sheets and our money. ___?___Eisenhower ___?___.

JIM: Okay. You got money from—everybody got money

BOB: Mm hm.

JIM: French?

BOB: I don't think it was really pay money. I think they just gave us that money so we'd have it.

JIM: To use over there.

BOB: It was like \$20 worth.

JIM: On the morning of June 6 of '44?

BOB: Well let me go back.

JIM: Okay. You want to back up.

BOB: On the night of June 1st we went over to Tor Bay. We were in Tor Bay which is a coastal bay. We pulled up to a ___?___ and loaded on thirteen jeeps, two two-ton trucks, a weapons carrier which was a smaller size truck and a water trailer and seventy-one enlisted personnel and two officers also came aboard. They were members of the 1st Division. Most of them were combat engineers. One group was going to set up a field hospital and the other group was going to blow a hole in the sea wall. All the soldiers that we had on board had been in other invasions.

JIM: Oh, they did? Like Italy and North Africa. They knew what to do.

BOB: Yeah. Then we went back over to—after loading up on the 1st, we went back to Dartmouth—camouflage netting over the tank deck so you wouldn't be able to tell if we had anything on board. Of course, that was on the 1st. At 19:20 which is 7:20 on the evening of June 3rd, we left the anchorage with the rest of our flotilla of LCTs. I think there were twenty some LCTs in our flotilla.

JIM: What did they do on the 3rd?

BOB: We was under our way. When we went through the town of Dartmouth, all the people ... We joined the escort ships out in the channel and sailed

along the coast taking an eastern course. By this time other LCTs and LCIs and LCNs would get in the line.

JIM: Now LCIs that was the infantry:

BOB: Mm hm. They looked more like at ship.

JIM: What was the other one, LC ...

BOB: LCN would carry one tank. There was just on tank (Inaudible. Jim and Bob talking at the same time). Very small steel boat. They had LCVPs which is Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel. They could carry one jeep and so many soldiers. They were wooden—plywood. They had one engine where as the LCNs would have two engines

JIM: Okay. They were all different sizes.

BOB: Yes. We had escorts. It was getting rough—the channel got rough and on the 4th (Both talking. Inaudible).

JIM: There was a storm?

BOB: Right. So we received word by signal that it was to be postponed until 5:30 a.m. on June 5th. It was set back twenty-five hours so that it would occur on June 6th at 6:30. But obviously we had been out there parading up and down the channel.

JIM: Waiting for the weather to clear.

BOB: Mm hm. So we went in to a harbor and staid for—I don't know. It wasn't all night. It was probably six hours or so. Then we started out again. I think then we headed west. We were supposed to be in the eleventh wave in the first time so that we would be up close to the obstructions. ___?___ is where we staid. When we left in the morning—we again got underway we again formed the convoy and headed east in the channel toward Dover. In the afternoon we turned around and headed back the other way again staying in about the center of the channel. That night we then went south towards France. At 6:15 in the morning of June 6 we sighted the coast of France. At that time we could hear heavy fire in the distance. Huge flights of bombers and fighter planes were going over us. We proceeded along the coast line for about two hours all the time we kept passing warships which were firing on the beach. We staid about five miles off shore when we came to sort of a shallow bay in the coast line. We were ordered to cut our speed and circle around until we received orders to hit the beach. At 0920 we received orders to go into the beach so the other LSTs and I got under way.

There twelve ships of all sizes of our U. S. LCTs and the British LCTs . We were the second ship in line in our wave. We followed it immediately behind the LCT 777 which was our sister ship and was the flag ship of our wave. At 10:30 we were about three miles from the beach. The triple 7 hit a mine. The mine hit in the aft section and cracked the 777 in half. Many men were blown off the ship including all the men in the ___?__. Fortunately though two LCVPs rescue boats were near by and came immediately to pick up the survivors. Our orders were not to stop. We noticed an increase in shell explosions around us and they continually increased as we neared the beach. We could then make out clearly the figures of the men on the beach and the burning vehicles and gun flashes. A control boat pulled along side and ordered us to hit the beach as close as possible ___?__. We beach at that location at 11:55 and the ramp was lowered and the vehicles were starting to debark. The water then was about three feet deep at the end of the ramp so that it would come to the hoods of the jeeps. The vehicles were fairly waterproof but nevertheless some of them stalled as they hit the water. We figured it was because they had disconnected the fan belts. The first jeep was just leaving the ramp when three shells hit around us and landed near the bow and one near the stern on the port side and one close to the stern on the starboard side. The shrapnel thrown by these shells splattered the ship killing our executive, killed Ensign Edwards and a soldier.

