

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

THE NAVY IN WORLD WAR II

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IRVING C. SHELDON

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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
THE NAVY IN WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEWEE: IRVING C. SHELDON

INTERVIEWER: DR. EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE NAVY IN WORLD WAR II

DATE: SEPTEMBER 16, 2003

EMC: This is an oral history with Irving C. Sheldon of 22 Gould Way in Saunderstown, Rhode Island. He served in the Navy in World War II. Today's date is September 16, 2003. The interview is being conducted at his home. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. I'm the curator of the Naval Historical Collection at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. Mr. Sheldon, I'm so pleased that you were able to give us some time this morning to talk about your experiences in World War II. I would like to begin the interview by asking you a few background questions before we get into your naval service. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

ICS: I was born in Narragansett Pier in Rhode Island on August 4, 1921.

EMC: Did you spend your growing-up years there?

ICS: No. It was a summer home. We went to either Waterbury, Connecticut, or New York until I grew up. Then I went to boarding

schools and then away to college and then the Navy. So I only lived here summers as a boy.

EMC: What did your father do for a living?

ICS: He was a manufacturer of watches in Waterbury, Ingersoll.

EMC: How interesting. Ingersoll-Rand?

ICS: No, Ingersoll Watches.

EMC: I've never heard of them.

ICS: Well, you've heard of Timex.

EMC: Yes.

ICS: That's the group that bought out the company. They're Norwegians, the Timex people.

EMC: Oh, really! I didn't know that. I had a Timex once upon a time. You mentioned that you were brought up in New York and in Waterbury. Were the company headquarters in Waterbury?

ICS: Yes.

EMC: Where did you go to school, to high school or prep school, as you mentioned?

ICS: I went to St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, and I went to Yale.

EMC: What class in Yale?

ICS: Class of '44. My senior year at St. Paul's was the year that the Germans tried to bomb England into submission. So we all really felt that we were going to get into the war in time. So when I got to Yale, I joined the Naval ROTC. Planned on it and did join.

EMC: What did that entail? What kind of schedule or commitment did you have with ROTC?

ICS: Well, I took maybe four or five courses every year at Yale, and one of them was Naval Science.

EMC: Oh, I see.

ICS: It was all Academy people who ran it, so it pretty much followed what Annapolis did, I guess.

EMC: Now, did you have to march and drill?

ICS: Occasionally, not a great deal. It was great fun when somebody was ordering a bunch of us to do something, and he had us going right out a door or something. Then he'd get flustered, and we'd go right on through the door and out of there.

EMC: Were there a number of Yale students that were in the Naval ROTC?

ICS: I think in our class there were about 80.

EMC: That's quite a few. Now, what inspired you to do this? Was it just the fact that you knew we were....

ICS: The war was coming. We were sure the war was coming. And being in the Navy was something--I'd had family members who'd been in the Navy, a grand-uncle, also ancestors. So quite a little background there. In fact, when I was thinking of going to college, one of the ones I was thinking of was Annapolis.

EMC: Well, you made a good choice. Can you comment on patriotism once the war began? You were at school, of course. Did you notice an upsurge in patriotism in the students and in the community?

ICS: It was a very different day than today. Today, at Yale such things are utterly hated. It embarrasses me to say so. But, no, I

think there was a high level of patriotism at college and in the country at that time.

EMC: There certainly was. No protest really on the college campus.

ICS: Just the opposite.

EMC: Right. Exactly. Can you tell me where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, and your reaction to that, and the reaction at school?

ICS: Well, I was taking a weekend down with my father. I think we were on the highway back to college when we heard on the radio what had happened. I had just been reading about all the anti-aircraft guns on the ships, so I told Dad it wouldn't be very terrible. I was wrong. He thought it was lucky the ships weren't at sea. I think it would have been very much harder for the Japanese to have achieved as much if the ships had been at sea. Undoubtedly they would have achieved a lot, but nothing like sitting in a harbor and taking it.

EMC: Right, right. So was your reaction one of horror or shock?

ICS: Confidence. I was sure it was the right thing, and it would lead to just what I was expecting.

EMC: What did you major in at Yale?

ICS: Government.

EMC: So Government and ROTC were your two major focuses there. When did you decide to join the service? Or when did you enter the service since you were in ROTC?

