

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Captain Harold Payson, USN (Ret.)
NAVAL WARRIOR PROJECT

1978

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Interviewee: Captain Harold Payson, USN (Ret.)

Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subj: Naval Warrior Project

Date: February 24, 1978

C. My name is Evelyn Cherpak and today's date is February 24, 1978. The interview is being conducted at the Naval War College in Room N-22 of Mahan Hall. Captain Payson, can you summarize your naval career for me?

P. Yes, I'd be glad to. I believe I was the last plebe to enter the Naval Academy in the summer of 1927. I did not reach the Naval Academy until two days before the opening of the academic year. This was because I was the first alternate and there was not a vacancy available until the very last minute.

C. From what state were you appointed?

P. I was appointed originally from New York State, but I came in finally on an appointment-at-large. I graduated from the Naval Academy on June 4, 1931 and after a month's leave reported in for preliminary flight training at the Naval Air Station in Norfolk.

C. This was in the early days of aviation, wasn't it?

P. Yes, it was. We trained and flew two hours, I think, of

solo flight in the single float seaplanes. After that, I reported to one of our new cruisers, the USS LOUISVILLE, and remained as Junior Officer on board the LOUISVILLE for one year.

C. Where did you cruise and what was your job? Do you remember?

P. I'm trying to remember. I think my duties were a little bit of everything as Junior Officer, as I recall. I was, I think, Assistant Navigator and Assistant Signal Officer and an assistant about everything. I had in the meantime applied for a Rhodes Scholarship and was successful in that and was sent to England in the summer of 1932 where I studied for three years at Hertford College at Oxford University.

C. What did you study there?

P. I studied Modern History.

C. Did you get a degree?

P. Yes, I got a degree, a B.A. in Modern History. At the end of that time, in '35, I returned and was ordered to duty on board the USS NEW YORK, Battleship #24, where I had again various duties--Signal Officer, B Division Officer, M. Division Officer and Junior Officer in the Anti-Aircraft Battery. That tour of duty lasted about four years. At the end of that, I was ordered to a new destroyer, the ROWAN, DD405, as Gunnery Officer. I think that was

the summer of '39 and I stayed as Gunnery Officer aboard the ROWAN for almost three years, at the end of which I was detached and ordered as Executive Officer to another new destroyer, the PARKER, the 604. That was from 1942 to 1943. At the end of that period, I joined the staff of COMDESLANT 8, who had been riding the PARKER, for less than a year, and then went from there as Commanding Officer to a Pacific Destroyer, the LANG, 399. All this destroyer duty was during World War II and up until the time I was ordered to the LANG most of it had been in the Atlantic. For a short time, the ROWAN had been ordered out to the Hawaiian area. I might say that while we were on that duty, we at one time had contact with what probably was a Japanese submarine. This was in 1940 before the attack.

C. Oh, before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

P. We stayed on it for about a day, after which we were told to return to base. This contact was just a few miles off the entrance to Pearl Harbor.

C. That was peculiar.

P. My duty in the LANG was probably the highlight in my naval career, that of being the Commander of a ship during wartime. It involved operations from the beginning of our offensive in the Pacific up through the return of MacArthur to the Philippines through the Leyte Gulf Operations. We were, I believe, the leading American destroyer into Leyte

Gulf at the beginning of that operation. The only ships that had been in ahead of us had been some minesweepers that had tried to go in but were driven out by a typhoon a few days before. The LANG was known as the "Lucky LANG" and she was indeed that on that day because we went in and by using our sonar gear, were able to dodge what apparently were mines, and which the next day disabled two or three of our destroyers that came in after us.

C. How long were you Commander of the LANG?

P. I was Commander of the LANG for about fourteen months and finally returned to Washington to the Bureau of Naval Personnel; I think it was just at the end of 1944.

C. Did you have any interesting assignments in the Bureau of Naval Personnel?

P. Oh, yes. The Bureau assignments were interesting. They had a peculiar division there, a section called Quality Control, which, as you might suspect, had been recommended by some of the business people who looked over the naval organization at the beginning of the war and recommended such a thing, based on their business experience. It consisted of a group of us who traveled around to the different naval schools and stations to see if they were producing the quality, really, that was expected of them particularly in the schools, to see if they were teaching at acceptable standards.

C. Did you visit the War College then?

P. No, we did not visit the War College.

C. Was it mainly lower echelon command schools that you visited during that time period?

P. They were not just officers' schools, they were all kinds of schools. They were enlisted men, training schools, officers' schools and things like gunnery schools and anti-aircraft schools and all the operating types. And we would go and come back with reports and mostly we were supposed to be helpful--trying to keep people informed of what was going on. As soon as the war ended, I think it was in August of '45, the Quality Control Section was disbanded and I was moved into the NROTC Section. I was put in charge of it in order to get the college program going again. By that time quite a lot of work had already been done and the plans for the Holloway Plan had already been drawn up. That was the name given to the post-war plan named for Admiral Holloway, who was the Chief of Naval Personnel, and also the father of the present CNO. There is a good story about that plan. There was a question as to whether the new plan would be approved by Congress and the President, or whether we would just revert to the old plan, which was a much less attractive one. The new one was really a scholarship sort of thing, for anyone coming into it got his tuition paid and books. It was a very exciting thing, of course, but it meant quite a lot of

money and it meant that Congress would have to appropriate money for it. The war ended in August and the colleges were going to open in September; there wasn't much time to do anything and we didn't know whether to open with the new plan or the old one. Our job in the Section was frantically to write two sets of regulations--one for the old one and one for the new one, quite a burden in itself. Finally, it was right down to the wire and it depended on whether President Truman signed the bill within a certain time. If he didn't sign it, it was like a pocket veto--it would not become law. There was one day left and President Truman was going to New York for a dinner at night, a Saturday night, I think. Clark Clifford, who was still in the Navy, I believe, was President Truman's Aide or had some other important position and was called in for help. Admiral Holloway and the others said look--you have to take this bill on the plane with you to New York tonight and see if you can get Mr. Truman to sign it, because if you don't we just go back to the old ways and we won't have anything really much good. Mr. Clifford did take it and he went over it with the President on the way to New York and Mr. Truman signed it that night.

C. Oh, that's good.

P. And the Holoway Plan went into effect that way.

C. That's an interesting story.

P. In order to get the plan from the printer in time, there

wasn't even time to proofread it. I had to go to New York and go to the print shop, and as each page came off the press, read it. The printer would give it to me and say proofread it.

