

Naval War College, Newport, RI

Oral History Program

World War II Navy Veterans

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
WORLD WAR II VETERANS

Interviewee: Ogden Ross

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Date: February 21, 2002

EMC: This is the first interview with Ogden Ross. It's being conducted at his home in Moorland Farm, Hammersmith Rd, Newport, Rhode Island. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. I am the curator of the Naval Historical Collection at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. Today's date is February 21, 2002. I'm very pleased that you consented to tell us about your life during World War II, your reminiscences of that time frame in motor torpedo boats. I'd like to begin the interview by asking you a few background questions.

OR: Of course.

EMC: Where were you born and when were you born?

OR: I was born in New York City in my grandparents house at 310 West 105th St, just off Riverside Drive, on December 14, 1921.

EMC: Were you raised in New York City?

OR: No. We moved to Nyack, New York, where my father was the minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in Nyack. A very Dutch area.

EMC: So you were raised there? Did you go to school there?

OR: We summered, because this is part of being raised, I guess. I summered in my grandparents' place in the Thousand Islands, Woronco Island, and then, also, in Old Lyme,

Connecticut, where my parents built a cottage on the water's edge, so Old Lyme has been a very very important part of my life.

EMC: Beautiful. Did you go to high school or prep school?

OR: High school in Nyack.

EMC: Where did you go to College?

OR: I went to Yale. I went in 1939 with the class of 1943. However, due to the war, they hurried us along to get us out of there, so we all graduated in December of '42.

EMC: So you had to take extra courses, I would assume.

OR: No, we went all through the summer.

EMC: Oh, you went through the summer?

OR: Yes, which made it easy, because with the house in Old Lyme I was able to go from Lyme to New Haven, which was less than an hour, so it made it very easy that summer.

EMC: And what did you major in?

OR: Modern European History.

EMC: Oh, that's always a good major.

OR: Yes.

EMC: History.

EMC: Did your family have any Navy connections or service connections at all?

OR: Well, yes. My great uncle was Commodore Nathaniel Terry who taught physics at Annapolis for forty one-years. His children and their husbands and offspring were all Navy, so I had gone down to Annapolis to see him at one time with my family. The Navy has been an important part of growing up, yes.

EMC: Oh, good.

EMC: I'd like to double back a little bit and I want to ask you what your reaction to the attack on Pearl Harbor was on December 7, 1941. You were in school then, obviously, in college.

OR: I was at college, yes. Believe it or not, I've been studying in my room at Silliman College and decided that I'll go over to get a coke and a hamburger and I forget the exact hour. So this little spot, George and Harry's, was not far from my college dorm, Silliman College. We went there and the radio was turned on and that's when I heard of the attack. There was much turmoil on campus and all the men. It was just a men's college at the time.

EMC: Right.

OR: We all descended on President Seymour's dwelling for great words of wisdom and encouragement, whatever. He came out and said a few nice things and went back in. That was about it. Do you want me to talk about anything further?

EMC: Well, can you tell us about the patriotic fervor during that time on the campus? Or was it patriotic?

OR: Unlike today, after the twin towers attack, patriotic fervor is universal or at least in all the United States. And I don't recall anything quite like that. I mean there was a lot of concern and anger at the Japanese, and FDR made that wonderful speech, the day of infamy. It was just a general feeling, as I can recall that we have to now gear up and go to war and beat the Japs.

EMC: When you graduated in 1942, December 1942, did you follow the war news when you were in college, reading newspapers and keeping up with what was going on?

OR: Yes, indeed. It was part of history in the making,

EMC: Exactly. Did many of your classmates want to join the service once they graduated?

OR: Oh, yes. We had huge numbers. Some had gone in already, before Pearl Harbor and volunteered. Gone to Britain.

EMC: They had left college to do that, I guess.

OR: Yes, they did.

EMC: Why did you select the Navy ?

OR: During my youth at the Thousand Islands, where my parents, grandparents had boats, because the only way to get from island to island is by boat. So I was familiar with boats and then in Old Lyme we had a house on the beach and I kept a boat there, which was a small mahogany outboard, which I use to race all over. And then the influence of my cousin, Barry Atkins, who is now an Admiral (Ret) who had gone into the motor torpedo boats, and through his mother, my first cousin once removed, she kept me apprised as much as she knew about Barry's adventures in PT boats. That's how I got really interested in PTs.

EMC: Right. That was kind of dangerous. Wasn't it extremely dangerous? Being in PTs.

OR: Well, I know.

EMC: At least that is what my perception is.

OR: My perception at the time was no, it wasn't. It was glamorous. It was a fast warship, if you can call a PT boat a ship. Very exciting. I didn't think about danger.

EMC: Right.

OR: In retrospect. It was depending upon where you were, where you were stationed, where you operated.

EMC: Where did you sign up to join the Navy? Where did you enlist?

OR: I got my commission in late March of '43 and at school they gave you, this was at Notre Dame, which I attended.

EMC: Oh, did you go there for training?

OR: Yes.

EMC: Oh, Okay.

OR: They interviewed an awful lot of us, if not everyone as to where your interests in the Navy were. What future assignment you'd like. It didn't mean that you'd get it. So I put down motor torpedo boats. Went in for that interview. It was a group of three haggard looking men in beaten up uniforms and their caps on, without the band inside. And one said, "What do you want to be in motor torpedo boats for, PTs"? I said, "I just would like to serve". He said, "Well, you know it's very dangerous. We are just back from the Solomons and it's hell out there." And so on it went. And it didn't look too good for me, although I was trying to put up a stiff front and answered all their questions. He said, "How did you get interested in PT's, and I told him my cousin Barry Atkins. He said, "Your cousin is Barry Atkins?" I said, "yes".

EMC: That's great. He must have had a great reputation in PT boats.

OR: Yes, he did.

EMC: Oh, so you made it. How long were you at Notre Dame? Is this for OCS?

OR: Yes. Three months.

EMC: Training and drilling, I guess.

OR: Oh, yes, and studying. I had to learn a lot out there.

EMC: Classes, I guess, that you took.

