

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF NAVAL WARFARE

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RADM CHESTER W. NIMITZ, JR.

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INTERVIEWEE: RADM CHESTER W. NIMITZ, JR., USN (RET.)

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF NAVAL WARFARE

DATE: NOVEMBER 6, 2001

EMC: This is the first oral history interview with Rear Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Jr. It's being conducted at his home at North Hill in Needham, Massachusetts. Today's date is November 5, 2001. I am Evelyn Cherpak, the curator of the Naval Historical Collection at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. Admiral Nimitz, I am very pleased that you could give us some time this morning to be interviewed for our Oral History Program on Naval Warfare. I'd like to begin the interview by asking you where and when you were born?

CWN: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, on February 17, 1915.

EMC: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

CWN: I have three sisters, no brothers.

EMC: Where did you spend your youth, since your father was in the Navy?

CWN: We spent it traveling around, following my father in the Navy, you see, is exactly what we did.

EMC: Where did you graduate from high school?

CWN: I never really did.

EMC: Oh.

CWN: I went to San Diego High School, I think, in what amounted to be, was supposed to be, the tenth grade. And then I ended up going to Severn School, a preparatory school for the Academy. And spent two thirds of the year there, and so I never really graduated from any schools. I left Severn before the end of the school year, being confident that I'd pass the competitive exam for the Naval Academy as a son of a naval officer with presidential appointments. And went to the Naval Academy.

EMC: So the Severn School was a prep school basically?

CWN: Entirely. At that time it was entirely a prep school for the Naval Academy.

EMC: You finished, I assume, tenth grade there, did you?

CWN: No, I finished the tenth grade in San Diego High School.

EMC: Oh, okay.

CWN: And then went to Severn.

EMC: Severn School. Why did you decide to enter the Naval Academy?

CWN: I frequently say, facetiously, that I had graduated from the Academy before I understood there were other educational institutions I could have gone to. It was the only one ever talked about in the family. And I don't know that my father--I don't know that he could have ever afforded to send me to college, quite frankly. I ultimately ended up getting out of the Navy because I couldn't afford to send my girls to college and stay in the Navy.

EMC: Did your father influence your selection, and did the Navy life have an impact on you, do you think in your choice?

CWN: Well, yes, the Navy life appealed to me. I certainly was attracted to it.

EMC: So the moving, the constant moving around didn't really affect you negatively.

CWN: No, no. Not until I'd done it for twenty-one more years out of the Academy.

EMC: From whom did you receive your appointment to the Academy?

CWN: The president. The president gave fifteen appointments a year to the sons of Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard officers. And you took a competitive exam for them.

EMC: Oh, that's great. Well, when did you enter the Naval Academy, what year?

CWN: Nineteen thirty-two. June 4th, 1932 or June 9th, at the depth of the Depression. And my class, entering in 1932, my class graduated in 1936. And it was the smallest Naval Academy class for years, before or ever since. They just didn't have the money.

EMC: It was because of the depression, I guess.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Even an education that was free was difficult.

CWN: Yes, as a matter of fact, of interest, the class that graduated first after I got to the Naval Academy, the class of

1933, they couldn't even afford to commission all of the people from the Naval Academy. And so thirty-three filtered back into the Navy, one year, two years, and three years later as Roosevelt gradually built up the Navy.

EMC: Interesting. Can you comment on the education you received there?

CWN: Yes, well, yes. I think it was simply marvelous. The reason I say that is that as a Navy junior, many years later I got out of the Navy, and knowing nothing and in a very competitive world, found the Navy experience and the Naval Academy education served me very well.

EMC: Good. Did you get involved in athletics at all at the Academy?

CWN: Yes, to some extent. I rowed on the plebe crew. My father had been a crewman. And I guess I rode on a JV crew in my second year. But then I didn't; from then on I was not in varsity athletics.

EMC: I suppose social life and vacation time was very limited?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: During your four years there.

CWN: Yes, it was. But my grandchildren can't believe what it was like when I tell them that, "Well, our first year at the Naval Academy we got two dollars spending money a month, the next year four dollars, the next year seven fifty and the last year ten dollars."

EMC: Well, things were much cheaper then, too. Where did you spend your summers on cruises when you were there?

CWN: Well, summers, vacations, I spent generally up on Cape Cod. Vacation month, I think, was pretty much September.

EMC: Oh, did your parents own a place on Cape Cod then?

CWN: No, no. I had an aunt, my mother's father and mother had retired there. But the rest of the time we were either on cruises or on a second class summer, pretty well occupied.

EMC: Right. They kept you busy and it was kind of a year-round situation at the Academy. Did you feel that your education, your technical education, at the Academy prepared you for the future Navy duties you were to assume?

CWN: Yes, I think it was remarkably good. I'm constantly bemused



by the continuing search for money from its graduates by the Naval Academy Alumni Association so that the Academy can do this or do that, put up a new field house or some such thing as that. And, to the best of my knowledge, I never heard of anybody giving the Naval Academy money at any time while I was at the Naval Academy. And, furthermore, I keep pointing out to the Alumni Association that the people who graduated from the Academy while I was there were really the people who ran World War II. And it seemed to me the Academy did a pretty damn good job when you consider how much it had to be diluted with reserves and so forth to fill it out. And, therefore, I am always allergic to saying-- so that the Naval Academy can fulfill its full mission. I think its mission was filled very well with taxpayer money.

EMC: All right. Are you a member of the Academy Alumni Association?

CWN: Yes, just by definition.

EMC: Right, oh, very good. Did you enjoy your years in Annapolis? Your four years there?

CWN: Yes. I certainly never felt abused or unduly confined. I just had never known any kind of different sort of existence. I was prepared for that kind of existence and....

EMC: And that kind of discipline--

CWN: Yes, yes.

EMC: --that you have there. Well, you graduated in 1936. This is before the war began. What was your first ship assignment, and your first job on the ship?

CWN: My first ship was the INDIANAPOLIS, a simply 10,000-ton, so called Treaty class heavy cruiser. She was also flagship for the scouting force. And my first job was as assistant to the navigator. It just couldn't have been a more heavenly job for a young officer right out of the Naval Academy, because I joined the INDIANAPOLIS in Brooklyn where she was being fitted out to take President Roosevelt to Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. And I was aboard when we took him down there. And it was just simply a marvelous cruise. And being assistant navigator, I was always up on the bridge, I knew exactly where we were and what we were doing and so forth. And the president and his son--

EMC: James?

CWN: James and I and another person out of my class, we were the only four polliwogs on board. So that when we crossed the line, the INDIANAPOLIS had just been crossing the line many times during some maneuvers before they picked up Roosevelt. So they

made a real ceremony of crossing the line. And the president would get the four of us together and give us scurrilous jobs to do.

EMC: Oh, really. What did you have to do for example? Do you remember?

CWN: Well, for instance-- Yes, sure. "Nimitz, you'll--" There's a general announcing system outlet in each of the, on each side of the quarterdeck which is not used when you're under way. "You get up at eleven-thirty and at four-thirty and pass words like, "All you shellbacks pull out of your bunks." And so forth and just heckle them. And so all of the ill will fell on us. The penalty for Roosevelt was they fined him a dollar cigar for each member of the crew.

EMC: Oh.

CWN: Yes, he was a great smoker of cigars.

EMC: Oh, right, right. So he had to buy one for each member of the crew?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Oh, how interesting. Well, you were on a very, very

important cruise and making very interesting stops along the way.

CWN: Right. Well, yes very interesting. In Buenos Aires, as the ship pulled along side this lovely sort of park-like embarcadero, there were massed school children singing "The Star Spangled Banner" in English. I can hardly remember the words let alone, and these children who didn't speak English had been taught to sing it in English in honor of the president. It was really remarkable.

EMC: Great. And you went to Montevideo and Rio, too, I gather?

CWN: Yes, I went to Montevideo to lay--as a representative of the President--to lay a wreath on the Unknown Soldier of Montevideo, decked out in full dress and so forth. We were all required to take part in social activities while we were in Rio, in Buenos Aires. And it was simply just one long--

EMC: Party?

CWN: --fete, yes.

EMC: Did you meet the president of Argentina then?

CWN: No I didn't.

EMC: But I imagine you had parties with Naval officers?

CWN: Oh, these parties were put on by prominent civilians and so forth. I spent my time, pretty much for the four days, with a family that had two twin daughters, a Dutch family, who had two twin daughters our age. And he was the owner of a great number of the railroad routes in Argentina and very, very wealthy. We spent time both at their houses in Buenos Aires and in the country outside.

EMC: Oh, you had a wonderful experience.

CWN: Yes, it was.

EMC: Wonderful experience. What was your opinion of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his son James?

CWN: Oh, I thought they were fine. They were fine, yes. Actually.

EMC: Congenial?

CWN: Actually, I don't know anybody that ever really met and knew Roosevelt who didn't like him. You couldn't help it; he just had the most remarkable personality. And, you know, I'm sure as time passes and as history fades into the background that he's, I

think even now, really jockeying for third place in our hierarchy of ex-Presidents.

EMC: Right. Well, did you have the same kind of experiences in Montevideo and Rio de Janeiro as being feted at all of these parties. Were you part of the social scene?

CWN: Well, Buenos Aires was the only place we stayed that length of time.

EMC: Okay, because I know Roosevelt made a speech in Rio, and he was entertained there and Montevideo, too. Well, you were under the charge of Captain Hewitt at that point in time.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Can you give me your impressions of him?

CWN: Oh, marvelous, marvelous. The INDIANAPOLIS had just wonderful officers all the time I was on it. Captains, executive officers and department heads, they all became very prominent naval officers during World War II. And Captain Hewitt had a daughter, Floride Hewitt. And, as the senior ensign on INDIANAPOLIS, one of my jobs was to be sure that any ship social functions, that somebody took care of the daughters of senior officers on board. And it was a wonderful task, because I was

always delighted to take care of Floride myself.

EMC: She lives in Middletown, Rhode Island.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Now she's still there with her husband Captain Taylor. I see them occasionally. So it was a happy ship you might say?

CWN: Oh, yes. Just simply wonderful. It killed me when it was torpedoed.