C. Oh, the galley proofs.

P. The galley proofs, yes. So, I sat there all one day and read the galley proofs, which were still wet, and if there was a mistake I had to correct it right there. The printer very kindly would make the correction and put it back and then run it off. The printed copies were run off that way and were delivered to the colleges just on time. So that's the tale of the Holloway Plan.

C. I guess the program was a success then, wasn't it?

P. Oh, yes. It was a success and it was really copied with some variations by the other services afterward because it was such a success. After my time in the Bureau of Naval Personnel which lasted almost four years, I went as Executive Officer to the ROANOKE, a new 6" cruiser. In her we made a very interesting cruise to the Mediterranean that today seems to have had more significance than we realized then, because at that time the King of Arabia, Ibn Saud, was ill and we were invited by the Arabians and directed by the Navy Department to go through the Suez Canal to Jidda, to pay a courtesy visit and to let our ship's doctor go up and have a look at the old King. The doctor flew up in a

helicopter to see him and, I guess, comforted him and let him know we were at least sorry he wasn't feeling well. In return for that, we received a boat load of live sheep as a gift, which we had to hoist on board and corral on the fantail of the ship, having been cautioned that one must never refuse a gift of that sort.

C. I wonder what the significance of that kind of gift was?

P. Well, the sheep--to give someone a sheep was a great compliment. It was a great gift. Later it was permissible to have the sheep sent back to shore to be butchered and then returned in a useful state. It created some amusement and excitement when they came on board.

C. I can imagine.

P. After the ROANOKE, I went to the Base at Key West. First as Chief Staff Officer and then as Chief of Staff when an admiral was there.

C. Was your work mainly administrative there?

P. It included the staff duties of running the base. It involved mostly keeping people happy, taking care of frequent VIP's who loved to visit there in the wintertime.

C. I'm sure.

P. And keeping modest operation plans up to date. Somebody found a bottle on the beach one day, up on one of the Keys, which had a message in it, purportedly from a sailor in a sunken Russian submarine off the Keys. It had just enough

realism to it, after it had been investigated by people from the Office of Naval Intelligence, to warrant our sending out some DE's to search to see if we would find anything. We didn't find anything but we searched for two or three days, as I recall.

C. Maybe it was a plant.

P. It might have been, but it was very cleverly done because it had some Russian letters and expressions in it which did seem to be genuine, as though it might be a Russian trying to write English under rather desperate circumstances. So it was a very interesting exercise. After the Key West tour, I went as Commanding Officer of the SARASOTA, which was an amphibious attack ship, and spent most of the time again in the Mediterranean with marines on board.

C. Is there anything noteworthy about this cruise?

P. Well, there wasn't anything noteworthy especially except that it was noteworthy for me to find out and to realize how much a crew could do with a ship that had little in the way of equipment or modern devices. The crew on board that old, really, it was just an old merchant vessel, seemed to be able to do anything. I never saw such a bunch and there was a First Lieutenant that was almost a miracle worker. He could do things, get things done in a way that I don't think I ever saw equalled.

C. A very resourceful group then.

P. Yes, they were extremely resourceful and they seemed to be a happy bunch.

C. Were there any specific goals that you had to accomplish on this cruise?

P. No, not really, except to be ready for amphibious landings. We had frequent amphibious exercises to see if we could run the marines ashore at night according to a very tight time schedule. The trick was to have the boats leave the ship and hit the beach within a minute of a given time and that's not as easy as it sounds, especially at night when it is dark and hard to see. But they got really good at it. There was no base in Greece at that time or anything like that. We use to visit those places but as I recall, we didn't have anything there; except in Italy, of course. We had a base at Naples and one on Sicily.

C. Then, you operated out of Naples.

P. Yes. After the SARASOTA, I came to the War College.

C. Right. For three years.

P. The first year as a student and the next year in the R&A Division and then the last year in Strategy and Tactics.

C. We can get back and talk about your War College experience in more detail in the third part of the interview. I have the questions outlined there. We are at 1957 now, and you spent three years at the Naval War College and you have four more years before retirement.

P. I left the War College in April of '57 and went to the West Coast to take Command of the LOS ANGELES, an 8" cruiser, and probably somewhat unique in that she carried one of our first guided missiles.

C. Oh!

P. The Regulus One. It was a missile, I think it was the only offensive guided missile we had at that time. Most of the others were anti-aircraft and defensive. This was really, just a remote controlled pilotless aircraft which was launched from a catapult and then controlled by a radar beam out to the target.

C. Was the missile aimed at land or sea based targets?

P. What?

C. Would the missile be aimed at a land or sea based target, or both?

P. It could be both, but it really was designed for land targets. It's doubtful if it would have been very effective against a ship. It might have been. I don't think anyone ever considered using it that way. It carried a nuclear warhead and that made it a pretty fearsome device. I don't remember its exact range. It seems to me we could run it out about 200 or 250 miles and then if you had a submarine out there it could pick it up and send it on another couple of hundred miles or so. That gave it a range of maybe 500 or 600 miles. It was subsonic in speed. It was relatively

slow.

C. Well this must have been in the pioneer days of guided missiles?

P. It was pioneer and it was a good missile in some ways-- in that you could recover it. You didn't just fire it and lose it. You fired it and when you were holding a practice you let it go and then you had some jet chase planes go along with it and at the end of its target run the jet planes would take control of it and fly it back to base and land it.

C. Oh! That sounds unique.

P. Intriguing.

C. So that was on the LOS ANGELES.

P. That was on the LOS ANGELES and during the time I was there we made a cruise to the Far East, to Australia first and then up to Japan and to Hong Kong. Nothing of particular significance, it was that period of 1957-58 when we hadn't gotten into the Vietnam War yet.

C. Now it was the Cold War.

P. In fact, some of our ships were still going up the river to Saigon. One of the things that did impress me about the LOS ANGELES, though, was the tremendous accuracy of the 8-inch gun fire. I was fascinated by our gunners. They could hit things on a hillside with incredible accuracy.

C. What was the range?

P. Oh, 15,000 yards or 12,000, maybe a little more or less, but I could shift targets for them and just say shift targets from there to there and they would let go and most every time if they didn't hit it they would be so close that the next salvo would be right on. The gunnery was really impressive but, of course, at the time, I guess, guns were going out.