OR: Yes, Navigation seemed to be my strong point, which amazed me. But to such a degree that I was asked to stay on at Notre Dame and teach navigation.

EMC: Oh.

OR: And I said I was pleased with the offer, but that was the last thing I wanted to do.

EMC: Right, stay in a classroom.

OR: But I did get word that you had to volunteer for PT's.

EMC: Oh, you did.

OR: Volunteer.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting.

OR: I got word that I had been accepted and would report after a few days of leave to go to Melville, which I did not know exactly where it was. Well, I was fortunate. I had a little Ford and I was able to drive to Rhode Island. Keep my car just outside the gates.

EMC: Melville is up in the Portsmouth area of Rhode Island.

OR: Yes, and on the bay.

EMC: And on the bay. When did you report to Melville and who was the CO there? Do you remember?

OR: Oh, boy.

EMC: You don't remember. That's okay.

OR: I reported in April. And that was also three months of training.

EMC: Did you live on the base?

OR: Yes, they had Quonset huts, and the training base was the only one in this country for motor torpedo boats. It also was a training base for enlisted personnel, who also lived some distance from our Quonset huts in their Quonset huts. And looking back, the average age of the enlisted men was about eighteen and the average age, I'd say, of officers was twenty two, so it was very young people's service.

EMC: Very young people, right. A lot of them were Ivy League graduates who went in. I found that kind of interesting. I wonder why. The excitement, adventure.

OR: There was a certain amount of prestige in it and your fellow, people you knew had gone there. So you know, this is sort of a old boy network or herd reaction. A lot were remarkable athletes in their own fields as football players. We had a lot of football players.

EMC: Oh, interesting.

OR: Yes.

EMC: Were you involved in any athletics?

OR: Swimming, Tennis.

EMC: That's very useful, especially if you are in a boat.

OR: Yes. I did swim all through school and at Yale.

EMC: Were you on their team?

OR: Freshman team and then intercollegiate. But in those days, I thought that my time records were great. I was doing 100 yards, we didn't call them meters those days, hundred yards at fifty nine seconds. When I reported in at Yale, we all ran times and the coach then reported to me and said, " Well, that was fine." He said, but there are thirteen other freshmen whose times are better than yours.

EMC: A lot of competition.

OR: Oh, It was terrible. And now back to the Navy.

EMC: Back to the Navy, right. Well, you're at Melville and just what did this three months training consist of?

OR: First of all we had to learn everything we could about the boats, their engines, their arms, and their construction, and then we had to learn boat handling (hands on), how to dock

a boat, how to bring it in and then formations. When you'd been there for a couple of months, you'd be allowed to take the controls and work in formations, take stations. We had to learn communications, more so than we learned at Notre Dame, Semaphore. Most of us, including me, were able to semaphore, first using flags and then just our arms. Of course, recognition, how to recognize enemy and friendly aircraft.

EMC: That's important.

OR: And both German and Japanese as well as the U.S. and British. We had to learn about torpedos and how they were built and how they were put together and how they worked and how they ran. That was a struggle for some of us, including me, until I learned that on every boat there would be a full fledged, fully trained torpedo man aboard. And the same way with radio. Later on, we were introduced to radar.

EMC: Yes, later in the war. How many officers were on a torpedo boat?

OR: Two officers and about thirteen or fourteen men. And each man had a particular assignment all the way from cook. There were three motor machinists, because there were three Packard marine engines in each boat. So each machinist pretty well, they could operate all the engines, because they were all the same. But I thought it was a good idea to have each machinist assigned to one engine, so there wouldn't be a lot of people working on it. And then we had gunners mates.

EMC: Did you have sleeping quarters?

OR: Oh, yes. There were three types of PT boats: Higgins, Huckens and Elco. Elco was the finest, built by the Electric Boat Company in Bayonne, New Jersey. And we all wanted to get an Elco. We had been aboard the other types and they were wet. The Huckens never,

I can't say never, but never went into battle territory. And I think there were some stationed in Hawaii. Higgins were slightly better, but they were very wet.

EMC: What do you mean? The waves lapped over?

OR: Yes. The spray when underway.

EMC: They weren't high enough, I guess.

OR: Well, it was the design of the hull. Anyhow, I was fortunate enough to be assigned to an Elco Squadron.

EMC: And how many were in the squadron?

OR: Twelve boats, plus a lot of support on the land. So a squadron then had twenty four officers, plus ground people, and your squadron commander who was not assigned to any particular boat.

EMC: Did he go on any boat that he chose?

OR: Yes, he did and frequently it was mine. We also had an intelligence officer who came aboard. Later on, I'll tell you a story about him.

EMC: So that's what your training consisted of for the three months. Now you obviously went out in the bay, too, on the boats for practice.

OR: In the night time. In those days, there was a net which crossed from Jamestown to Newport to keep enemy submarines out of the bay.

EMC: Yes, Right. Literally.

OR: So later on we would come back after being assigned to a squadron and we'd been given our boats. We came back to Melville and this would be in October, November, for shake down and take the boats out, learning everything you could about them and then go out at night, usually.

EMC: That's what you did normally during war time.

OR: What we did normally during the war was patrol at night. So here in November in the water it could get extremely rough.

EMC: Cold.

OR: Cold, and no lights. Of course, everything was blacked out. It was cold, very unpleasant.

EMC: Yes, that's what everybody says.

OR: But we'd have to run, at least, these war time practices were outside, beyond the nets, maybe be about six miles offshore.

EMC: Oh, so south of the Newport bridge, I would think.

OR: Yes.

EMC: Way out.

OR: Yes, out in the Atlantic Ocean. Right.

EMC: Right, exactly.

