NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

# HISTORY OF WORLD WAR II:
# THE LSMs

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LEONARD D'OSTUNI

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Oral History Program

# The History of the World War II:

# The LSMs

Interviewee: Leonard D'Ostuni

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: History of World War II: The LSMs

Date: June 9, 1995

C: This is the first oral history interview with Mr. Leonard D'Ostuni of Cranston, RI. He served on LSMs in World War II in the Pacific; he was trained at boot camp and electrician school here in Newport, RI. We are trying to capture some of his memories regarding his time in Newport and in World War II. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. Today's date is June 9, 1995. The interview is being conducted in my office in Mahan Hall at the Naval War College in Newport, RI. Mr. D'Ostuni, I'm glad you came down this morning to talk about your experiences in the war and to donate several items to the Naval Historical Collection regarding your time period in Newport, RI. Can I begin the interview by asking you where you were born?

D: I was born in Massachusetts, the City of Worcester. It's a memorable day because it was Memorial Day, May 30, 1925. I was educated in public schools in Worcester, Massachusetts.

C: What did your father do for a living?

D: My father was a shoemaker, a cobbler by trade.

C: And what did your mother do?

D: She was a homemaker. She remained home most of the time caring for two younger sisters and a younger brother, so we were four children in the family.

C: Did you spend your growing up years in Worcester?

D: All my years of growing up were in Worcester until 1973 when I moved into Rhode Island.

C: So you became a Rhode Islander twenty-two years ago. Where did you go to high school?

D: I went to North High School in Worcester. The school is no longer there. It has been converted to condominiums.

C: What year did you graduate?

D: I graduated in 1943.

C: Did you enter the service immediately after that?

D: No. During the years that I was attending high school I was working. Besides taking part in school activities, I was involved in working with defense contracts. So there was a question of my not being able to be deferred. As a matter of fact, what I wanted to do while I was in high school was to join the military because most of my friends in the senior class had already committed themselves to joining the Air Force or the Navy. As a matter of fact, I did take the V-12 examination but didn't qualify for it.

C: Did you work in a factory during your high school years?

D: Yes. I worked in a factory.

C: What was the name of it?

D: Quality Paper Products Company.

C: And how were they involved in defense work?

D: It was subcontracted work. We made gaskets, probably for tanks. Then we also made a V-mail, if you remember the postal involvement.

The factory was a small shop. Maybe about ten workers. I worked there weekends and after school. My last two years of high school were very busy. I was involved in extra curricular activities in high school as I mentioned. I played the baritone horn in the band and I played the violin in the orchestra. I was able to concentrate, to some extent, on my studies (not as much I liked to). I was the oldest in the family and so there was a need for income. That was one of the reasons why I had to work. I realized that there was a war going on. I had very dedicated and good teachers that I looked to that emphasized the importance of study. They knew that we were going to war. I mean we were in a war, and then many of us seniors would be entering the service so they emphasized the importance of studying. If the United States was to win the war, it was important that we concentrate on our math and our sciences and maintain good health. We were a serious class. It was one that I can remember all of it.

C: It was a serious time in our history.

D: It was a serious time and we took our studies seriously, and the events of the time had a great impact on us plus our mentors.

C: Did you continue working in the factory after you graduated from high school?

D: I had intentions of maybe going to college because I took a college course. I did work in the factory but being the draft age, I also wanted to enlist in the service.

C: Why did you pick the Navy?

D: Actually I wanted to go into the Air Force. I made model airplanes and a friend of mine had enlisted in the Air Force. I talked my dad into taking me up to an Air Force show in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, and they were having a demonstration and trying to recruit young men to join the Air Force. But, unfortunately, they had a serious accident on the airstrip that day and my father wouldn't allow me, and discouraged me from entering the Air Force.

C: Did you pick the Navy by default?

D: Well, the Navy, there was a conflict even with people I was working for. They said, well, we need you here and so I became of draft age, but I had friends that I worked with who were Navy men. So I said, I wanted to enlist, but I remained in the factory where I came under temporary deferment because of the war.

C: When did you finally enlist?

D: They drafted me. I was inducted in November and during that time period, fortunately, being of good health and where there were large recruitments for Navy people they were looking at...I look back now to the staffs of some of the Naval operations and ships that would be participating in the invasions of Europe and the Pacific. Like I said, fortunately, I was able to get recognition from the Navy recruiter at the induction center that I had an interest in joining the Navy. It was a service that I desired to enlist in besides the Air Force.

C: Oh, that's good!

D: And I was really thrilled when I was accepted.

C: Great! Now when were you finally accepted in the Navy?

D: It was November.

C: In November 1943. And then I guess your first assignment was to go to basic training. Where did you go to basic training?

D: I knew that there was a bootcamp at Newport, but most of my friends were going to Great Lakes and Sampson and San Diego and Bainbridge. But when I was selected to go to Newport I was quite

thrilled because it was close to home and meant that there would be a chance of my having furloughs and visiting rights with my family prior to going overseas.

C: How long was the basic training?

D: I believe it was sixteen weeks. I may be wrong but my recollection was that it was sixteen weeks.

C: It was a good four months.

D: Intensive group training.

C: How large was your class--the group you were with? Do you remember?

D: I don't remember. The picture that I have shows the number of people in it. A few hundred, I would say, in the class.

C: Now what did the training consist of here in Newport?

D: I remember the first day was the haircut. Prior to coming in to the station many of the men had fancy haircuts from a barber, but when we were brought into the station we were assigned to a storeroom where they measured you and gave us a physical examination and assigned clothing and then gave you a

haircut. The training itself, I would describe it today, as a piece of cake because I was a young lad of 18; I probably weighed 120 lbs., I was very active physically and mentally, where many of the recruits couldn't stand the vigor or they were homesick. It was the winter and the training in Narragansett Bay was horrendous with the wind, cold wintry wind blowing off the water. But like I mentioned, it didn't bother me with all the physical activity that we had to participate in.

C: Did you have classroom training as well?

D: Yes. We had classroom training in seamanship, boat descriptions, rules of the Navy. The Blue Jacket Manual was kind of the Bible of a Navy recruit. There was a lot of useful information in there.

C: So did you have to know that verbatim?

D: I can remember some of the military training which was with a Springfield rifle. We had manual of arms which was a basic maneuver that military people have to know. We did the obstacle course and we had swimming which was some of the physical training.

C: Was that mandatory?

D: It was. There was a prescribed swimming test that we had to pass in order to progress. And there was an obstacle course where you had to climb ropes and scale walls. But it was vigorous in the fact that we were constantly pressured. It seemed like harassment in a way, almost like you were being badgered to conform. There was no time wasted. Everything was accounted for.

C: Did you have tests on your classroom work?

D: I don't remember but I know on inspections we were judged by the company commander on our ability to lead. The company commander was overall in charge of the company. But at various times when we were in class we were assigned men who were skilled in seamanship or a physical instructor who was assigned to us.

I can remember one noted person who was a physical instructor and if anyone who is familiar with boxing, Willy Pep was one of our physical instructors at that time.