C. How long were you on the LOS ANGELES?

P. That was about fourteen months.

C. Fourteen months and your major cruise was to the Far East?

P. I was relieved by Captain Martineau at the end of my cruise in the LOS ANGELES and joined the staff of C-in-C, Pacific, Admiral Fett, in the operations division. The Vietnam War had not yet begun, officially, but there was talk of trouble ahead. There was a daily shelling of the offshore islands, Matsu and Quemoy by the Chinese and every morning the staff briefing officer reported to the admiral how many rounds had been fired each way. C-in-Pac had his headquarters at Camp Smith, on a hill, but at the same time a huge combined headquarters was being constructed beneath a pineapple field about eight miles away. About a year later, I was ordered as Commander of the Reserve Fleet Unit in Norfolk. That was '59--the fall of '59--and I retired in the spring of '61.

C. Oh, so your last two years were in Norfolk.

P. Yes.

C. In sum, these are the major highlights of your career and you have indicated already that your most important or interesting assignment was in the Pacific as Commander of the LANG in wartime, is that correct?

P. I think so, yes, I think the responsibility was greater and the risk was higher and the stakes were higher than at any other time. Yes.

C. What made you retire in the Newport area? You said you retired in '61.

P. Bristol is the home port for both sides of my family.

C. Can you tell us something about your family and why you chose Bristol? What was your family connection with Bristol?

P. Well, the connection was that they lived there. My father not as much as my mother's side although my grandmother on my father's side use to come there for the summer, come to Bristol for the summer, and my uncle and father use to be there. My mother's side of the family has been there for generations.

C. You mentioned that you were related to the Perrys.

P. Yes. Again on my mother's side. My maternal grandmother was Elizabeth Perry and she was the granddaughter of Raymond Henry Perry, the brother of the Commodore, so there was some pull to come back.

C. So there is a naval tradition in your family and it was here.

P. We always considered Bristol our home. Although, as children we didn't really live here except in the summertime. We often came here in the summertime.

C. I see. Have you had any connection with the Navy officially or unofficially since you retired in 1961?

P. No, not officially.

C. Or any connection with the War College here in Newport since your retirement?

P. Only that I have been down here many times to lectures and I knew Admiral Turner and knew Admiral ...

C. LeBourgeois?

P. I knew him and--the one that died.

C. Admiral Colbert.

P. Colbert--yes--Dick Colbert. I knew him quite well. I used to come down and talk. I had no official work with him. I spent seven years at MIT after graduation and I used to see people from the Navy from ONR (Naval Research).

C. What were you doing at MIT, may I ask?

P. First I was a student again and then I was working for them. I had the title of Director of Marine Operations that involved fitting out a surplus boat that we had gotten from the Navy as a research vessel for work around Massachusetts Bay and Woods Hole and also setting up a small marine

laboratory on the Boston waterfront. MIT was expanding its Oceanography Program at the time and this was part of the work.

C. Now was this after retirement in '61?

P. From 1961 to '68. I used to see quite a number of Navy people there.

C. Well, let's shift into another vein now, into questions perhaps that are a little bit more general and perhaps even philosophical in tone. Given your career and experience of about thirty years, can you give me an assessment of the changes, technological or otherwise, that you saw in the Art and Science of Naval Warfare during that time span?

P. I think the biggest change in World War II was the change from battleships to aircraft carriers and our class at the Naval Academy was always proud of the fact that our class ring had an aircraft carrier on the ring. The first time, I think. But, we know what happened at Pearl Harbor. The battleships were really clobbered and luckily our aircraft carriers were not in Pearl Harbor at the time of the attack, so they escaped. From then on, I think, it became obvious that in World War II, surface naval warfare was going to be fought by aircraft carriers and their accompanying screens. Battleships weren't written off altogether, but they really played a minor part after that. In the Atlantic, of course, I think it was very different. I think the tremendous power

of the submarines again was brought out. This wasn't new but it just stressed the fact that they were even more deadly and the battle there seemed to be whether the submarines could be sufficiently controlled so that the surface commerce could continue. Controlling the submarines seemed to depend on whether the development of electronic detection devices was successful and whether it was pushed through quickly enough. Two things--that's aircraft carriers and submarines.

C. Aircraft carriers and submarines, that's right.

P. The third one, I think we can say, was amphibious warfare and amphibious operations which seemed to be becoming so important.

C. Yes, I think that was proven to be very important in WWII.

P. Again and again it was proven necessary, and the necessity for a lot more knowledge about the ocean itself, which really had been neglected. The Navy, as far as oceanography was concerned, didn't know very much. I was impressed when we were on the first operation to North Africa for the landings there, reading the oceanographic information and the prediction of wave conditions; what we could expect on the Atlantic side of the North African Coast. It was tremendously important because if you were going to send landing boats in and you sent them in in a roaring surf, you would

probably drown everybody and wouldn't get any of your boats back; and it was also important to know what part of the coast was best for landing.

C. Why do you think the Navy was lax in oceanographic work?

P. There hadn't been any real demand for it or need for it much. But apparently somebody had done some work, because that was an excellent annex to the operation order and the predictions of wave conditions, probably partly through luck but also probably due to the fact that somebody knew what he was doing, were excellent and they were almost exactly as they were predicted and were a tremendous assistance in the landing that was made.

C. So those are three changes that you witnessed during your career: the introduction of aviation into the fleet, amphibious operations, and oceanography.

P. Yes, I mentioned the increased importance of submarines too, I think. The ability to stay at sea longer and go deeper and, of course, the atomic sub hadn't come yet, but it wasn't far off. It came after the war.

C. And probably was developed as a result of it.

P. Another technological breakthrough on the defensive side which made a tremendous difference to the defense of ships was the, they called it, the proximity fuse. That was an anti-aircraft shell which, if fired toward an attacking plane, did not have to hit the plane to explode, but if it just went

near it somewhere, its proximity triggered off an electronic reaction and that caused the shell to explode and that had a devastating effect on attacking planes. I remember one night off the Marshall Islands, I think it was, some Japanese planes were attacking in the pitch dark, and the battleships were screening the carriers and they were firing in the dark and they were knocking down these planes. You'd see them fire and you were wondering what in the world they were shooting at and all of a sudden a ball of fire would burst out of an exploding plane, and it was due to the proximity shells they were using.