ICS: I think it was the beginning of junior year you became an apprentice seaman or something.

EMC: Oh, really!

ICS: I'm not absolutely sure just what it was. The very lowest thing of enlisted rank. They called us midshipmen, but I'm pretty sure....

EMC: You would have been officers, not enlisted.

ICS: We became officers when we graduated. But not when we were in the Naval ROTC. I might even have the support for it. I was considered a seaman in some ways. And they also used the term "midshipmen." I really don't know exactly what it was.

EMC: Oh, so you had a rank of some sort.

ICS: A rate.

EMC: A rate, yes. A rate vice, a rank of some sort before you even graduated. So once you graduated in '44....

ICS: No, it was a whole year early because everything got accelerated, so it was exactly a year, June of '43, when we got kicked out. I spent the summer down in Norfolk.

EMC: Were you undergoing training there?

ICS: All sorts of training, yes. I was trained for the CIC, Combat Information Center, aboard ship, and in fighter direction. Also a few odd things like fire-fighting, which was very interesting, and anti-aircraft fire. Down around Norfolk there was a lot of equipment that we were handy to.

EMC: How long was this indoctrination or training?

ICS: Well, until I got assigned to a ship, and I guess it was probably in November that orders came to the USS MCGOWAN at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

EMC: So that's November of '43.

ICS: Yes. The commissioning of the ship was on December 20th, and I was there by then.

EMC: What was your job on the ship that you were assigned to, the McGOWAN. What were you supposed to be doing?

ICS: I was in charge of the CIC, the Combat Information Center.

EMC: What did that exactly consist of?

ICS: Radars and radios and plotting tables and a bunch of guys who knew how to use all these things. So much information was available, it was put in a form that would make it easier for the commanding officer to judge what to do.

EMC: So you had a very important position there.

ICS: Well, I thought it was important. I don't know if anybody else did. I was just a wet-behind-the-ears ensign.

EMC: Alright. But radar was relatively new on ships.

ICS: Yes, probably three or four years. At the beginning of the war it started showing up. By the time the McGOWAN was commissioned, the radar sets were a lot more sophisticated than when they'd started. It was wonderful what you could do with

them. The radio was equally important because it transferred information.

EMC: Oh, sure, sure. What kind of a ship was the USS MCGOWAN?

ICS: She was a Fletcher Class destroyer, 2100-ton ship. There were an awful lot of them built. They were a marvelous design. Gibbs & Cox. As I said, oh, maybe a year and a half before the first of them started coming out. So they were a great help in the Solomon Islands and all. By the time I got out to the Pacific, we'd gotten a long way from the Solomons, although we did get back there one time while I was there.

EMC: So it was a destroyer. How many officers and men were on this ship? Do you have any ballpark figure, more or less?

ICS: Yes, something like 21 officers and I think maybe 320 men. Something like that.

EMC: Enlisted crew. So it was a relatively large ship, carried a lot of people.

ICS: Yes. Today, the ships have very few people by comparison with the number used then. It was a different day than today. These new ships coming out today are automated a great deal more.

EMC: Oh, yes, computerized. Absolutely. Do you remember who the captain was?

ICS: Oh, very well. We had three captains on the McGOWAN: James B. Weiler was the commanding officer when we commissioned. He, unfortunately, had an illness. So that after we had gone through shakedown and were on our way to the Pacific and we stopped in at Norfolk, he left the ship. Then our second captain, William Ruffin Cox, came aboard. He was with us through all the most interesting part of the war. A great leader and a much-loved man. He got reassigned to a new ship in the spring of 1945. Our third captain was Terrell E. Connor. I think I have those names right there. Terrell E., and Connor is C-O-N-N-O-R. He was with us through--I left the ship when we got back to San Francisco in the fall.

EMC: So you had three captains. You mentioned that one was much loved, the second individual was much loved, Ruffin Cox, who was with you through the....

ICS: When we refer to the captain on the McGOWAN, there's no question we're always talking about Captain Cox. We do have these reunions annually. I get to some of them. He became an admiral, and when he was alive, he was always a big part of these reunions. We talk about him a lot today.

EMC: Oh, that's great. I've interviewed a few other people whose captains were not so good.

ICS: We were lucky.

