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CAPTAIN HERBERT F. ROMMEL, USN(Ret.)

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE: CAPTAIN HERBERT F. ROMMEL, USN(Ret.)

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

DATE: JANUARY 22, 2002

EMC: This is the first oral history interview with Captain Herbert F. Rommel. The interview is taking place in my office in Mahan Hall at the Naval War College. I'm Evelyn Cherpak, the Curator of the Naval Historical Collection. Today's date is January 22, 2002. Captain Rommel, I'm very pleased that you were able to come in today to be interviewed for the War College Oral History Program on your career and your experiences in World War II. I'd like to begin with a little bit of background information about you prior to joining the Navy. Can you tell me where you were born and when you were born?

HR: Philadelphia, October 27, 1915, Navy Day.

EMC: Just medical incidents. Were you brought up and raised in the Philadelphia area?

HR: Lansdowne, Pennsylvania. I graduated from high school there.

EMC: And what year did you graduate from high school?

HR: 'Thirty-three.

EMC: Right in the heart of the Depression. Did that impact on your higher education?

HR: Very much. The tuition at the University of Pennsylvania was about $400, but we couldn't afford it. And I had to go to work. I went to night school at the University of Pennsylvania, Wharton Evening School. I guess the main reason I went is that the bank I was working for paid the tuition. But that was how I got my initial education.

EMC: Oh, that's good! What bank did you work for?

HR: Fidelity Philadelphia Trust Company.

EMC: It is now known as Fidelity Bank.

HR: I was in the bank, but I wasn't in banking; I was in the trust department. But I wasn't in trusts; I was in the real estate department. But I wasn't in real estate, I was down in the insurance department of the real estate department of the trust department.

EMC: So you rotated.

HR: No. That was where I worked, in the insurance department.

EMC: Oh, I see. So you were in the insurance department. Did you enjoy this position?

HR: Oh, very much. To show you how things were then, I was there six years. I was not the dumbest guy in the bank, and just before I volunteered for active duty, I had received a raise from ninety-eight to one hundred dollars a month. That's how salaries were then.

EMC: Right. But I guess everything else was cheaper, too, so you could survive on that. How many years did you go to Penn to the accounting night school there?

HR: Five years. I got a certificate of proficiency with honors in finance.

EMC: Oh, so you were deep into it, both in your daily work and your education and training. Well, I read your Navy bio, and I know that you joined the Reserves in 1934.

HR: I wanted to go to the Naval Academy, but my commanding officer got the application in too late, so I took correspondence courses, was able to do a day's work in navigation before I ever

had a sextant in my hand. And through some fluke I must have passed because one day I got an envelope addressed to ensign four years later.

EMC: Wow! So you really have progressed, which was very, very good. What appealed to you about the Navy versus the other services?

HR: Well, I suppose it was partly due to my hobby. I collected stamps and was a junior member of the Lansdowne Pennsylvania Stamp Club. And we had a naval officer, a supply officer, a member, who used to send out meeting notices postmarked on ships at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. So I got involved in collecting these postmarks, and actually went down to the navy yard to get some of them. And I remember going to the USS HANNIBAL, which was painted white, and it was the oldest coal-burning ship in the Navy, a survey ship. And I suppose that was one thing that sparked my interest in the Navy.

EMC: Right, you were in a Navy town, that's for sure, Philadelphia, and the naval yard, and your collecting of Naval postmarks. That's very interesting. When you were in the Reserves and taking the correspondence courses, did you also have to drill every month?

HR: One night a week. And I had six Reserve cruises, three as a

seaman on a four stacker and one as an officer; and one as a seaman on the TEXAS, and one as an officer on the TEXAS.

EMC: Now, did that whet your appetite even further for the Navy?

HR: Oh, yes.

EMC: Being at sea and actually being on a ship.

HR: I volunteered as soon as it was possible. They put out a notice in January of '40 that you could volunteer for six months or less should the emergency be less. And I was ordered to the OKLAHOMA.

EMC: Oh, so were you in the Regular Reserves by then? I think your bio said something about being in the Regular Reserves in 1938.

HR: I don't know what you mean by Regular Reserves.

EMC: Well, I didn't either. I thought that was rather peculiar terminology, because I had never heard that before.

HR: I never heard that either.

EMC: But I believe it was in here. Yes. It says, "On June 21st,

he enlisted in the Organized Naval Reserve, and in '38 was commissioned ensign."

HR: Yes, Organized.

EMC: Okay.

HR: They had DO for Deck Organized, and they had other categories. But it was what they called the Organized Reserves, yes.

EMC: Oh. Okay.

HR: Not the Regular.

EMC: Right. Okay. That was it. And then you were in the Reserves in 1938. Well, you volunteered for the coming crisis, and when were you detailed to the OKLAHOMA?

HR: Well, when I volunteered, I was ordered to the OKLAHOMA at San Pedro.

EMC: This was 1940?

HR: This was 1940, January. And then I reported in March, and I was so dumb. The orders said the OKLAHOMA at San Pedro. And I got

the train to the West Coast and a bus to Long Beach. And I said, "Well, how do you get to San Pedro?" And they said, "Well, you take a bus." I took a bus to San Pedro. And of course all the ships' boats came in to Long Beach. And I just was lucky that a stores boat came in to San Pedro and picked up me, and I went out to the ship on a weekend.

EMC: Well, how would you know, really?

HR: Well, you wouldn't, except--

EMC: You wouldn't.

HR: Anybody that knows how all the ships' boats came in to Long Beach would think you were pretty stupid to be right there and then go out to San Pedro where nothing comes in.

EMC: Well, you were an East Coast person. What was your job and your assignment on the OKLAHOMA at this point?

HR: I was the junior officer at turret 4, which was a three-gun turret. And my division officer was a fellow named Forrest Simenea. He married a Norwegian girl from his midshipmen cruise. And he volunteered for sub school. When he left, I got the division. He was later assigned to a submarine, the ARGONAUT. Subsequently, during the war, when I was exec of the GRIDLEY, the

GRIDLEY and the ARGONAUT were in Pearl Harbor, and he told me he could get me on his sub, and I didn't have to go to sub school. Fortunately, I didn't take him up because they never came back from that last patrol.

EMC: Oh, yes.

HR: The ARGONAUT was sunk.

EMC: Oh, yes, that was horrible. Well, that was a wise decision. You were surface line Navy then your whole career, which is good. Well, you said you were a turret officer, and then you got the division. Did the OKLAHOMA cruise outside of Long Beach during this year? Well, almost two years prior to the war.

HR: She went to Pearl, and then came back to Bremerton for an overhaul, and then went back out to Pearl. And cruised out to sea out of Pearl.

EMC: And did you cruise in adjacent waters to Pearl Harbor?

HR: Yes.

EMC: You didn't go that terribly far, I guess. Well, there's nothing there all the way.... I guess Guam or Okinawa or whatever. But anyway, you were in Pearl Harbor on December 7,

1941, the day of the fateful attack. Were you in the OKLAHOMA then in the morning?