C. How do you think World War II contributed to naval thought in the post-war era or do you think it did in any way? What was the legacy of WWII and what were the resulting technological changes?

P. I'm afraid it contributed in a way that may not have been as desirable as wished in that it seemed to repeat what WWI had done. WWI impressed everyone with the great power of the battleship so that after WWI there was a lot of building of great battleships and this went on even up into WWII. The Japanese built the largest battleship of all which was sunk before it even fired a shot. I think WWII did the same thing with the aircraft carriers. It impressed everybody with the tremendous might of aircraft carriers and

nearly everyone since has been all out for building these huge things. I think we have gone overboard again. There is too much in a big carrier. It's too perfect a target. It's an ideal target for an atomic weapon. We didn't learn anything. I should be one of the old traditionalists, but I go about mumbling to myself, "Don't we ever learn?" We have seen all this happen before and we are doing the same thing again.

C. What do you think they should concentrate on developing?

P. I think I would have gone, at least for a while, on having some smaller carriers. I think it gives you a mobile field and that's probably good. I think we probably had to go into nuclear missile submarines, because if we didn't, the potential antagonists would have done it and we have to keep a balance. So it seems to me again, it is chiefly the battle between the submarine and anti-submarine forces. Hanging over the whole thing, though, are the land based intercontinental missiles and I don't think anybody knows whether there will be enough restraint on either side to keep from firing those. I also still think that we had better not let the Russians or anyone else have too many ordinary little ships visiting foreign ports, just showing the flag, because that is important. They may not be a tremendous wartime asset, but they certainly are peacetime assets because they are something that can go in and they

can be seen; they can be friendly to people. People can come on board and look at them and talk. I think they have a place in our fleet.

C. The idea of naval presence, I guess.

P. Sure. That's important and I don't think we ought to forget that and as far as learning anything, I thought we were supposed to learn that our forces shouldn't be concentrated in major bases, but we have completely ignored that. We have got the largest naval base in the world at Norfolk and we are abandoning these northern bases which are the ones that ought to be operating.

C. Right. Newport and north of Newport.

P. Yes. I don't care if it's Newport, Newfoundland or what, but we should have somebody working in the north. Somebody who knows what a deck is like when there is ice on it, and how cold it is for lookouts on the wing of the bridge and what oil is like when it gets cold, and the colder operating conditions of the arctic.

C. This hasn't been the case?

P. I don't think so. I would have thought that our North Atlantic convoys and battles in the North Atlantic and what not would have taught us something, but I guess we have forgotten them. It's no good to say it's cheaper to keep the Navy down in the southern waters, because it's cheaper

not to have any Navy and it's cheaper not to have any Army, so what are we talking about?

C. The idea of cost then, you don't agree with.

P. You have to wonder what cost you are talking about. If it's cost of preparedness, then it's something else again; it is expensive. But it's not as expensive as being unprepared. That's what is really costly.

C. We can shift on to another area now. I think you've covered the changes in naval warfare and your ideas on what they were and why they should be in the post-WWII world very well. Could you tell me what influences molded the minds of naval officers who served with you during the time period in which you were on active duty? What were your mind sets? What were your priorities in the Navy and what influenced you to make the decisions you did? Were the influences educational, technological or otherwise?

P. I can't answer that one now, I'll have to think about it.

C. You want to think about it more?

P. I'm not quite sure what you want.

C. Do you want to pass it by?

P. Yes.

C. Fine. Another question in this vein regards the teachings of Mahan and Luce. I wonder if you are acquainted with their works?

P. Oh, yes, I think so.

C. Mahan's Seapower Series. I wonder if you found them pertinent in the 30's and 40's and even 50's?

P. I think, in general, the philosophy is good.

C. Mahan and his idea of seapower.

P. It's certainly safe to say that control of the seas is a great asset to whoever controls them. Now, if you say what results in control of the seas, that may be a different question. Mahan, I'm sure, felt that ships did. I am not ready to say ships alone do any longer. Maybe it's land based missiles that control the sea, but I'll certainly agree with him that control of the sea and the sea lanes is just as important now as it ever was, because if we want to get oil from Arabia to New York or Texas, we've got to have control of the sea over which it comes.

C. Right.

P. That's simple.

C. How you do it

P. How you do it, that's a different problem and I don't know whether anyone knows that. It could certainly, I think, be safe to say that it would take a Navy, a Navy with undoubtedly aircraft accompanying and maybe on carriers, or whatever, to do it if the powers engaged are restraining from the use of intercontinental nuclear missiles, but if they let them go then I don't know what the answer is. Maybe even then ships are the answer.

C. I think Mahan was partially searching for an immutable principle, a changeless principle, in his work and studies. Perhaps today we are not seeking changeless principles as ardently as he was. Who do you consider the greats of naval history? Do you have any heroes or any men you served with or knew that you particularly admired?

P. My two favorites for WWII were Spruance and Nimitz.

C. And why did you think so highly of them?

P. Well, first because I worked with both of them--not directly--but under their command and it was very obvious when you were working with them that you were working for somebody who knew what it was all about. Admiral Nimitz had a custom of talking to every Commanding Officer that went through Pearl Harbor out to the Pacific. He would always call them in and talk to them and I was tremendously impressed with just talking to him. When you left there you felt as if you could lick the whole Japanese Fleet with one destroyer. He was so calm and so absolutely certain that everything was going to be right, that you went away with that same feeling.

C. Rather an inspiration then.

P. He was and yet he didn't pound the table or anything--just sat there very quietly and talked and said, well good luck to us--and just, terrific. And, Admiral Spruance--I don't think I even saw him during the war, but I was in his

task force a number of times and the smoothness with which his operations were carried out was magnificent. When you read one of his operations orders, you didn't have to ask any questions. You just followed it.

C. Everything was spelled out.

P. And you won the battles.

C. So that was good planning.

P. It was good planning. It was brilliant planning because it seemed as though he anticipated every condition that might arise during the battle and you didn't have to break radio silence and say, "Hey, something has gone wrong now, boss, what do we do now?" It was all sort of spelled out for you. I wouldn't say this was true of some of the other commanders, unfortunately.

C. Did you know any of the others?

P. Yes, I worked with some of the others.

C. You worked with Hewitt in the North African landings.

P. I was trying to think whether he was in command. Was he in command of the first North African landing? If he was, I did then.