JIM: That was the new Ensign?

BOB: Yes. And wounding Ensign Kurtz. That was our acting skipper and quartermaster Thomas so all was on top of the ___?__got hit.

JIM: Where were you at?

BOB: I was on the throttles. You could control the engines. In fact that is the only way you can do it.

JIM: At the rear?

BOB: Yes. It's a little square cubicle.

JIM: Was it—Did you have some armor protection on these ships.

BOB: They claim (inaudible) See that's the ___?__ over there.

JIM: Oh, okay. Like a square box.

BOB: It sets on top. Like this was—on this side it was the officers quarters ___?__ and on the opposite

side it was the crews quarters and then there was this where the toilets were and the showers and then on the opposite side was the stove for cooking. The rest was storage area. There were several other soldiers killed. They went out ___?__.

JIM: They had good rescue ships? A couple of them picked up survivors.

BOB: Yeah. After that at fifty second intervals shells would light around us and they came in salvos of three and landed at fifty second intervals almost to the second and it was said later that the shells were from a German ___?__ located several miles away. Well, anyway we were up on the beach and we unloaded about half the jeeps and we got rid of the two truck which we were happy about because they were carrying explosives for blowing a hole in the sea wall. And then we were—the water was getting deeper for the jeeps to get out so we tried to back around and hit the beach square again instead of getting off at an angle. In doing that we caught the anchor cable which we dropped the anchor a quarter of a mile back. That was when ___?__ caught the anchor on the propeller. We couldn't go forward or we couldn't go backward.

JIM: So then what?

BOB: We tried revving up the engines to see if they could cut the cable. Then the ___?__ was we couldn't decide if we cut the cable by one of the other screws ___?__ propeller or a German shell landed on it.

JIM: Oh, okay.

BOB: The only thing I knew about—we went back out then. We went to the hospital ship then.

JIM: Which was out in the channel.

BOB: Yeah. We took the—The skipper had a hole right in the front of his helmet but he didn't have the chin strap on it, you know, and it just knocked the helmet and put a line—just like someone had taken a red pencil and made a line across his ...

JIM: You never got hurt did you?

BOB: No. We had one of the gunner's mates got hit in the hand and then the quartermaster, he's the signal man also, he got hit in the butt. (Laughter)

JIM: Sore bottom. Not bad I presume.

BOB: No. We took him to the hospital ship and they dressed their wounds and they came back. Then we had to—we didn't only go in without an anchor but we carried a spare anchor so they told us to put the anchor out and then they said not to go in. By then it was getting toward dusk.

JIM: You had to wait for the next day then?

BOB: Yeah. There really wasn't much night. It was really funny. It wouldn't get dark over there until eleven o'clock

JIM: Oh, yeah?

BOB: Mm hm. Of course, that was near the longest day of the year, June 6th. But it really stays light a long time. They wouldn't send us in in the dark. I don't know. I suppose they didn't want to have them ramming into each other.

JIM: Now at this time you only had part of your cargo unloaded.

BOB: Yes. We only had—we got rid of the big ones but we still had probably six or eight jeeps.

JIM: Do you remember what happened the next day?

BOB: One thing that I thought was really marvelous—well, there were a couple things. Going into the beach, the cruiser—the heavy cruiser, Augustus, which was a neat looking ship—it had a clipper bow, you know, a real pointed bow and it was a (blank for a short time) and then when we was on the beach there and these jeeps would be stalling when they'd get to ___?___ there was some soldier driving it a big “cat” and he was really impressive—pulling those jeeps. At least everything that was falling there.

JIM: Then the day after, did you have to go back in then?

BOB: Yes.

JIM: Finish the job.

BOB: We attached our cable ___?___ the day before ___?___. I think the things that we were hauling in weren't, you know, ___?___ field hospital.