EMC: Oh, right, right. And there's a new book about that incident. So your job as assistant navigator was over after the two-year time frame?

CWN: Yes, we were rotated fairly rapidly. And I stayed on the INDIANAPOLIS for two and half years, maybe a hair more. And I had jobs in the engineering department and in the deck department. And my last job was in charge of the Third Division, which was the after division of the ship, the part of the ship that gets dirty on Friday afternoon as we'd steam in fast. And everybody would have to kill themselves working for inspection the next day. So we had the real tough gang on the ship.

EMC: And you were head of that? Now after your cruise to South

America, where did the ship go back to?

CWN: It went back to the Pacific base in Long Beach. And I got married at that time in Long Beach, while the ship was in Long Beach.

EMC: Was that in '37 or '38?

CWN: 'Thirty-eight, '38.

EMC: 'Thirty-eight. And where did you meet your wife, may I ask?

CWN: At the Mare Island Navy Yard. She had graduated from Dental, Royal Dental College, in London. And had practiced as a locum for six months and decided that that experience told her that she should get orthodontic training after. And so she came to the United States, to the University of California in San Francisco, which is a dental school, and I met her while we were overhauling, a short overhaul, on the INDIANAPOLIS in Mare Island.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sake. Isn't that interesting?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: So she's a dentist?



CWN: Yes.

EMC: Oh, did she ever practice?

CWN: Other than that six months as a locum, no. But she did graduate. She did get her degree in orthodontistry as well. But then we got married and began this moving business.

EMC: Right, and that's a problem, right. Oh, how interesting. So she's British?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Do you have any connections with England still?

CWN: Well, yes, she still has.

EMC: Siblings there?

CWN: She has two. She has one sister there that's alive, a younger sister, and she talks to her on the telephone fairly regularly. And that sister has a couple of children, one of whom, with his wife and children, come to the Cape almost every summer. They're very close to our children.

EMC: That's great.

CWN: Yes, it's wonderful.

EMC: Very, very interesting. Well, you left the INDIANAPOLIS in 1938 and you decided to go into the submarine service, and I wonder why you made that choice?

CWN: First place, I couldn't pass the physical for aviation. Matter of fact, when our class was given the physical, very few people could pass it.

EMC: It must have been rigorous.

CWN: Oh, it was so rigorous they had to change it, or they'd never gotten any aviators. Anyway, so submarines offered a chance for command at a much younger age. And they had the appeal of an independent command that also could do a great deal of damage. I mean a very powerful ship if things worked right. So it had an appeal and it also had extra pay for submarine people.

EMC: Oh, really?

CWN: Pay and a quarter.

EMC: Oh, because of the type of service you were entering.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: So that appealed to you. What did your father think of that?

CWN: Well, he'd been a submariner. So that probably influenced me, too.

EMC: So he supported that. Did you attend sub school in New London, Connecticut?

CWN: I did.

EMC: What kind of training did that consist of?

CWN: Precise, very precise training for being a submarine officer. And just as an aside, I'm constantly impressed by the fact that if anybody in the world knows how to teach people to do what they're going to need to do, the American Armed Forces understand that perfectly. And just think, if you will, of a Nimitz Class carrier, finished with all of its intricacies, pulled up alongside a dock and then having the Navy--then saying to the Navy, "Here's your ship. Get some people to run it and operate it." The planning and forethought that had to go into getting people competent to do all the myriad jobs--the armed

services do them constantly.

EMC: Training?

CWN: Training, training, training.

EMC: Right.

CWN: And people say, "Well, that's training, not education." You can say what you want. The armed forces have literally changed the circumstances of blacks, for instance.

EMC: Women.

CWN: And women, absolutely. And it's because the armed forces know how to teach, how to train. They may not know how to do it scientifically. For instance, my prof at the Naval Academy in electrical engineering, I remember, used to--had hit me in the forehead several times with a piece of chalk when I fell asleep. And I got to know him very well later in submarine. But he also knew that he didn't know much electricity either, but he was damn sure going to be sure I knew what was in this book. And that's not all bad.

EMC: No, so you got good training at sub school. How long was the training before you shipped out?

CWN: Six months.

EMC: So that was long enough.

CWN: Yes. And then I went to the STURGEON in San Diego, a brand new fleet submarine.

EMC: And what were your duties there?

CWN: Well, as a junior officer, they always included the commissary officer, the boardroom, mess, treasurer, the ship service officer, all those crummy little jobs that had to get done. And I probably was the first lieutenant, and I don't remember. But obviously by the time I left the STURGEON, I'd done everything.

EMC: Everything that a junior officer would do.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: I just wanted your observation on life in a pre-World War II submarine. I've been to the Fall River Battleship Cove and been in a World War II submarine, and to me it was extremely claustrophobic and almost tin-canny.

CWN: Well, the so-called fleet submarines that I'd say they were those from one--I don't know someplace around number one sixty on, STURGEON was one eighty seven. She was air conditioned and beautiful, big, comfortable. We all had our two-bunk staterooms except for the skipper. But they were comfortable, and we had a nice ward room. The crew had their own bunks; there was no hot bunking or anything like that.

EMC: Right.

CWN: Mind you, the air conditioning--

EMC: That's most unusual.

CWN: The electrical machinery. But it later became obvious that it made the life worth living. It was a very nice life.

EMC: Oh, really?

CWN: When we were operational, we would go out on Monday mornings and come back Friday afternoons.

EMC: And where did you go? How far out did you go?

CWN: Well, I was based in San Diego. We would go, oh, to operating areas, as far enough off San Diego so that we could

shoot torpedoes and that sort of stuff. And there were lots of other ships in San Diego similar, and had different operating areas. And we'd come in Friday afternoon. When I had the duty, I had to work on my notebook. But Joan would come out to the ship for supper, and they'd ask, "What do you want for supper?" We could order lobsters or steaks, or anything else. So it was really....

EMC: Quite elegant, quite nice, yes.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Well, maybe the ship that I saw was of a different--

CWN: You must have seen an S Class.

EMC: Oh, yes, I must have; it had very, very tight quarters. Anyway that was your routine on the STURGEON, and the five-day cruises out.

CWN: Yes. I was on the STURGEON. She subsequently was moved to Honolulu, so we spent the year before the war in Honolulu.

EMC: Did you move your family out?

CWN: Oh, yes. It was absolutely a halcyon period.

EMC: Oh, I bet.

CWN: Joan and I lived on the estate of a man named Ikeda, a Japanese man, who owned The Fair, a big department store in Honolulu. He also owned a Japanese-American investment corporation, and he owned a hotel down in the Waikiki area, very wealthy. And he had a couple of cottages on his estate, way up on Pacific Heights. It was just the loveliest living you could imagine.

EMC: Old Hawaii.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Before the tourists came.

CWN: Yes, well, I remember there was a beautiful place about, oh, a half mile up the heights from us. And Joan and I would walk by, and we used to envy it, a beautiful tennis court but no net and so forth. And so I knocked at the door one day and asked if I could put a net up. I asked if I could speak to the owner, and the owner escorted me back to where this elderly lady was, and she said, no, that I could not. But that there would be a net up within a week; she'd put it up herself. And invited us to use the court and use it for parties. And it was just....



EMC: Great.

CWN: And she was one of those original five.

EMC: An American?

CWN: A missionary.

EMC: Oh, a missionary from the U.S. Oh, how interesting.

CWN: The Lords Anointed they called them.

EMC: Oh, really. So when you were in Hawaii in 1940--

CWN: If we weren't out at sea--

EMC: Yes.

CWN: -our workday was from seven until one.

EMC: Oh, how wonderful.

CWN: So we'd have these long, long afternoons, and we'd spend them out on these remote beaches spear fishing and swimming and whatnot. It was just lovely.

EMC: Sounds great, a real paradise.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: And then came December 7, 1941. Were you in Hawaii then?

CWN: No, no.

EMC: Okay.

CWN: I would guess about probably, about November 15th, my submarine division got orders to go to Manila to augment the Asiatic Fleet. And for our families to get out of Hawaii. So Joan went back to the States. I sold our car in less than an hour, in the morning. But we were gone. And we got to Manila in a week. We got there about December 1st. And we didn't even get any shore duty, any shore leave, that night. They then got us under way and made us scout around the northern end of Luzon and around the other side, because they anticipated Japanese ships and so forth. And we came in on the night of December the 7th, their date because they're a day ahead, and I had the duty that night. And about maybe eleven-thirty that night, I got a decoded message. They had to get up and decode a message, which said, "Executed War Plan Orange. The Japanese put Pearl Harbor under attack." And so we were at war. We left that very next day on patrol, on our

first patrol.

EMC: Oh, and was the first patrol outside of the--

CWN: Well, it was off of--

EMC: --the Philippines?

CWN: Oh, yes.

EMC: Adjacent?

CWN: It was up off, I was trying to think last night of the name of the port, huge naval base at the southern end of the--

EMC: Olongapo?

CWN: No, the southern end of the--

EMC: Subic Bay?

CWN: What's the island that the Japanese, that the Chinese want and they--

EMC: Oh, Quemoy and Matsu?

CWN: No, no, no,

EMC: Taiwan?

CWN: Taiwan.

EMC: Yes, of course, Taiwan.

CWN: They had a huge base at the southern end of southwestern end of Taiwan, like their Pearl Harbor. And we were sent to patrol off that. And we were being depth-charged two days later.

EMC: Oh, sure.

CWN: So war started very rapidly.

EMC: Yes, of course, if you were in that area. Well, what was your reaction, your own personal reaction, to December 7th?

CWN: Well, uh....

EMC: Shocked? Surprised?

CWN: No particular alarm.

EMC: Did you see it coming?

CWN: Yes, more or less. Because even in Manila that night, when we came back from this route around, the search around, the island we weren't allowed to nest with each other. We had to anchor independently out. I've always been bemused by the fact that the Navy in Manila fully expected an attack at any moment. In contrast to what seemed to have been the position at Pearl Harbor.

EMC: Right, complacent.