HR: Yes. I was eating breakfast. And the reason I was up was that I was going to the police pistol range for a match that day. So, fortunately, I was awake when I heard the explosions on Ford Island. Ran up on the fo'c'sle to see what it was. Just then a plane with two red balls went right over the ship, and they just dropped a torpedo. So I ran aft. The officer of the deck sounded air defense on the bugle, which was proper. I ran aft to my turret. On the way aft I passed the word over the loudspeaker: "This is a real air raid. This is no shit!" And people can remember that. So we all reported to the turret.

EMC: Did you fire?

HR: Well, of course the turret's only a surface gun, and it didn't have anti-aircraft fire. Actually, the OKLAHOMA had two anti-aircraft guns manned 100 percent of the time. The ammunition was in a ready box. The only thing is the ready box was locked. Now, the officer of the deck had the key to the ready box. Well, the officer used to have the key hanging on the deck shack. So we had a rather stupid senior watch officer who said, "That's too dangerous to do that. You should keep it around your neck." So when the attack came, the mid-watch officer still had the key around his neck, and the OKLAHOMA never fired a shot in two wars.

EMC: Oh! And what happened to that officer who had the key?

HR: Nothing. He might have been one of those lost. We lost 425 men.

EMC: Oh, I know, I had read about it, and it was a devastating loss. Now, the ship was hit, as you said. Can you describe the situation on the ship after the attack and the ship being hit?

HR: Well, when the ship was hit, she took a list. She was scheduled for a material inspection on Monday. That's part of Admiral Kimmel's criminal negligence: to have peacetime routine when everybody realized that war was coming. They had removed the manhole covers to the blisters on the side of the ship, so that they could air them out for the material inspection. So as soon as the ship took a slight list, the water just poured in the manhole covers, and that's why she rolled over. Because the ship would have sunk normally and not rolled over.

EMC: How did you get off?

HR: Well, actually--

EMC: Do you know?

HR: That's sort of a long story. I was up in the control room of the officer's turret, and I went out the overhang hatch on deck to see if we could do any damage control, help, or anything. And, you know, it was all quiet out there and nobody in sight. Just then something else hit the ship, and I scrambled back up into the turret. Well, I finally got my nerve up to get out again and check. And while I was out on the deck, the list got so great that I just slipped into the water.

EMC: And then what happened?

HR: Well, there was a grate from the top of the accommodation ladder that I hung onto, and just sort of paddled away from the ship. Of course, the water was all soaked with oil. I looked back once, and she rolled over very slowly but, you know, steadily; and sort of thought of Lot in the Bible and never looked back again. One of the float planes had broken loose from the catapult and was floating in the water. And, of course, then the ARIZONA blew up.

EMC: It must have been chaotic.

HR: Eventually I was picked up by a motor launch. They were picking up other men, and they were so oily that they were very difficult to pick up, and we had to do it by their clothes. Then that motor launch took us to the beach. Then coxswain wanted to

make another trip. And in those days, the coxswains had to have a boat officer. So he sort of berated us for nobody willing to come, so I went with him.

EMC: Oh, you did!

HR: We went out and picked up some more people, and then brought them back. And then his motor conked out. And then the captain's gig from the hospital ship was there to pick up the captain. I guess he never came. He'd been ashore. And that coxswain asked me to be a boat officer for him. So the rest of the morning I was a boat officer on this hospital ship motor launch. And I remember we were sent to the CURTISS, which was a seaplane tender which had been hit. And, of course, those old captains' gigs and the officers' motorboats had rounded canopies and were not in any way convenient to transport litter patients. But I remember they put a couple of badly burned men on litters down to us, and we took them over to the hospital ship. Then they didn't need me anymore. So they dropped me off, and I went ashore.

EMC: But you must have been in fairly decent shape physically, I mean after you jumped, after you fell, into the water.

HR: Well, I....

EMC: I mean, you know, to go on a boat launch. You weren't

terribly injured, were you?

HR: I wasn't injured at all.

EMC: Oh, that's what I meant. You were in fairly good physical shape to do that. You were very, very lucky. The whole scene must have been terribly chaotic.

HR: It was. It was like a Sunday supplement, something going on all over. Every battleship, of course, was hit. The UTAH was sunk. The PENNSYLVANIA and two destroyers were in dry dock. They were hit, and they flooded the dock, and then they unflooded it, and sort of knocked the destroyers off their pins.

EMC: What ship was the OKLAHOMA next to?

HR: We were alongside the MARYLAND.

EMC: And was that hit, too?

HR: Oh, yes.

EMC: And did that one sink?

HR: I don't think so.

EMC: But was the OKLAHOMA ever recovered?

HR: They raised the OKLAHOMA. I remember my new ship, the GRIDLEY, was in port at one time subsequently, and I actually went aboard right down to my old stateroom. The divers had broken into my safe and stolen my gold watch. Just like the looters in the World Trade Center, which you may have read about, though they kept it pretty quiet.

EMC: Right. Yes.

HR: So things haven't changed that way. The OKLAHOMA had a patch put on her, and she was sold for scrap, and was being towed across to the States during the war when the patch fell off, and she went down and almost took the tug with her.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sakes!

HR: But it broke loose.

EMC: And did everybody on it--?

HR: There wasn't anybody on it when they were towing it.

EMC: Oh, oh, they were just towing it. Oh, I see.

HR: They were just bringing it over for scrap.

EMC: Oh, okay. Yes. Oh, okay. Well, it was fated, I guess, for it to happen. How many men did you lose on the OKLAHOMA?

HR: Well, we had, I think, about 425 all together. Of course that was less than half of the ARIZONA's losses. But actually there were less men lost in my division than the other divisions due to a fluke. I had ordered the men to keep below because the steel protection on the sides was stronger than the overhead protection. And I thought, you know, the farther down in the turret they were, the safer they would be. Well, of course, when she rolled over, some got out and some didn't. But, they cut thirty-two men out of the bottom the next day. And many of my men were cut out and saved that way.

EMC: Isn't that amazing! Yes. That's something. So you said there were 425 men that were lost.

HR: Were lost.

EMC: That's quite a bit. Do you know how many were saved?

HR: I don't know how many survived.

EMC: You don't know how many survived. Who was your captain on

the ship, on the OKLAHOMA?

HR: Well, a no-good guy called Bode, B-O-D-E.

EMC: I've heard that name.

HR: And he was later skipper of the CHICAGO.

EMC: Why do you say he was no good?

HR: Well, because he was not respected by a lot of the men. He later became skipper of the CHICAGO, and was at the Battle of Savo Island when the ASTORIA, QUINCY, and VINCENNES, CANBERRA were sunk. And the CHICAGO was off chasing another contact and never did get into the battle. And, of course, he was accused of being a coward. But I was convinced he was not a coward, that he actually was investigating another contact. He later shot himself down in Panama in '45. But the previous skipper, Captain Foy, F-O-Y, had been a wonderful skipper. Now, after the ship was sunk and all the survivors were housed at the submarine base, Captain Foy came around, "Is there anything I can do for you?" And, of course, we didn't have any money, we didn't have anything. And he gave me ten dollars, and he said-- I said, "Well, can you send a telegram to my mother that I'm okay?" And he said he'd be glad to do it. But he said he'd have to take the ten dollars to do it because he really didn't have an unlimited amount of money. He

was just passing money out to his crew members. So, in other words, he was a captain who was interested in his ship and taking care of his crew even after he was detached. Now, the reason he was detached he had been involved in a collision. And the OKLAHOMA had three collisions while I was aboard.