JIM: Did you find that the medical treatment was excellent, superb or adequate?

BOB: We would haul out wounded and we had a Chief Pharmacists' Mate which is like a combat ...

JIM: Medic like?

BOB: Medic. And he would—I mean when they would bring them on on cots or stretchers, some of them were in real bad shape. He would give out—to kill the pain.

JIM: Morphine?

BOB: Morphine. And ___?___ presently the hospital ship came by. It seemed like they took their time.

JIM: Best they could at the time.

BOB: That evening when we went off and anchored by ourselves, just at dusk there was some DC3s came over and they dumped out parachutes but if they were men or supplies, I don't know. I thought they was awfully low if they were men because they couldn't have been more than ___?___.

JIM: Now on the beach, you're talking about.

BOB: Mm hm. The Germans would—every night and they did this for a long time—they'd come over and drop what we called chandelier flares—a whole group that I assume was magnesium ___?___ on fire and you could read a newspaper under them.

JIM: Light up the area.

BOB: They really fired a lot. Our ships ...

JIM: Were there a lot of German enemy planes?

BOB: Never saw any of them but one night—I think it was the next night or so they strafed the beach and you could ___?___ you could—most of the time the tracer bullets were going up from the ground up but these were coming out of the sky. All the gunner's mates were eager to shoot and we—that first night we just anchored ourselves and didn't have anything to shoot at. The next night we had three men—we had 20mm cannons is all we had like overgrown machine guns. We would have three men hand over the ammunition. One guy would be the trainer and pull the trigger, and the other guy would put up the—as soon as it was empty would put up another magazine.

JIM: From the top down.

BOB: Yeah. The next night ___?___ was right close. We were again anchored by ourselves. We were trying to get away from the big ships cause they were shooting up there. So we were sitting back there and also didn't have a gun station cause everybody had to be out when they called GQ, they had to be right in the ___?___ there was a JU88. That's a medium sized bomber, German, and I'm sure he was probably dropping mines and he must have thought because there was nobody out there where we were and he came over and he was painted white underneath but you could see the pilot. He was looking. Our guys got chewed out before for shooting without waiting for the skipper to tell them when to shoot so they had radio telephone communications and he said that he (of course, ones could argue either way) but I don't think he had the button pressed and the guys never got the word.

JIM: So they sat there.

BOB: Otherwise the only time we saw a German plane was—probably ten or twelve days after that, a Messerschmidt 109 came out of the clouds. Nobody fired at him. You could sure tell what it was. And then a P47 came down and they down and they really opened up on him.

JIM: Oh, my gosh. Your own plane.

BOB: Yeah.

JIM: He was chasing the German?

BOB: Must have been. We saw a couple of them crash although they weren't shooting at them but I guess one of them was on the beach there and it had a projectile in the engine but it didn't explode.

JIM: They had to disarm it then.

BOB: Yeah. There were some big shells, too, like battle ships—fourteen inch or so but they had flagged them. You'd walk fast to go by them.

JIM: I'll bet. Say after he beach was secured—first of all, you went in on which beach?

BOB: Utah.

JIM: After the beach was secured you had a chance to go ashore you mentioned earlier.

BOB: Mm hm.

JIM: What did you do there?

BOB: Well, you see we would dry out. When we were carrying gasoline, we'd go out and we'd just wait 'til the tide went out and go in as far as we could and then when the tide went out ___?___ otherwise ___?___. Because we'd carry five thousand of there ___?___.

JIM: You didn't like that either.

BOB: No.

JIM: I can understand that. After you got off on shore—after the area was secured, I guess.

BOB: We'd go around looking for ___?___.

JIM: Looking the area over.

BOB: Some of the other LCTs would be there in our group ___?___.

JIM: You mentioned you found a German helmet.

BOB: Well, I didn't get that until later on.

JIM: It wasn't there.

BOB: When Bresser entered there in Brittany the Germans—they took—or we took our soldiers took rifles and helmets and had them all in different piles. They let you take one of each. You could always trade them or sell them to the merchant. They were wild to buy anything.

JIM: I suppose. What were your duties after D-Day? Where were you sent then?