CWN: I never could quite understand this either. But the Navy, Admiral Hart's Navy, was fully prepared. And that very next morning, December the 8th, we were in an anchorage where when we flooded, just let the submarine sink, we'd drop to the bottom and we'd have-- The water covered us, but we could use our periscopes and watch. And I remember standing on the bridge of the STURGEON watching these bombers coming over and bombing the Philippines and Cavite Naval Base. And then I actually saw the bombs, and said this is it for us. Down we went. Incidentally, that made submarines seem pretty damn good to me.

EMC: You could dive down and escape, so to speak. Well, the war had started and you were now with the Asiatic Fleet in Manila.

CWN: Right. And we were on patrol that night from Manila. We got

our patrol orders from Admiral Fife, Commodore--Admiral Fife, who was in a motor whale boat rocking back and forth off of Mariveles Harbor. And it was really quite a rough evening off Corregidor, beyond Corregidor. And he handed us our patrol orders, and we were gone. I remember him yelling at my skipper, "Have you got everything you need?" And Bull would never admit to that, ever. So Bull would yell, "No, we're short of toilet paper." And Admiral Fife yelled back, "Use your files." Anyway....

EMC: That was Halsey.

CWN: No, this is Admiral Fife.

EMC: Oh, well, who was--?

CWN: Bull Wright.

EMC: Oh, Bull Wright, another skipper.

CWN: He was the skipper, Class of '25. Anyway two mornings later we were making approach on this enormous fleet coming out of this base at Davao, and I could hear the screws of the destroyer. And about that time I could hear the exec say, "For Christ's sake, Skipper, look over there." And Skipper, all he did is say, "Down periscope, brace for depth charge." But two depth charges went off on that side of us. I could hear the screws go right over

head. I was down in the control room. I was the torpedo officer at the time at my torpedo data computer. And I remember thinking Jesus Christ! This is such a short war. Hanging onto the cables that supported one of the two periscopes that was-- Thinking, well, I mustn't look nervous. And wondering whether the roof was going to fall in. And two more depth charges went off on this side. And then it became apparent that apparently their depth charges were relatively ineffective at the time.

EMC: Well, that's good.

CWN: They corrected that very rapidly, much more rapidly than we corrected our torpedo problem.

EMC: Right, right, well you were lucky that they did miss, and they weren't that terribly effective.

CWN: Yes. Anyway, as I recollect backwards, had we had a perfect set-up on a carrier or anything else, it would have done no good. The goddamned torpedoes were running so deep that they might just have well not been running at all. They were set to run under the ships with these magnetic exploders. But, in addition to the magnetic exploder being somewhat unreliable, the depth mechanisms were allowing them to run as much as twelve and thirteen and fourteen feet deep, deeper than sonar.

EMC: Yes, deeper than the--

CWN: So if you set it at forty feet for some carrier so you can get underneath it, it was really running down there around fifty feet. And it was just--

EMC: Oh, so missing?

CWN: Yes, it was awful.

EMC: Not being very effective in doing the job that was necessary. Well, you were in the STURGEON, I believe, through 1943. Is that correct?

CWN: Yes, I guess.

EMC: 'Thirty-nine through '43?

CWN: I made six patrols on her.

EMC: And were these all out of it Manila?

CWN: No, no.

EMC: Where? Did you move?



CWN: Sweetie, the first one was out of Manila.

EMC: Right, right, exactly.

CWN: And then they--

EMC: Where did you go?

CWN: And then we ended up in Fremantle.

EMC: Oh, Australia.

CWN: Fremantle. And there we made, I don't know, anyway some patrols out of Fremantle. And then at the time of Guadalcanal, we went around the southern end of Australia and operated out of Brisbane in the Guadalcanal-Shortland area. And then finally back to Perth.

EMC: So you were based in Australia.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Now were these missions successful?

CWN: Well, the patrols--

EMC: Or the patrols, I should say.

CWN: Yes, the patrols were all deemed successful. We got a Combat Star. In other words we sank something all the time.

EMC: Oh, that's good. That's what I wondered.

CWN: Yes. We could have done much better with better torpedoes. Nonetheless, we began to learn not to pay any attention to the depth settings.

EMC: Right.

CWN: Set them at zero and let them run.

EMC: Or set them 10 degrees higher. Did you ever have a chance to meet Admiral Lockwood?

CWN: Oh, yes. Yes, he was out there for a while, it seems to me, before he became commander of the submarines in the Pacific at the Old Man's headquarters. But I can't remember where I met him. I met him a couple of times in Pearl passing back through there.

EMC: You were also involved in sort of a search and abortive, I guess, search and rescue mission near the Java Sea. Can you comment on that?

CWN: Yes, this is shortly, ultimately, after we left Manila, all of us tried to, you know, we'd stop in various Dutch East Indies ports and so forth. And the STURGEON was in Surabaya the night before Surabaya fell. The next morning it was in Jap hands. And we went around Surabaya to a town on the south coast called Tjilatjap, where we picked up, I don't know, lots of people, nurses and every other damned thing, and took them down to Fremantle. And on our next patrol, I don't remember whether it was going on patrol or coming back, they ordered the STURGEON to see if they could-- We had a boat. That fleet class happened to have boats, diesel boats, that sat up under the super structure. They asked us to see if we could go up this river which led to Tjilatjap, so it was quite a way up. And in a bay off that river there were a group of RAF aviators' camp and try to extricate them. There were mine fields about seven or eight miles deep off the entrance to this river and so the STURGEON went up to near the edge of the mine field and then we hoisted out this boat. And a gunner's mate and I took it and went to see if we could find these people. And it was the damndest thing because it was constant lightning and thunder, constant, you felt like you were illuminated on a stage.

But anyway, because we could go through the mine field, the mines were way below us, and we knew that if we stopped this goddamned engine, it wouldn't start again. It was a very balky thing. So anyway, we got to the river, we went up the river, and

we found this bay on the eastern side of it, the western side of it, a little cove. And the gunner's mate would run the boat around in the shallow water, but we didn't want to stop it so that I could jump off. And this camp was there, obviously all kinds of remains, but no bodies, no nothing. And they, it turned out, had all ultimately died of malaria or been overrun. Then I got back in the boat, and we came out. And the timing, it was still thundering and lightning. The timing run out. Hoping. When I figured I'd gone as far as I ought to, I still couldn't see the STURGEON anywhere, I tell you, it was so stormy. I took a flare and rather than shooting it into the air, I just shot it so it went SSSHHH right into the water.

EMC: Oh.

CWN: And a voice, just like right up there, said, "Chester, for Christ's sake, what are you doing?"

EMC: Oh, so you were right nearby?

CWN: I was right at the boat.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sake and you couldn't see it.

CWN: Right at the submarine. No, but you see they could hear my screws as I came out. We finally damn near ran into them. Anyway,

the great thing about that, the really amazing thing about that trip to me, was that we then hoisted the boat out and swung it in over its cradle on the submarine and lowered it into the cradle and unhooked the hook that held this big circular iron ring and the lifting gear. And lo and behold, the hook fell off the cable. You know, the way they made a cable would be pushed down through a hole, and then it's spread out and a bolt and stuff put in. And all this time I was just pulling itself out. And had that thing done that when the boat was half way out, it would have easily killed one or both of us.

EMC: Oh, heavens!

CWN: But there it was.

EMC: There it was, right. So you finished that mission. Well, it's late '42, I guess, '43?

CWN: I guess.

EMC: And you're still in the Pacific and you are about to be transferred to another submarine.

CWN: The BLUEFISH.

EMC: The BLUEFISH.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: And where was that being outfitted and what part did you play in its outfitting?

CWN: I was the exec.

EMC: At what rank were you now, may I ask? Were you promoted?

CWN: I was still a lieutenant.

EMC: Oh, still a lieutenant.

CWN: Probably. And it was being built in New London. General Dynamics, whatever we called it then. It wasn't General Dynamics then.

EMC: Electric Boat?

CWN: EB, Electric Boat Company.

EMC: Old EB.

CWN: It was a surely routine thing. Joan and I went across country by train. It was the most wonderful train ride. My God,

those were the days of decent trains.

EMC: Right.

CWN: A compartment as big as this on the train, I swear. And it had us and one child. And somebody, as soon as we arrived in New London, turned a car over to us, some friend of my grandfather's or something, so we had an automobile. And anyway it was a real vacation for me.

EMC: After, yes, service in the Pacific.

CWN: And then the BLUEFISH went back to Australia. And it was very successful, I guess, I made two patrols on her as exec, two or three. I don't remember.

EMC: Where were you home ported in Australia on the BLUEFISH?

CWN: Fremantle.

EMC: Oh, Fremantle.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: And you made a couple of patrols you said on that as exec.

CWN: Yes. And then I was taken off.

EMC: Were these patrols successful?

CWN: Oh, yes, very.

EMC: Did you sink any ships?

CWN: Both patrols were very successful.

EMC: Did you get any commendations for this personally and as a ship?

CWN: Yes, I think I probably got a Silver Star for each of them.

EMC: And when were these awarded? Were they awarded at the time or later?

CWN: Oh, no later.

EMC: Did your father award any of them?

CWN: Yes, he pinned a Silver Star on me for the trip into Tjilatjap.

EMC: Oh, I see.



CWN: Because I was on my way back to the BLUEFISH, passing through Pearl.

EMC: Oh, so you stopped at Pearl Harbor.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Was that the only time you saw him during the war?

CWN: No, I saw him at another really fateful evening later in the war. I'll tell you about it when we get there.

EMC: Oh, okay, when we get there. We're on the BLUEFISH now and you made your patrols. How long were you on the BLUEFISH?

CWN: Well, I can't really remember, somehow that's a little bit vague.

EMC: Okay.

CWN: But they took me off the BLUEFISH to put me with this ordnance PG to try to solve the torpedo problem.

EMC: Oh, okay.

CWN: I have to point out that the torpedo problem had been solved in the Pacific Fleet under Lockwood, because they simply abandoned the magnetic exploder. And they had discovered and fixed the depth thing in the Asiatic Fleet under MacArthur, as was our area. Our commander was Ralph Christy, a submariner. And Ralph Christy was an ordnance PG officer who had been very instrumental in the design of the exploder and all other aspects of torpedo design and wasn't about to change. My father said, "You know I can stand anybody who's dumb. I can stand anybody who's stubborn. But I can't stand somebody who is dumb and stubborn."