C: Oh, really!

D: And that was quite exciting to see him because anyone who followed boxing, and I came from a city that had some prominent boxers.

C: Isn't that interesting; the Navy must have recruited him.

D: The Navy did recruit these special talented physical people to conduct physical training for the recruits.

C: Did he just do general physical training?

D: Mostly at gym. He was assigned to a gym so if we had wrestling or boxing or calisthenics he would be part of the training.

C: Do you have any more comments on the physical training you had on the base?

D: Other than it didn't bother me. I enjoyed it. The only thing that I regretted was the boat drill.

C: What did you have to do there?

D: I remember that very well. It was a cold, windy morning that we had to go out in the boat and row in the bay. I think it was to simulate a life saving skill that we had to be aware of in case a ship was sinking. Fortunately, I never had to use it, but I remember that very distinctly because of the cold, blistering winds.

C: Where were you domiciled? Where did you live during this time?

D: At the time, I'm refreshing my memory, it was Barracks C. There were quite a few temporary wooden barracks throughout the base, but I was one of the fortunate ones that was assigned to live in the brick barracks, Barracks C, and true to the Navy tradition we slept in hammocks, which was not unusual because that was the tradition.

C: Was it one long room?

D: I believe it was a large room and on each side there were sections where the men were assigned. I think we may have had upper and lower levels of the hammocks. It was quite a feat to get in and out of the hammock.

C: Where was the galley?

D: The galley was in another part of the building. I'm not sure if it was part of the same sleeping quarters or it was next door. The location I can't remember but I do recollect having a galley and a dining hall which was probably in the same complex that we were living in. I never was unfortunate to be assigned, but occasionally certain men from the company would be assigned K-P duty, and that was working the kitchen, cleaning the trays. I remember the stainless steel trays that were petitioned off to

portion the food off, or you would be assigned to peeling potatoes or skinning vegetables.

C: Did you have any extra duties of any sort?

D: I never was assigned any extra duty. I do remember I was recognized, and given credit for ... we had an inspection Saturday of clothing. We were trained to keep our clothing in the wash and lay them out in an orderly fashion that was described by the Blue Jacket Manual, and apparently because of my inspections in the past I was always assigned as the company guide-on bearer.

C: What was that?

D: That entailed that I carry the flag on parade and when we marched to different classes and different events I would carry the flag. The flag had the company designated number on it, and I would carry that and lead the company to whatever direction we were assigned. It was an honor. I was quite thrilled, especially Saturday mornings when we had company inspections with the various companies competed among the company commanders to get the best grade. So we were quite pleased when that company was given a good grade.

C: Did your company ever win?

D: I'm not sure, but I think we did place in the top groups. The company commander would be disappointed in his performance if not.

C: How were your weekends structured? Did you have time off?

D: The first few weeks or probably a month, we weren't allowed much recreation. We weren't allowed to go off the base. I hardly remember any free time; it was so busy and we were so exhausted in the evening to participate in any activities. I believe that some of the men, if there was any extracurricular activities that we could take part in, was probably in the library. Mostly I remember people going swimming.

C: Did you have any leave during this four month period?

D: There was, like I mentioned, in the first four weeks of eight weeks, we were confined to the base. But then we were given passes. A certain section would be given a pass. We'd leave in the morning....weekends it would be in the morning....I really can't remember if it was a weekend or when we were given passes. The weekends we were given as an overnight. We were confined to the general area, but I did manage, when we did get a pass, to disobey the rules and I left the area and I did get a bus to Worcester. It meant maybe a two hour ride just to spend an hour at home. This was toward the end of my training. We

were pretty well restricted as to any furlough or any leave off the base.

C: Did you ever get into Newport itself?

D: I never had the opportunity. I went into Newport to take a bus to Providence and then to Worcester. That would be the only time that I ventured into the town itself. But I do remember during the time that I was here that there were so many sailors, not only recruits, but ship's company in the town that many of the men would say well, a good liberty town would be Fall River. They would go into Fall River.

C: I wonder why.

D: Because maybe the girls or the liquor, or the gambling or whatever. But I've even heard that the men went as far into Massachusetts as Webster. Webster, Mass. was a town that the sailors would go to.

C: That's interesting because Newport is always noted as a Navy town and Thames Street, I guess, kind of catered to the sailors at that time. Well, when this four month training period was over did you have any sort of commissioning or graduation ceremony?

D: We probably had, at the end of the period. I think we may have had a Captain's Inspection or a Captain's Review which was taken on the parade grounds in front of the War College which was a very impressive sight. That would be the only thing that I remember. Then, of course, we went forward to our assignments to various schools or ships or whatever. Most of us were asked our preference to where we would go.

C: And what did you want to do? What did you select?

D: The typical military protocol was that if you were a cook and wanted to be a cook they would make you a truck driver. But it was always the opposite. Some of the men who were wise to the thoughts of the selection group would show preference for other than what they wanted and hopefully they would get what they wanted. But I was watching it because working in the shop, working with electric motors and equipment I think that I had selected to work below in the engine room. I think I may have selected electrician's mate school. And it was fortunate when the list came up for assignment I was chosen to attend electrical school here in Newport.

C: Oh, that's great! So you stayed in Newport again.

D: So after a short leave, because after bootcamp we were granted leave. I don't remember how many days, but I came back to school in Newport.

C: Now this was on the base here?

D: It was on the base. I didn't have the luxury of the brick barracks then because the schools were assigned to temporary wooden barracks. Gray, drab-looking black-shingled barracks.

C: How long was the electrician school?

D: I can't remember whether it was a couple of months, eight weeks or ten weeks.

C: This would have taken you into mid-1944 then.

D: It was February or April. I would have to check my records to see exactly when I finished.

C: What did you study there?

D: We studied theory and, as a matter of fact, I even kept the book that was assigned to us. It was Swoope's lessons in Practical Electricity (Hansman's), and we studied theory which I was familiar with from my studies in physics in high school. So

the course of magnetism and tubes and various aspects of electrical work pertaining to what may be involved in on board ship. So it was an interesting course. We went to school from the morning. We had a break at noon and then we went to class in the afternoon.

C: Were you tested on this material?

D: I believe we had weekly examinations in order to judge our skill and our ability to absorb. Most of the men that were in the school were all young fellows. Some had experience with electricity at some point and they were high school graduates, so it didn't bother us too much to absorb the training.

C: Did you get any practical experience on shipboard at this time?

D: No, we didn't. The course was accelerated so that it was kind of difficult to absorb all that was being taught. They covered the highlights. Toward the end of the course then we were asked to specialize. There were two categories that we had to choose from, and that was vacuum tubes or gyro compass. I chose the gyro compass. I don't know why but I had some knowledge of vacuum tubes, so the gyro was interesting to me so I picked that.

C: You had more training in that then?

D: They separated the class to give a little more training to the gyro.

C: Oh I see.

D: If you selected the gyro, you were given a special instructor and you received specialized training in that field. The same with the vacuum tubes.

C: So that was your course in electricity. When you finished it what was your rate? What did you come out as?