C. Hewitt was involved in that.

P. Yes, I remember, I just couldn't remember how. That landing was well done. There was, I don't remember who it was, one admiral that just about drove us crazy going across the ocean on that trip. The ships had been fitted out with

what we called TBS, shortwave radio transmitters, and there was one admiral that got so enamored of that device that he talked his way all the way across the ocean. He never got off the circuit. We were supposed to be observing radio silence.

C. Oh, undercover, yes.

P. And he said, "This is just a short distance thing, it's only a straight line." Well, it's true, but sometimes it bounces down and enemy listeners could pick it up. There is a good tale about the MASSACHUSETTS, which is nearby in Fall River, you know. She ended up being in my Reserve Fleet in Norfolk and somebody said, "I hear they are placing you in Command of the MASSACHUSETTS." I said, "Yes, when she was in mothballs in Norfolk I was." But she was the newest thing we had in 1942 and she was sent over in that North African landing. She was the biggest and hottest ship that we had and her mission was to silence the Jean Bart, a French battleship that had gotten away from southern France and had run down to Casablanca. In Casablanca, there was a long stone mole that protected the harbor from the ocean and the Jean Bart was moored on the inner side of the big mole. Her deck was a little bit below or just about even with the mole, so it was a very difficult target for the MASSACHUSETTS. She couldn't hit the side of the ship because the mole was there and the mole was maybe a hundred feet wide and if a

shell tried to hit the side, it would just hit the rocks. So they had a tough problem, and the JEAN BART, although its engines were not working and she couldn't get under way, could train her guns out and she was shooting at the MASSACHUSETTS. The MASSACHUSETTS had to use armor-piercing shells. That was the only way they could pierce her decks. She was well protected. They had armor-piercing shells which were very heavy shells with lots of steel and very little explosive stuff inside. They were supposed to pierce the armor and then explode. The MASSACHUSETTS was firing at the JEAN BART and she was doing pretty well. She was way out because it was feared there were some German submarines around--and she was scared of those--she didn't want to be torpedoed. She was far out firing and the shells were coming in and they were hitting the deck of the JEAN BART. Since they were coming at not a very great plunging angle, but along a shallow trajectory and being armor-piercing, they just bounced off the deck and went on into Casablanca where they ended up unexploded. They did very little damage to the JEAN BART. I don't think anybody was hurt and the battle went on for some time. Meanwhile, the JEAN BART was getting uncomfortably close to the MASSACHUSETTS with her gunfire. Finally the MASSACHUSETTS turned away and we never saw her again. The JEAN BART surrendered soon afterward. They had fired some shots for the flag, but didn't really

want to fight. One of the first things that had to be done was to send the bomb disposal squad into Casablanca to get rid of the shells from the MASSACHUSETTS.

C. They might explode and hurt the civilians. Did the landings go smoothly in North Africa?

P. Oh yes. They went very smoothly. There was hardly any resistance. A few days later, we wanted to capture an airfield up a little river, I've forgotten the name of the field now. But there was an airfield there, and to do that we planned to send some commandos or rangers up in one of the old four-pipe destroyers. It was a very shallow, winding river. It was north of Casablanca. They were going to go up the river with the old destroyer and put the commandos ashore and capture the airfield. But, before they could do it, they thought they had better have a French pilot. So, after a day or two, they got hold of one and he said, "Sure, I'll take you up. I doesn't matter to me, if you've got the ship, I'll take you up." But, there was a problem because the French had strung out sort of a net and other obstacles across the entrance to the river. The pilot said, "I don't know if we can get through that or not because there are still some guys with machine guns up on the bank and if we slow down they will probably start shooting at us. But, anyway we'll give it a try." And then it was exciting because we were off the coast a little way and the skipper of

the destroyer thought it was going to be a pretty good show and was going to broadcast it. He said, "We're going to the mouth of the river now, the pilot is taking us in. We're approaching the bar and we're going over the bar and now we're approaching the net." He said, "We're going full speed ahead." He broadcast this the whole way up and said, "There are a few fellows taking shots at us, but we fired a few back and they've quit and gone into the bushes and now we're about 50 yards from the net and we've got all our power going. We're going to try to crash through it." And he broadcast the whole thing. He said, "We're right at the net and we're going through, we're going through, I think it's going to break. It's broken! We're through!" And everybody on the ship cheered and everybody on the coast cheered and the little destroyer sped around the curve to the airfield and captured it. That was the end of that little incident.

C. That's an interesting recollection. How long did the landings take? Do you remember how many days? It was in November of '42.

P. It seems to me it was about three days or so before things were stabilized and were under control. We went ashore at the end and had a meal in Casablanca before we left.

C. You were in the Pacific after that.

P. After that I went to the Pacific. That's when I went to the LANG.

C. And worked under Spruance and Nimitz, the two that you admired so much. You were in many campaigns there--quite a few--and I remember from ...

P. All those island hopping campaigns and down off New Guinea.

C. Are there any interesting recollections that you can give me about your campaigns in the Marianas and Marshalls, or any other places?

P. It was interesting off New Guinea because we were assigned to screen a high-speed British minelayer called the Ariadne, whose skipper was Lord Ashbourne; he was a great guy. His operating procedure was to go out at night and go along the New Guinea coast where there were little groups of Japanese still present and to lay mines around the entrances to these places so that they couldn't be re-supplied by submarines. We were assigned to run ahead of him and screen him in case there were any submarines around. We were amazed to find on the first night out that the minelayer, which was quite a large ship, it was about the size of a small cruiser, could go almost as fast as we could and could accelerate at a tremendous rate. So we had all we could do to stay out ahead of her and keep in the proper screening position. Once we got there, we would just roar

up the coast and we would navigate entirely by radar. His navigator would check with ours and we would keep our position that way. The coast was not too well charted but fairly safe. After we would finish minelaying, he would say, "All right chaps, give her a few for good luck," which meant--fire a few rounds into the bushes and see what happens. We would let go a few broadsides in toward the beach and occasionally the reaction would be a searchlight turned on looking up into the sky because apparently they thought it was a bombing raid. One of the interesting things there was an elaborate headquarters that MacArthur built for himself on a mountain top in New Guinea. It was several miles back from the coast and quite high and it required a tremendous road-building project to get there. To find such a thing in the middle of the New Guinea jungle was something. You can't imagine what was put in there and I have often wondered if it is all covered over now with jungle vines again. It had everything. It had tennis courts, swimming pools, the works.