OR: And one night, that time I was the executive officer, number two, but my captain particularly did not like what he saw, so he went down below in his bunk. I think you asked earlier about sleeping quarters. There was state room for the captain, and then a head, and then a stateroom for the executive officer, and then a little mess area for them to chow down. And the enlisted people had bunks in the forward area and some above the three gasoline tanks that carried high octane gas. So we all slept aboard at all times, except when we were in some advance bases out in the Pacific. Anyhow this particular night, I'd taken over the wheel and you couldn't see but the Commodore with a radiant light, I guess they were, and our assignment was to go to position A, to position B and C, and do it in most rapid time as

possible. There were six boats out one night, one-half the squadron and it got rougher and rougher. Normally, we slowed down a lot, but you had to beat the clock, so I didn't slow down. And at one point the waves were so great it threw the boat right up into the air so that all three propellers were out of the water and I could see the tacometers go zoop, and you could hear the props spin and then we splashed down heavily. Our quartermaster, great guy, was being sick over a torpedo at the time, so when we came crashing down he knocked out his three front teeth, but brave and stoically as he was, we just preceded on until. We called base to say it was awfully rough out here. Finally, we got a call "Negit Peter Program", which means negative Peter Tare program that your out on. In other words, come back to base.

EMC: Right.

OR: Which we did. We got inside the bay where the water had calmed down. The skipper of my boat got out of his bunk and took over.

EMC: Wow, that was an experience.

OR: Yes.

EMC: Did you think the boat would have been wrecked?

OR: Well, we broke a couple of ribs in the boat. Yes, it was all inspected. Needless to say, that was the end of the Captain.

EMC: Oh.

EMC: It was his fault?

OR: No one knew where he was, and he had to admit that he was down below.

EMC: And you were in charge, as you say, doing what you were suppose to do.

OR: That's right. I was a little nervous that this crash happened.

EMC: When you were in charge.

OR: With me in command, but I was following orders.

EMC: Right, and that's the way it is.

OR: Nothing happened to me, except I pretty well took over the 380. That was the number of my boat.

EMC: Oh, 380.

EMC: Was the other fellow dismissed from the service or the captain?

OR: He was no longer with us. I don't know exactly what the terminology was.

EMC: Yes. He just wasn't with PT boats anymore. So that was part of the training, going out in the ocean at night and doing what you were suppose to do. Any other tales of training in Newport or anything else that happened?

OR: Well, yes. Earlier in the shake down period, Oh, I don't know if it was earlier or later, but at one point the Squadron Commander, George Madison who was a native Rhode Islander, by coincidence, came to me and said: "There's a lot of Navy brass coming in from Washington tomorrow, and they are bringing with them experimental torpedos and I've selected your boat to take them out."

EMC: Test it.

OR: And test these torpedos. So have your boat ready to load the torpedos at 0700. He didn't tell me any further as to where we were to go. They took off the existing torpedos and put on the shorter torpedos. A couple of captains, a rear admiral, the squadron commander- there was a lot of brass and I was told that we were going up to Bar Harbor, Maine.

EMC: Wow, that's quite a trip.

OR: Where we would fire these torpedos. The trip was great. Weather was good. We got there and I was the only boat and one of the captains said: "Now see that huge rock over there, great big rock, that's what were going to fire at." So I circled around and aimed the boat at the rock. We all watched as the first torpedo went over the side. You'd see the bubbles and then nothing. Nothing further.

EMC: It didn't fire.

OR: No, it went right into the bottom and stayed there.

EMC: Oh.

OR: It did not go off.

EMC: Right.

OR: So to keep the boat in trim. The first was a starboard forward torpedo. The next one would be a stern port torpedo, so we fired that one. We could see it bubbling, bubbling and then it would leap out of the water several times and then go into the bottom. Porpoising, its called.

EMC: So again.

OR: So again I had to turn around. This time I fired the third one. My memory tells me it was the stern starboard torpedo. So we let that fire and it went out and we followed the track by the bubbles. And you could see it. Suddenly the bubbles did a hairpin turn.

EMC: Coming back at you.

OR: Coming right back at us. Yes, and to the brass and myself, of course, when I was at the wheel we all got very nervous and I threw all engines into forward and took a hard left. But at some point the controls broke down between the bridge and the machinist below, and so I

was, for a while. I was stationary there in the water with the torpedo headed right at me unable to move.

EMC: Oh, how horrible. With all these officers.

OR: Yes. All these officers. Believe me, it was a heart thumping time!

EMC: And yourself, needless to say.

OR: The Squadron Commander went down into the engine room and told him what to do, because the controls were not working. And so suddenly I had the power to make the turn and we were free.

EMC: Oh, thank heaven.

OR: We had one torpedo left, fired that, it hit the rocks squarely and we went home.

EMC: Success.

OR: Yes. I could see myself back to the drawing board with advanced torpedos.

EMC: Exactly.

OR: We and the U.S. submarines had terrible troubles with our torpedos.

EMC: They were awful.

OR: They were. They were very bad.

EMC: They were not good and not well designed. That was quite an escapade.

OR: Yes, that was.

EMC: Certainly fear for your life and the lives of those people onboard. So that was quite an escapade that you were involved in and you got back safely to Newport that summer.

OR: Yes.

EMC: I wanted to ask you a few questions about Newport at that time, because, I assume, you did get some time off.

OR: Not much.

EMC: Oh, really.

OR: Not much.

EMC: Did they keep you busy six days a week?

OR: Yes, and Sundays.

EMC: And Sundays, too?

OR: Oh, yes. Occasionally we would get off in the evening and go to the Viking, known as the "snakepit," and once or twice to the casino where there were dances with local ladies.

EMC: Right.

OR: I went, with three other guys, up to Providence. That's about it.

EMC: So you really didn't have much time to socialize.

OR: No, we didn't.

EMC: Opportunity to socialize or to really see the town.

OR: Well, I think. I met Barbara Wood at that point. She was Barbara Brandt.

EMC: Right. Yes, because she was dating somebody from your class.

OR: No, Barbara's friend was a couple of years older than I. He was already overseas.

EMC: Right, I guess her mother was here, so she came down. Now did you meet your wife during that time frame?

OR: Well, I've been married twice.

EMC: Oh.

OR: And, yes, I did. Her name was Diana Lanier and her family summered in Newport.

EMC: Oh.

OR: I met her through a mutual friend at Bailey's Beach.

EMC: Oh, so that was at this timeframe or during your training at PTs.

OR: Yes during shakedown.

EMC: Can you comment at all on Newport and its gearing up for the war at that time? What the feeling was in town and the atmosphere with the Navy here in full force?