D: We were told from the beginning that there were a certain amount of rates that would be given that would be electrician's mate third class. But everyone that passed the course would get ... we were seamen when we went in, but we would be given the rate of Fireman First Class. A fireman was a designator rank of those that were below deck. A seaman was above deck. So those that had a high class average, and there were quite a few of us that did, but there were only so many rates that were given upon graduating from the class. We were promised that those who had attained high average in the class would get rated when you were assigned to a ship. Well, that was one of my disappointments in school because I tried to excel in the class and I did get good

grades, but at the time of the end of the course I wasn't given a rate. But I did attain Fireman First Class. But like they promised, I did get my rate when I was assigned to a ship.

C: Well, that was kind of extensive training--about five months then--here in Newport, RI.

D: Yes, it was.

C: When you finished did you feel that you were well trained and qualified to do what you were supposed to do?

D: I felt that I could do what I was assigned to do and I could take the responsibility. I had confidence, not because of my training. That would be part of it. But because of my overall experience prior to entering the service I had that ability even before I came into the service. So as young as I was I had good skill with machinery.

C: How would you have rated your instructors? Were they good?

D: I would say a lot of them were good. Some of them were civilians who enlisted in the service specifically to train the recruits in a special field, whereas others were regular Navy men. I found that the regular Navy men dwelled more on sea tales than instruction. They were great to exploit their events in

Newport or when they were on leave in Norfolk or whatever. I never heard an instructor tell of his experiences at sea. It was mostly when he was out on leave.

C: Oh, so sea stories.

D: Sea story. It was really a shore story.

C: Were there any discipline problems here at Newport that you noticed among the recruits?

D: There may have been a few but not that I was aware of. There was a few that maybe overindulged in alcohol, and there were those who weren't disciplined enough to keep their equipment clean or their personal belongings clean. Inspection was a very rigorous form of trying to discipline a large group in the military. I thrived on it because it was discipline that I was raised on at home.

C: So you had no trouble adjusting to the military.

D: No, never had any. I loved it. I realized that was the only way to get a large group to conform and to do things. You couldn't operate independently. You had a leader and you had followers.

C: Absolutely. Do you have anything else to say about your time in Newport? Any other recollections that you remember about either about your training or the base itself at that time?

D: The thing that I remember is that it was such a pretty area. I can remember the bridge and the area. Especially, not so much being on the base, but when I would get on the bus or from a ride to go home then to return, it was a very picturesque sight and I always thought gee, it would be nice if I lived in the area, not knowing that I would eventually.

C: After you finished up in Newport where were you assigned next?

D: There was always the question of after training because the war we were following.....That was one of the things that we were concerned about after the training we had in school was where would we be assigned to. Plus there was always that day dreaming that we had. Some of our classrooms had windows that overlooked the bay and at the time that I was receiving training at electrical school the base had become a precommissioning base and we saw the Leyte. A carrier was out there in the water. It was a wagon battleship base and some of these large ships would be anchored out in the Bay or would be coming in and we could see them and we dreamed. That was our ultimate goal--to get sea duty--to get on one of those ships. So that was what we were

looking forward to, and so when the assignment, when we graduated and were getting our orders, I believe, we were given leave but we were given our orders it was questionable. Normally the events of the war, Europe was occupied by the Germans and we knew there was a pending landing that had to be made on the shores of Europe and, of course, there was a war in the Pacific. The amphibious was a large recruitment at the time I know. We didn't realize it then, but later on the sailors for the smaller ships, our desire was to get on the larger ships, but it wasn't meant to be. Most of the training that we had and most of the recruitment of the personnel was for amphibious warfare. I remember some of my classmates went into LSTs and some of them went on patrol craft, PCs and small craft. Very few were fortunate to get on one of the big ships.

C: Were you sent for additional training after Newport?

D: When I was assigned to the Amphibious Forces, Pacific, specifically the Pacific, I was remembering my history, I'm happy because pacific means calm and quiet. Normally I would be susceptible to seasickness. I thought it was a better ride in a boat out in the Pacific than it was in the Atlantic--the fury of the Atlantic--so I accepted the fact that I was assigned to Little Creek, Virginia. I didn't know at the time what type of vessel I would be on because it was just the amphibious training.

C: So you underwent amphibious training at Little Creek?

D: That was amphibious training.

C: How long was that?

D: I don't remember the dates.

C: What did you do during this time frame. How were you trained?

D: We went there. Any time you were transferred from one station to another you would have to undergo a physical and a medical examination, too. Then you were assigned to a group which covered, basically, probably almost the same thing as we had in boot training: seamanship, obstacle course, rifle. We had signal, that was the seamanship part; then we had airplane identification, ship identification, friend or foe. We weren't given any real knowledge of the events of the time.

C: Did you keep up with the events of the time?

D: I did. I would read the newspaper and listen to the radio. We were more concentrating on our own, I wouldn't say survival, but our own ability to absorb this training because it was important to us that anything we learned would benefit us.

C: Absolutely. You had to be well trained.

D: We had to be sure we were skilled.

C: Mr. D'Ostuni, I believe you had completed your remarks on the training at the Little Creek, Virginia, Amphibious School in preparation for your assignment to the Pacific. Can you tell me what happened next? After you completed the training, were you given an assignment?

D: The training wasn't actually completed. During the middle stages of the training, we realized we were going to be assigned to a particular class of ships and this was LSM (Landing Ship Medium). It was a new type of amphibious landing craft. It was designed, built and commissioned. It hadn't seen service until it was sent to the Pacific. Mostly amphibious operations were carried out by LSTs. There was one particular LSM that was built and it was used as a training ship--LSM 201--and when we realized that we were going to be assigned to LSMs, we began our training, our sea training, so to speak, on this particular craft, the 201.

C: Did you actually go out to sea in it and practice landings?

D: We did. The group that was assigned to Little Creek was composed of men who would be assigned to different tasks on the ship: electricians, quartermasters, seamen, firemen, motor

machinist mates, radarmen, signalmen, etc., most of the compliment that were needed to staff the LSM. What would supplement our classroom work we would go on to the ship and pair up with a person of a similar rate, and we would go through the paces of operating the equipment, landing the ship, opening the bow doors and lowering the ramp and fire drill, etc., all the details that would be needed for the knowledge of operating this particular type of vessel. Not only were we assigned to each particular person, there were officers too that complimented our group. So it was almost certain that the group that we were training with and the officers would be assigned to a particular ship.

C: How many men did the LSM hold?

D: Approximately--we started with 50 enlisted men and 4 officers. But then gradually as the need became such that the services or the operations of the vessel were more dangerous or less, the compliment of the crew was increased. But there was one interesting thing. As the training on the LSM ended, there were particular men who were selected from the class and sent to a shipyard. I was one of the privileged who was sent to Wilmington, Delaware, and that was where the ships were being built and launched.

C: Was that the LSMs?