C. Oh, that elaborate. You mentioned that you were in the Leyte operation. Isn't that correct--under Admiral Spruance?

P. I don't remember who the naval commander was.

C. Is there anything outstanding about that operation that you can comment upon?

P. The day before the landings were supposed to take place in Leyte Gulf, we were all hit by a typhoon which disturbed things a bit, but the worst part of it was that it made the minesweeping that was supposed to be done before the ships entered the Gulf, rather ineffective. But, as I recall, I don't think the landings were delayed--only the preparations weren't as good as they might have been. But we did go in on time and there was no opposition, at first.

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interviewee: Captain Harold Payson, USN (Ret.)

Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subj: Naval Warrior Project

Date: March 10, 1978

C. My name is Evelyn Cherpak and today's date is March 10, 1978. The interview is being conducted in Room N-22 of Mahan Hall at the Naval War College. Captain Payson, do you have anything else to say about your experience in World War II? I know we left off with the Leyte Operation on the last tape. Would you like to complete it?

P. I think I should complete the story of the Leyte Gulf operations. Except for the minesweepers, I think that my Destroyer, the LANG, was the first one to reenter the Gulf and apparently her reputation as the "Lucky LANG" held because we entered and reached our assigned destination without colliding with any mines. This was not altogether luck, because our sonarmen were superb in picking up what must have been mines and enabling us to steer a zigzag course in order to avoid them. The fact that the mines were there was borne out the next day when two destroyers that came in later were struck by them and totally disabled and by subsequent minesweeping operations which swept up dozens of them. Our assignment, soon after arriving at the

Leyte Gulf, was to screen MacArthur's Flagship. I don't remember the name of it, it was one of the communications ships. We were along side of her, sometimes moored along side of her, and MacArthur used to cross our deck going to and from the beach. We were along side of his Flagship the night of the Battle of Surigao Strait and had practically a ringside seat. The battle was about 15 miles down the bay and was broadcast on the TBS shortwave radio. We knew exactly what was going on. The next morning, since we had not been actively engaged in the battle, we were one of the few ships left that was still fully armed with torpedoes and ammunition and were told to proceed at high speed to the entrance to Leyte Gulf to join up with other forces which were to repel any attempts by the Japanese to enter the Gulf. At about that time, they were giving the jeep aircraft carriers a bad time out in the open sea. As it turned out, they never did try to enter the Gulf and we never expended our torpedoes. Our ammunition did come in handy frequently, though, for Kamikaze attacks and it was used, occasionally, on shore bombardment targets.

C. Do you have any recollection or any impressions of General MacArthur, that you can give us?

P. My impression of him is that he was a very impressive looking person. He always looked dignified and there was no

question about it, he had an air, a flair I would say. He also had a superb PR group around him. When he sent out action reports, they sometimes required pages of type-written radio translations to record every enemy jeep and wheelbarrow and donkey and everything else that was destroyed in the activities so that even a minor operation would appear, before you read the thing, as though some tremendous occasion had taken place. I remember what a significant part the radar played in our maneuvering in Leyte Gulf because frequently we were given nighttime maneuvers with all lights out. We had to maneuver in very tight places in the Gulf and the radar was absolutely essential and made it quite easy, although there were hundreds of little boats and all kinds of craft all around. Then the one other impressive thing was the tremendous artillery barrages that the Army would occasionally engage in. We couldn't understand it sometimes, it seemed as though we would be celebrating the Fourth of July up and down the lines for hours on end at night.

C. Did you feel it was unnecessary then, a waste of ammunition with no purpose except for show?

P. I would never accuse them of that; I imagine they were keeping the bushes cleared of infiltrators; a lot of it was star shells to light up the surrounding countryside and

keep it clear, but it did appear to be extravagant at times.

C. Do you have any more comments on Leyte or Surigao Strait? We can leave the war in the Pacific at this point if you do not have anything else to say on it. I believe, I think in the last tape I mentioned defects in Naval Strategy and Tactics that you observed or were aware of in World War II. Were there any that you observed?

P. I'd like to go back, if I may, to one of the first questions you asked me and I think you--let's see--you asked--there was a question that had something about what --how were we or by what were we influenced as naval officers.

C. Yes. What I asked you about was what influences molded the minds of naval officers of your generation.

P. Well, if you are speaking of generations, I suppose you would say the generation molding might have been done by the historical background that we began to absorb at the Naval Academy and even subsequent to that. Once the actual war started, and before we were in it, we began receiving action reports and these had a tremendous influence, I think. At least they did on me. Reports of British actions and submarine actions against convoys and amphibious operations. Many of them often were not very successful. I

remember there was one famous one, it was called the Dieppe Raid by the Canadians and the British Navy.

C. Now is this in the 30's?

P. This was during World War II, the beginning of it, before we were in it.

C. Oh, I see 1939.

P. The first two years, but they (the action reports) began to come in and we immediately began learning that things were not exactly the same as they had been in the classroom text books. There were some lessons from reading memoirs too from older leaders and then once we were in it, of course, we began getting detailed action reports from our own forces, and they were extremely helpful. Now another influence, and this is peculiar and, I think, interesting when you look back on it, was from some of the war games that were played. I was in the fleet war game, I think it was in the early spring of 1932 in the LOUISVILLE, a new cruiser, and we were with an attacking force that attacked Pearl Harbor. We had at that time two new aircraft carriers, the SARATOGA and the LEXINGTON, and we were attacking Pearl Harbor from the northeast, almost from the same position that the Japanese later attacked. And we, according to the war game report, attacked it undetected and destroyed it.

C. Just like the Japanese.

P. That report apparently was read by somebody and filed away, except that I don't think the Japanese filed it away, because they used the same procedure, and their planes came in on almost the same flight path that were on our plans used in 1932. Well, so much for that war game. I am told also that the Japanese are said to have war gamed the Battle of Midway and when they played it, they were defeated and yet they went ahead and tried to attack Midway and they were defeated. So again, so what. I don't know, but it seems to me sometimes there are lessons to be learned which we teach ourselves and then ignore.