OR: Well, because we were at Melville all the time, I didn't see much of the scene sometimes at night. But you don't get a picture. Everybody was very pleasant, and I know that the Reading Room took me in as a naval officer for a very minimal fee of \$15 a year and everybody was very generous, pleasant and hospitable.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Newport was a Navy town.

OR: Absolutely

EMC: Absolutely. Right. Your three months of training was up and what boat and what squadron were you assigned to?

OR: At Melville, you were given a letter telling you your next assignment was. That letter was delivered to me in my Quonset hut, and it said I was assigned to Squadron 28, which was under construction in New York, actually in New Jersey, and I was to report to the PT headquarters at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, in an area called the Wallabout Basin. While there, we assembled our squadron and determined what our logo would be and what the design would be.

EMC: What was that?

OR: I could show it to you later. And then we, not all of us, but in sections, we'd go over to Bayonne, New Jersey, where the boats were being built.

EMC: Well, that was Elco, wasn't it?

OR: That was Elco. That's right. That was fascinating, because you could see a PT boat in its earliest stages just the framework. And we went, at least I did, and I guess everybody else did three or four times. We could see the progress on your boat. So you got to know your boat from the ground up, as it were. So when all of the boats were completed and the squadron was assembled, the squadron was commissioned. The individual boats were not commissioned. The squadron was commissioned.

EMC: Oh, I see.

OR: That was a gala day and my father came down from Nyack. There was a lot of whoop de doo.

EMC: Was that at the Brooklyn Navy Yard?

OR: Yes. It was at the Wallabout Basin. There was an old vessel, the name of which I've totally forgotten and I'd could dig it out sometimes, which was the headquarters where you always reported in. But once you were commissioned that's when we went on shakedown.

EMC: Oh, you went back to Melville?

OR: Yes.

EMC: What was your position on the boat? You were obviously an officer. Were you a CO?

OR: I was XO until that unfortunate night up here which I have related, which I have related.

EMC: And then you were CO?

OR: Yes, for quite a while

EMC: Of your boat. Who was your Exec? Do you remember?

OR: That's terrible, I don't.

EMC: Oh, OK. That's alright. Not that important, really. So you went for shakedown here and then the unfortunate incident with the Captain asleep below. How long did you spend in shakedown in Newport?

OR: Several months.

EMC: Oh, I see. Just testing the boat?

OR: Right.

EMC: Getting use to it?

OR: Yes, getting use to your crew, and they to you.

EMC: And, I assume, the crew was all very cooperative and good.

OR: They were. They were excellent. They were trained at Melville in their expectant field, whether it was radio or cooking or gunnery. We had a cook on board.

EMC: Ok, you needed that.

OR: Torpedo men. Radio man. And then we were equipped with radar, so we had to learn about radar.

EMC: That was relatively new.

OR: It was relatively new, yes, and highly secret. Even pictures of boats in those days never showed a radar tower.

EMC: That's interesting. Not let the enemy know that you had it.

OR: That's right.

EMC: So after your months in Newport shaking down, getting use to your boat and crew, where were you off to?

OR: Then we were loaded aboard a tanker at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Six boats to a tanker, and the tanker went all the way down to Panama.

EMC: Now did you go with it?

OR: Yes.

EMC: You were on the tanker with the boats.

OR: Yes.

EMC: Oil tanker?

OR: Yes, and then on this side of the canal a crane took us all off. The other six boats would come later on another tanker. And so we went through the canal under our own power, which is very exciting.

EMC: Oh, it must have been.

OR: Yes, it really was. And then we went on the Pacific side to a little, little island, where we were stationed for several months for real night training with large Navy warships at night and lots of tracers and lots of guns.

EMC: Simulating war time activity, I assume.

OR: Yes, right.

EMC: In the heat of Panama.

OR: Yes.

EMC: That was a change from Newport.

OR: Oh, quite a change, yes. Quite a change.

EMC: That was good training for what you were to do.

OR: Oh, yes, it was. It was. I had the 380 out on one of those nights and you could see the rockets and hear them going over you. Much noise and light and heavy cruisers, destroyers, and staying on the bridge and watching this and trying to maneuver to keep station. It was thrilling, if not nerve racking. So at one point I turned the wheel over to the Exec and went

below for a cup of coffee and there was the Executive Officer of the Squadron, not the Executive Officer of the boat, the squadron. And he was sitting down there and I said, "Well, come on back up". He said, "I haven't been up," I said, "Oh, well come on up." He said, "No, I'm very happy here", and he never went topside.

EMC: Wonder why?

OR: I'm not naming any names, but he turned out to be a coward.

EMC: Oh.

OR: Absolutely.

EMC: I thought that he thought that you were in total control and didn't need his supervision, or expertise, or anything.

OR: No, he certainly didn't think or say that.

EMC: Oh.

OR: Later on he was removed from the position and went back to the states. But that's all part of the story.

EMC: That's part of the story. Yes. There were people who.....

OR: And then when that experience was over we were loaded on another tanker and zig zagged our way across the Pacific.

EMC: That must have been a long journey.

OR: It was. Yes, particularly we were zig zagging to avoid Japanese submarines. We never saw one, thank God, and I don't know of any tanker being torpedoed. That's how all the boats got out there.

EMC: Yes. They would know that.

OR: Yes. But on the way out, the boats were secured to the deck of the tanker by huge belts that went over the boats and shackled them down to the deck surface. We were told about drills if we did spot a submarine and we would have to get ready to free the boats and so they could float when the tanker went down. One night we could hear it all over, you could hear these belts go bang, bang on the deck.

EMC: Loosening.

OR: No, they had been thrown off. So there's much going around wondering what we should do with our boat until it was learned that that particular boat, the 378, had mistakenly given the command to release the belts. And it was a very unfortunate time for Captain Leppo, but he weathered it and went on and Walter Brown was his name. He's married to a Newport girl.

EMC: Wonder why he gave the command? That's bizarre.

OR: I don't know really, confusion or communications. But we got out there and they finally found a crane big enough and strong enough to unload the boats.