D: LSMs. I was assigned there for two weeks with maybe three or four others with one or two officers (not necessarily an officer from my ship), and the reason for that was our responsibilities and duties were we were assigned to a barracks on the shipyard and we were given sustenance and leave, but we had a roster. Our responsibility was to examine the welds, the tanks, the compartments, ballast tanks, fuel tanks and water tanks. Prior to them being sealed, it was our responsibility, when our assignment came up, the shipyard foreman would say, well, such and such a compartment is going to be sealed and it would be our responsibility to go in there and inspect the welds to see that there weren't any debris in it.

C: Kind of a final check.

D: Final check and then we would sign and they would seal it in our presence. The reason for that was to get kind of a quality control thing knowing that we didn't know what ship we had signed off. I remember there were three vessels that I inspected: the 218, the 219, and the 220. I remember those. And I have an interesting comment.

C: How long were you there?

D: I think it was two or three weeks. A short time because then they would rotate. They would get a new crew in and we

would go back to our.... Then we would be assigned to the ship and that's how I was assigned to the 219.

C: The very one you inspected.

D: But there's one incident that I remember very well. It was my duty to inspect the tanks. I was notified, and it was probably the end of the shift, so I went in and looked and it was clean but there was a few welds. There was a section of 2 or 3 feet of weld that wasn't completed. The metal was butted together but it was an incomplete weld. They had moved all their welding equipment out, and the foreman said, "We'll get that later, just sign it." I said, "No when you finish it then you call me and I'll sign it." They were quite upset about it. The next day a friend and I had liberty. We were in the shipyard and we had to go through a street and Al (can't think of his last name we met in electrical school). . . someone was shouting and my companion said, they're shouting at you and I said what are they shouting at me for? And I looked and I recognized some of them from the shipyard and apparently they were quite upset about my decision not to sign the release, so I said to my shipmate, let's get out of here because I think they're looking to rough me up. Shipyard workers weren't the kindest men. So that was my experience. Then it dawned on me that they were part of that shift that was on and had to go back in and complete the job. That was one of the things that I'm proud to mention.

C: Sure because if there had been an accident or a problem....

D: But that trait carried on even after the war in the profession that I went into, in power plants.

C: It's very important to be exacting. After you completed this assignment in the Wilmington shipyard, were you assigned to LSM 219?

D: Then I went back to the training base to join the rest of the crew and I was assigned to the 219.

C: Did you ship out immediately to the Pacific?

D: No. I think there was an itinerary that I had somewhere. We went to Philadelphia, I think, to be retrofitted for guns and ammunition and the other details of the ship. After we were assigned to the ship with the full crew, we went out on a shakedown, they call it, and we were with the various vendors of the equipment: Westinghouse, Worthington or Cleaver Brooks. The manufacturers that had installed the equipment, and they went out with the ship to look at the bugs and kind of train us in the operation of the equipment.

C: I assume you went out into the Atlantic.

D: Yes, well, it was in Chesapeake Bay. What went on topside I wasn't aware of. I was only familiar with the activity in the engineroom. Being an electrician's mate, I had responsibility for equipment above deck as well: signal lights and that experience that I had in training with the gyro compass, radio equipment, batteries, etc.

C: How many electrician's mates were aboard?

D: There were three electricians. The other two were older than myself and I don't know whether they had any experience.

C: You were all of eighteen or nineteen then.

D: Eighteen years old--not quite nineteen, and even then the officers recognized, and even the older men who had some mechanical experience in other departments, the officers recognized my ability, my skill, that in spite of my youth, they made me the lead electrician.

C: Oh, that was a compliment.

D: I was tactful not to take away any responsibility or authority from those that were older than me because the gentleman that I would be seeing in Cincinnati is 84 this year. He was one of the electricians. And he was older but both men,

Arthur and John, said, "Dusty, (which was my nickname there) you're qualified, you're good at logs," and bookkeeping was a chore that no one cared to do. I enjoyed it. Record keeping is very important.

C: Oh yes, logging in and out.

D: And the fact that I could write legibly and could keep track, they gave me the responsibility. As it was later on--when promotions came along--I got the promotions, which was only right.

C: Certainly. You finished the shakedown cruise.

D: Yes. There are a few incidents that I don't recall but it went well. We jelled into a fighting unit, a complete combat machine. Then we were grouped with other LSMs and given orders to proceed.

C: Did you know where you were going when the orders came through? In a general way?

D: We knew we were going to the Pacific. Japan was our enemy.

C: How were you transported to the Pacific?

D: This was a seagoing vessel.

C: Oh, so you went on the LSM itself all the way to the Pacific.

D: This LSM was a seagoing vessel and we went from Philadelphia to Norfolk to Key West. Key West was the last U.S. port.

C: Did you go through the Panama Canal?

D: Yes. We went through the Panama Canal with a group of other ships. I don't remember those. There's a log somewhere that tells how many were assigned to a group. We were one of the first groups of this type of vessel to go.

C: What month and years was this that you started out?

D: It was the summer of 1944. The exact dates are documented somewhere.

C: I want to get a general feel so we'll know. Where did you dock in the Pacific when you finally arrived?

D: Before I get further on, during training I have to mention one of the things that most people encounter when they go on a vessel. Seasickness. 90-95 percent of the men, including

officers, that sailed on these ships never went to sea. They never were on a boat at all. So that was an experience that a lare precentage of the officers and men experienced--seasickness.

C: Did you have a case of it?

D: I had quite a bit. The fact that I could do my job--at one time it was so severe in the Pacific--that one of the officers was quite upset about my condition of seasickness that he wanted to beach me. If it wasn't for the Captain... I would always get over it and I always did the work. I assumed the responsibilities. I wasn't the only one that was sick, there were others, but for some reason the executive officer, who later became Captain, whom I'm friendly with now, I think he's a great person, he was the one. But I don't hold it against him that he wanted to put me on the beach.

C: Who was your Captain?

D: Captain Harmon Burns. He was an attorney out of Washington, DC. He was a fine officer. Captain Harmon Burns was the original Captain and the Executive Officer was Hugh Murphy who later became Captain and our engineering officer was Wallace Patton. He was from Wisconsin. Then we had a communication officer, Guy Masters, and he was a Harvard graduate. I think he lived in New York somewhere. He has since passed away. We had a

gunnery officer, Mr. Kelly, John Joseph Kelly who was from Philadelphia. He was one of the officers that was wounded. Then we also had the privilege of having a medical officer on board, Dr. F. Breed, who was a Harvard graduate. I've located him since. He's an Opthomologist and lives in Glouster, Mass. After the war ended those reassignments, Mr. Wallace who was the engineering officer, finally became Captain, and he was the one that took the ship back to the States after the war ended. But there were others like I mentioned. The original compliment of 50 men and 4 officers, but I think during that time the compliment was less. The fact that they were trying to get people out of the service. We were privileged, like I say, to have a doctor aboard during the time when we needed one.

C: Where did you dock in the Pacific after you finished this long voyage?