BOB: We stayed right there on the beach 'til—it must have been—it was after the storm—A big storm came on June 19th. We really—In fact they brought a Liberty type ship in and beached it just to get ammo off it because it was getting that close. ___?___ we got washed up on the beach.

JIM: I heard stories or somewhere I read, they had regular piers out to—after the storm.

BOB: Yeah. That's___?___ steel. Most of them were busted up. They were all shook loose and that but it didn't take long to get them back up. But what they also did, they had about eight or nine of these Liberty ships—I call them Liberty ships. They're freighters

and they brought them in and blew the bottom out of them to act as a breakwater.

JIM: Oh. To make part of the pier.

BOB: Mm hm.

JIM: There's a picture that looks like you beached.

BOB: Yeah. That's when we got blown up on the beach—where the Army tried to get us out.

JIM: Okay. Did they ever get you out?

BOB: Yeah.

JIM: With balloons?

BOB: Well, the bulldozer pushing and there was a tug ran out a cable for us and between the two of them they pulled us. We hauled all kinds of stuff—like, I said, nurses—one time we had a whole bunch of nurses on board.

JIM: The hospital they set up.

BOB: Someplace. We never knew ... but that was when they went off on the ramp. They had trucks waiting for them. then—like say, we hauled all kinds of things from the Liberty ships. The LSTs would generally beach themselves. They had the same kind of deal where they'd __?__ and we didn't try to unload them.

JIM: From France, where did you go? How long were you in France?

BOB: We were in France until—we were on the beach head until it was in July. Then we went back to England because some of our tanks had been pierced and they had water in them and they were low in the water. We went back and they welded those up. We went ...

JIM: Did you make a lot of trips back or not?

BOB: No. Just that one. We went with—to meet Patton. We had—I don't remember if we had gas on or lube oil. We had a bunch of lube oil, I know and I can't remember ...

JIM: __?__, I suppose.

BOB: Mm hm. But they went on and they captured everything up to Brest because the Germans just retreated on to Brest. They fixed up the holes in the ship and we went back to the beach. We was carrying big semis. They had like machine shops in them. The Army did. They were Army and welding shops. The truck part wasn't there—just the trailer part. I think there was one truck. Anyway, we had to dry out because they couldn't get them off except one at a time. Then they'd take it out and park it someplace. We'd carry cranes. Very seldom tanks. A couple time we had tanks.

JIM: How long were you in England?

BOB: It was when the "Buzz" bombs were coming over. We must have been there five or six days.

JIM: You weren't anxious to stay then.

BOB: No.

JIM: Where'd you go from there?

BOB: We went back to Morlaix, a big railroad base.

JIM: With Patton's equipment and supplies.

BOB: Yes. We stayed there. We had some funny incidents. Do you want to hear about them?

JIM: Sure.

BOB: One time we went out and there was a Brazilian ship came in loaded with coffee. It was a gift from the people of Brazil to France. They came in one hundred pound bags. Great big bags. Maybe there were fifty pounds. But anyway they were really big bags but they were really poor quality. The damn coffee would leak on the deck. They were green beans. They weren't roasted. We let the people—they'd see all that coffee. We would just sweep it over. So they came and we let them on board with their dishpans or whatever to get that coffee. Just about that time, we must have had about two hundred of them on the deck, some old lady fell between the ship and the sea wall but she—It was shallow water. It was only three feet deep or so. And then she couldn't even get down because she was wedged in there. The ship was here and the sea wall was at an angle and she was hollering her head off. Just then our group commander came up and he was raging that we was doing that and he said, "Get those people out." It really was tough to get them off if

they didn't have there bag full yet. We finally got them off then we'd fill their containers.

JIM: Dished it up.

BOB: Right. One time we—I remember it was in November. It was when the Army and Navy football game was on. I always remember that because we could get that on our ship's radio over there.

JIM: Who'd you cheer for?

BOB: Navy. They brought down a bunch of Senegalese. They were French troops.

JIM: From Africa.