EMC: And an egomaniac.

CWN: Yes, and a phobiac. Anyway, Christy just hung onto these things. So, as I say, we studied this.

EMC: Well, couldn't somebody override him?

CWN: Sure, somebody should have.

EMC: Should have overridden his decision.

CWN: Yes, yes.

EMC: But they didn't.

CWN: They never did. No, it was just the most awful thing. Anyway, this guy and I analyzed every torpedo shot that had been fired--and we could--by both forces (Pacific and Atlantic). What course they ran on, ba, ba, ba, whether they were they at high and low speed, what range, and did they premature or didn't they and so forth and so on. And so we really-- That was the most terrible business. This is before the days of computers--to run all this data.

EMC: Right.

CWN: And we finally decided that this is just--it would remain with me forever as one of the great unknown mysteries. We finally decided on a modification of the circuit that would make them less sensitive. It turned out they were very sensitive on east-west courses--would make them less sensitive so they should not premature. And, simultaneously, in order to, with our tongue in our cheek, so to speak, take care of in case they did.

Heretofore, the torpedoes armed mechanically at 400 yards. So that if they prematured, they were only 400 yards ahead, and that's awful close. And they would wreck your torpedo room doors and so forth. And so we fixed it so they could not arm until they had been 800 yards, so we did both things. Now Admiral Christy had twenty-six torpedoes fixed, actually fifty-two torpedoes fixed the way we asked him.

EMC: Yes.

CWN: And he put me in command of my first command, the only command I had, the HADDO.

EMC: That you had of a sub.

CWN: And he put another very experienced submariner, skipper, in command who already was in command; he gave him the other twenty-six. And, incidentally, Christy himself went to sea with that guy to see--

EMC: If they worked.

CWN: Yes. Well, I was very ambitious to make a name for myself. So on my first patrol we passed through Lombok Strait into the Flores Sea; and there was, in the early morning, was a huge submarine tender with four destroyers.

EMC: Let me just turn it over. [Change to Side B of Tape]

CWN: And there was this big submarine tender with four destroyers and aircraft coming in from the east headed toward Surabaya. And I determined we were going to get that ship. We surfaced and ran away from it so that we could get out far enough

so that the aircraft wouldn't drive us crazy, and, ultimately, got ahead of it, and it was zigzagging. And I finally got myself in a position 2500 yards on its port bow for a perfect setup. And as the destroyer on its port bow passed overhead without detecting us, put up the scope, and I said, "We'll see this boat off at the water line." And I fired six torpedoes so that it couldn't possibly fail; and we had six prematures, 400 yards off our bows, just nearly killed us.

EMC: Right. That's what wasn't supposed to happen.

CWN: And couldn't mechanically happen. Well, I've always just come to the conclusion that the vacuum tubes were just breaking in some way and short-circuiting. But anyway....

EMC: So those were the ones you had analyzed and fixed.

CWN: Yes, those were the ones we analyzed and fixed.

EMC: Supposedly, yes.

CWN: Yes. So we spent the rest of that day, after we'd gotten away from these goddamned escorts, we spent the rest of that day removing the magnetic exploders from the torpedoes we had. I said, "That's the end of that." I took them over to the side. I took them topside, just threw them over the side. I was so

outraged! And I sent a message. My message simply said, "Back to the drawing board, I have destroyed my magnetic exploders." And didn't ever want to see one again. And so forth. And it turned out that the other boat had similar experiences. It fired something like eighteen of them at a tanker, and they just kept going off.

EMC: Oh, wow.

CWN: Well, so we never did solve that, and that was the end of the magnetic exploder.

EMC: So you never used it again?

CWN: Never used it again.

EMC: But you did fire torpedoes again?

CWN: Oh, sure.

EMC: And how did they work out?

CWN: They have a contact exploder. Well, by that time we in the Southwest Pacific had fired torpedoes through nets, and that determined they were running ten to twelve feet deep. So we simply corrected the settings on the depth setter. But then we

set them for zero depth anyway. I just said, "Set all the depths on zero." That meant they were running probably two or three feet under the water. And that's the way, and they worked fine from then on. And they found out, you know, that so bad was the exploder mechanisms--not just the magnetic--the contact exploder when the torpedo hit the side of a ship, the firing pins that rode on a little chassis that went up on two smooth rods, and it was held locked by a spring-loaded ring, a big ring. But that spring-loaded ring would on impact would upset and release this, and the firing pins would go up and go up. But like all everything else about these goddamned torpedoes, they rode on these rods going up in a lap fit, an absolute lap fit. So that if they didn't go right then, the thing would reset itself and then it couldn't go.

EMC: Oh.

CWN: And the way we licked that was we took those parts out of the exploder, machined them out so they were just big sloppy loose no lap fits. They worked fine from then on. But now all this is done by the operating forces.

EMC: Right, right.

CWN: Not by the goddamned torpedo station.

EMC: No, not by the engineers.

CWN: And not by the.....

EMC: Well, they did practice with them before, didn't they, somewhere?

CWN: No, they never fired them against a war shot. They never fired a war shot in peacetime.

EMC: So they didn't do practice runs with them?

CWN: Yes, we did practice runs; but they didn't have warheads, they had exerciser heads.

EMC: Oh, oh, there is a difference.

CWN: When the exercise head had reached the end of its run, it would then blow the water out of it. And it was painted yellow so you could find the thing. Listen, the torpedo situation was so bad when the war began, we really knew we just weren't going to have enough torpedoes. The way they made a torpedo, an air flask carries 3,000 pounds of air pressure and it's tremendous pressure. They would take a 21-inch or a slightly larger ingot of steel, and bore it out to make this air flask. And then they'd-- Well, first off, they'd let the ingot of steel age, for ten



years, twelve years in a torpedo station.

EMC: Oh, wow.

CWN: And, presumably, to remove any stresses or strains. Anyhow when the war came, and, finally, we got some brains in there, and they were convinced, you know, you're not going to be able to provide enough torpedoes; we're going to need torpedoes like they are going out of style. And they gave the job to Westinghouse. Westinghouse just bought sheet steel, and rolled it up, cemented it, and built torpedoes--ninety to the dozen. But everything was bad about that procurement. Now, and I think that that torpedo experience, while it was never punished, nobody ever had his head chopped off like Christy should have--has permeated armed forces in a totally different way in that, that's the reason to this day people want to test their nuclear weapons at regular intervals to be sure they're still working. This having all these weapons, never having fired them against a cliff or anything is just insanity.

EMC: Right, right, yes, definitely. We have to test.

CWN: Well, anyhow that was my experience on the....

EMC: The HADDO?

CWN: First patrol of the HADDO.

EMC: The HADDO, right. Did you engage in any rescue missions on the HADDO at all?

CWN: Oh, yes. I was looking at some papers the other day. I see as part of a patrol report, I guess it was, may have been that first patrol, we were ordered to try to effect the rescue of some people in the Philippines. And I've got all the details of it because in a separate part of the report and I'd almost forgotten it. But anyway, whatever it was, the pre-arranged signals and precautions were, obviously, had been made known to the enemy, because, while we sat and watched for three days, these patrol craft never left the area right at the beach where we were to pick these people up. So something went haywire.

EMC: Yes, something did go haywire. Do you know how many Japanese ships you did sink in the HADDO with the HADDO?

CWN: Well, not many. That first patrol....

EMC: Do you remember if you got any stars for that?

CWN: I don't remember. I don't remember. My second patrol was in an area where there just wasn't anything.

EMC: You were just out scouting, I guess.

CWN: Oh, yes, we were out in the south, which is known as the dangerous ground in the South China Sea. They began to wonder if the Japanese, who knew a lot more than we did about those waters, weren't using the dangerous ground, these miles and miles and miles of reefs, and wending their way through them. So we went into them ourselves. And, God, it was just the most lovely, beautiful weather. We never saw a thing. I used to flood the ship down so that the decks were washed and let the crew come topside and they'd swim in the superstructure. It was just awful, nothing on the radar. There was nothing around; there was nobody who could surprise us. Well, anyway the last patrol, which was, I noticed the other day reading it, I've got the patrol report right here, it says we sank 17,000 some-odd tons. That doesn't mean anything. A destroyer is 2,000 tons and we know we sank five destroyers during that. That's what's the key.

EMC: Right.

CWN: Well, and we got a Navy unit commendation for that patrol. And I guess that's how I got a Navy Cross for that patrol. And I think, I've always had the feeling, that as soon as-- Well, I noticed when I came back in from that patrol, it seemed to be-- I was immediately relieved of the HADDO. And I sensed that Admiral Christy had always, and maybe the Navy Department had always sort

of planned, that when I'd had a really bang-up patrol, then they'd take me off, and ease my Old Man's worries. I never did know. But, in any case, I was ordered--this was late 1944--I was ordered back to submarine school.

EMC: Oh, okay. Well, you mentioned that you did have a fateful meeting with your father during the war.

CWN: Oh, yes, yes.

EMC: And I want you to comment on that. Is it around this time frame?

CWN: Yes, yes. Because when I was taken off the HADDO, I was sent back. And I went back through Pearl, and it was the only night I ever spent there. I think I did once earlier when I came off the STURGEON, I'd been through there. But at dinner that night, I noticed Admiral McMorris, Admiral Spruance, and my father and the doctor--I can't remember, Doctor Anderson, I think his name was. But anyway they were all nervous as cats at supper. And I finally said, "What's everybody agitated about?" It turned out that they wondered where, they were sitting there, wondering where Task Force 34 was. Now, Task Force 34 was all of the heavy battleships that were assigned to Admiral Halsey in the Third Fleet. And Admiral Halsey was supposed to be supporting the landings at Leyte Gulf and losing no opportunity to destroy major

enemy forces. The reason I know these is because, finally, I said, "Gee, Admiral, what's everybody so upset about?" Well, it turned out, where is Task Force 34? I thought to myself, Jesus Christ! I was in a wolf pack on my last thing, and we'd no more do something without letting our boss know....

EMC: Oh, right.

CWN: And to me, I said, "Well, Jesus Christ! Don't we have a radio?"