D: There's a chart that I have somewhere. We went from the Canal with the group and I think we went up to the New Hebrides. Bora Bora strikes a familiar name to us and that is probably one of the small islands in the Society Islands that we went to. I remember our first area that we docked at, or I don't know if we beached at, that rang a bell as far as wartime. It was Guadalcanal. The Army had occupied it. It was an assault primarily credited to the U.S. Marines, but after the island was secured the Army took over, and that was one of the areas that we

went to. In the meantime, we probably carried supplies. There were different ports along the way that we landed. These were stops, fuel stops or fresh water stops and to indoctrinate ourselves and acclimate ourselves to what was in store for us in the future because the historians will tell you what the plan was for that area--island hopping. But our major landing actually was noncombatant, but we were exposed to the conflict because of the enemy aircraft reconnaissance. It was in New Guinea. We were in New Guinea around November or December of 1944.

C: So from the time you arrived in the Pacific until November you really were not engaged in any enemy operations?

D: No. Mostly supplies, refuelling or transporting troops from one island to another. We were not actually engaged in any combat. But during that time LSMs were engaged, because October, I think, was the first in Leyte, October was the first engagement of an LSM type vessel. And it proved itself. It was said that these vessels were so successful in their operation and in whatever they were asked to do. They didn't check them out or do many tests. They just built them and sent them out.

C: That's a great tribute to the vessel.

D: The vessel *and* the crew. It was a compliment to us. I always said how so many misfits can jell into a fighting force.

C: Very different people.

D: Different and different occupations. I think a very small percentage of the actual crew had any experience in civilian life prior to being assigned to the vessel.

C: Oh, sure. But I think at this time period there was a lot of patriotism. Did you find that apparent among your crew? The fact that there was a lot of support for the war.

D: Most of us who were inducted or enlisted wanted to be in the service. There was no question. There weren't any draft dodgers or any person who contradicted the government. They were 100% behind the decisions that the staff made. Later on, we questioned them because when we look back at history, you know, why was this done? Why was that done? But at that time, and we always said that that's why you always assign young people to the military. You don't want older people who are set in their ways. But the young people today question decisions more so.

C: And there was a lot of, as you say, complete support for the war on the homefront and among the fighting forces.

D: The military is such that you have to have that unity. Whether it's right or wrong you have to have, hopefully, those

who make the decisions, make the right decision. It isn't right for us to question whether it's right or wrong.

C: Do you know how the command structure worked for your vessel,? You had a Captain as you said, but what group did your vessel fall under? Who was the ultimate commanding officer?

D: The Captain himself was the commanding officer of the vessel but we were part of a group and then the group probably had a higher ranking. Our highest ranking officer on the ship was a lieutenant junior grade and ensigns. The line officers were ensigns, but later maybe the captain would become lieutenant commander as the war progressed. Our group was part of the 7th Fleet.

C: Okay. That's what I wanted to find out.

D: And Admiral Barbe was the overall officer in charge of that particular fleet which the 219 was assigned to. It was broken down into groups. But Admiral Barbe, we were called, because Admiral Barby wrote a book, "MacArthur's Navy." We were more likely to be taking orders from MacArthur than from Admiral Barbe. They called it MacArthur's Navy for that reason. It was his decision to use the amphibious forces for his ultimate goal to capture and occupy the islands that were taken away from us--the Philippines. Most of our operations were in the Philippines.

C: Let's get into that because you mention that in January, I guess it was January 9, 1945, was the first time you saw action. Is that correct?

D: That was the first major assault for our particular ship.

C: Right and that was at .....

D: Lingayen Gulf.

C: Can you tell me anything about that encounter? What was the experience like? What were your observations of that assault?

D: There was anticipation prior to that because we were loaded with combat equipment. Men, supplies, ammunition, etc., on the ship in New Guinea. We were aware that there were other LSMs that had been involved in the landing in Leyte. One was sunk. This was something that we feared.

C: Were you personally afraid of going into combat?

D: Yes. All of us. Maybe we didn't admit it, but there was a fear of the unknown. But the description was in that convoy someone described it was one of the largest armadas he'd ever seen, because there were thousands of ships from different points that converged to go off into the Straits to make this landing.

It had been postponed, I think, because the military feared that they had more opposition. And so they had to be prepared for this landing. It was scheduled for earlier and then it was postponed. There was anticipation not only in the crew members but then you had soldiers aboard and in their conversations, we had soldiers aboard who had experience in combat prior to this landing, and a lot had been in the Pacific longer than we were and were scheduled to go back home for R&R. Particularly this group, the 43rd, who had been on Guadalcanal. They had fought in New Guinea, too, prior to its occupation. New Guinea was enemy occupied and many of these men, particularly the group that we were on were reconnaissance men, infantry. They were the soldiers who were there first. They were the front line. They met the enemy first. It was uneventful in convoy. We were escorted by a larger armada of ships. I remember distinctly that there was one ship behind us that was a civilian type yacht and I understand from conversation with people on board who were knowledgeable, that it was staffed by photographers and writers, reporters from the Associated Press and Time Life.
Unfortunately, I say that because during the convoy one of the Japanese suicide planes, kamikazes, as you remember their description, tried to crash into that yacht. I don't think it hit it. That was one of our experiences in convoy that we had to go to general quarters. As a matter of fact, that happened January 8. The convoy itself was uneventful until the day before, because the day before usually on a landing we have our

own military people and minesweepers. There are preparations made prior to a major landing. Beaches have to be secured and there are beach parties that go there, underwater demolition crews to check our obstacles and check out the beaches. So the enemy is fully aware that there is a landing coming.

C: You can't hide it.

D: No. You have to clear the harbor and clear the beach area. It was January the 8th that we became aware we were in hostile territory. We were at general quarters and plus there were planes that were trying to get into the convoy and there was anti-aircraft fire. My station at general quarters I relinquished my seniority as being in the engine room. As being the lead electrician I should have been in the engine room to go topside.

C: Why did you do that?

D: Well, I don't know. But I was assigned to the gun locker, the ammunition locker.

C: So what did that mean? What did you have to do?

D: What that meant was they had a 40mm gun, and there was another fellow and we would feed. I didn't use my skill as an

electrician but the other two electricians, one was topside at damage control and the other one was in the engine room.

C: You probably wanted to see the action.

D: I don't know whether it was to see the action, but I may have been the first casualty on the ship because during the kamikazes a shell or something hit and one of the shells was loaded. I thought I was perspiring but I could taste something salty. (I've never said this to anyone before) but I felt something salty and naturally after the general quarters was secure they took me to the sick bay and I was bleeding. What happened was one of the shells I guess struck me in my brow and it cut me. Dr. Breed and the pharmacists' mate put three or four stitches in the eye brow. So the day that we went into Lingayen Gulf, January, I had a patch over my eye. When we hit Lingayen Gulf, there was a lot of wounded. Some of the men went off the ship. Luckily, I was the only one that had a patch. I never dwelled on this minor, to me it was a scratch, compared to the wounds received by the others.

C: Were you up on topside when they actually invaded?

D: January 8th was the convoy. My general quarters was in the forward starboard ammunition locker. Now on landing I had a more responsible position. I was the ramp control operator.

C: Oh, on January 9th, yes.