EMC: Wow!

HR: And one of them was up in Bremerton. We were going up the channel, and a barge, a tug, came in, fortunately, from our standpoint, on the port bow. It was very foggy, and the tug swerved and just missed our bow. And this barge, then, with the line slack just kept coming slowly, inexorably, and then hit us, and all the railroad cars fell off just like toys. So that was one collision. And then another collision, we were having some night darkened ship exercises, and the word was passed, "Stand by for collision amidships! Stand by for collision aft!" And I don't know the details, but the ENTERPRISE almost hit us. In fact, they did hit us because their bow clipped our flagpole and bent it double. So there actually was a collision. And in those days you had a telephone on top of the turret for when the turrets moved around that they wouldn't tangle with each other. And that talker was just speechless because the bow had gone over his head.

EMC: Oh, my word!

HR: And then finally the last collision, the ARIZONA hit us during some exercises. And Captain Foy was--I guess he would've been courtmartialed, but all the papers burned up on one of the other ships that was hit. He later made rear admiral and was commandant at the Staff College in Norfolk.

EMC: Was this Foy?

HR: Foy. He was a wonderful man.

EMC: He had three unfortunate incidents when he was captain, right?

HR: Well, yes. Well, of course, the other two were not his fault.

EMC: Right. Oh, well, that's quite a story then. Three collisions, and then the attack at Pearl Harbor, and then the sinking while it was being towed. So kind of an unlucky ship. Did you go over to the SOLACE at any point in time? Were you there on that ship after the attack?

HR: That was the ship whose gig I had command of for the morning.

EMC: Oh, I see. Right, the gig.

HR: When they didn't need me anymore on the boat, I went up on the ship, and they treated a minor thing. I guess it was shrapnel or something like that. But it wasn't a serious injury; it was just minor.

EMC: Yes. So they had to treat that.

HR: And then I went ashore.

EMC: And did you stay at the base there?

HR: Yes, the sub base.

EMC: The sub base. That's where you were.

HR: They set up an emergency fleet pooling office. They gave us our assignments.

EMC: Right.

HR: I was eventually sent to-- Well, I had one day when they sent us over to censor mail, incoming mail. And, of course, these letters had been written with no idea that they were going to be censored. So some of them were pretty juicy.

EMC: So you'd read them?

HR: Well, you had to. I mean we had to censor them.

EMC: Right. Cut it out.

HR: Well, no, you didn't cut it out because--

EMC: Or did you cross it out?

HR: No, the sexual stuff, I mean.

EMC: Oh, oh....

HR: These letters were written without any idea that they were going to be censored.

EMC: Right.

HR: So the incoming mail was censored. I still had in my collection letters that had been sent to me that were incoming and were censored.

EMC: Interesting.

HR: Then I was ordered to the--

EMC: Well, can we just backtrack just a tad bit about Pearl Harbor? I just want to ask you another question. What was your opinion of Admiral Kimmel?

HR: Criminally negligent and should have been drummed out of the Navy! Absolutely no damned good! Here I am an hour and a half away, an hour and a half later, a mile and a half away, and the USS WARD senses something there in the harbor, which was the one defect in the Japanese plan, their use of the midget submarines, which could have given us warning and actually did give us warning, but we didn't act on it. So the word was sent to his headquarters in plain language, and he said he'd be down to the office. But obviously if the ships had been buttoned up (condition Z set) and at general quarters, it would have been far different. But that was not the extent of his negligence. He just had a peacetime mind. For instance, I was going to tell you I was ordered to the fleet headquarters to be a sound-powered talker on a sound-powered phone line to the harbor entrance control post. My station was right outside his conference room. And while I was there, I saw a pile of orders dated December 8th, signed by the chief-of-staff, that officers would wear hats when they left the ship on liberty. And hats were derisively known as "kimmels." And he had, you know, plenty of warning to protect his fleet and failed to do so. So I have nothing but disrespect for him.

EMC: Criticism, yes.

HR: His family's trying to get his four stars back. Congress passed it, but fortunately President Clinton did not sign it. So as far as I know, he doesn't have the stars back yet. But the family's still trying.

EMC: Right. I think his son was in the Navy.

HR: The son was actually director of the Naval Command College here. I worked for his son.

EMC: Oh, you did, yes. I know we've had some correspondence, years ago, I think, with him. Do you believe that Roosevelt knew that the attack was imminent?

HR: Oh, absolutely not.

EMC: Absolutely not?

HR: No.

EMC: Oh, okay. I just wondered, because there's been a lot of discussion about that: whether he really knew and, you know, and let it happen to draw us into the war.

HR: No. I'm sure that didn't happen.

EMC: Well, how long were you in Pearl Harbor after the attack?

HR: About four weeks. I got tired of this job and asked to be ordered to a ship. I went to the GRIDLEY on January 7th.

EMC: Nineteen forty-three.

HR: Nineteen forty-two.

EMC: Nineteen forty-two. Pardon me, '42. Right. Because we were talking about '41. Did you have any after effects of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

HR: Absolutely none.

EMC: Oh, so you didn't have any post traumatic stress syndrome?

HR: No problems at all.

EMC: Or nightmares or anything?

HR: No, no.

EMC: But it must have been, you know, awful.

HR: I thought war was like that all the time. But it turns out it's only very occasionally like that.

EMC: Yes. Well, you certainly had experience coming up in the GRIDLEY, which was a wartime assignment for you. Can you tell me what your jobs were in the GRIDLEY? What were you assigned to?

HR: Well, my first job was commissary officer. And I was so stupid that I didn't check the inventory when I took over. We had a captain who was very secretive about ship movements, so one day I was getting commissary stores replenished. They were all broken out on the tender ready to ship over. We were told the ship was getting underway at noon, and all the supplies got left behind.

EMC: Was this from Pearl?

HR: This was for the Marshalls, Gilberts raid. We almost ran out of food, but-- I won't say fortunately, but we had a collision at the time and had to put into Guam. There was a Matson Liner there that had just brought marines. And we were able to get wonderful stuff from them: fresh frozen peas and strawberries and everything we needed.

EMC: Yes. So how long were you commissary officer?

HR: Oh, not very long. I worked my way up--gunnery officer and then finally executive officer.

EMC: Were you a navigator also on the GRIDLEY?

HR: Yes.

EMC: So you moved up. And what kind of a ship was the GRIDLEY?

HR: The GRIDLEY was a destroyer. We had sixteen torpedoes: four mounts, two on each side. We never fired any in battle. But we fired one in the tube one time by mistake.

EMC: Where did the GRIDLEY go during your service in it? You were in it for about three years.

HR: I was there three years under six different skippers. During my time on board, the ship was in twenty-six numbered engagements and earned sixteen battle stars. I was awarded a Bronze Star Medal.