EMC: Did you experience any rough weather going out, zig zagging from the Pacific?

OR: Ah, really no. Nothing compared to that night out here during shakedown.

EMC: Right. Newport's the worst.

OR: Right.

EMC: As far as weather. Pacific, the very term indicates calmness.

OR: That's true.

EMC: Where did you finally end up? Where were you based?

OR: The torpedo squadron moved all around. They were not basined any place for any length of time. Our squadrons first went up to the northern Solomons, on a little island called Green Island and we operated there in the Bismarck Archipelago waters.

EMC: Now is this late '43?

OR: This would be spring of '44.

EMC: Oh, spring of '44, you finally got out there.

OR: Yes.

EMC: Ok. A year's worth of training.

OR: Right. I haven't laid down a time line.

EMC: Right.

EMC: So you were there.

OR: So we were there for five or six months.

EMC: Did you see any action during this time?

OR: Yes.

EMC: Did you go out?

OR: We went out about every third night over toward the islands. One had the capital city, Rabaul, and that's where our little Green Island was also. In those days the Army Air Force was bombing Rabaul and we would go out there looking for any barges or capital ships or anything whatsoever. And there were float planes and Jap planes, including zeros that we would see at night or pick up on radar. We didn't sink any capital ships, but we shot up a number of barges. I think it was there that one night another boat in my section saw a Jap plane or radar and we went after it first. Then I told my group no shooting, let the 320 do it. So they kept reporting back to me, because we could communicate by short wave radio

between the boats that "we got it and we were going over to pick it up or pick up the survivors, if there are any." We went over there and it was a huge bird they had shot down.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sake and it looked like a plane.

EMC: Right. It was a target.

OR: It was moving.

EMC: A moving target.

OR: We congratulated their gunners.

EMC: Good shot anyway.

OR: Then after that we were called down to the southern Solomons and had our engines changed and a general overhaul.

EMC: Well, they were careful and the Navy was very up to speed.

OR: I had my engine changed, I think, three times. Originally, there were 1500 horse power each. By the time I left the boats a year and a half later, they were up to twenty five hundred horse power each. Yes. They were very careful. We had no charts really that amounted to anything. I had an old German chart pre World War I. Barbara Brandt was doing that.

EMC: Yes, updating charts. Oh, that's kind of miserable.

OR: Well, yes, it is because you don't know what's underwater, because surface wise you have radar and eye sight in the day time, but underwater there are all kinds of coral shelves and projections and sand banks. So a lot of our propeller blades got badly damaged from hitting rocks and what not. We were always changing propellers and that was a shortage out there. We got some inexpensive ones, because that's all the U.S. Navy could send us.

EMC: They probably break very easily.

OR: Otherwise, it was great. I mean the food was always there. I happen to like spam. I still do.

EMC: Still? That's World War II rations.

OR: But the supplies were fine. You know age twenty two years. What the hell.

EMC: Yes. You are not that fussy.

OR: Everybody else is doing the same thing, which is a great help in the mutuality of your problems.

EMC: Yes. Not fussy about it.

OR: In due course, we were assigned to go to New Guinea.

EMC: Oh, yes.

OR: And the squadron was stationed there, waiting its next set of orders. My squadron had been overseas, I think, by then thirteen months with no leave and the squadron commander said, "I know that you all would like some leave". He said, "I can only, let a few of you go. It would be twenty enlisted men and five officers.

EMC: Were you one of the lucky ones?

OR: I was one of the lucky ones.

EMC: To get leave

OR: I don't care if I don't win anything else, like lotteries in life, but that was a record. Also one of the other five was a very good friend in my squadron, so we had hell of a good time in Australia which was where we went.

EMC: Oh, you went to Australia?

OR: We went to Australia, yes.

EMC: Brisbane or Freemantle?

OR: We went to Sydney first.

EMC: How long was this leave?

OR: Two weeks.

EMC: Oh, great.

OR: But it turned out to be more, because we could not get any way of getting back, because our squadron had already left New Guinea and gone to the Philippines.

EMC: Oh.

OR: Anyhow.

EMC: Well, that's kind of awkward.

OR: So we flew over the New Guinea jungles.

EMC: On your way back?

OR: No on the way down.

EMC: On the way down. Okay to Australia.

OR: That first night we were sent to an R & R place, Research and Recreation or Rest and Recreation. And two or three Australian women were like mothers. What would you like? Would you like some scotch, some gin? She asked both of us, I said, "no". I want a glass of milk and he said, "I want a head of lettuce."

EMC: You hadn't had that.

OR: So that first night, that's what we did. We drank milk and ate lettuce. We didn't dare tell some of our squadron.

EMC: Right.

OR: But then things changed, and then we finally were able to hitch a ride back in the nose of a U.S. bomber and get to Leyte where our squadron was and at the tail end of the Battle of Leyte, October 1944.

EMC: Now did you take part in that action?

OR: No, personally not. Most of the action was over by that time. Pretty clever. We hadn't been there very long when we were sent on up to Lingayen, which is the northern of the Philippine Islands. And it's shaped like a hand. Our base was down there and we would patrol all the way up here and around to the top at night.

EMC: Did you see action there?

OR: Yes.

EMC: Did you sink any?

OR: We sank more barges. Well, these barges were Japanese vessels that the Japs were trying to flee the island, and, you know, there might have been 100 or 200 Japs on it. And they would fire at us and we would fire back at them and that was it. We were attacked by float planes. One of our boats was hit. Long Ellis was the Commanding Officer.

EMC: Yes, I met his wife.

OR: Well, she's on the board of the Foundation.

EMC: Exactly.

OR: I know her well and I was on standby that night, to make a long story short. I did go out with the doctor and bring him back. He had a badly damaged elbow. We went back to the states. And they were right with that arm. He was a fine tennis player, but it was his left arm, as I recall, had been hit.

EMC: Well, surgery was developed, but they could probably do a better job today.

OR: Well, they could, yes.

EMC: Definitely.

EMC: But was your boat ever attacked? Did you ever suffer any casualties on your boat or damage?

OR: No. We were attacked by a plane. He missed us and we didn't hit him either.