D: There were doors to be opened, the bow doors. Charles McDaniels was the bow door operator and I was the ramp control operator. So upon beaching and the command of the Captain or the Executive Officer, direction was given to the operators of the doors and the ramp to lower or raise it depending on what function...

C: How far in did you get to the beaches?

D: We got right on the beach. Hopefully we would beach so the soldiers wouldn't get their feet wet. That was one of the greatest compliments that this vessel received. That it could attain a position on the beach where they could disembark personnel and vehicles without much damage or being submerged in water. There were times when the beach wasn't surveyed enough to judge the depth, but that was the responsibility of the beach master telling where vessels of this type....it was already understood just how the vessel. There was an engineering sequence that the captain or the executive officer would have to perform so as the ship would beach get on there. Then they would have to change ballast so it would be stern heavy and bow light. It was a flat bottom vessel if you can understand that. It had a stern anchor, but prior to landing on the beach the stern anchor would be disengaged and then the stern anchor would be used to

retract the vessel in case there wasn't enough propulsion by the engines to pull the vessel off the beach after it had been unloaded. So repeating, my responsibility on landing was as the ramp control operator. I was alone in this area. The only communication I had with the other parts of the ship was a sound powered phone. We had phones that were my responsibility to maintain the service to. We had sound powered phones for communication between the bridge or the engineroom and different parts of the ship. It was common knowledge in the Navy when a command was given you would repeat the command, then execute it, and repeat its execution so there wouldn't be any misunderstanding as to what order was given.

C: So did things go smoothly with your job there as a ramp operator?

D: It did. It was electrical. We were trained to operate it manually in case there was a malfunction in the electrical power or such. There was a winch with a crank and it was geared such that it would be possible to raise the ramp or lower it manually. We would practice this and on occasion there were vessels that had to do this.

C: How did the landing go?

D: There is a description of the landing. The landing prior to going on to the beach this particular day there were other LSMs. We knew we were in battle because at sunrise there was heavy bombardment of the beach by destroyers and wagons and cruisers. The Air Force, we had control of the skies. We were elated. We were at our general quarters station preparing to land and after this tremendous bombardment nothing could survive on the beach. Our feeling was that we would go in and there would be no opposition, or if any, it would be minimal. We were surprised. But we were surprised and we were aware--I wasn't, I didn't know what was going on-but my shipmates later told me that they saw and heard shells going by and landing in the water. I think I mentioned that one of the pictures shows the shell landing in front of the landing craft.

C: So you really didn't have any first hand observations?

D: The only way I knew what was going on would be in a conversation that you would try to keep it light and not say too much because of orders on the sound powered phones. But I could feel the concussion, not knowing whether it was our ship that was hit. I understand that we took seven direct hits. But it was frightening for me not knowing. I had a responsibility to do. I had a job and that was to operate the ramp controls and that was it.

C: What happened after the members of the 43rd got off the LSM? Did you retreat?

D: There's a detailed description, documented on what happened.

C: But I mean did your LSM retreat? You don't have to give me a description of the battle.

D: We weren't able to get people off on the beach. We had to come off.

C: Right. That's what I mean. You had to retreat.

D: We had to retreat. I don't remember if we retreated with the ramp down or the doors open or not. But we had to retreat. As a matter of fact, I believe that someone said that there was a tank on there that was stuck. A vehicle with a defective battery or whatever. It was stalled. Later it had to be pulled off the beach and pushed off so that we could raise the ramp and close the doors. When we hit the beach there were two other vessels that hit the beach. Forty-one and LSM 219 and LSM 127. But apparently the enemy shore batteries had that beach charted and they traversed their guns....

C: This is the second tape of the interview with Mr. D'Ostuni about his career in the Navy during World War II on the LSMs. I

believe we were just talking about the Battle of Lingayen Gulf and the invasion there and your job as a ramp operator. How long were you in the vicinity of Lingayen Gulf? How many days were you there?

D: I would have to guess. We probably were there about a week or less because after the landing, the injured, both with the Navy personnel and Army personnel, they had to be transported to hospital ships, but then we went back and disembarked the rest of the cargo. Then we came back and were in anchorage, so to speak, and we had to maintain a watch for suicidal boats and aircraft. I would say we probably were in the vicinity for about a week.

C: Did you feel that the training and preparation you had prior to being in your first wartime assignment served you well?

D: It certainly did. The saying was that we made boys grow to be men.

C: Did the men on the LSM suffer many casualties? Your own crew?

D: Yes. On the Lingayen Gulf invasion there were, I believe, five who were injured and one who was killed--the radio operator.

C: Yes, you showed me the picture of the shell above the radio.

D: Plus there were three Army personnel killed and I don't know offhand the count, probably 12 Army personnel were wounded. Looking at it from the Army point of view, it affected them more so than all the landings that they made, this was the largest casualties that they suffered at any one engagement. Some of these men were scheduled to go back to the States and it affected them quite a bit. And this was the result of my locating them 50 years later.

C: Did you have a chance to ever see General MacArthur?

D: No, I never had the experience but there were people in the LSM group who were in close proximity to the actual landing that MacArthur made when he fulfilled that proclamation of "I shall return."

C: What invasions did you participate in subsequent to Lingayen Gulf? I believe you mentioned there were about three or four you were involved in.

D: There were other minor landings, but I can't recall because I mentioned that you make a comparison to that horrible day that we went through on the 9th, but there were several other islands in the Philippine group that we landed on and the ship was given recognition in all those landings. The last engagement that the ship was involved in was a contingent of Australian soldiers who

hadn't seen action since they fought Rommel and they were stationed in Australia and they were about to reclaim their territory in Borneo. So it was in the Borneo invasion we had the pleasure of operating with a fine group of gentlemen soldiers, Australian soldiers.

C: Were they on your LSM?

D: I don't remember just where we loaded them, but we took them on for the landing in Borneo. The opposition, although we didn't encounter it, was mostly aircraft. This was toward the end of the war where the kamikaze was used as a means of combatting any invasion attempts as far as American forces were concerned. But I did witness prior to going into the landing, and this was where I had heard the scorched earth policy, that the Japanese had set fire to vast oil fields and oil storage facilities in Borneo because that was a rich oil source of the British empire before it was captured and invaded by the Japanese.

C: Now you had mentioned when we were just conversing generally that you had made a landing in Palawan in the Philippines.

D: Yes.

C: Was there anything significant about that landing or unusual or interesting for you and your ship?

D: That landing was insignificant as far as our ship was concerned, but from the Army point of view it was because the pending landing was anticipated by the Japanese. Their airplanes or their spy network knew, and it was documented that there were American POWs on that island. And the Japanese, knowing of the pending invasion, brutally tortured these POWS. And it's documented that one Army survivor was able to verify this.

C: How did they get rid of the prisoners?

D: They sealed the barracks so that the prisoners couldn't escape and they set fire to them.

C: That was another atrocity. You mentioned while we were talking also that your ship picked up a Japanese fellow that was on the island.