EMC: Right, '42 to about '45, I believe, early '45. And where did the ship go, and what was its support purpose?

HR: Well, we basically were a screen for the carriers. We had one incident when the GRIDLEY and HELM were ordered to make a

reconnaissance at Guam before the invasion. The HELM noticed flashing lights, and it turned out to be Tweed, who was picked up. Actually it was our skipper who was the unit commander, and we wanted to send in a boat, too. But he said, no, they found him; let them send it in. But it was sort of, I'd say, brave of him to stop and have his other ship put a boat in the water and pick up Tweed. You've heard the story of Tweed, haven't you?

EMC: No, I don't think I have.

HR: Tweed was a radioman who escaped on Guam and hid on Guam from the Japanese for months and months or maybe a year or two.

EMC: Isn't that something!

HR: The natives protected him. When he saw us, he used a mirror to signal who he was, and we picked him up. He later wrote a book about it which I'm sure you have in the library.

EMC: Oh, I'm sure.

HR: And, unfortunately, I understand--I don't know whether as a result of this or not--but his family broke up afterwards.

EMC: Yes, it must have been a traumatic experience.

HR: Now, there was another time on the GRIDLEY when with another ship we had a sound contact and dropped depth charges. And there was an underwater explosion. Now, of course, a lot of ships would report a sub sunk when it wasn't.

EMC: Right.

HR: We put a boat in the water, and the doctor picked up what he said was a human liver floating. So it turns out from postwar analysis that we did sink a Japanese sub. They had a number that were in the area at the time. But mainly it was just screening carriers. And, of course, later in the war when the kamikazes came, we used to joke that the destroyer would put up a sign "the carriers are that way" with the kamikazes coming in.

EMC: To avoid being hit yourself, right?

HR: Well, they weren't interested in us. We weren't the target.

EMC: No. Right.

HR: We were in a screen one time when there was a Betty, a Japanese bomber, shadowing the fleet. It came in where we were. And we had what they called the VT Fuses. I don't know if you've heard of it, a Variable Time Fuse. Instead of setting your fuse as a fire control solution to go off in, say, six seconds, you

had a magnetic fuse, which would go off when it passed close to a plane. And so we fired at it, and all of a sudden the Jap plane blew up and crashed.

EMC: Well, that was good targeting.

HR: But mainly, I'd say, we escorted carriers.

EMC: So you really didn't see much action.

HR: We were in the screen once when the USS LISCOMBE BAY blew up. She was a CVE. She blew up just like a firecracker from a submarine torpedo. And I didn't think there'd be any survivors, but there were.

EMC: Now, did you pick them up?

HR: No, we were not--

EMC: Close enough. You saw it from afar. In my reading about the GRIDLEY, I noticed that it was in Alaska, Kodiak Island, in June, for Midway.

HR: Oh, yes. The Midway Battle. As you know, the orders came out that we expected the main attack at Midway, but it could be in Alaska, and there was a small Jap force sent to Alaska. We were

sent to Alaska that summer for the Midway Operation. That was a sort of interesting tour. We bombarded Kiska one time. They had an admiral who later was, I think, relieved for incompetence. He had put out a signal--I guess he put it out himself--"Turn 9, I mean 9 Turn. Turn 9, execute." And there were two collisions of ships that turned the wrong way.

EMC: Oh, yes. Now, was that on the U.S. side?

HR: They were our ships. We were not involved in the collision. They were minesweepers and something else. We operated out of Kodiak at that time.

EMC: Oh, way up. Kodiak Island in Alaska. Now, you said you bombarded Kiska in August '42. That was a little bit of action that you saw. Were you involved in patrolling the Japanese Islands?

HR: No.

EMC: No? Not there. Well, you had three years in the ship, in the GRIDLEY, and got a little taste of war anyway throughout the Pacific. Do you have anything else, any other comments or any other recollections of that time period? Did you ever get any leave, for example?

HR: No, I never got my survivors' leave. When the war ended, I had sixty-some months of sea duty.

EMC: Wow! With no break.

HR: No break. Of course, I got thirty days' leave when I got ordered to command my destroyer. I got thirty days' leave then. I got married then.

EMC: Right. Now that was the WILKES, wasn't it?

HR: That was the WILKES (DD 441).

EMC: And when were you named C.O. of the WILKES?

HR: Oh, that's sort of an interesting story. It was the exec's job to type out the roster. The roster would have the duties you were in training for and what you qualified. And, of course, the exec is in training for command. I had put down "qualification indefinite." So one day we got a roster from a sister ship, and I told the captain, "Look, this exec says he's qualified." And I said, "He's no more damned qualified than I am. So what date should I put down?" He said, "Oh, hell, put down you're qualified." So that's how I got my command. It turns out-- I had a friend back in BuPers who said that ComDesPac had written BuPers--that "I know we agreed that reserve officers would not

get command of fleet destroyers. But we've run out. And here are the first four reserves to get a destroyer." And that was how I got my orders to the WILKES.

EMC: Great! So you were CO about March 1945 of another destroyer. Where did you patrol at that point? Where were you assigned?

HR: Well, we had escort carrier operations for part of it. We had a trip where we escorted USS CETUS and a merchant ship from Saipan to Ulithi. Then, we were on radar picket station off Okinawa, the ship before us on that station was sunk. We had two kamikazes come in on us.

EMC: Did they hit or miss?

HR: They missed us.

EMC: Thank God! Well, you saw a taste of action then. How did you react to these near misses or almost attacks?

HR: I just loved that command. I enjoyed it very much. I was never afraid about any of the attacks. The only time I was afraid was during the June typhoon. You know Halsey rolled over three destroyers the previous December. But he ran his fleet through another typhoon in June of '45. It was so bad it knocked the bow

right off the PITTSBURGH.

EMC: Oh, my gosh!

HR: So we were ballasted, and he had detached us to operate independently, and I was trying to keep the ship headed into the waves and using the engines to do it. I thought of the men in the engine room, and I was scared.

EMC: Yes. The forces of nature then at this point in time rather than the war itself. Unfortunately, that's the South Pacific. Well, you also ended up, I guess, in the WILKES in Korea at Inchon.

HR: Yes, we were ordered to Tokyo. And, as a collector of Naval postmarks, I regret exceedingly that I didn't write to the other ships because those Tokyo Surrender Day covers are very, very desirable. But anyhow, our orders got cancelled, and we were sent to Korea, and got up to Jinsen. While we were there in September, the Navy was demobilizing. In fact, the Navy made demobilization the number one priority. Nothing was to interfere with it, nothing. So people were getting out on what they called points, this complicated system of points. So my exec and some of the chiefs had enough points, and they left the ship in Korea to go back on a Liberty ship, you know, eight or ten knots on a great circle near Alaska, to the States. And I was left with a

lieutenant junior grade exec. He was very good. But, you know, we were pretty shorthanded. Well, about three days later we got our orders to go back, and we beat them back.

EMC: The ones who took the Liberty ship were a little slow. You mentioned you were married in '45.

HR: 'Forty-five, yes.