EMC: Communications, right.

CWN: Why don't we ask them? And their attitude was they hated to interfere with the forces underway because they felt that they didn't want the people to think people were looking over their shoulder. But anyway....

EMC: The Japanese might they have been listening to radio intercepts?

CWN: What?

EMC: Would the Japanese have been listening to radio intercepts?

CWN: Oh, sure, but who cares, who cares. The Japanese had a, I

think they called it their Sho Plan, S-H-O, had a suicidal plan where Admiral Kurita was to come up from Tawi Tawi, and come through San Bernardino Straits, and down to Leyte Gulf to destroy the attacking forces at Leyte Gulf. He had no carriers, just big-two stupendous Japanese ships, plus others. And Admiral Ozawa was to come out of Japan with two of our carriers. None of them had any aircraft. But to lure Halsey away from San Bernardino Straits so that Kurita could go on down. Now that was a comedy of errors, I can tell you.

EMC: Right.

CWN: Because Kurita was supposed to be a suicide mission.

EMC: Oh, I see.

CWN: They expected him to be lost. But, well, he got into the Sea of Samar and was immediately attacked by aircraft. And he thought, Christ, all the carriers of Halsey are here, and I'll never make it and whatnot. He finally turned away. He could have gone into Leyte Gulf and sunk a hundred transports loaded with men and so forth, so you could see the risks were terrible.

EMC: Right, right.

CWN: Why wasn't Halsey supporting the landings at Leyte Gulf? In

the meantime, Halsey, having heard about the two carriers pulling out from Japan, off of Luzon, off of Northern Luzon, had fled north with Task Force--

EMC: Thirty-four.

CWN: Task Force 34 along with the rest of us, and he didn't need those. Why didn't he leave them to guard San Bernardino Straits? Well, anyway, they finally sent a message, "Where is Task Force 34?" But, and have you seen them, it's been written up many times. But because the message was so short, the communications officer put some dummy words at the beginning and the end to pad it out. And it was, "All the world wants to know." And it says that when Halsey got this message, he took his cap off, and threw it on the deck and jumped on it. But he must have suddenly realized that he just pulled the greatest boner that had ever been pulled. And anyhow if Kurita hadn't--

EMC: Turned back.

CWN: Turned back it would have been. Just think of that, how close we came--

EMC: How close.

CWN: --to one of the greatest naval disasters.

EMC: Disasters, yes.

CWN: So, I was there that night.

EMC: Oh, that was, yes, very fateful, gosh. Well, just luck on his part that nothing happened.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: So do you think your father had, do you think he interceded to remove you from the HADDO? Or do you think--

CWN: Oh, no, no, no.

EMC: He didn't really.

CWN: No.

EMC: Interfere with Navy policy in that regard.

CWN: I suspect Admiral Christy just did.

EMC: Well, you had enough wartime service.

CWN: Yes.



EMC: And you said you were sent to the sub school in New London in 1944, back there?

CWN: Yes, actually 1945, I guess I got there.

EMC: Oh, okay. And were you assigned to teach?

CWN: I was assigned as the head of the Torpedo and Gunnery Department. We taught torpedo fire control and approach tactics and that sort of stuff, and prospective commanding officers how to make torpedo attacks. And I had all absolutely brilliant young officers under me. They just took the very best there were on, who were the best torpedo data computer operators and so forth. And they were wonderful at the school. A lot of fun. And then I went from that job to command of the USS SARDA being built in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. And she was sort of an experimental submarine, in that she had a huge conning tower and special fire control and sonar equipment.

EMC: Oh, was this after the war?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Oh, okay. Well, can I just ask you a couple of questions toward the end of the war? So you were at the sub school in '45.

CWN: Right.

EMC: And the war ended on August 15, 1945.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: VJ Day. What was your reaction to the end of the war, and how did you celebrate that, or did you?

CWN: I don't remember having any particular reaction. I do know that I was very disappointed that they had to end it by using the atomic bomb. Because in the first place, it was apparent to me the Japanese couldn't move around those islands. The submarines had absolutely, and now aircraft, too, had them cold. I'm sure my father felt the same way: That we could have, within a year, with a blockade, we'd have starved them out. It was just too bad. And I know, just as sure as I'm sitting here, I know why the atomic bomb got used. It got used for the same reason that Sir Edmund Hillary climbed Mt. Everest. Because it's there; they had it.

EMC: It's there, right.

CWN: And its overpowering desire to see what it did. But anyway that's just the tragedy of the situation, and we're going to live with that for the rest of time.

EMC: Right, right. And I was going to ask you that question. I'm glad you brought that up. Do you think the sub service contributed to the winning of the war greatly?

CWN: You bet. You bet. The Japanese were really running out of everything and that's 'cause their shipping couldn't provide it. They can't provide that stuff by air. And the submarines sank, I think, as many warships as the rest of the Navy did.

EMC: Well, that's great.

CWN: When I had the HADDO on that last patrol, we had always had tankers as our first priority targets.

EMC: Oh, I see.

CWN: But for that last patrol I was told, "No, sir, no longer. Destroyers are our primary target." And that's why we went after them. And they got so they couldn't get escorts.

EMC: Oh, they were destroyed, the DE's.

CWN: Yes, you couldn't even escort there.

EMC: Well, despite the misfired torpedoes and all the problems,

we were still very successful against merchant and navy shipping.

CWN: Yes, it might have ended the war a little sooner had we--  
It might have ended the war a little sooner. But as long as the  
atomic bomb was being so much put on it, I don't know.

EMC: Did you have any reaction to the death of Roosevelt in  
April of '45?

CWN: Oh, yes, sure we all got so use to having him.

EMC: Yes.

CWN: That was terrible.

EMC: Well, the war ended and it's 1946 and you said you were in  
command of the SARDA, a submarine. And was that being outfitted  
in Portsmouth, New Hampshire?

CWN: Portsmouth, yes.

EMC: And were you the CO of it?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: And where did it patrol during those two years?

CWN: It operated out of New London. And we spent an awful lot of time doing work for the underwater sound laboratory, which is in New London. And they were being used by Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute to do experiments. We did some real hairy things with it. But I'm now a retired trustee of Woods Hole.

EMC: Oh, you are? When you say you did some hairy things with it, like what, experimental?

CWN: Well, this guy would say, "Now, listen, Chester, I'd like to circle another submarine, staying exactly 200 yards away from him submerged."

EMC: Oh.

CWN: Well, let me tell you that's quite a maneuvering problem. Because as you start to turn back toward him, he's coming toward you very rapidly. And you're both at the same depth, and it's real hairy. But we did that for days on end, that kind of stuff.

EMC: Oh, and what was that really supposed to prove? That you could maneuver well?

CWN: No, no. We were testing various underwater telephone and acoustic devices.

EMC: Oh, I see.

CWN: He was using, wanted to be at various ranges from it and so forth. They were just testing underwater propagation properties and so forth.

EMC: Oh, I see.

CWN: But the SARDA still won a battle efficiency pennant as being the most battle-ready submarine in the submarine force.

EMC: Well, that's quite an honor.

CWN: It was wonderful. I was very experienced, and we had a very experienced crew.

EMC: Oh, that's good.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: So your crews were excellent throughout?

CWN: Absolutely.

EMC: And how many usually were on a wartime sub or on the SARDA?

CWN: I could make a watch quarter and statcon bill for you right now and say that's what determines how many people you need. And you say, now all right, we're underway in the patrol area, we have to have three people to steer, one every eight hours.

EMC: Right.

CWN: We have to have three people for sonar, we have to three people for radioing. You keep going that way and build up the crew. And then there's some people, like the chief cook.

EMC: Baker or whatever?

CWN: Yes, that you only have one of and so forth. We ended up with a crew of seventy-two and officers, six or seven.

EMC: Oh, well, that's a sizable number,

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Almost eighty people on a submarine. So you were out of New London for a couple of years with the SARDA. Did anything else outstanding happen during that time frame? Other than these patrols and testing acoustic devices with the maneuvers that you undertook.

CWN: No, no. I went from the SARDA, I think, to--

EMC: To California, at Berkeley?

CWN: The University of California, yes.

EMC: So you were out of the submarine service temporarily at that point. And what were you doing at Cal Berkeley?

CWN: Well, I was ordered there as what they call as an associate professor of naval science. I was the executive officer of the naval ROTC unit on that campus. Berkeley was one of the seven original NROTC campuses; my father had been there.

EMC: Yes, he was there. Right.

CWN: And after I got there, at the end of the first year, my professor of naval science died. And so I really acted as a professor of naval science for most of the next year. And it was a terrible time for the--

EMC: For the Navy?

CWN: For the military on campuses. The campuses--this one, in particular, we used to call it the "Little Red Schoolhouse." It



was the University of California. It had a marvelous president, Robert Gordon Sproull; there was nothing communist about him. But the students really were terrible.

EMC: Oh, very left wing?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: And this is right after the war?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: More or less?

CWN: Yes. But our naval unit was wonderful. We ended up with president of, or head of, or captain of most of the teams and fraternities and so forth. And that did us a great service.

EMC: Did you enjoy this teaching at ROTC?

CWN: Yes, mind you I couldn't have stood it for more than one session. I couldn't teach the same subject again for another course. But, yes, everything was different, and it was something different, compared to anything I'd done before.

EMC: Oh, really, yes, exactly.

CWN: And the University was having a loyalty oath controversy, where professors were being told they either took a loyalty oath or they were out. And, oh, it was the damndest agitation.

EMC: It must have caused--

CWN: Yes.

EMC: --quite a stir for doing that. But anyway, so--

CWN: From there I went to--

EMC: You went to destroyers, I believe.

CWN: Yes, well, from there I went to the East Coast where I was going to go to Armed Forces Staff College or some such thing.

EMC: In Norfolk, I think.

CWN: Yes, but the Korean War, and, incidentally, we were finished with California, and the Armed Forces Staff College didn't start till late September or something. So we had this long, long summer. We bought a horse for the stay in Wellfleet. Joan and I went down to Bronxville, New York, to stay with close friends of ours, and party, and so forth. And then the Navy

caught up with me down in Bronxville saying, "Jesus Christ! Why don't you say where you're going to be when you're on vacation? Go back to San Diego and recommission the destroyer O'BRIEN."