D: We were beached. I don't recall who was responsible for it but we picked up a young Japanese lad who was just barely clothed, just around the waist. His trousers were ragged. And he was brought aboard the ship and in trying to interview the lad I was able to find out his name--Suhan--from Maurati, Japan. Apparently in the communication, he was a merchant seaman that survived a sinking--one of the survivors of his vessel. We had to accommodate him in a temporary cell which was formerly a boatswain's locker where we stored the chain or a rope, and he

was fed. He was quite reluctant to accept our hospitality, but for the short time that he remained on board, maybe a few days, he was transferred to the G-2, which is the intelligence department of the Army, for questioning as to what his participation was on the island.

C: And you never knew what happened to him then?

D: No, never. I questioned some of the Army personnel but we can only guess.

C: Where were you on VJ Day in August 1945? Were you on the ship, on the LSM?

D: I was. I would hope that I wasn't seasick but I'm sure that I was probably on watch. But I do remember when the war.... well, we had an idea the war would end with the dropping of the first nuclear bomb on Hiroshima. It had more of an impact on us I think than the action.

C: Why do you say that?

D: I loved Physics. I had some idea what nuclear fission was in the bomb. When I heard about this bomb and I said, well that, to me, my feeling was the war had ended when they dropped the bomb. We were aware of a pending invasion. Our feeling was that

we would land on the mainland the first of November and none of us would survive. Like I mentioned, after that January 9th invasion, the mood of the ship was changed for some reason or other.

C: Was it positive or negative?

D: Negative, very negative. Some of the men that were wounded came back to the ship and we thought that was the ticket back home. The fact that those that survived and then had to come back wasn't favorable to us.

C: Kind of a bad omen.

D: It was like what are you trying to do with us; we were almost expendable. We realized that later, after so many years, we were kind of a shore side flotilla. If they hadn't dropped the bomb, the LSMs plus the first cavalry division would have been the first ones on the beach. There's documentation in history of what opposition we would have met. It would have been a casualty on both sides, both on the Japanese and on the American forces. That was one of the reasons why when the bomb was dropped, we were kind of elated, you know, those of us who had some idea of the potential of this weapon realized that the war would soon be over.

C: So when it actually was declared over...

D: When it was over I vaguely don't remember it all. I don't know whether it was shock, but the stories I heard that there was gunfire and all the ships...for me it probably was my feeling, if I can recollect, was more of sadness than joy. Relieved that it was all over and I could go home, but they say there was fireworks; well, actually everyone was shooting firearms which in many cases caused casualties in themselves.

C: Oh, indiscriminate firing.

D: That's right. But there was a description of elation. It wasn't such that I could get a bottle and get drunk or something. I felt sad because I was friendly with the radio operator that got killed and it was only later on that I realized when I was getting involved with these reunions, he was a twin. He had a sister.

C: So you mourned the losses that occurred.

D: I really can't remember. Was it something that I've forgotten or just blanked out? There are others that vividly remember that night or that day when the war ended, but, truthfully, I can't.

C: Well, that's interesting.

D: To me, like I said, truthfully, the war ended when they dropped the bomb.

C: You knew that the end was in sight. Where did you go next?

D: We remained in that general area of the Philippines. We were in Manila and then we went Luzon and we were used primarily...when the war ended, everyone was counting the points on how soon they would be transferred back to the States and released. There were a lot of us from the original crew. The older men started to leave. And it was sadness because we had new people coming in and there was comaraderie among the original crew that had seen combat that's undescribable. It's there.

C: And it's still maintained.

D: Oh, definitely. More so 50 years later. We were hauling lumber. We were carrying mahogany lumber from MacArthur's lumber camps or something. A lot of the vessels were carrying expended shells. It was routine and yet it wasn't. It started to get, oh I don't know. I was reprimanded once by one of the officers for being out of uniform. It was a hot day. I was transfering ship to shore power and my responsibility is that when we were docked I had to service the generators, and it was in the afternoon and

I happened to be transfering and the Captain noticed that I was working and one of the officers said, "D'Ostuni, get below and get into uniform." The Captain overheard him. The Captain knew my ability and was more concerned with getting shore power. His priority was to get the ship ready for whatever it had to do to get back stateside rather than one of his enlisted men being out of uniform.

C: Did you have trouble adjusting to the heat out there because it was intense?

D: I never did. It bothers me now but I was one of those that tan very easily. I did get dengue fever out there once and I had to be hospitalized a couple of days on the USS WISCONSIN. They took me aboard that ship. They had the facilities a sick bay to treat me. That was one of the problems in the South Pacific. You would get malaria and fevers.

C: Sure because it was hot and it was humid. When did you finally come back stateside?

D: In November. The war ended, I believe, in August. I had enough points and time overseas. I don't know how they calculated it but I left the ship--I wasn't sure until I refreshed my memory--I left the ship in November and was transferred on the USS Sirius. It was an AKA, a transport that

was going stateside. So bag and baggage with several other shipmates, this was in Manila, I was transferred to this ship. It was coming back to the states and it was an uneventful trip from the Pacific through the northern route. I think we went up by Alaska because it was warm and then it got cold.

C: Where did they let you off finally?

D: San Francisco. The Golden Gate Bridge was a really great sight. That was Victory Day for me, I think.

C: Coming back to the states?

D: When I saw that Golden Gate Bridge.

C: When were you finally discharged?

D: I wish I could take that train ride now. I took a cross country train ride from San Francisco. When I was in the Naval Station in San Francisco, they wanted to keep me in and said something about advanced schooling, and as I mentioned, I had taken the V-12, and if I would like to resubmit on that occasion an examination to Officers Candidate School. Then they wanted to keep rates of those that qualified.

C: But you decided to get out.

D: No. I didn't want to but the last few months in the service where I liked the military I didn't care for it. I turned against it later. Then when I got into Boston where again they tried to recruit me to stay in because I was a reservist. Even though you're inducted, you're a reservist for six years. This was a commitment that you signed to stay in, so in 1953 I almost was called back for the Korean War.

C: So you were in a reserve status even after you were discharged.

D: Yes. I was reserve V-6. They tried to recruit me to stay in but I was inactive duty.

C: You wanted to return to civilian life, I assume.

D: I wanted to return to civilian life and actually when I look back I probably should have sought counselling or direction. You didn't have that in those days but it was a shock for me to come back. Culture shock from all this turmoil and then when I started to go back to school and I began to "smell the flowers." I appreciated it. My wife to this day mentions that when I dated her how appreciative I was of life.

C: Oh, I think so after seeing all that carnage.

D: Because I never said anything to anyone, I just kept it to myself. It was very discouraging because I went back to school, Park University Summer School and took courses. People had enough of the war. They didn't care whether you were in.

C: They didn't want to listen, I guess, anymore.

D: We didn't want to say anything. What I felt was that I wanted people to appreciate what we had--what the United States went through--all the suffering. There was sugar rationing, gasoline rationing. You know what I'm saying?

C: Exactly.

D: We weren't attacked like the Europeans or the English.

C: Exactly. We didn't have the enemy at our door.

D: I felt that. I was mature enough to realize that, and it had an impact when I was going to school. A lot of the youngsters just didn't take school seriously.