EMC: Before you took command of the WILKES. Where were you married, may I ask?

HR: In Philadelphia.

EMC: Oh, so you got liberty obviously at that point in time to leave.

HR: And my wife was a very supportive Navy wife. Later I was with the Naval Command Course when they were separate from the rest of the College. We had two instruction teams, and the social life was much more, I guess you'd say, incestuous. I mean you had much more contact with the foreign officers. And my wife entertained all of them and enjoyed it very much.

EMC: Oh, that's good, that's good.

HR: She enjoyed the Navy.

EMC: Oh, that's great. That's great. Because I have interviewed Navy wives, too, like Floride Hewitt among a few others in town, on their contributions and their thoughts on being a Navy wife. Well, when did you return to the U.S. from wartime duty?

HR: We got back in October. My wife met us down in Charleston, and she had to give up Army-Navy game tickets to come. There's a little story that the WILKES and two sister ships had come in at the same time. I guess the C.O. of one of the other ships had gotten ashore first. She was down at the dock to meet me. So they told her, "Well, he won't be in for a while. Can't you see the sun flashing on the oars?" She believed him. So when I got back, she was up in the club room with my "friends."

EMC: You weren't in a rowboat. How did you feel about VJ-Day? Do you remember your reaction to that news?

HR: Absolutely! It should be called VJ-Day, and we should have it.

EMC: Rhode Island does.

HR: As a matter of fact, a couple of years ago I gave a speech when they had the ceremonies at the monument. I feel strongly

that we should have VJ-Day, and it should be called VJ-Day.

EMC: Right, right. Were you elated when you learned that the war ended? Was over?

HR: Oh, yes. It was sort of funny. The Navy put out a directive that you were to take pictures of the celebrations and all. I guess we took some, but they're in a cruise book published at the end of the war. So we were elated. I feel strongly that if we hadn't dropped the bomb, I wouldn't be here. Because we did not have the answer to the kamikazes. Even with the surrender there was a group in Japan that tried to sabotage the surrender.

EMC: Oh, they did!

HR: They would have had all sorts of kamikaze small craft and such. It would have been frightful. So I'm very strongly in favor of the bomb having been dropped.

EMC: Yes, I was going to ask you if you were in favor of that. It certainly ended the war and saved a lot of lives on our part, because it would have dragged on after that. Did you celebrate on your ship at all, on the WILKES?

HR: People were happy, but we didn't have any formal celebration there.

EMC: I assume you were glad to return to the U.S. and to a peacetime Navy.

HR: Yes, I was.

EMC: After, as you say, a very lengthy time at sea. When you landed in Charleston, South Carolina, what was your first postwar assignment?

HR: I was ordered to the General Line School.

EMC: And that was--?

HR: And learned the things that I should have known when I was commanding officer.

EMC: That was in Newport, Rhode Island, wasn't it? A year's duty. Now did you find that experience and that year of education profitable for your naval career?

HR: Very. A very good year.

EMC: It was a good year. What did you think of Newport at that point in time?

HR: We made a lot of friends here, civilian friends, and subsequently decided to retire here. We were pleased with Newport.

EMC: That was your first introduction to Newport. I asked that question because you did eventually stay. So you liked the area. Do you feel that you would have been a better C.O. if you had gone to Line School first?

HR: Absolutely.

EMC: But you had good ships, didn't you, with good crews?

HR: Well, of course. When you're out there twenty-four hours a day, you learn fast.

EMC: Sure.

HR: That's probably a better education than the Line School. But, no, I thought the Line School was very good.

EMC: Did you ever make any decisions as a C.O. that you second guessed or kind of regretted? Well, you can answer, go ahead. Anything that you would have done differently? You may not have.

HR: I'm trying to think. There were a few things I did that I'm

proud of.

EMC: Oh, then talk about them.

HR: One of them was when we got back to the States, of course, everybody wanted to go on leave when we arrived in San Diego. So I put out a policy that when you got to San Diego, you could have thirty days leave and report to the ship in Charleston if you signed a page nine that you agreed to stay on the ship, regardless of points, until the ship was decommissioned. And that turned out to be a stroke of genius, because when we got to Charleston and were putting the ship out of commission, people were dropping away like flies on points. But my crew couldn't leave, because they'd already signed their early discharge away. Then the head of the reserve fleet tried to transfer my people. So I told him, "Look, you can't transfer them. You transfer them, they go right to the separation center because they have their points. They're only here because they agreed to stay here to get their leave." So that was one of the things I was proud of.

Then I had another one that backfired. They had a sort of a dumb regulation that you had to go to the separation center nearest your ship and not nearest your hometown. So I sent some people on leave with orders to report to the separation center in their hometown if they would agree not to put in for the travel money which, of course, they could. I didn't think they rated it because they should have gone to the separation center near the

ship. Well, one guy did put in for the travel money, and I got in a little bit of trouble. But that didn't bother me.

EMC: Well, that's good. Can you describe what the postwar Navy was like? Because so many people were leaving who were just in for wartime service. Was it kind of a downer?

HR: The fleet was pretty well decimated. After I went to the Line School, I was ordered to command the BURKE, APD.

EMC: Right.

HR: Of course, my nose was a little out of joint because, you know, here's the big-time, wartime destroyer skipper sent to a little ship like the BURKE. But I enjoyed that year, and the amphibious force immobilized us. They sent us up to Yorktown until they could have enough men to man the ship properly. While the destroyer force had a little "can do" attitude and kept running their ships with too-short crews and really running them into the ground. But, no, I had no problems with the postwar Navy.

EMC: What exactly did the BURKE do, and where did it go during that year that you were on it?

HR: Well, we made a reserve cruise to Bermuda. It was sort of

funny. We were ordered to make the reserve cruise, and only one man showed up.

EMC: Why was that?

HR: I figured, well, they ordered us to go, and so we did it. We took some underwater demolition team up to Camp Dietrick.

EMC: Where is that?

HR: Camp Dietrick is the poison gas facility in Maryland. I don't know why the team was going up there for an exercise, but they did. While they were up there, they caught a deer that was swimming, and it sort of pretty much happened before I knew what was going on. So they butchered it on the rear deck and had it in the icebox. They wanted to catch another, and I said, "Absolutely not! We're not going to be a slaughterhouse."

EMC: That's right. Venison for dinner.

HR: We had an interesting thing, for which I got a letter of commendation. The radioman reported--we were at anchor in Norfolk--some ship reported they were in distress off the coast. Just for the devil of it, I said, "Well, let's go." So I sent a message that we were proceeding to their assistance. Well, we got to this ship--it was on fire and sort of halfway listed--and went

alongside for a high line and transferred a lot of--about 50--fire extinguishers over to them, which they would hope they could throw down to where it was burning like hell. But it didn't. Then eventually the Coast Guard came. So I said, "Request permission to proceed on duty assigned." We just went back to port.

EMC: You let the Coast Guard take care of it.

HR: So that turned out all right. But it was just routine sea operations.

EMC: On the BURKE. Well, you're back to Newport again the following year. You were a member of the Naval War College Junior Class of 1949. Did you like the idea of being assigned to the War College?