BOB: From Africa. They were all big guys. All with like scars cut in and everything, you know. There must have been—there was three of us carrying them and I imagine there was over a thousand. There was a lot of them. They hadn't been paid like months and they were revolting. The paymaster was on board and he was scared to death. They issued us all side arms ___?__. He showed them a bag full of money and he said when they got on the transport that they'd give them their pay which I hope they did. Boy, I was up on the bow this day. I don't know why. I was in the bow and brought up the ramp. He really scared me because I didn't know that to do with him. I told him, "Go down. Go down." He said "Just want to see. Just want to see." I said, "Okay". He could speak pretty good English. He told me they hadn't fed them that day or anything. So I said, "Well, gee, we can give you something to eat." We had a bunch of processed cheese in gallon cans. It was like Velveeta. We had some—because they couldn't eat meat. I don't understand that. (Not audible. Both talking at once. Anyway we gave them a bunch—we unloaded a bunch of canned goods we didn't like. This was all when we were at Morlaix. We had a bunch of French that had been down to Africa. DeGaulle was there welcoming these people. He must have been kissing somebody or something because he was head and shoulders above the majority of the people. The Army had a band there.

JIM: This is a photo of unloading French refugees.

BOB: Mm hm.

JIM: Okay.

BOB: That's what I call them. They're really service people.

JIM: Oh, okay. French.

BOB: Mm hm. They couldn't even get into the bay where we normally had an anchorage there. It was a big French liner and they ...

JIM: They were taken care of.

BOB: You could see they built a ramp for them and everything. One poor guy—when we were in the channel the sea was running. It wasn't a storm but we still had waves probably eight foot waves. But, Geez, one French man—we had a terrible time because they couldn't come down the cargo ramp. Normally troops and that go down the cargo ramp then you can jump over. They had a gangway that they had and, boy, we had to keep the bow of the ship up against there. When the waves would go up, they had to jump just at the right time ___?__. One guy dropped his bicycle. He was carrying his bicycle when he jumped. He made a grab for it but it went over. Geez, he cried. Poor guy. You even felt sorry for him. (Laughter)

JIM: See, there's the railroad bridge.

BOB: Yeah. That's the big one.

JIM: Mm hm.

BOB: So we staid there and we were going to have a big party. Those kind of things were interesting. It broke the monotony.

JIM: Do you remember any humorous things outside of the guys not firing at the—of course, that wasn't humorous at that time but looking back, I suppose ...

BOB: We got a kick out of it.

JIM: After your stay in France, you mentioned you were ...

BOB: We were going to have a big party on New Year's Eve. Well, it was New Year's Eve day. We made a deal with an old gal there in the black market to get champagne. What they were doing then—It was rough crossing the channel ___?__. The Germans had subs out there. They were going to have a big—I can't think what they call it. It was a landing ship. They could carry three LCTs in it and they could float them in. They still had these for like the Army. We were headed up We didn't have any cargo. They didn't have any ships in there. We were going to go up to—up to Morlay for the night and we got about half way there and there was two other ships

coming the opposite way and they said then we had orders to go back to England.

JIM: You didn't have your party. You had to go back to England?

BOB: Then we had to re-paint the ship and fix everything up. They tore out the engines and put in new ones and was sent to the Pacific.

JIM: You didn't have to go to the Pacific, did you?

BOB: Yes.

JIM: Did you? Where were you sent—from England then?

BOB: No. I came back and went to diesel school at Fairbanks Morse in Beloit up here.

JIM: Oh, okay.

BOB: I put in for that. That was another thing where they say that you never get what you ask for. I asked for that because it was close to Shirley.

JIM: And you got it. You knew Shirley at that time. This is his wife.

BOB: Oh yeah.

JIM: When did you meet her. You knew her before?

BOB: Yeah. When I was working for my granddad on the grain elevators. Her dad owned the country elevator and we met ...

JIM: Near Detroit?

BOB: Oh, no. By Ashton, Illinois.

JIM: Ashton. Oh sure.

BOB: She lived out in the country.

(A considerable blank space on the tape.)

JIM: Now you didn't get married until after the war.

BOB: Right.

JIM: I think this about winds it up.

BOB: We corresponded.

JIM: You did. Did you get a lot of letters from her?

BOB: Mm hm.

JIM: Did you write her a lot?

BOB: Pretty good, I think. My dad wrote.