EMC: Was this 1950 yet?

CWN: Yes, '50, yes.

EMC: Okay.

CWN: And I had just sold a house in Coronado, so anyway.

EMC: Back you go.

CWN: Back.

EMC: Why did they make you switch to destroyers?

CWN: Because they needed skippers.

EMC: Oh, I see. Yes. The Navy was kind of in a downturn at that point.

CWN: I'm trying to think.

EMC: So, it wasn't your choice. It was an assignment?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Out to San Diego.

CWN: I know what I was trying to think of. I said we'd sold a house in Coronado. That wasn't so, because we'd come from the University of California. I know, while we were back on the East Coast, that's it, this moving from pillar to post had finally gotten to be over sensitized in my makeup. And I submitted a resignation to the Navy.

EMC: Oh, you did, back in '50. You were just tired of moving around.

CWN: Yes. And I got this goddamned dispatch back saying I'd be pleased to know and honored to know that I'm the first regular officer whose resignation they will not accept. Get myself back to San Diego. So I did that.

EMC: And you were going to be CO of the USS O'BRIEN, the destroyer?

CWN: Yes, I was. And it was a real job, too. She'd been badly, badly damaged, and she's a big beautiful ship. But badly damaged at Normandy, badly damaged in the Philippines, hit by kamikazes;

she was a wreck.

EMC: Oh, gosh. So they had to do a lot of repair?

CWN: Oh, yes. And my crew were all ex-reservists recalled against their will. They didn't want to come back either. It was really something.

EMC: So, it wasn't a very happy ship?

CWN: Oh, it was a happy ship, but it was a real workout. God. I'd never worked so hard.

EMC: Oh, you oversaw all the repairs then?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: And how long did that take, do you remember?

CWN: Well, we got the ship underway finally, and I was the division flagship, and we went to Korea. Oh, we had lots of action. And we spent two different tours in Wonsan Harbor where you have to get underway every few minutes, every few hours. And they fire at you. We were surrounded by 360 degrees in their territory.

EMC: Oh, I see.

CWN: And we would execute "war dance," as they called it. And we'd try to suppress their fire as we went around. I used to go up and man the director myself, because I could see so well and it was wonderful. You'd see guns poking out of holes in the cliffs, and you'd fire one gun of six until you felt you were right on them, and then rapid fire six guns. And by that time you haven't got any hits because you were turning so fast going around. But it was exciting.

EMC: Yes, I'll say. So you were under fire?

CWN: Oh, yes. And several of the ships got hit. We never got hit.

EMC: Oh, that's good.

CWN: We never got any damage, yes.

EMC: How long were you out there?

CWN: Over a year. And Task Force 77 was the carrier task force that was doing all the bombing. And you were either in Task Force 77 or you were in Wonsan harbor in a destroyer.

EMC: Oh, I see.

CWN: So one was just as bad as the other. Wonsan was more dangerous, but the carrier task force was a strain. It was cold and--

EMC: Winter, yes.

CWN: Yes, I had a great Navy overcoat lined with red squirrel fur, beautiful, some friend had given me. You know, I wondered the other day where the hell that was.

EMC: Yes, but you needed it out there because the Korean winters are horrible.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: How long were you out there? When did you return to the U.S.?

CWN: We came back--I would guess that we came back around early in '52. And I then went to a submarine division in San Diego.

EMC: Oh, back to submarines again?

CWN: Yes, and that was just a sort of routine job.

EMC: Were you CO?

CWN: I was commander of the division.

EMC: Of the division. And how many subs were in the division?

CWN: Six.

EMC: Yes. And did you patrol outside of San Diego?

CWN: No, you supervised the training of the other submarines.

EMC: Oh, I see.

CWN: And you conducted their readiness inspections and evaluated the skippers.

EMC: It was a local assignment. Did anything outstanding happen during that period of time?

CWN: No.

EMC: When you were CO at the submarine division 32?

CWN: No.



EMC: Well, you finally were sent to the Armed Forces Staff College.

CWN: Yes, and then to England. Oh, you see having tried to resign once.

EMC: Right.

CWN: I'd made up my mind then that there's no use fighting that problem, inasmuch as since I was a Class of '36, I could resign, I could retire, at the end of '56 after twenty years, and with retired pay. And so I made up my mind we would stay in the Navy.

EMC: Stick it out.

CWN: So I could at least retire. And at the Armed Forces Staff College when asked where I wanted to go, I chose to go to a staff in London, CINCNELM staff.

EMC: Oh, could I just double back a little bit?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Now what was your rank at this time when you were at the Armed Forces Staff College? Were you a captain at that point?

CWN: I think so, yes.

EMC: Okay, so you had been promoted up the line.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Now the Armed Forces Staff College, was that in Norfolk at this time?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: And was it a six-month course?

CWN: Yes, yes.

EMC: And what did that prepare you for?

CWN: For duty with on a joint staff or a joint operations with Air Force or Army. And it was really very necessary, too, because the services lingos are different and everything else. And there was a lot you had to learn.

EMC: Well, that's the focus now at the War College, jointness-- very, very much so.

CWN: Well, and I thought they did a very good job. I was assigned an office mate; I wish I knew what happened to him. Norton, his name was Jack Norton, and he was an army officer, a colonel. And just a marvelous guy. And I'm sure he became a general officer of some kind. And then we went to England.

EMC: So you felt the joint Armed Forces Staff College was career enhancing, or useful career-wise?

CWN: Absolutely.

EMC: Good.

CWN: Absolutely. By that time I had also gotten a terrible bias against wanting to do duty in Washington, DC, because of a myriad of officers, and we didn't have enough money to live decently, and whatnot, so....

EMC: So the pay was still rather low in the Navy?

CWN: Yes. When I retired in August of 1957, my pay as a skipper of a big submarine tender was \$904 a month. And I had three daughters just getting ready for college.

EMC: Right.

CWN: We simply couldn't stay. The man who headed General Electric, Cordner, Ralph Cordner, was heading a commission. They came and stayed on my tender to question me about why I wanted to get out of the Navy.

EMC: Oh, interesting.

CWN: Because when we came back from England, the staff guys, I got command of this tender which made me stay one more year in the Navy. And I had put in my request for retirement.

EMC: Well, you mentioned you were sent abroad to a CINCNELM staff in London, I presume.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: And what was your position there?

CWN: I was in the Strategic Plan section. What we did was, Admiral would call down and say, "What do we do if Israel jumps the Suez Canal?" "Make a plan." And we'd make a plan. So you got to be pretty familiar with most of the situations there.

EMC: In Europe and the Middle East.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Yes. This was 1953.

CWN: Yes, '53 to '56 we were there.

EMC: Oh, you were there for a good three years?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Oh, did you enjoy this assignment?

CWN: Oh, you bet. We lived outside of London on the Wentworth Golf Course at Virginia Water, which is a beautiful place. I see it all the time on TV, golf TV. Yes, and you know, we visited Joan's mother who lives on the Isle of Jersey. And, yes, we did a lot of traveling around England and Scotland.

EMC: Oh, I bet that would be perfect.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Perfect for traveling. And was your position there solely making these plans? Was that what you were assigned to do?

CWN: Yes, yes. I'll never forget one day a marine came down in his colorful uniform, and handed me a slip of paper which was

from Admiral--

EMC: Was Conolly there then? Admiral Conolly?

CWN: No, I don't think so. Anyway this is from the chief of staff who's a red-bearded, Peary, Admiral Peary, Rear Admiral Peary. And he said, What do we do if such and so and such and so? And I promptly sat down, and there was nobody around and pounded out on a typewriter about a page and a half. And handed it to the marine. And he came back less than--like he'd been fired out of a gun. And written across the page in blue, big blue pencil was, "I'm allergic to horseshit; send me one short sentence."

EMC: Oh, oh. No long papers. I was trying to think, I don't remember who the head of CINCNELM was at that point.

CWN: Damn it! I do. Because you see we lived down in Virginia Water and CINCNELM had quarters there.

EMC: Had quarters there, yes, yes.

CWN: And we use to act as host and hostess a lot of times for him and her when they didn't--

EMC: Did you meet any important dignitaries during this time period?

CWN: Yes, I met several times Lord Mountbatten, because I used to go down and help run submarines in NATO exercises in the Mediterranean. And he was the NATO Commander of them then. And I used to go to his place to shoot in England.

EMC: Oh, Broadlands?

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sakes.

CWN: Through a mutual friend. And he was most well known.

EMC: Oh, yes, yes. Were you ever invited to any of the garden parties?

CWN: No, not that I know of.

EMC: No. Yes, I guess sometimes the Navy were. I can't remember whether Admiral Wylie was there at that time.

CWN: No.

EMC: No, I guess not.

CWN: This was '53 to '56.

EMC: Right, right, yes, at that point in time. I know Eccles was there a little earlier doing some logistics work. So this was kind of a great assignment.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Well, you finished that in 1956, and came back to the U.S. for your last duty. And what was that?

CWN: The command of the ORION.

EMC: And what kind of a ship was that?

CWN: Submarine tender.

EMC: A tender.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: And where were you located at that point?

CWN: Norfolk.

EMC: And what did you do during this last year prior to



retirement?

CWN: Well, the ORION, it so happened, was just finishing a refit or a Navy yard overhaul when I joined her. So we went to Guantanamo for what they called a working up. And we really got organized. And she was a great ship. Having been a destroyer skipper, I understood how a gun battery should work and whatnot. And I think we were the first submarine tender that ever really used it. I actually fired her gun battery at a tanker. I was in charge of an exercise where we going to destroy an LST, an old LST with a target titan torpedo. And the submarine had fired the torpedo, went over the horizon, came to this goddamned tanker, heading right through the area going to be hell. And she made more noise then the LST. I signaled it with lights and flags; it didn't make any difference. So I finally went to battle stations and fired salvos across her bow, and she turned and disappeared.

EMC: Oh.

CWN: But I felt good about that, because the ship was well organized. Anyway, we tended a squadron, six submarines, and we also were the squadron flagship for a friend of mine. St. Clair was the squadron commander.