HR: It was wonderful, absolutely wonderful. We had as our instructor I think it was Claude Ricketts. He was a comer. Well, the head of the Command Course at the Naval War College was the senior passed-over captain who really wasn't very much good. Admiral H.D. Feff, who was the deputy, put out an order that the Junior Course was to be considered the equivalent of the Senior Course for the record. And I had a wonderful time at the War College.

EMC: Did you find the education here valuable for your future

career?

HR: I would say so, yes.

EMC: Did you find it rigorous or easy?

HR: Easy. We had absolutely no competition, no marks. Your fitness report was rubber stamped "Satisfactorily completed the course." All you had to do was write one paper: "relations between the U.S. and Russia and the implications for U.S. foreign policy." It was largely a lecture course. It was not in any way rigorous. Admiral Turner changed it all.

EMC: Yes, there was a notion that it was kind of a country-club atmosphere here, kind of a year off, you know, from your ship assignments. But, again, you were back in Newport and being educated here at the College. Well, you went off to another ship after that. You were C.O. of the USS HAYNSWORTH (DD 700).

HR: Well, I think before that I had a tour at the staff of the General Line School. Then it was while I was at the General Line School that I was ordered to the HAYNSWORTH. It was sort of interesting. The orders came in to three officers to command the following three ships, respectively; and that's how I got the HAYNSWORTH. She had been decommissioned the previous February. In fact, one man had been sent to the hospital. After they were

recommissioned and his treatment was completed at the hospital, he was ordered back to the ship just as if the ship had never been decommissioned.

EMC: Oh, can I double back, because I forgot that you were an instructor at the Line School. So you stayed in Newport another year. What did you teach there? Do you remember? This was '49 to '50.

HR: Strategy and Tactics. Maneuvering board.

EMC: That kind of thing. Did you enjoy the teaching assignment?

HR: Very much, very much.

EMC: Did you find the students good?

HR: Good.

EMC: And responsive. So you were on the other side of that podium at that point. After the war you had gone to the Line School, and now you were teaching there. Where was the HAYNSWORTH home ported?

HR: We were home ported in Norfolk. That was a good tour.

EMC: Where did you go for your cruises?

HR: Well, we deployed to the Med, and that's sort of a sad story. There were four ships, and only three were going to the Med, and the commodore told me that I could be the one that stayed back if I wanted. But we planned that my wife would go over and follow the ship if I deployed, and I decided to go to the Med. Well, it turned out the ship that stayed back, the WEEKS, was ordered to Vietnam and had a wonderful tour there. So I missed my Vietnam active duty by deployment to the Med. But we had a wonderful trip in the Med, and we visited the island of Rhodes. We had a band, a great band, and paid honors to the governor when he came aboard. We visited Venice.

EMC: You made nice port calls.

HR: Yes.

EMC: Did you meet any royalty on the way?

HR: No.

EMC: Did they visit your ship? Sometimes they do. And plenty of nice ports to see. Were you merely showing the flag then? Was that part of it? Or exercises, too?

HR: Well, we had the normal Sixth Fleet presence there. I don't know whether you'd call it showing the flag. But I think we were there for military reasons as much as public relations reasons.

EMC: Right, right. And exercises as well. Did anything unusual happen during that tour? That was a two-year tour, '50 to '52.

HR: Yes, we had a cracked strut. I remember we had some kind of a face mask with air, and I went down and took a look at it. So Com 6th Flt decided to send us to Gibraltar to check it out. Admiral Pirie was the commander of the Sixth Fleet. Admiral Pirie was commander of the carrier group; he told me that he would make sure that my wife was well taken care of. I guess she was. But anyhow, we went to Gibraltar, and went in dry dock there. They decided that the ship could continue to operate, although we shouldn't try to go full power. While we were being shifted around in Gibraltar, I had a pilot who was dead drunk.

EMC: Oh, dear.

HR: A British pilot. I had to take the con away from him, which is sort of--you're in a foreign port, and it wasn't something I wanted to do. That was interesting. We also got to Crete. It was a good tour.

EMC: Yes. It sounds great. You had a chance to get off and visit

the islands and make port calls, and that's kind of exciting. Well, after two years as C.O. of the HAYNSWORTH, you were in Washington, D.C. You were assigned there, weren't you, to the CNO's office?

HR: Yes. I worked for Admiral Burke. He was deputy director of the Strategy Division, and I was his administrative assistant for a couple of years, then I was on one of the teams, the North American Continental Defense Team.

EMC: What were you planning for then?

HR: Well, it was just mainly infighting between the services.

EMC: Right, during this tenure.

HR: When we were on the Intercontinental thing, we had what was called a Canada-U.S. Military Cooperation Committee. We'd meet up there in the summer and meet down in Florida in the winter. That was sort of interesting. Admiral Burke was an absolutely wonderful, wonderful man. A workaholic.

EMC: And did you have to work exceptionally hard?

HR: Well, I made a decision then that probably cost making admiral. If I had hitched my wagon to his star, and I recognized

it then, I think I could have gone places. But my family was important, and I wasn't one of those that worked late. A lot of people would work late just to impress people. I understand that it was not until President Bush came in that he put out an order to knock it off. But really down there it is sort of insane. They're spinning wheels, and everybody is working late to impress people. I didn't do it.

EMC: That's what I've heard, that they'll stay there 'til seven, eight o'clock, you know, put in twelve-hour days just to impress people. But you don't know what they accomplish. But you found that Admiral Burke was a good boss.

HR: He was wonderful.

EMC: Did you have much contact with him?

HR: Well, every day because--

EMC: You were the administrative assistant.

HR: Yes.

EMC: To his division. Well, you had duty in Washington for about three years then, '52 through '55. Did you like that atmosphere? Did you want to stay there?

HR: I enjoyed it. I had bought a house in Arlington, which was not too far away, and had a good parking place. And I enjoyed it.

EMC: Well, that's good. But you went out to sea again for your next assignment on the USS WORCESTER.

HR: And that was a good tour. We had an absolutely wonderful skipper called Captain Wales, W-A-L-E-S, who later made admiral. He ran a tight ship. When we got back to port, all four boat booms went out at the same time, and the boats lowered into the water. Everything was--

EMC: Precise.

HR: Was 100 percent.

EMC: Now you were the exec on that ship.

HR: Yes.

EMC: So you were working directly with him. What type of a ship was it, and where did you go?

HR: That was a light cruiser. I joined her in the Med, and we came back and had a short availability at the Boston Navy Yard,

and went out to the Pacific. Went to Japan and Hong Kong. It was a good--

EMC: Right. The Asian ports then. Did anything unusual happen on those cruises and during that year you were on the WORCESTER?

HR: Nothing that comes to my mind now, except that it was a good ship and a good tour.

EMC: Well, in '56 you were back at the War College again. What were you doing here? You'd been educated here.

HR: Well, I guess that's what sort of derailed my career. I spent too much time here. I was in the Correspondence Course Department for one year, and then I had two years in the Naval Command Course.

EMC: Were you the U.S. Officer there?