EMC: Oh, very good. But you were lucky.

ICS: Not just the captain, but he set the tone so that there wasn't much ill feeling aboard the ship. More than 300 people, they got along pretty well for a couple of years.

EMC: Oh, that's great. Were most of the young officers like you on the ship reservists, for the most part?

ICS: Yes. We had maybe as many as half a dozen what we called "trade school boys."

EMC: Academy people.

ICS: Including the captain. But it might have been down to-- Well, I think six is a good number--out of 21 officers, about six of them were Academy people.

EMC: So most were reservists.

ICS: Yes.

EMC: How did the reservists feel about serving in the war?

ICS: It seems like everyone was a volunteer at that time. I don't believe anybody was drafted. Every one of us was there because we wanted to be. I don't know how an officer could be drafted. We know enlisted men were drafted. But officers, I think, were generally volunteers, as far as I know.

EMC: Yes, out of the reserves or whatever. So you said the morale of the crew you thought was quite good, considering.

ICS: I did.

EMC: You said you were at the McGOWAN when it was commissioned.

ICS: Yes.

EMC: You were at the ceremony.

ICS: Well, no, I wasn't. The captain sent me somewhere in the yard, and I was off doing it. By the time I got back the ship was in commission.

EMC: Oh, so you missed that ceremony.

ICS: My wife was there. We'd gotten married. No, we had not gotten married yet. We did get married before I went out to the Pacific.

EMC: Oh, you did.

ICS: I think maybe other members of the family were there, too.

EMC: Oh, but you weren't.

ICS: I missed it. Sent off on an errand.

EMC: Well, once the ship was commissioned, did you go out on trials, on a practice cruise?

ICS: Yes, we started the training session. There was a great delay when it was discovered that the engines had a vibration or one of the engines had a bad vibration at high speed. So the ship had to be taken apart. All those ships--I think it was General Electric made the turbines, and there was an extra turbine rotor for each ship. They called it a battle replacement or something like that. Well, no battle replacement in our case. We started out by replacing the rotor, and then the ship passed her trials fine after that.

EMC: Where did you go for the trials?

ICS: Down in Long Island Sound in the wintertime. Just go up the East River, up and down, where the hospitals--and schools; the girls would always come out, and it was fun waving at the girls. We didn't pay any attention to anybody else.

EMC: On the shore. Oh, okay. Well, that was interesting. Do you remember, was that a couple of weeks trials, or did it last longer?

ICS: I don't know. I think taking the ship apart, that was at least a month's job. It really slowed things down. But we were training the whole time in the CIC, for instance, we were always having mock situations, and there'd be a general quarters with everybody there, and practicing for what we expected to be doing when there was an enemy there.

EMC: Well, that was good. It was practical use of time obviously. You needed that. Well, once the ship was repaired, where did you set out for?

ICS: The first thing was a small carrier, the SAN JACINTO, had to have her speed trials. So three destroyers accompanied her up to Penobscot Bay where there was a measured mile or something, so the ship could go up and down at high speed. The water's plenty deep there. Actually it was in a blizzard that that was carried

out. That was late March, but it was a blizzard. It made no difference. Then we came down to Norfolk, and I guess the other two destroyers took off at that point. We accompanied the SAN JACINTO out to Pearl Harbor.

EMC: Oh, then you must have gone through the Panama Canal.

ICS: Yes. I, unfortunately, had a bad stomach. I've done a lot of ocean racing since, and I've been seasick plenty of times. I never get used to it. I used to envy anybody--envy anybody so much who didn't have that problem. When we left Norfolk, that first day, with Captain Cox just came aboard in a beautiful, brand-new uniform. We headed out at 19 knots around Cape Hatteras and ran into a southeasterly gale our first day. Oh, boy, it was a little fast for this ship at 19 knots. Well, I was sick as a dog. All of a sudden the captain was taken completely by surprise and threw up all over his brand-new uniform.

EMC: What an embarrassment!

ICS: Well, he'd just gotten aboard, and he just hadn't had time to get used to anything.

EMC: Were a lot of the crew seasick?

ICS: Oh, sure. It's something you've got to get over. It took me

six months to get over it.

EMC: Oh, really! Then you're debilitated, you can't do anything.

ICS: Oh, yes, you can. You damn well have to.