EMC: Oh, yes, yes. That's a familiar name.

CWN: Yes, it was.

EMC: Did you cruise anywhere other than Guantanamo?

CWN: Yes, yes, we did. Well, we went to Jamaica. We cruised down to Fort Lauderdale for Fourth of July once. We did much more active cruising than I ever anticipated for a tender.

EMC: That was your last assignment.

CWN: Yes, yes.

EMC: In the Navy. And when did you retire?

CWN: August 1, 1957.

EMC: 'Fifty-seven. Can you comment on any medals that you received for your service?

CWN: No.

EMC: Anything outstanding?

CWN: No, the Navy Commendation Unit gave me a unit commendation for the Seventh Patrol. Well deserved it. They'd just given the skipper of the HARTER, Sam Dealey, a Medal of Honor for sinking

five destroyers on his previous patrol. And he was my wolf pack commander on my last patrol. And he was lost on it. But I felt quite sure we'd sunk five destroyers ourselves that patrol, plus other things. And what was nostalgic about it was that I heard later from Admiral Christy that they had determined--they had decided--that the HARTER must be gone. When I left the HARTER, I was out of torpedoes. I went back to an advanced base and got some more torpedoes. And during the time I was gone, HARTER was trying to approach this cove above Manila where this destroyer, whose brow had been blown off, had been towed; it actually sank in there.

And the next morning, just after I left, the next morning a patrol craft, called Japanese Patrol Craft 102, came out of that thing, out of that little depression in the coast, and contacted the HARTER. And according to Christy, they sent a message saying that this ship showing up must disdain, or something to that effect, for them, that they sank it. And they did. It was just terrible. But anyway that Patrol Craft 102, it turns out, was the old USS STEWART that forced four stack DD, that had been wrecked and rolled over and dry docked in Surabaja. And after lying there for a year, the Japanese re-commissioned it, put the two forward stacks together so it looked more like a Jap ship.

EMC: Oh.

CWN: And they commissioned the STEWART as Patrol Craft 102.

EMC: Wasn't that something.

CWN: And I have quite a diary of it that somebody, by just the most amazing circumstances, sent me.

EMC: Oh, isn't that something.

CWN: Yes, yes.

EMC: That's amazing. Oh, what was your rank when you retired?

CWN: Captain.

EMC: But you did get the Rear Admiral's rank after that?

CWN: Because of the silver stars or the Navy Cross.

EMC: So, and that impacted, of course, on your retirement.

CWN: And that really was nothing but a nuisance to me because it confused me with my father. And people would say to Mrs. Nimitz, "Are you Admiral Nimitz's wife?"

EMC: Yes, and not the one. Well, you said that you had put your twenty-one years in. And Navy pay was rather low at that point.

Did you work in retirement? Did you get a job after you retired?

CWN: I did.

EMC: And where did you work as a civilian?

CWN: As a matter of fact, I can answer that question in a rather interesting fashion. I didn't know anything about outside the Navy and being a Navy Junior. And this company called me and this company sent me a first-class ticket.

EMC: Oh, how fantastic. What company was that?

CWN: Texas Instruments. And I'd never heard of them.

EMC: Oh, good.

CWN: Didn't know what kind of instruments they made.

EMC: Yes, yes.

CWN: Pianos or what.

EMC: In Texas?

CWN: Yes. And I went down, and they then sent me more first-

class tickets, and told me to bring my wife down, which I did. And she wept for a couple of weeks. We didn't want to live in Dallas.

EMC: Oh, Dallas, yes.

CWN: Anyhow we went, because it was so patently the right thing to do. This company just says you don't know nothing; you don't know what you want to do; don't ask; don't answer if somebody asks you, because you don't. But if you come to us, we'll educate you for two years in a manner you couldn't get done at business school. And then if you aren't any value to us we're the ones who took the risk.

EMC: Oh, okay so.

CWN: So I did.

EMC: You took the risk.

CWN: And I stayed with TI for four years.

EMC: Oh.

CWN: Oh, I nearly killed myself. They gave me one difficult job after another. I had to go to night school for the two years at

Dallas. I had to take correspondence courses in accounting through auditing for four years.

EMC: Oh, so you were doing auditing or accounting rather?

CWN: Accounting, yes. I did everything, because they wanted me--Pat Haggerty said, and he was dead right, "We're going to get you so that your confidence level rises to the way it was in the Navy. And then you'll be of enormous use to us." And anyway, I just didn't want to stay at TI, so I went to Perkin-Elmer.

EMC: Oh, Connecticut?

CWN: In Connecticut. And became the head of that after four years there.

EMC: Oh, really?

CWN: Yes, and I stayed the head of it for sixteen years.

EMC: Oh, that's fantastic! That was down in Greenwich, isn't it, around that area?

CWN: It's in Norwalk, headquarters.

EMC: And what do they make exactly?

CWN: Oh, listen, they make all kinds--analytical instruments is what I was involved in to begin with. But they make electro-optical things. They made the space telescope. They made much of the overhead surveillance craft that we used over Russia.

EMC: Oh.

CWN: So we were really-- Listen, I have to go get a flu shot.

[End of Tape #1]



EMC: You were mentioning that you were president of Perkin-Elmer for sixteen years?

CWN: Fifteen or sixteen.

EMC: Fifteen or sixteen years.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: In Connecticut. How did this differ from your naval service? Was it dramatically different in some ways?

CWN: No. As Texas Instruments had correctly deduced, you know, running the Naval ROTC Unit at Berkeley was nothing like running a ship, totally different. Under the rules and rack of the academic senate and everything different. Doing strategic planning in London was completely different than anything else. And as Texas Instruments deduced, as soon as I learned the language, namely accounting and everything to do with finance, I would be useful. And so as soon as I did--and it only took me about six months to realize at Texas Instruments that the bulk of the people there spent their lives evading being responsible. You know it was just crazy. Here was I from nothing to do with any of their businesses, and they made me controller of the government equipment division, of all things, at the end of a year. And I'd had only a year of accounting. And we were making bids to the

government of millions and millions of dollars for radar equipment and so forth.

It's just a question of learning enough of the language so that you can think correctly about it. Because what you really need to have is an innate sense of initiative and responsibility that you're going to determine to get the goddamned job done. If you have to kick somebody else to do it, fine. And I always learned that you can't do everything yourself. I can't do the things that the chief electrician's mate can do and so forth. And don't worry about it. And so there's no point in looking over other peoples shoulders if you don't know any better than they do. And people really work under those circumstances when they know you're relying on them and you're not looking over their shoulder.

EMC: Trusting them to do their job.

CWN: Trusting them to do their job.

EMC: Exactly.

CWN: Yes, and you're relying on them to do their job.

EMC: Absolutely.

CWN: Yes, well, it was, I'll tell you, it was duck soup. Once

I'd caught on to that, going to Perkin-Elmer or anyplace else was. I went to Perkin-Elmer, and I immediately realized I knew more about running a company from what I learned at Texas Instruments than anybody at Perkin-Elmer knew. And it took me four years, but in four years I became the head of it.

EMC: Oh, I see, so you weren't, you weren't brought in as the head?

CWN: No, no, no.

EMC: Okay.

CWN: But....

EMC: Is it a large company?

CWN: Well, when I took over we were something like sixty million a year. When I left we were a billion and a half a year.

EMC: Wow.

CWN: In sales, so.

EMC: And when did you leave Perkin-Elmer?

CWN: 1980.

EMC: Yes, about twenty-one years ago, yes. Somebody in Newport said that they thought that you had worked at Raytheon.

CWN: No, I didn't.

EMC: I guess they were mistaken.

CWN: Incidentally, I applied to Raytheon for a job because it was--

EMC: Something in defense.

CWN: And they offered me a job as the head of a big program. And I remember had to write back and say, "You know I just know I don't know enough to do that. I have no idea how to proceed." Had I had my experience at Texas Instruments, I wouldn't have thought twice about it.

EMC: Right. Oh, so the Raytheon offer was immediately after your retirement from the Navy.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: So you left civilian employment in 1980, and I guess

retired permanently from a paid employment at that time.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: How would you sum up your naval career and its significance for you? What did it mean to you?

CWN: Well, I'll tell you, my naval career definitely, and in a really remarkable way, fitted me for what went next. As soon as I could learn language, and incidentally in the government, in the Navy, one of the things is there's a lot of places where the language is everything. If you're going to be in the communications business, the communicators have more damn odd language. And until you have unmasked them, they can snow you under. Which is the same way until I understood, really understood accounting, and making a profit, and how to make a profit, and what constitutes a real profit, you can't really think correctly. But once you get that straight in your mind, then everything is just trying to fit the circumstances you're faced with into that puzzle and make it work. And the Navy taught me to do that all the time. Every job is different. And I also never had a job in the Navy that I didn't feel I couldn't have done with fewer people, if necessary.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Oh, what was your most interesting and your favorite Navy job? Was there any that stood out among the others as being something you enjoyed doing most of all?

CWN: [Pause]

EMC: It's a tough one.

CWN: If there's one thing I know in the world, and I still think this is true, forgetting the nuclear navy, there was a time when I knew there was nobody in the Navy that could operate a submarine as well as I could. I mean I just knew that. I've got a fitness report in which my duty commander says--and he was a very experienced submariner--says that the only thing I can say is if I ever had to go to war in a submarine again, I would only want to go to war with one commanded by me, which is a wonderful compliment.

EMC: Well, that's a compliment.

CWN: Yes, compliment. So I did enjoy submarining, but only because I had so much of it that I really got so I could be lying in my bunk and tell just what's going on in that boat, just from the tiniest little noise and sounds and so forth. It just

becomes. I remember going to bed one night on patrol and just as I was going to sleep thinking, Son of a bitch! I'll bet that vent in the crew's galley is still in the locked-shut position so that they can't open it with the hydraulic manifold. So I got up and went into the crew's galley and surely it was. We'd had trouble with it during the day, and we'd been working on it. But they didn't fix it. It's instinctive. It's like part of your body all these....

EMC: Mechanisms.

CWN: Mechanisms, yes.