EMC: That was lucky.

OR: Yes . I escaped any serious injury or any injury whatsoever.

EMC: Well, that is good.

OR: Except one time, I did not get a Purple Cross for it. But coming home from patrol you were tired and the sun was just coming up. I just put the boat at mooring and what I often would do to do was take a swim and then go to the sack. And this time stark naked, ran the whole length of the boat, 80 feet long and dive in. Which I did on this occasion and I looked down from up in the air and there was a big Portuguese Man of War. I tried to turn but one can't turn, so I ended up, slap right on top of it. And you could feel all tentacles wrapping around you and the venom coursing through your lower abdomen and I was beginning to get numb but I was able to swim to the stern of my boat and then holler. The crew hauled me on board as I was quickly going totally numb. I was in sick bay for three days.

EMC: Oh, my word. You never know what's out in those waters. Sharks! Heaven knows what. That was very dangerous.

OR: That was unbelievable.

EMC: How did you react to going out at night? I assume you were out pretty much all the night.

OR: Always at night.

EMC: Always at night, for long periods of time. Did you feel fear or anxiety?

OR: Concern.

EMC: Were you ever scared to death?

OR: Oh, yes. One time in the very beginning I was asked to go aboard and we, meaning two or three of us, on one of the PT boats that was operating down there in the lower Solomons and see what its like. So we went out at night and we hadn't been out very long and suddenly there were a hell of a lot of tracer bullets coming our way and the skipper said, "We better get out of here". And there were four or five people behind the helmsmen, one great big guy and you could see these traces coming over the starboard side of the boat. I found myself behind the great big guy and I said to myself, you coward. The other me said, "No, self preservation."

EMC: Right. Yes, that's for sure.

OR: So yes, that was very scary.

EMC: Yes, it certainly was. You were in Lingayen, I guess, in late '44, '45.

OR: Yes.

EMC: In Lingayen Gulf, patrolling there. Did you continue there for the remainder of the war or were you finished?

OR: Yes, that's right. I don't know how much time we got left, but I have another anecdote.

EMC: Oh, sure, add it in. Please.

OR: Because it was a long distance from our base all the way up the coast to the top of the Island, we would have to stop and get some refueling from another naval vessel. Our intelligence officer one night said at one meeting, "I think we got to put in a little sub base half way up there and just keep a supply of gasoline there. "So that idea was accepted and so

it was said now we got to have people manning that base. The intelligence officer said, "I will do that." He was a full lieutenant at the time and "I'll take one enlisted person with me." So my boat was the one that took him up there and we carefully noted where to drop him off. He was the one that sort of picked it out. I had a wonderful quartermaster named Lockwood and so we left the Lieutenant off there with a dingy, waved goodbye. He had a lot of radio equipment and so on and some food. We went back to base, and no sooner had we gotten back to base than the serious storm began. Knocked out radio and the communications, so we never could hear from him. We couldn't contact him. Days went by and it so happened that it was my turn to go up and look for him. I said to Lockwood, "Do you remember exactly where we left him off, because everything looks the same there." I said, "No I don't think that's it" and he said, "I think that was it." But I said, "I don't remember any cabin on the shore."

EMC: Maybe he built it.

OR: That's exactly what happened. Because we put our glasses on this little cabin and there he was. It had a little porch and he had his feet up on the railing, flicking himself to keep the flies off with a horse tail.

EMC: Isolated though.

OR: Isolated. So when we finally made contact we urged him to come out and have dinner with us onboard. He said, "Why don't you both come in and have dinner with me", so we thought that was very nice and so we did.

EMC: Well, he had to find food. He was left with food, I guess.

OR: No, what had happened was we had a nice dinner with, some odd things like fried Filipino tree worms with a cocktail.

EMC: Oh.

OR: Yes. Or sometime he didn't tell us what the snacks were.

EMC: You wouldn't want to eat them.

OR: Yes.

EMC: Oh.

OR: And we had a nice piece of shark steak, which is like swordfish.

EMC: Yes.

OR: He told us about the little cabin. We said, "Wow, this all happened in a week's time."

The minute I landed a Filipino man came out from the jungle, showed me his tattoo and he had been in World War I in the Navy and his family all lived there. He said they came over, they built this hut in a half day and they been supplying me with fresh food and what not and keeping an eye out for the Japanese.

EMC: That's amazing.

OR: It was amazing.

EMC: Yes.

OR: Wasn't it? His name is Paul Austin.

OR: A-U-S-T-I-N. Austin. He later, in civilian life, headed up, he was an attorney, headed up the Coca Cola company.

EMC: Oh, for heavens sake, CEO.

OR: Yes.

EMC: Wow, that's a story.

OR: Yes.

EMC: Being isolated, living in the Philippines in an old hut, eating fried worms.

OR: Back at the base I finally got orders to return to the States.

EMC: I should ask you one question. Now when you were in dock, you know, at Lingayen did you sleep on the boat or did you go ashore?

OR: Both. In the beginning, you slept on the boat, then we could put up some tents and we could go ashore. I just as soon to stay in my cabin. It was very comfortable in the cabin,

EMC: Right, oh, sure. So in 1945, when in 1945 did you return to the States? Was it before VJ day?

OR: Oh, yes.

EMC: Oh August.

OR: By all means, it was before VE day.

EMC: Oh. Ok, before May of 1945.

OR: Yes, because VE day was in what?

EMC: About May 8th, something like that.

OR: Yes. Because I was on Guam on VE day.

EMC: Oh, you were? And what kind of celebrations were there? Or were there any?

OR: They were very wet.

EMC: Oh.

OR: The whole island just went crazy, and the bars never closed.

EMC: I see.

OR: Everybody was just having a hilarious time.

EMC: And did you feel that the end was near for the Japanese in the South Pacific?

OR: No. I knew we still had a lot of fighting to do and then we had a very, very tough enemy. We had witnessed kamikazes when on the way up to Lingayen Gulf. I was a convoy of navy ships. The convoy was attacked by a kamikazes.

EMC: Oh, you were?