EMC: Oh, you do!

ICS: Oh, yes. You can't give in. But about the time the captain was taken, a sea came over the bow so high that a huge pipe that supported the forward deck down in the chief's quarters forward bent and let the deck down so that the No. 1 gun couldn't be trained. So we had to continue in that way all the way to Pearl Harbor where they had the facilities to fix things. So actually there was no action of any type. We never even came close to a Nazi submarine or anything like that in the Atlantic or in the Eastern Pacific. So the ship was repaired in time for anything we needed.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Now, you must have had liberty and leave in Pearl Harbor.

ICS: But I'd just gotten married in New York. So all these guys who'd stood in for me because we were newly wed, and I had a little honeymoon--I think we had three days for a honeymoon--anyway, at Panama and at San Diego and at Pearl Harbor, I was

busy making up for all the watches that people had stood for me. Then the captain sent me to some school in Pearl Harbor, too, fighter director, something like that. The ship was in training all that time: gunnery exercises on Kahoolawe and things like that.

EMC: So that was an interesting time. Was that a couple of weeks, would you say?

ICS: Something like that. Might have been a month.

EMC: Well, you're in Pearl Harbor, and is it still 1943 now?

ICS: Oh, no, the commissioning was right at the end of '43 in New York. So it was about April 1st or late March when we sailed from New York. It must have been the 1st of May perhaps or late April when we got to Pearl Harbor, and then the training there. I seem to remember that it was the last day of May that we sailed from Pearl Harbor with a task force. This was preparations for operations against the Marianas Islands: Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. We went to Kwajalein first, which had just been taken a month or two before, and a tremendous fleet anchorage there where all the forces were put together that were going to the Marianas.

EMC: That was your first big real battle that you were involved in.

ICS: Yes. The Japanese didn't do much to us at Saipan. There was some spray of machine-gun fire one time that was very--bullets dropped in the water. That was the nearest thing that was like action. But we were shooting all the time, shore bombardment. We were there as part of the shore bombardment force. So a lot of it was controlled with firing the guns, controlled by men ashore who were with the troops, and they wanted the shells put here, there, or wherever else, and they would control us then.

EMC: So you had a lot of radio communication in your command.

ICS: Oh, yes, the radio was very important.

EMC: And your work in CIC involved that.

ICS: We'd be at general quarters whenever anything was going on. We did work out a method where the crew could get more rest. It was called Condition One Easy. People could either sleep at their stations for part of the time or--I can't remember anymore about that.

EMC: So that was your first action, so to speak, in the Marianas.

ICS: Yes.

EMC: Now, how did you feel about going into battle? What was your personal reaction, fear, whatever?

ICS: There was nothing to be afraid of. There really wasn't. We were certainly not in the conditions we ran into at Saipan or at Tinian. Generally speaking, it was just a job to do. But at Tinian it was at night. We spent all night just--it was the night before the invasion of Tinian, and the idea was to keep the Japanese from sleeping. So we were bothering them all night right in near the south end of the island. The invasion would be at the north end.

At eight o'clock in the morning we were relieved by one of our squadron mates, the NORMAN SCOTT. We hadn't gone more than a few hundred yards when a battery opened up on the poor NORMAN SCOTT, and the battleship COLORADO, I think, and the cruiser CLEVELAND. All three ships were hit. The NORMAN SCOTT was very serious. We went back and went alongside, and the doctor went over to help the doctor on the NORMAN SCOTT. I don't think he was a casualty. So there was a hard day's work for our doctor and a few of the medical people. But otherwise we were not involved. That happened to us again in the Philippines when the doctor went aboard the ALBERT W. GRANT. Once again, it didn't concern our ship other than loaning our doctor.

EMC: So you were lucky. So your reaction wasn't fear, it was

just you're doing your job.

ICS: That's right. Well, you really wanted to put your mind to something, you know. You did have a job. It would be hard to be a passenger, I think.

EMC: Oh, yes.

ICS: Much better to have a job.

EMC: Absolutely. So you escaped from the Marianas conflict, the battles at Saipan and Tinian and Guam relatively easily. You were involved in a whole host of other actions, too.

ICS: Yes. After the Marianas we went down to Guadalcanal to bring up forces for the Palau invasion. On the way down, we crossed the equator for the first time. The old shellbacks aboard sure took it out on the polliwogs.