EMC: Right that's amazing. Now your ear was really tuned, fine-tuned, to the sounds of the ship. I'd like to ask you a few questions about your father, too.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: Can you describe his character and personality to us?

CWN: Yes, he was of extremely, extremely even temperament, very difficult to get excited about anything. And he had great faith in his fellow man. It was an absolute tenet of his that any man of goodwill, and 90 percent of the people are of goodwill, will do his utmost to do his best if he understands truly what it is

that is wanted of him. And he's allowed to do it. And he could communicate that to a subordinate so clearly that they, again, they'd just kill themselves, fall all over backwards, to get the job done. Like when he went to Pearl and kept the staff of Admiral Kimmel. All of a sudden daylight broke on that staff, and they realized they weren't lepers.

EMC: Right.

CWN: Yes, and that was his great leadership quality: that he conveyed to you his confidence in you and his reliance on you.

EMC: Yes, that's great. So he was a soft-spoken, even-tempered person who wasn't easily ruffled.

CWN: Yes, right.

EMC: How was he as a father?

CWN: Well, he was alright, I suppose. Actually I've often admitted several times, I'm sure I was really raised by my mother because he was away most of the time.

EMC: Right, right. And your mother was a strong influence then on you?



CWN: Yes, sure, yes.

EMC: I'm sure you're aware of the article that was written about her in The American Neptune, oh, years ago, about that young Navy Wife, Catherine Nimitz.

CWN: Well, I don't remember the article. But she definitely was the force in our lives as far as I'm concerned.

EMC: Right, did she have strong faith?

CWN: Strong?

EMC: Faith. Religious faith?

CWN: No, I don't think so. I think she and my father were both great believers in "God helps he who helps himself."

EMC: Did you meet any wartime leaders during the war or after that you can comment on? Ernest King, the CNO during the war?

CWN: No, no. Did you read that biography?

EMC: Tom Buell's?

CWN: Somebody wrote a biography. I don't know what it was about.

I guess it was Roosevelt and His Commanders.

EMC: Oh, right, right.

CWN: In which his daughters said it was the most ridiculous thing, people saying that he had an irascible disposition, that he was even-tempered all the time in a towering rage.

EMC: So did you ever meet him?

CWN: No.

EMC: No, you never met him. Did you ever meet Spruance. I think you mentioned that.

CWN: Oh, yes, several times.

EMC: And what was your impression of him?

CWN: Oh, wonderful, calm, dispassionate, careful person. His son, his son.

EMC: Oh, Edward.

CWN: Ed Junior. Ed, his son, relieved me on my turret three job on the INDIANAPOLIS.

EMC: Oh. They're both deceased now, both his son and daughter.

CWN: Yes, yes. His son died in an automobile accident, I think.

EMC: Right, right. Did you ever have a chance to meet Halsey?  
Task Force 38?

CWN: I don't think so, I don't think so. I don't think so. My  
father loved Admiral Halsey and whenever--

EMC: Oh, he did.

CWN: Oh, he sure did. And I guess everybody who knew him did.  
But every time anybody would say anything critical, like me, Dad  
would say, "Nothing the matter with Halsey. He just had a poor  
staff."

EMC: Excuses. Do you know what your father thought of Spruance?

CWN: Oh, he loved him. He spent most of his life trying to get  
Spruance the five stars which he should have had. Halsey was  
Third Fleet; Spruance, the Fifth Fleet. Same ships, different  
staff. The things that had to get done, failure for which would  
be disastrous, were always assigned to the Fifth Fleet. The  
flamboyant stuff, Third Fleet.

EMC: Right.

CWN: Well, but that's all right. You need flamboyant people.

EMC: Yes, sure.

CWN: Where I'm sure Halsey endeared himself to my Old Man and most everybody else was when he went down and replaced the guy in the Southwest Pacific when Guadalcanal was about to fall again, and oh, it was awful. And Halsey turned it right around.

EMC: Did you ever meet Admiral Turner, Richmond Kelly Turner?

CWN: No I don't think so. Apparently he was an irascible man.

EMC: Right, or Admiral Mitscher?

CWN: No, I didn't. I know my Old Man was also terribly fond of General Vandergrift.

EMC: Oh.

CWN: And a couple of stories. After they had seized the airfield on Guadalcanal, Dad, in a fit of something or other, decided to go and pay a visit to Vandergrift to thank him.

EMC: Oh.

CWN: And so he arranged for an Army bomber to take him to Guadalcanal and land on this woven metal--

EMC: Tarmac of some sort?

CWN: Tarmac, yes. And Dad was sitting up in the bombardier's place watching, looking at the islands going by and so forth. And he had in his hand a page out of the National Geographic that his aide had given him, showing pictures of the islands. And he said his confidence in the whole thing was shaken badly when there was a tap on his shoulder, and it was the navigator saying, "Admiral, could we borrow that map?"

EMC: Right. Not quite sure where you are.

CWN: And imagine. So they used this National Geographic thing where they found Guadalcanal. And they landed on the tarmac, but ran off it, and it packed the bombardier's thing with mud like potted shrimp. And Dad was in there, and he says it was really something.

EMC: I bet.

CWN: Anyhow that night Vandergrift had a meeting, a dinner, in his mess tent with Dad and the colonels, who reported to him on the island, all tough as nails. And the dinner was C rations and K rations. But the chef had made a salad out of hearts of palm, of which they had tons.

EMC: Oh, yes.

CWN: And Dad said to Vandergrift, "Jeez, I didn't think of it, but here in this wild Godforsaken place, we have one of the world's ritzy salads." And Vandergrift said, "Chester, why don't you--would you say a few words to my mess sergeant? He's been with me for many years." And Dad said, "Sure." And Vandergrift sent for this guy. And Dad says this great hairy, sweaty thing came in in a dirty apron.

EMC: Oh, yes, dirty apron.

CWN: And shifting from foot to foot, and Dad makes his flowery little speech about his salad and so forth. And Vandergrift-- The guy just stands there, going back and forth. Vandergrift nods at him as though to say, "For Christ's sake say something." And he says, "B-B-Bullshit, Admiral," and fled. And everybody burst out laughing.

EMC: Oh, what a riot. Did you ever meet MacArthur, General

MacArthur?

CWN: I don't know. I really don't, so I can't say I did.

EMC: Yes. Do you know what your father's opinion of him was?

CWN: Yes, my father recognized his military abilities. But he felt, I'm sure, that they were greatly offset by such a towering ego you couldn't--and he put that ahead of everything.

EMC: Is there anybody else of importance that we've missed during the war or after? Because, of course, your father was CNO after the war for two years.

CWN: Yes.

EMC: And, oh, George Marshall?

CWN: No, I never met him.

EMC: He was in Europe.

CWN: No, I've met Eisenhower.

EMC: Oh, yes.

CWN: Because he was in the same mess as my Old Man was when he was chief of staff of the Army while Dad was CNO.

EMC: Right. Oh, what was your impression of Eisenhower?

CWN: Well, not much. He obviously is a very able guy. Dad once told me that one of the things that impressed him about Eisenhower was--and I think it's most Navy people aren't brought face to face with it the way Army people are. But apparently some boy, who had refused to go forward with his unit, was courtmartialed and sentenced to be shot. And the family appealed to Eisenhower, and Eisenhower got the guy in and, you know, said, "Look, this is ridiculous. Go forward with your unit, and we'll forget it." And the guy says, no, he wouldn't. And Dad said he was--they were talking about this over lunch in the mess at the Pentagon, and Dad said, "Well, what did you do?" Eisenhower said, "Take him out and shoot him."

EMC: Oh, that was the end of that.

CWN: Yes. So I always feel that of all the services the Navy has the least sort of--

EMC: Backsliders?

CWN: No, has the least face-to-face with blood and death all the



time. The Air Force has it constantly. When you realize the number of bombers they lost in the Eighth Air Force and the Fifteenth Air Force in Europe, it was just appalling. Complete thirty-five missions, if you can. And very few did.

EMC: Right.

CWN: Awful. And now the Navy Air. I know it seems ridiculous to me to think that Navy Air carriers are being involved in this Afghanistan thing. In fact, they are involved more than any other air force.

EMC: Yes, they are. Absolutely. They're the ones that are doing this. Do you have any Navy connections today?

CWN: Any Navy connections? No, zero, absolutely zero.

EMC: Do you have anything else to add to the interview? Is there anything we've missed, any event or personality?

CWN: Well, I'll tell you an unusual thing--no use recording. But it's just of interest, an illustrated degree to which we were poor when I got out of the Navy. I went to Texas Instruments as a, mind you, I worked in the shops for the first six months just learning, getting oriented. And then I worked in all kinds of goddamned places. But I left Texas Instruments four years,

exactly, later. And I had during those four years, I paid in income taxes, in cash, more money than the Navy had paid me as a midshipman for four years or as an officer for twenty-one years.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes.

CWN: I mean I really felt: Take it! I'm finished with you!

EMC: Wow.

CWN: And you may know my father lived a very humble life financially. If he hadn't been chosen by the United Nations to run a Kashmir plebiscite, which never came off, but he was hired by the UN for two years. Those two years gave Mother some seventy thousand dollars she'd never had. And she was very clever, and she invested it. But otherwise he'd still be living on fifteen thousand dollars a year when he died.

EMC: Pension.

CWN: It is.

EMC: It's improved over the years.

CWN: Yes, I suppose it has.

EMC: Not greatly, but....

CWN: No, I'll tell you I would really oppose any of my daughters marrying a military person.

EMC: Oh, really.

CWN: Oh, you bet, unless he had an outside income. But that's--

EMC: That's rare.

CWN: Yes, that's very few and far between.

EMC: Yes, but you did educate and bring up the three daughters?

CWN: Oh, yes.

EMC: And sent them to college.

CWN: Well, I got out of the Navy to do it.

EMC: Yes.

CWN: That's the only way we did.

EMC: Right, right. I want to thank you very much for your

reminiscences of your career, Admiral Nimitz, and of your father and World War II.

CWN: Good.

EMC: So we will get this transcribed, and I'll do some editing and listening, and you can do editing, too. I will send you a copy for your comments and editing.

CWN: Okay, good.

EMC: Thank you. [End of Tape #2]

[End of Interview]