HR: No, they didn't have a U.S. Officer in the Command Course. They had only foreign officers, and we met separately. For security reasons, they didn't attend the lectures here and they didn't mingle in any way with U.S. students. We had two teams that instructed them. They had many trips. And then when Captain Kimmel was detached early, I was the acting director for a couple of months for the Chicago trip. That was a wonderful, wonderful

tour of duty.

EMC: Oh, I bet. You mentioned the social life and the parties and the entertainment. You became very close to these people, I guess.

HR: We got very close.

EMC: Do you ever hear from any of them?

HR: Our class has pretty much died out now. There's only the Philippine officer, Alcaraz, who later became commodore, and he now lives in the United States. He keeps in touch, and one of the Australian officers who had been a junior officer on the CANBERRA when she was sunk.

EMC: Oh, yes, during the war.

HR: Later had command of a carrier which was in a collision. He was courtmartialed, but the sword was returned to him with the hilt toward him; he beat it. He keeps in touch. But mainly--most of our people have died out.

EMC: That's the early classes, '58, '59.

HR: 'Fifty-nine and '60.

EMC: And '60. I see. So you were on the staff then basically. You were one of the instructors, you were on the staff. Did you find that experience with NCC a valuable one, and do you think it's a worthwhile effort?

HR: Well, absolutely, and I'd had a friend every place in the world. That was a great tour.

EMC: Did you ever get to travel to see these people at any point in time?

HR: Never did.

EMC: Well, after you left the War College-- You had a good long tour there, as you said, that kind of may be derailed the rest of your career, because you stayed here from '56 to '60. But you did go on to another ship command.

HR: The AMPHION (AR 13)

EMC: Where was that home ported?

HR: In Norfolk. It was a repair ship. Of course, I'm not a mechanical man, you know. I don't know which end of the hammer to pick up. But we had a wonderful repair officer, and I'd go to

these arrival conferences when the ships would come alongside, and kept my mouth shut. He would run things. The ships had a three weeks availability. You had to get through in three weeks because when their time was up, they left. It wasn't like a navy yard where you were delayed and delayed. We did a good job. That was a very successful tour. We won the Marjorie Starrett Battleship Award while I was there.

EMC: Oh! That's great!

HR: Actually I had command of two deep drafts at one time. The skipper of the USS HYADES had a heart attack, and they wanted to save his command for him. She was due to deploy in a couple of days to the Med. So they gave me temporary additional duty to take the HYADES for a Med deployment. So once again, my wife was able to come over and be with me. The ship went over and replenished the Sixth Fleet. This was an old steam vessel that couldn't make much speed. Our speed was the fleet speed. That was another good tour.

EMC: Yes. I'd say. Well, that was kind of a lucky break. Some nice opportunities for cruises. Well, your next assignment was as a logistics officer in Newport again.

HR: No, that was in Norfolk.

EMC: Oh, pardon me.

HR: That was Cinclantfleet. Yes, Director of Logistics Plans. That was sort of interesting. That was when the Cuban Missile Crisis came.

EMC: How were you involved in that?

HR: Well, that was sort of a fiasco. The original plan was that the fleet commander would go to see in a command ship and command at sea. But at the last minute they changed it, and he stayed ashore. They brought in all these--some joint Army command. I remember down there at the headquarters there were carpenters carrying lumber around, building offices. There was an incident there that never has been publicized. There was an Army officer--I think his name was Truman; I'm not sure--who wanted to have his signature on the order. There were three plans. One was an immediate air strike, and then something else, and then an invasion. So a messenger shows up in the communication center to execute the air strike. Well, it turns out the messenger had picked up this message that the general had had on his desk. But the situation was not such that this made sense, so they didn't do it, and checked around. I don't know whatever happened, if anything, to the guy. But if we had gone the invasion route, it would have been a disaster, because, as we now know, the Russians had tactical nukes and the authority to use them. If they had

nuked our invasion force, that would have been it.

EMC: Yes, that would have been it. Right. Yes, that was kind of a scary time, trying to settle that crisis. So that was what you were involved in, I guess, for your year.

HR: And actually at that time I was humped.

EMC: What is that?

HR: Are you familiar with the hump legislation?

EMC: No, no, I'm not.

HR: Right after the war, a bunch of people came in. Down the line they had too many captains, and it was preventing promotions. So the Navy gave up their tombstone admiral system, which I would have been a tombstone admiral, in return for legislation that took care of this hump. So I was humped and ordered to retire. Well, it turns out that the Cinclantfleet had made a mistake on my fitness report. BuPers put out an order, which they admitted was a mistake, that you didn't have to put any comments in the comment section. So Cinclantfleet did leave comments blank on many officers, including me. But my comment section was not entirely blank as it had a statement to the effect that this constitutes joint duty in accordance with the

requirement for joint duty.

One of the officers who thought he might make admiral complained to BuPers. BuPers returned the fitness reports for comments, but they did not return mine because it was not entirely blank. When I received orders to retire, I appealed to the Board for Correction of Naval Records. They received a report from the deputy chief of Naval Personnel, Admiral A.S. Heyward, Jr., that my report would have indicated to the Continuation Board a lowered standard of performance on my part. Cinclantfleet did submit a revised report which reflected a continuation of my previous high performance and that these comments would have had some influence in the Board's decision in my case. The Board for Correction of Naval Records also noted that the Continuation Board did not have available to it a letter of commendation for my command of USS AMPHION winning the Battle Efficiency and Communication Excellence Awards.

The Board for Correction of Naval Records decided that my record be corrected to show that I was not scheduled for transfer to the retired list on 1 July 1963, and that my name be deleted from the list of officers scheduled for involuntary retirement on 1 July 1963. The Under Secretary of the Navy disapproved this recommendation. I entered suit in the District Court. The case was heard by the judge who knocked President Truman down on the train strike. The judge said he would not interfere with the Navy's promotion process, but that it appeared I had a strong case, and he would remand it to the Superior Court for a hearing

on the day before I was due to retire.

The Under Secretary of the Navy then referred it back to the Board for Correction of Naval Records, and they replied that they adhered to their previous decision. So with that recommendation and a pending court case which would blow open the Continuation Board's proceedings, the Under Secretary of the Navy approved the report. I had a phone call from BuPers: Would I like to go to Iran, Pakistan, or Vietnam? And then the detail officer laughed and said he could send me to be Professor of Naval Science at Villanova near by hometown, or to Personnel Officer at ComDesPac, or to Commanding Officer, Washington. I chose Washington.

EMC: Right. Over all the other options. And you were there for how long?

HR: I had a wonderful four years, which is unusual. I tried to extend it for my last two years of duty, but the detail officer said he had to give other officers a chance at command.

EMC: And was that a smooth-running command that you had in Washington?

HR: Well, that was a real challenge. We had all sorts of things happen. In my first week we had a flood which almost flooded my quarters; we had the Black March in D.C.; and on my first day of duty BuPers, our budget command, called me over and informed me

that we would have to have a 142 person reduction in force. My command included the Washington Navy Yard which had just been closed, the old air station Anacostia, the Receiving Station, Barracks K and the WAVE tenants, and the Washington Navy Yard.