EMC: You were a polliwog, I presume.

ICS: Somebody who hadn't been across the equator. Yes, it really was a wonderful thing. They made it as tough as they could. But still, it was nice to have it behind you. It's an experience you're glad you had. We crossed the equator many times afterwards and had other people aboard, and some of them were quite

disappointed. But the guys had done such a lot of work the first time, they never felt like doing it again.

EMC: Oh, so those people escaped.

ICS: They felt bad about it. They really had missed something that--

EMC: Right, King Neptune and all of that.

ICS: A rite of passage, you might say.

EMC: Right. Exactly. Well, that's kind of interesting. Well, you were preparing for the Palaus, you said, and your ship was involved there.

ICS: That's right. I had a rather fun, idiotic thing happen to me at Guadalcanal when the captain received us at quarters. When I reported to him at quarters, he said, "I'd like to see you afterwards." So I came back to the captain afterwards, and he said, "At eleven o'clock, I want you to--" I guess he said at 1100. "--I want you to take my gig and go down the shore a mile or so, and you will see an old raft tipped up on the beach right at the water's edge. There will be a young lady there whom I've invited to lunch with us, and I want you to pick her up and bring her back." "Aye aye, sir." So at eleven o'clock-- He had great,

beetling eyebrows.

EMC: Now, who was this?

ICS: Captain Cox. This lady was in the Red Cross at Guadalcanal, and she was a friend of his from home. So he'd invited her aboard. When we went down the beach, we saw what he said. There was this girl standing. She'd taken her shoes off, and she was standing on the float. The coxswain brought the gig in at right angles to the beach so the bow would touch the float. I worked out around the little spray shield that gigs have to the bow. When we got there, I leapt onto the float. Well, I didn't realize it was kind of seaweedy, and my feet just went zing into the water. The beach was quite steep. I went all the way to my neck with the gig banging into my back.

Of course in reaction, I flailed my arms around at the only thing which was there, which was the ankles of this young lady. I was very fortunate I didn't tip her over. And the gig's crew were splitting their sides laughing. I pulled myself out, dripping, and helped her up on the bow, and she worked her way in. We came back to the MCGOWAN. If a 2,000-ton ship can tip from a few thousand pounds of people, the MCGOWAN was tipping. Because everybody was there to see this. Here I am, absolutely drenched. Well, you can imagine it was a hilarious lunch.

EMC: Talk of the ship. So you got ashore that way.

ICS: That's the only time I got ashore. There really wasn't that much to go ashore for.

EMC: Oh, no, I wouldn't think so.

ICS: This, of course, is long after the Japanese had left.

EMC: Yes, this was '44 by that time. Well, did you see action at the Palaus?

ICS: No, we did not. We were in the invasion of Angaur when I think it was the 81st Division landed there. The saddest part of it was there were a lot of poor Marines who'd been killed whose bodies were floating around, and we gave them proper burials. Which, to be physical, about it, the bodies had decomposed quite a bit. It's not a pleasant thing to do at all, but it was a wonderful thing to do.

EMC: Burial at sea, I presume?

ICS: Well, to take care of them. Better than leaving them there.

EMC: Oh, good heavens. Well, you went on. It's '44, and in October '44 was the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

ICS: Yes. We had arrived at Leyte Gulf a few days before the battle. We'd gone to Manus, Seeadler Harbor, for the preparation for the Philippines. We were escorting a huge convoy of LSTs, LCIs, LSMs, and so on, hundreds of ships in a great big convoy which must be a thousand miles or so from the one at Manus to the Leyte Gulf. We got them in on the morning of the 20th, and they went to the southern landing force; I think that's Tacloban, if I remember right. This was Admiral Wilkinson's force.

The admiral's staff had assigned our squadron to patrol the approaches to Leyte Gulf, so a couple of the ships were in the main opening on the Pacific, and three more of us were blocking off the--we were blocking off Surigao Strait. I forgot to say that not only the NORMAN SCOTT, but the WADLEIGH was badly damaged at Palau where she struck a mine and had to go home. So we only had seven active ships in the squadron. I was wrong saying three blocking Surigao Strait. There were five destroyers blocking Surigao Strait, with two of them blocking the Pacific openings, that accounts for the entire squadron which had started off all together; we were missing two ships then.