C. In sum, these were the influences on naval officers at that time: the war games that were played; and the action reports that came in and that molded them in preparation for WWII. Did you know anything about the Naval War College during the 1930's? Would you be able to indicate whether or not the NWC contributed to the development of naval warfare in strategic areas in the years prior to WWII? Would you have had any idea what they were studying?

P. Frankly, no. Although I come from Bristol, I knew where the NWC was. I had often passed it by boat and by road. I don't remember even reading anything from the NWC.

C. Then

P. I could elaborate on that at great length because one of my pet theories is that the Naval War College has never entered into the reality of things; and I think it's tragic. I think it should be a vital part of the active strategy and tactics--not make-believe--not studying what happened, but

C. Projecting.

P. Feeding into the plans of the Chief of Naval Operations. What I just said was so true. I hadn't the vaguest idea that they ever did anything at the NWC.

C. So it obviously wasn't publicized and made known to naval officers.

P. I can't remember whether it was before or after the war. A very small booklet began coming out from the NWC, maybe 20 pages, of a very small paperback bulletin or something and I always enjoyed reading that, but it was insignificant as far as publications went. As soon as it was made available, I asked to be included on the address list.

C. Do you feel then that the NWC, or perhaps you can't say whether or not the NWC prepared students adequately for WWII and studied possible problems and solutions to situations then. What do you see as priorities for the U.S. Navy in the post-war world? Are any changes in strategic thinking necessary?

P. I don't think that the priorities have changed much, really. I think the old traditional one of maintaining the freedom of the sea is as important now as ever. I am tremendously concerned, though, over what's being done with the Navy and the way it's being handled. Soon after the atomic bombs were dropped, there was the realization that the worst thing that we could do would be to concentrate forces at any particular base and that the best thing we could do would be to have them scattered. We observed that for a while but now if you look at us, where is most of the Navy? Most of it is at Norfolk, and it is anything but dispersed and what is worse, there is hardly any of the Navy left in the northern operating bases in that part of the ocean where it is most likely an enemy is apt to be engaged.

C. So this southern strategy is at fault.

P. This, I think, it is disastrous.

C. Let's go on to the Naval War College section of the interview. You came to the NWC in 1954 as a student in the Naval Warfare Class. Can you comment on the nature of the curriculum at that time? What subjects did you study? Do you remember what the method of instruction was?

P. I don't remember too much in detail.

C. No, but ...

P. We had a number of war games. It (the mode of instruction) seemed to be based on small games and on one fairly

large game late in the spring. A great deal of time was spent on writing two theses or papers; one during the first half of the course and then another one during the second half. As I recall, that is what took up most of my time, because for many of us it was the first time we had ever had time to do any kind of research and to use a library consistently for uninterrupted periods.

C. Did you write on any specific topics? Do you remember what they were? What were the subjects that were of prime importance?

P. The first--yes, I remember the first term. In the fall term, there was no choice. We were assigned a topic and the topic was "Seapower." So, we wrote on seapower. The second one was a choice and, being somewhat of a maverick, I suppose, I wrote on, "The Decline of the American Merchant Marine and Its Relation to the Navy." I don't think I was popular for having chosen that but it was and still is a big problem.

P. I remember that one student wrote a great paper on the subject of how the Russians could defeat the United States and it created tremendous excitement. He placed himself as a Commander in Chief of the Russian Navy and he defeated the US. They copied this and sent it to Washington and there was all kinds of flap and fury.

C. I can imagine! What was your opinion of the study regime?

Did you find your stay here worthwhile as a student?

P. Yes, I thought it was very worthwhile. As I say, it was the first chance since leaving the Naval Academy that I really had to do anything like it. Up until that time, practically all my duty had been sea duty. Let me say one thing, though, and I don't know if the NWC has overcome this yet. When I was ordered to the NWC, one admiral said, "That's the kiss of death" and I've heard that so many times. And for older officers they say if he gets sent there--"Well they're putting you away" and if you are younger, "Well, they didn't know what else to do with you so they sent you there." And this all ties in again with my theory that if the NWC were made more as a real part of things and not just a kind of nursery school for staff officers, I think it would be umpteen times more valuable to the Navy, and people would respect it more.

C. How do you think other students reacted to a NWC education? Did they feel the same way that you did or was there any adverse reaction on their part?

P. I didn't notice any adverse reaction. It didn't seem to me that any, or at least too many of them, took it seriously. It was a delightful period. It seems to me that it might be well if the courses were such that you would end up with a degree or something a little bit more than just to note that you had attended the NWC.

C. Did you feel that a NWC education had an impact on your thoughts about naval strategy, or tactics, or naval warfare in general? Did coming here change your ideas or give you any new insights?

P. I am not so sure it changed them. It certainly enlarged them and broadened them and I would say made me wiser in the ways of the sea. No question about that.

C. Did it have an impact or make any difference in your career promotionwise? Do you feel that going here was a plus for you?

P. That's what is so hard to say. I don't know how to answer that.

C. How did you think the Navy Department ...

P. I will say I had a superb command when I left here; I would never say that it did me any harm. I couldn't have asked for a better command when I left.

C. How do you think the Navy Department viewed the NWC at that time?

P. How did it use it?

C. View it. How did it view it?

P. I wish I knew because when you say the Navy Department what does that mean. Does it mean how did the Chief of Naval Operations?

C. Yes--Chief of Naval Operations.

P. It seemed to me they didn't take it too seriously and except for my story about the nuclear missile firing submarine, I don't recall that they ever asked for anything very much from the NWC or ever assigned them anything very important to do.

C. Let's continue with your activities in Research & Analysis because you did stay on at the NWC for several years after your student days and remained in connection with the Research & Analysis Department through 1955 and 1956. Can you tell me what your function was there?

P. That was a small division. I had a Supply Officer and a wave, who was a statistician of sorts, and a civilian scientist, Dr. Albertson, and that was all. We had a vague assignment. Most of our time was spent trying to help the other divisions analyze some of their problems. If they were working on a war game problem or if they had some particular problem they were stuck on, then we tried to help them. The division was really winding down from its earlier activities. My predecessor had a whole board full of projects but they were strange things like, how well were certain schools doing or things you really couldn't get your teeth into. I'm not sure how long the division kept going after I left because I went over into the Strategy and Tactics Division. I think it wasn't too many years before they closed down that division (R&A) altogether.

C. Yes, it was a couple of years later. I believe that when you were at the R&A Division you played a part in persuading Admiral Burke to accept the Polaris System.