EMC: But you said the Navy Yard had been closed.

HR: Well, I mean closed as a gun factory.

EMC: Right, right. Yes.

HR: In fact, they had just built a new foundry that never poured lot one. That was a wonderful tour.

EMC: Were they operating the Navy Yard as a historical center then, or did they convert it?

HR: I was a landlord. We had the Navy Federal Credit Union. We had the Navy Band, ceremonial guard. Many different sub-commands were tenants at the Navy Yard.

EMC: Yes, yes. Did you live there in the Navy Yard?

HR: I lived in quarters at the former Anacostia air station that went to a vice admiral after I left. It was wonderful.

EMC: Yes, it must have been.

HR: I had a steward, which you don't have these days.

EMC: Right, right. So you lived rather well. Were there any problems at that point in time with activities that you had jurisdiction over?

HR: Well, just one series of problems after another. But it was all very interesting. One sad duty was processing incoming hospital corpsmen. They went on a one-way trip to Vietnam.

EMC: Nothing--

HR: Nothing earth-shaking.

EMC: --earth-shaking or outstanding then. Well, after that, your four years in D.C., you were back in Newport again.

HR: Yes. I'd decided that I'd like to retire in Newport, and I asked for duty in Newport. So I came up and interviewed Admiral Means Johnston. He had been a junior officer on the OKLAHOMA when I was on the OKLAHOMA, and asked if I'd be able to serve under him. And, of course, I could and I would. He was subsequently relieved by a couple of wonderful officers.

EMC: That was around '67, wasn't it?

HR: That was in '67 to '69. I retired in '69, and they gave me a wonderful retirement ceremony with everybody passing in review. The works.

EMC: Oh, that's great!

HR: Which Admiral Johnston would not have done. I'm trying to think who was--

EMC: Yes, I don't know who the commander of the base was then.

HR: --the Commander of the Naval Base. And I should remember his name. Admiral Wiley was one of them.

EMC: You were chief-of-staff.

HR: I was chief-of-staff.

EMC: What were your remain responsibilities as chief-of-staff? Were they ceremonial or administrative?

HR: Mainly just paper-pushing, keeping the instructions up to date, helping the admiral with his housing problems.

EMC: Did anything outstanding happen on the Naval Base Newport? Anything you remember as being outstanding? Well, you retired, as you said, in 1969 as a captain. When had you been promoted to captain? I didn't ask that.

HR: I was promoted to captain at the time I left the WORCESTER.

EMC: Yes. That would have been in the fifties, mid-fifties. Well, you retired from the Navy. What were your feelings about retirement? Were you ready to move on to another career?

HR: One day you're a big shot, and the next day dot the "i's." It's the end of the world.

EMC: Why did you decide to stay in Newport?

HR: Well, we had a lot of civilian friends here. We had bought a home. And we liked it here.

EMC: Did you purchase a home here?

HR: Yes.

EMC: And that's on the Point, I believe, isn't it? That's a very picturesque section of Newport. Did you want to work after you wrapped up your Naval career?

HR: I made a mistake. We bought Arnold's Art Store.

EMC: Oh, of course! I've been there.

HR: It had been donated to the St. John's Church. Old Father Turnbull came around one day--this was when I was on active duty. "You don't want to buy an art store, do you?" And I was dumb enough to buy the thing.

EMC: Oh, I know I've been there when it was down on Thames Street.

HR: We were on Broadway at that time.

EMC: You were on Broadway?

HR: Twenty-two Broadway.

EMC: Well, you had to learn this business then. You had to learn the business from scratch.

HR: Absolutely! You know a Naval officer can do anything, but not necessarily well. There was not really too much in my career that taught me to run a business, so we made a lot of mistakes. But it survived.

EMC: Oh, yes. Because then you moved to Thames Street.

HR: Then we moved to Thames Street.

EMC: Right.

HR: Now my son has it.

EMC: And a second store is over on Aquidneck Avenue.

HR: Sometimes he says "I gave him the business." That tone of voice.

EMC: Now, that was about the only art store in town.

HR: It was. We had the first gallery in town. My wife had been a graduate of the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art, now the Philadelphia College of the Arts.

EMC: Oh, so she knows something.

HR: So she was in her element on that.

EMC: Right. Well, she would know the artistic end of the business. But, you know, it is difficult to learn how to run a

business, if you've never done that, for profit. But, you know, it's lasted.

HR: To get any profits, it took a long time. Right now that my son has it, it's in pretty good shape.

EMC: Yes, I'm sure. Well, when did you retire from the art store?

HR: Well, maybe fifteen years ago.

EMC: I'll ask you a few other retirement questions. Were you involved in the Newport community at all after you retired?

HR: I was on the zoning board for twenty-five years, and that was interesting. Right now I'm president of Nina Lynette home, a nonprofit boardinghouse. Are you familiar with it?

EMC: I've heard that, yes.

HR: It's on Washington Street. They have nine residents. I'm treasurer of the Seamen's Church Institute. That's about it.

EMC: Right. Well, you're still quite active. Are you a member of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association?

HR: Absolutely not!

EMC: Oh, no?

HR: I'm not a professional veteran. I didn't join the Veterans of Foreign Wars or anything.

EMC: Anything like that. Okay. Can you tell me what your favorite assignment was if you had one?

HR: Oh, that's easy. C.O. of the WILKES. I mean to have command of a destroyer in wartime, that's the ultimate. Everything else is downhill after that.

EMC: Right. You were fortunate. Who would you say was the most outstanding Naval officer that you met or that you served under?

HR: Oh, Admiral Burke, without a doubt.

EMC: Yes, many people say that. Do you have any thoughts on the Navy today in the twenty-first century and now it's changed?

HR: I think it's absolutely horrendous that they have women on ships. I just can't imagine the problems that's caused. And also the degradation of readiness and efficiency.

EMC: So you think they're kind of a thorn in the side of efficiency and readiness and a disruptive influence perhaps?

HR: Very much. I think the other sailors' wives must just hate it.

EMC: That's an element there that they'd rather not have. Do you approve of women on shore duty?

HR: Absolutely.

EMC: But not on ships.

HR: As a matter of fact, I think that if they had, say, a destroyer with a 100 percent women crew, it'd probably be the hottest destroyer in the fleet; they'd be so competitive. But, of course, how would you get people qualified to command and department heads if you didn't have them on ships.

EMC: What do you think of Admiral Turner's reforms of the War College when he was here back in '72 to '74? Because you mentioned that he changed things, and he did, dramatically. Do you think it was for the better?

HR: I didn't approve of them when they were made, but they probably were necessary. I mean it certainly is a more commanding

and effective institution than it was then.

EMC: Yes, he raised the standards and really made the curriculum more rigorous and competitive. The changes have, more or less, lasted over the years. Do you have any other comments to make on your naval career and its significance for you and your life? Because it was a large portion of your life.

HR: I enjoyed it.

EMC: That's great. And you were glad you made the Navy your career for a long time. Yes. Well, thank you very much, Captain Rommel. We'll get this transcribed and back to you.