We were at first put way down the strait. But when there was an attack, everybody was going about their business on a bright sunny morning when all of a sudden there was a roar, and the water alongside burst into foam. A Zeke had dived on us right out of the sun and was unlucky about his aiming. But we were caught flat-footed. Nobody had seen it, or heard it, or anything else. We had a big fighter director team aboard, and they directed the

fighters out. The Zeke was shot down about 40 miles away.

EMC: Now, was that a Japanese plane?

ICS: Oh, yes. The Zeke was the Japanese fighter.

EMC: That's what I thought.

ICS: The admiral had us brought back to the north end of Surigao Strait just so we would have a little more air cover than we'd had 20 miles down the strait.

EMC: So you're lucky it didn't do any damage to your ship.

ICS: The ship was a lucky ship.

EMC: I guess so.

ICS: Because it wasn't just that time. People missed. Thank goodness.

EMC: That was the kamikazes that were--

ICS: This was not a kamikaze.

EMC: Oh, the Zeke wasn't, no, right.

ICS: It was not, but sometimes I remember later in the war, a plane was not a kamikaze; our 20 mms killed the pilot, and in his dying moments he tried to hit us. That's not what we consider a kamikaze, yet he would have done the same thing. But, unfortunately for him, he went in the water alongside.

EMC: Well, you were moved up, you said, to Surigao Strait where there was more air cover.

ICS: To the north end, right, and to the edge of Leyte Gulf. Then when the Japanese fleet was approaching, and, of course, the captain knew something about this. I don't know just how he knew. Coded information that most of us didn't have, something like that. Anyway, he told us that the Tokyo Express was going to run again tonight. Our commodore of the squadron, Jesse Coward, he was in charge, right on the next ship, the REMEY, to us. When this huge force of the battleships and all that were in Leyte Gulf came up behind us and set up shop, as you might say, for an expected battle, Captain Coward suggested that he would like to submit a plan to make a torpedo attack. That was through Admiral Oldendorf in command of the battle force there. So Oldendorf okayed the plan.

That night--I guess we had aircraft information, so we were expecting this Japanese force, which included two battle ships, the FUSO and the YAMASHIRO, a cruiser, the MOGAMI, and four

destroyers. They were coming up, and there was another smaller Japanese force farther back. Anyway, the PTs were down the strait, and they started letting us know that they were trying to do what they could about these ships coming in. So we knew they were there.

About two-thirty in the morning of the 25th, Captain Coward led the way in in the REMEY, with us and the MELVIN. On the other side of the strait, ComDesDiv 108-- Let's see, Captain Coward was commodore of Destroyer Squadron 54. So the second division of that was Commander Phillips on the McDERMOTT. He had two ships on the west side of the strait. Captain Coward had three ships on the east side of the strait. We went down together and fired our torpedoes and got out of there with smoke as fast as we could from the Japanese. I was in CIC, so I knew everything about the approach, but I knew nothing about what went on outside the ship. They told us we were lit up a lot with searchlights and star shells, and then shells were falling around. Then we got out of there. Once again the Japanese were not lucky, not only with us but with all our other ships. They didn't hit anything.

EMC: Well, that's great.

ICS: Yes, thank goodness.

EMC: Thank goodness for you down below stairs there. You didn't see the action, what was going on outside.

ICS: But we did have quite a bit to do, so we were busy.

EMC: Oh, absolutely. Did you ever get a chance to go on deck?

ICS: Yes. We retired to up by Hibuson Island at the north end of the strait, near where we'd been before. Then that's when the captain set Condition One Easy, and we were able to take turns going up on deck to see all the stuff being shot by the cruisers and battleships and destroyers. Well, not the destroyers. I think the destroyers limited themselves to torpedoes, as we did. We did not use our guns. But the battleships and cruisers were making quite a sight.

EMC: I bet. That's quite something. So was that the end of your action at Leyte Gulf?

ICS: Yes, we were there for....

EMC: Must have been late October.