C: They were too privileged. Can you tell me what medals you achieved for your service?

D: The Victory Medal that most of the men received, and I received the Asiatic-Pacific Medal and the Philippine Liberation Medal. It was only in the past several years that I asked for them.

C: Oh, you you did have to ask for them.

D: Well, they gave you the ribbons but they never gave you the... The designate what you're entitled to receive.

C: But they just never struck the medal perhaps.

D: No they never did. Some did and some didn't. There are several that I received. I can't remember now what they were.

C: Did your service in the Navy in any way redirect your life and re-channel it regarding an occupation in the post-war period?

D: The company I worked for I thought I would own someday, and I found that because I was skilled enough in all aspects of that business to own it, and when I went I found that the previous owner had died and it went into receivership and went out of business. While I wanted to get employment in a similar field, my priority was to go back to college and get a degree, an associates degree. But I couldn't. Of course, I had responsibility like I mentioned, at home. I was the oldest and I

was the only one working besides my father. I felt obligated to help the family. I was taking some technical courses in one of the trade schools and I don't know how I came across. I was interested in engines--steam engines--I came across an engineer and I questioned him. He was quite impressed with my knowledge of engines and electricity and he said, "you should get an engineer's license or something stationary." So I inquired as to what I had to do and what knowledge or exams and I pursued it from there. I got a license. A state inspector was giving out engineering licenses pertaining to power plants, and I got a license and I was working in a box shop of all things, but I made others things. I made other things than boxes. I made coffins and I made stationery boxes. I got involved in a lot of things that I had skill for. But then I went to work for the utility. It was just a chance that I went and I was going to school and I was working.

C: But I guess your Navy experience with engines and electricity kind of directed you.

D: And I loved it. My Navy experience definitely directed me into the career that I followed the rest of my life.

C: That's very interesting. That happens to a lot of people. Did you feel that the war changed your life in any way? Changed your ideas about life or changed you personally?

D: That's very difficult to say. I firmly believed I was structured before I went in the service. I was a leader more than a follower and there are a lot of things that I can say about that. To prove my point, because I had four children and I raised them and there are those that lead and those that follow. And when you follow, it's always good to follow those with integrity and honesty and character.

C: Absolutely.

D: You follow those and not those that will send you down a path, you know, you're talking to a different generation, you know what I'm saying? So I believe that when my father sent me off I said, "Pa, you don't have to worry." And he didn't.

C: Did you write letters home to your parents from the Pacific?

D: I did. I don't know whether my mother kept them or not.

C: They would have been a great source of information.

D: My mother wasn't one to keep things, but I did write to my mother and my father about my experiences.

C: Unfortunately, a lot of people's letters have disappeared.

D: But about getting back to being structured. It reinforced what I already was made of until the present day. You know what I'm saying? I'm not ashamed to say it.

C: Moving onward into the present more or less. You are very involved in the LSM organization. Can you tell me when that began and how many members are in it?

D: I've always wondered whatever happened to the men that I served with. Did we ever have a reunion? Did they ever try to get a hold of me and couldn't locate me? A friend of mine told me about an organizational meeting in 1989 of an LSM, so I made inquiries and got involved. I was the only representative from the 219, and we had our first meeting in Norfolk, Virginia.

C: Of the National Organization?

D: The birth of the national in 1989.

C: Just six years ago. Isn't that amazing.

D: Just six years ago.

C: And is there a New England Chapter as well?

D: There is a New England Chapter and there's a Northwest Chapter and there's a Florida Chapter now.

C: Yes, there are regional chapters I guess.

D: Right now we have over 3,100 members on the mailing list and there is a potential for more, but we may have reached the peak because it was late in organizing. Most of the men who belonged who were involved are along in years health wise and not able to travel or to get involved with it. And I'm very fortunate that I was inspired prior to that. There were several people from the ship that I had located. This Charles Chrisofuli, the picture that you saw from Merrit Island. He's quite active in a religious group and I went to visit him because my son had a job in Tampa, and I expressed a desire to have a reunion of our ship. He didn't say either way, but he was notified plus another gentleman about the pending reunion in 1989 but he never, for some reason or other, wasn't able to make it.

C: Are there more 219ers in the National Organization than yourself?

D: Yes, there are due to my effort in locating them. I've located over 37 men plus the officers.

C: That's almost the whole ship.

D: Right. But quite a few have passed away. We were very fortunate. The first two meetings I was the only representative from the 219. It was after 1990 or 1991 that I took a more concentrated effort on locating men from the ship and making them aware that it was a national organization. We were very fortunate, like I mentioned, to have the Captain of the ship meet with us in Charleston at one of our reunions, and the Executive Officer, who I mentioned made a career out of the Navy, lives in Charleston and hosted a dinner for the people that attended that particular reunion. We try to get between 8 and 10 members of the crew and their wives. The wives have just as great a time as the men. But there are ships beside my own who have a greater attendance as a group than we have, and there are still some ships that have their own individual reunions.

C: Some of the larger ships. Where are you going to hold your 50th anniversary reunion coming up?

D: We will be having our 50th anniversary in Cincinnati, Ohio. It will be the 50th anniversary of the ending of the conflict both in Europe and Japan. It will be a very memorable experience for all of us that will attend, and we're hoping that those that weren't able to attend others will at least try to make this one. It's the last one probably, and I'm hoping that I can maintain my health in order to continue. I've attended all the reunions that we've had since the National LSM Association was organized.

C: That's great. I want to thank you very much for participating in the Oral History program with your reminiscences on WWII and the LSMs and your training here in Newport. As I mentioned I will get the tape transcribed and we'll do some editing and it'll be ready for the archives for future research.

D: I certainly appreciate the interview and hopefully you will be able to contact others that will contribute to your effort in treasuring these historical moments that many of us have had for the past 50 years. Thank you very much.

C: You're welcome and I hope they will contribute. Thank you.

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August 14, 1996

Mr. Leonard D'Ostuni
7 Tallman Avenue
Cranston, RI 02910

Dear Mr. D'Ostuni:

I am enclosing the final typed copy of the oral history I conducted with you on your experiences in the LSMs in World War II. I hope that you and your children will enjoy reading this reminiscence of your naval service during such a crucial period of our history.

I am retaining one copy in the Naval Historical Collection for research purposes. I know that scholars and researchers will find much of value in your oral history in years to come.

Thank you so much for participating in our oral history program. I appreciate your giving of your time and sharing your memories with me.

Sincerely yours,

Evelyn M. Cherpak
Head, Naval Historical
Collection

Enc.

June 29, 1996

Dear Ms Cherpak,

I want to thank you for sending the transcrift of my interview made last year in your office.

The only corrections I made were the Captain's first name which is Harmon and the Dr. F. Breed the Medical officer, otherwise I left my ramblings intact. After reading the report I realize I have a tendency to drift from subject matter in question.

I am grateful that I was ask to participate in contributing oral history of my experiences durring Worl War II.

Have an enjoyable Summer.

Sincerely,

Leonard Castuni