OR: Oh, yes. And it's quite a sight to see that plane way up there and you look down and see this fine cruiser and you wonder and you could kick yourself, you wonder is it gonna hit or is it gonna miss? And I wonder what it would look like if it hit.

EMC: Big explosion.

OR: Yes. We had to pick up a Japanese pilot at this particular time and one of us went over and rescued him, hauled him aboard my boat I was at the wheel at the time, so I didn't actually see what happened, but I was told that he still had a knife on him and he came after my men with his knife even after they had rescued him.

EMC: Yes, right.

OR: So he was finished off and over to the side he went. That was the diversion from your question, which is now lost.

EMC: Oh, that was the year I was asking you about VE day. You were on Guam. You were on your way back, I guess.

OR: Yes.

EMC: How did you get back? Did you go in your boats?

OR: No. I flew back.

EMC: And the boats were there, so somebody else assumed your command.

OR: Yes. The boats were there in the Philippines to take us back to the States. And I was told that this plane, I don't know what it was right now. It would stop on its way for

refueling at Kwajelein Island. That rung a bell as I had gotten a letter from my father, who had told me that his brother, Ogden Ross, who was a then Brigadier General was in command at Kwajelein.

EMC: For heaven' sake. Your uncle?

OR: Yes. So anyway the plane put down in Kwajelein, and the pilot said we got ten minutes here, if you want to get off." So I did, and I found a telephone, one of those army type things.

EMC: Yes.

OR: I said, "I'd like the Commanding Officer, please." And so they asked who. I said, "this is Lieutenant Ogden Ross." There was laugh at the other end. I said, "No, this is a nephew of the General." He sent his squad car right down. Down came a jeep with the flags flying on the fenders. I went over to the pilot of the plane to say I was staying. "Get aboard. We're leaving". I said, "No! I'm not going to get aboard." He said, "you are. That's the orders." And I said, "No, we are going to be staying here for awhile" and he said, "Well, how can you do that"? I said, "It's there." And there were two army corporals, waiting for me, so I spent three days in Kwajalein with Uncle Ogden.

EMC: Oh, the plane was there for three days, too?

OR: No. I said, "You go on."

EMC: Okay. That was something.

OR: But it was fascinating, because they were planning a future invasion of one of the other islands. He was nice enough to say, "Now these islands, we don't know the waters too well, so we'd like you and Lieutenant Wouters, it was a Belgium name, W-O-U-T-E-R-S, and a squadron mate traveling with me to come and advise us."

EMC: Scout?

EMC: Did you scout it out?

OR: No, we just looked at charts and they made it seem as what we were doing was important, and we thought it was.

EMC: Thought it was, too.

OR: So then we got another hitchhike into Hawaii, having stopped at Guam. From Guam to Hawaii where we were grossly disappointed, because we got a room at the hotel on Waikiki beach and we couldn't wait to get in the water. We had been in town and bought some bathing suits at six in the evening. We both woke up, early the next morning. Here we are a Waikiki beach and we were ready for a swim. We looked out our window and it was high tide, very high tide. There was no beach. Water was lapping against the wall

EMC: Did you stay very long in Hawaii, or was that just a short rest stop?

OR: Just a short stop.

EMC: And then you went back to the States?

OR: Yes.

EMC: And where were you staying?

OR: Back to Melville.

EMC: Oh, back to Melville.

OR: Yes, where I was asked to teach seamanship and navigation.

EMC: Yes. What they originally wanted you to do at Notre Dame.

OR: That's right.

EMC: So did you do that?

OR: I did, yes. I did that right through Hiroshima. We had been told they were forming another squadron who would probably suffer maybe thirty to forty percent losses in the invasion. None of us were really looking forward to going back and facing that.

EMC: Right. And they were preparing another squadron, I guess, to go back to Melville to prepare for the invasion.

OR: Oh, yes. The Navy was preparing a lot of things for the invasion.

EMC: Now did you enjoy the teaching aspect?

OR: Yes, yes, I did. These young kids. By then, you know, you were an old guy, twenty four or twenty five.

EMC: Experienced.

OR: And everything was new to them and exciting. It sort of took me back. That's the way I was. And so they were all anxious to learn how to operate and drive the boats. It was very exciting, and the pressure was off.

EMC: Right, at least off of you.

EMC: I assume you were in Melville when VJ day occurred on the 15TH of August, 1945.

OR: Yes, that's right.

EMC: And what was the reaction on base? Your own personal reaction and any celebrations that occurred?

OR: Well, of course, elation, relief, and then the thrill of having it over and then to wondering what are we going to do next. What are we going do with the Japanese? So it was all of those emotions simultaneously.

EMC: Very good. And what are you going to do with your life, too, I imagine. You probably thought of that.

OR: Oh, yes.

EMC: What were your plans?

OR: Didn't have any particular plans.

EMC: Did the idea of staying in the Navy appeal?

OR: Well, I had to stay in. In those days, you had to have a certain number of points. I forget how many it was and I didn't have enough, because I was still young and I was unmarried. If you were married, you got extra points, so I was assigned to go down to the separation center known as Lido Beach.

EMC: And where was that?

OR: Long Island.

EMC: Oh, I see.

OR: As assistant to the Commanding Officer.

EMC: Oh, so an administrative position then.

OR: Yes. Where men and women would have to go to get released from the Navy. And I would handle most of this information, incoming mail etc. One day early in the morning, because I was always at the desk by 0700, there was a communication from Washington, BuPers, saying that two senior grade lieutenants are needed in Hawaii to go aboard ship on its way to the Bikini test.

EMC: Did you volunteer?

OR: Yes. So I went and woke my good friend and I said, I read it to him, "How about it. I'm ready to go." He said, "Count me in," so I wired back, then by 8:00 the Commanding Officer was up and I said, "Would you mind signing this." He said, "what's that". I said, "My release." So we did, we went out there.

EMC: You went out there and witnessed the actual test.

OR: No. What happened when I got there? I've got other anecdotes about Navy screwups, but this one was is a beaut. When I got there, they had no record of having required any such thing asking for two senior grade lieutenants.

EMC: Oh, heavens.