P. Yes, have I put that down yet?

C. No, we haven't talked about that yet.

P. Oh, I see.

C. That is what I wanted to get into because it was during your time period in R&A Division.

P. Yes, that was one of the things that I think was significant. Dr. Albertson was an MIT graduate and it was during this period, about the time when the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Burke, was wondering whether to approve funds for the development of a missile-firing submarine. It was a tough decision because they didn't know whether they would work and if they didn't there would be an awful lot of money spent and maybe wasted, but if they did work it might be a real breakthrough. Dr. Albertson was sitting in the Drawing Room one day and started drawing circles with his compass from imaginary positions of a number of nuclear missile-firing submarines. He began to get quite excited and he said, look, with only a relatively few, I don't remember if it was 15 or 20, we could cover just about any target that we might want to cover. We probably ought to point this out to the Chief of Naval Operations and he wrote up a very convincing, concise report on this matter in a scientific,

scholarly manner. He showed it to Admiral Robbins, the Chief of Staff, and he, too, got excited about it and said, "I'm going to rush this into Admiral McCormick. Admiral McCormick read it and he liked it. He said, "I'm going to send this to Admiral Burke," which he did and I think it was only a week or two later that Admiral McCormick received a very nice letter from Admiral Burke saying, "I certainly appreciated your sending me that letter. It helped me make up my mind to go ahead with the missile-firing submarine."

C. Oh, very good. Why do you feel the Polaris System was important? Do you feel it was needed at that time?

P. I feel it's important because I think it is important for us to have the best things first and I am sure if we hadn't done it, the others undoubtedly would have. Just as it was certainly important that we beat Hitler to the atomic bomb. You can imagine what might have happened if we had lost that race. I think it is in a sense unfortunate that any of us have it, but if it must be, we had better stay out in front.

C. What changes do you think were implicit for the Navy in the adoption of the Polaris System? Or do you think there were any changes implicit for the Navy?

P. I think tremendous changes were implied. I think it has certainly reduced the importance of large aircraft carriers. It has made it possible to project an offensive force way

beyond their own frontiers but, of course, as you could predict, we were soon copied by our opponents and now it has presented us with the same problem they had, of how to defend against it and these are tremendous problems. It means practically wiring the bottom of the ocean with sound, sonar, detecting devices and every conceivable sophisticated electronic gadget.

C. It has affected the art and science of naval warfare to some degree and the naval strategy of the future.

P. Very much so.

C. Did you develop any concepts for Naval War Gaming or logistics when you were at Research & Analysis? I believe some work was done in that area.

P. Would you repeat that again?

C. What concepts were developed for Naval War Gaming, Strategic War Gaming, and Logistics when you were with the R&A Department.

P. No, we didn't develop any new concepts, but electronic devices for gaming were being developed.

C. Did you do any work in that area?

P. We helped in working out the games they were making up but I wouldn't say we developed any new concepts. We worked on the established problems and helped them make up games for the annual battle.

C. Yes, they still have that. Can you tell me about Admiral McCormick, who was President of the NWC while you were there? Did you have any recollections of him and his administration?

P. I remember him as being a very quiet man, rather reserved, tall, good looking, loved to play golf. I liked him very much. It was a big shock to all of us when he died.

C. Did he institute any changes or reforms at the NWC during his time period, or did things stay pretty much the same?

P. I think he had already started on this before I came. There were changes being made in the Strategy & Tactics Courses. I don't remember the details now, but I think they had been up-graded quite a bit. There was, as I recall, a small group of senior officers who were called the Advanced Study Group. I don't believe that it was followed up very vigorously and it may have folded up because of the fact that he died.

C. Yes, he did die rather unexpectedly. What was your position in the Strategy & Tactics Department? I believe you left R&A and then went over there in 1956-57.

P. I was the Head of it.

C. Oh, you were.

P. Yes. There were a dozen or so of us and we were responsible for the orderly scheduling of events, games, lectures, etc. The main thing was having the war games

ready and run off on time and assigning people different jobs for preparing it.

C. So, it was more administrative.

P. Yes, it was from my point of view.

C. Then you left the Naval War College in 1957, I believe, and went to a ship command. That is the job you mentioned that you thought was so excellent.

P. That was the Command of the LOS ANGELES.

C. Right. When did you retire from the Navy?

P. I retired in June 1961.

C. Then you settled in Bristol, which you mentioned before, and went to MIT.

P. I settled in Bristol right away in 1961, but I went to Boston for 7 years every day to MIT--3 years as a student and 4 years working in their Marine Science Program.

C. Eventually you came to Roger Williams, where you are presently. What type of position did you hold there?

P. At Roger Williams I have had a little bit of everything. The first year I was assistant to the Academic Dean for Special Programs and then afterward I was what would correspond to the Department Head of the Natural Science Department and also instructor in Oceanography. I've been Acting Academic Dean a total of 3 years and now I am teaching Physical Oceanography and Meteorology and I'm also ombudsman, the man who solves all impossible problems.

C. Captain Payson, would you like to comment at all on the present day Navy and its objectives, problems, and future?

P. It seems to me in this terribly dangerous time, when it is conceivable that a nuclear war might start, that sea borne naval forces might be the only thing left in an operating condition after an attack. That is why I keep harping on the subject of having these forces dispersed. If, for instance, we had undergone an attack, it's conceivable an enemy might follow it up with a landing operation. And the only thing that could possibly beat off such a thing would be an operating sea force which could speed to the landing site. So I plead for dispersing our forces and having them in rather small independent units and not putting everything down in one tremendous base where they can be paralyzed.

C. What do you think about the cutbacks in defense spending in the Navy budget.

P. Well, again, one reason everything is so expensive, having accepted the fact that everything is inflated, is that we make everything too highly sophisticated. Now, what if we just had something that could go to sea and fire a gun or a missile and not try to do everything under the sun all at once. Something that's still alive and operating is going to be much more valuable to us in a real hoedown than a tremendous multi-billion dollar submarine that is lying disabled on the bottom or a huge carrier that can't move

because everything has been blown apart. I wonder if we aren't just making up--causing our own trouble about expenses.

C. This is the end of the second oral history interview with Captain Payson. I would like to thank you very much for participating in our Naval War College Oral History Program. I'm sure your reminiscences will be of worth and interest to future historians. Thank you.