JIM: Do you remember the end of the war? VJ Day.

BOB: Yes.

JIM: Where were you?

BOB: I was on Okinawa.

JIM: Oh, were you. Out in the Pacific?

BOB: I was going to be on an LSM. It was a new one that they came up with toward the end of the war. A brand new ship. It was a little smaller than an LST. It had an open tank deck. It was sort of like an overgrown LCT, I guess.

JIM: A lot of celebrating at that time or not over there?

BOB: Well, they celebrated the first one that was dropped. The first bomb. The ships were all—the battleships and that were all in Buckner Bay. That was really a sight. You couldn't believe it. All the battleships and these big aircraft carriers—generally you see one or two, you know. Boy, they were all in there. There were all the big cruisers. It was really something to see. When they dropped the first bomb they figured it was all over and they were shooting of flares and these—they got a shell—like the battle ship has got a shell. I forget what they call that stuff.

JIM: Like fireworks.

BOB: Yeah. A Jap plane came in and torpedoed the USS Pennsylvania.

JIM: Oh, my gosh.

BOB: So that—the actual night—We was on beach. We stayed there and it wasn't much of a celebration.

JIM: You just—quiet thinking.

BOB: Yeah. We was living in a tent. We must have got there the end of July and I didn't get any mail from when I left home until I got on ship in October.

JIM: You went straight from the U. S. over to Okinawa.

BOB: Yeah. We went to the Philippines and they had dysentery there and they wouldn't let us off so they took us—we were supposed to get off there and they took us up (*blank space on tape*).

JIM: VJ Day. After the bomb was dropped, you didn't do much celebrating?

BOB: No. We got put in a camp that the CBs had built and it was tents—these pyramid style tents because it was warm weather there. We just kind of rolled up the tent sides so the air would circulate. They warned us about snakes. They had poisonous snakes on Okinawa and that they were around and I was sleeping just with my shorts on, laying on the floor and, God, I felt something on my back. I hollered and said, "I think it was a snake." Everybody got up, you know, and looking for it. It was a little rat. We had all our gear and our clothes and that in the middle of the thing __?__. I think that's where it was. I could feel that on my back for a week. Not that it scratched me or anything but I could just ...

JIM: Okay. At the end of the war when the Japanese finally surrendered, do you remember that?

BOB: Yes, I do. They were still holding out on Okinawa for quite a while and what they'd do there at that base—Camp Costello they called it—they'd issue them grenades and rifles with ammunition on Sundays and they'd go souvenir hunting. On the south end of the island there was an old castle—Cheree Castle—and there were just all kinds of caves down there. Those guys would go up there and look in those caves for Jap souvenirs.

JIM: How about the Japs. Were they out of the caves?

BOB: No they were still in there. It was really scary around there because there were so many places they could hide. They had guys on guard duty our guys—and one night the guy said there was somebody and he shot about ten rounds. Scared the heck out of everybody. Nobody could go back to sleep.

JIM: I suppose not. One thought I had in mind—being on Okinawa, so close to Japan. Was that close?

BOB: Yes, to me it was.

JIM: Did you hear or feel the atom bomb at all?

BOB: No.

JIM: You couldn't. It was still too far away. Never thought to ask anybody that. Okay, I guess we're just about done here. Do you have any contact with the Veterans' Administration?

BOB: No.

JIM: You were never injured in the service?

BOB: No.

JIM: Have you ever gone to a VA Hospital?

BOB: For myself? No.

JIM: How did your family support you when you were in the service? Were they against you going in?

BOB: No.

JIM: They let you go.

BOB: Mm hm.

JIM: And you wrote a lot to your wife—your fiancée

BOB: Yeah. My mother and dad.

JIM: Well, Bob, I guess that about winds it up. I enjoyed talking with you. Would you like to say good-bye?

BOB: Good-bye. I'm a history buff and it meant a lot to me to see something like that and I don't mind talking about it.

JIM: Any last thoughts? If you had to do it over again would you pick a different branch of the service.

BOB: No. I'd stay with the Navy.

JIM: they had good food, I suppose.

BOB: Yeah. The food was generally good.

JIM: That about ends it. Bye.

BOB: Bye.