OR: And there was no position for either of us. We showed them our orders and they took that and said, "Well, don't worry. We'll find something. Meanwhile, would you like a jeep?" We said, "Sure." Here's some money. So they took care of us, and saw that we had a place to stay and I had a jeep.

EMC: What did you do? What did you have to do?

OR: Oh, we would mess around.

EMC: Just go around the island.

OR: Yes, chase girls, things like that, go swimming, sight seeing, surfing.

EMC: Yes, but you had no real duties.

OR: Not until about after two weeks. I did get assigned as executive officer of an LST, great big ship, and the Commanding Officer of that, his name was Brazil. He was a nice enough guy, but he stayed in his quarters all the time. I turned the jeep that I had over to my friend. But the captain said, "If you ever need my jeep," he said, "I never go onshore, so I don't need it." So I had a jeep again. I reviewed as best I could everything I could find out about the ship and got to know the chiefs and inspected the ships stem to stem. One day I was inspecting the galley. I looked at a barrel, lifted the lid and it was full of flour. I said, "What kind of flour is this?" There were a lot of little specks in it. He said, "Those aren't specks, those are bugs."

EMC: Weevils?

OR: Weevils, exactly. I said, Well, lets get rid of this whole barrel." He said, "No, the men like the weevils when they're cooked in the bread.

They kept delaying this LST. It was the flag ship for divers who would go down after the bomb had gone off and had sunk a lot of vessels intentionally. They would go down and bring back the remains. The Navy kept postponing the trip to Bikini. By this time I had enough points to get released from the Navy.

EMC: Was that in 1946?

EMC: Yes. That's when the test was finally carried out.

OR: Finally, after three postponements, I said, "No, I am not going do that. "So I came back to Newport.

EMC: And to the base here at Melville?

OR: Yes, that's how I finally checked out.

EMC: And you checked out at Melville.

OR: Yes.

EMC: You were discharged?

OR: Things got a little fuzzy now.

EMC: Sure going back fifty-six years. So you were out of the Navy at that time and what did you decide to do with your life, just very briefly after you left the Navy?

OR: Well, I had some assignments writing news stories both in Nyack and elsewhere. I'd done a lot of reading, and so I thought that the field of public relations would be very interesting and so that's what I did. Took courses in, the subject at Columbia. Got a job in

New York and one thing led to another, and I became Head of Public Relations and advertising, and general marketing.

EMC: A bank?

OR: Yes. In New Haven Connecticut.

EMC: Oh, in Connecticut?

OR: Yes, in Connecticut.

EMC: Very good.

OR: Headquartered in New Haven.

EMC: Oh, very good. Excellent.

EMC: I'd like to ask you a few other questions about PT boats after the war. Are you a member of Peter Tare?

OR: Yes.

EMC: Do you go to the reunions?

OR: I've run two of them right here in Newport and only yesterday, by coincidence, a member of the board of Peter Tare asked me if I would be willing to do it again in 2003.

EMC: Here in town?

OR: Right.

EMC: Because I know there was one here and they went to the Naval War College Museum. I think the men visited that area. And we are the repository, the Naval Historical Collection, for the archives of Peter Tare.

OR: Oh, are you?

EMC: Yes. We have the records, meetings, we have photographs. Ned Garvey I believe it was. I can't remember his last name; he was from Southport, Connecticut. Anyway he

send us materials. He's deceased now, but anyway, so you do keep in contact obviously.

You're very involved with Peter Tare.

OR: I can probably turn some items over to you. We'll go over to the table in a minute. I got stuff there.

EMC: Sure.

EMC: Some fifty-six years later, how do you look back on your PT boat experience and your naval service? What was outstanding about it? What did it mean for you and your life? What was its significance?

OR: Oh, boy. I look back on it with enthusiasm. It certainly taught me discipline at an early age. I have a high regard for the Navy and naval officers. And that continues until this day. I remain fairly close to the War College. I just ran a program on Sunday night there.

EMC: Oh, what was it?

OR: Well, Admiral Jim Hogg, the senior Admiral, I asked him if he would speak to our English Speaking Union.

EMC: Oh, I see.

OR: I'm President of that here and I have been for the last three years. I arranged to have the meeting at the Officers Club, courtesy of Admiral Joe Strasser, who is an old friend of mine.

EMC: Great, Of course. Oh, that's great.

OR: We had, I guess, there were sixty-three people there and, maybe eight of them were former naval officers. So it's nice to be here in Newport. I can feel very close to the Navy.

EMC: This is where you had your training? You retired here.

OR: Yes.

EMC: So you liked it obviously.

OR: Yes.

EMC: Very much.

OR: During the last PT reunion up here, it all started by my reading a note in Leonard Panaggio's column. He said there used to be a memorial to PT boats in Melville and then he went on to write something about PT boats. Then he said that it isn't there anymore. What a shame. I thought to myself well, that isn't good. And, in due course, when I headed up the reunion here that was in 1995.

EMC: Several years ago.

OR: I thought, well, let's do something, so working with Brooks Roberts, who is a sculptor here in Newport.

EMC: I think I know who he is.

OR: I designed with his help, a plaque with a PT boat on it and some words below. I had it built and created and presented it to the War College Museum.

EMC: Right, I remember that.

OR: It's outside there. I don't know how I got off on that subject.

EMC: Well, that's part of your connection still with Peter Tare and your involvement.

OR: As a matter of fact, I looked at it the other day and it is aging, I guess, talking to Ruth Kiker.

OR: You know, Ruth?

EMC: Yes, sure. Oh, yes, I know her.

OR: She said it needs polishing and what not. I said, "Will you let me know what it needs and I'll see if we can get it done."

EMC: I'll have to get on that.

EMC: Do you have anymore anecdotes or tales, interesting occurrences during your navy service for the three years that you want to end up with and relate to us? I just wonder if we missed anything.

OR: Oh, I'm sure we have. I'll let you have it. Ten years ago I wrote the whole story, every little anecdote I could think of.

EMC: Great. Well, that's what we want. I thank you very, very much for your time and for your reminiscences of your service in the navy and in the PT boats in the Pacific and, of course, here in Newport at Melville. Thank you.

OR: Thank you.