ICS: Well, I think on the 26th we sailed, about three destroyers, with Admiral Wilkinson in his command ship, the MOUNT OLYMPUS, to Hollandia, on the north coast of New Guinea. We were there a while. I can't recall just what we did there. The mail and everything had gotten really screwed up because Halsey a

month or so before had discovered that the central Philippines were not defended well by the Japanese. So the war had been advanced a month or two, and things like mail had been just set aside so food and shells and stuff like that could get to the ships.

There had been like a square mile--well, maybe a hundred acres--of forest at Hollandia had been cleared with bulldozers, just mud, and tens of thousands of mailbags had been stacked there. Immense piles. Then, of course, the stuff from the lowest rows got driven right into the mud because it was a month or two before things could be straightened out. We did get some mailbags; they were nothing but mud.

EMC: So the mailbags were sent to a certain ship then?

ICS: Yes, each bag was addressed to some ship. Some of them we got were fine. I mean we got them regularly. But in this thing, a lot of them got shunted aside, as I said. At least one of ours was in the lower layer in the pile.

EMC: Too bad they didn't have boards and put them on boards or something.

ICS: They didn't have time for that.

EMC: Yes, just throw them into the mud. So anyway, you're in

Hollandia, you're in New Guinea.

ICS: Yes, we went back to Leyte Gulf in December just before Christmas. Mindoro had been invaded over the other side of the Philippines. We went with another--this second group. It was called the First Resupply to Mindoro. It was all kinds of--there were great barges with huge cranes on them, things that could proceed at three or four knots, maximum speed. There was a lot of Japanese air action. We were really pinned down. One rather odd thing that took place is we were going through the Mindanao Sea, what we called a sampan was seen ahead. That was any small craft we called a sampan.

So the McGOWAN and the WILLIAM D. PORTER got sent to get rid of it as the force was coming along very slowly toward it. The WILLIAM D. PORTER was the senior ship. They had us alongside of them, about a quarter mile apart, and we went along at 20 knots or something, coming on either side of the sampan. So the result was that we both started shooting. I think we used 40 mm for a wooden craft of maybe 50-foot length. Forty millimeter was a proper size weapon to break it all up, I guess. Well, anyway, you can imagine then as the little craft came between us, we were starting to aim at each other. The WILLIAM D. PORTER actually did shoot at us. But thank goodness it all went overhead. She was called the WILLY D., and she had a checkered experience and ended up with a kamikaze.

EMC: Well, that was a near miss. Did you get the sampan, though?

ICS: Oh, yes. We took maybe seven people aboard, all wounded. One was an officer, Fumiosa Yamada, and we kept him in the wardroom. He'd gone to the American School in Tokyo; he was a banker. He seemed to be a swell guy. He was in a bad position. We talked to him. He really didn't know much English, and, of course, we knew no Japanese. Communication was difficult. But when we got back to Leyte, he was sent ashore to a prison camp, and I don't think the Marines treated him very well. They sort of would grab a guy by the neck and throw him.

EMC: What was that sampan doing there with officers?

ICS: They'd been to a military hospital, I think, in Cebu and were returning to a little port on the north shore of Mindanao, coming across the Mindanao Sea when we happened to come upon them.

EMC: Oh, I see. Blew them out of the water.

ICS: We did.

EMC: Well, anything else interesting or exciting happen in that time frame?

ICS: Well, there were a lot of air attacks. The kamikaze thing just started at that time during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. But none of the planes that-- As I remember, none of the planes that attacked us in that particular time, in December of '44, were kamikazes.

EMC: Yes, it was just beginning around that time, exactly. You were lucky to escape that. Well, when '44 ended and the beginning of '45, where was the ship?

ICS: That was when--well, we were back at Leyte. We had Christmas at Leyte and were there for several days. Then the operation to have the big landing on Lingayen Gulf on the other side of the Philippines took place. Of course we steamed through to the South China.... [Change to Side B of Tape] All the troops on Leyte were reembarked, or almost all of them, I guess, and we accompanied them and LSTs and other landing craft around to Lingayen Gulf. Must be several hundred miles, maybe a thousand.

They landed on January 7th, '45. There was a lot of air action. But there were so many ships. I remember there were some kamikazes. A battleship got hit by a kamikaze. The MARYLAND maybe? My memory is vague on that. Anyway, there was considerable air action. But mostly it was just a job of getting the troops ashore. Then we went back, and I think we went to Ulithi, I believe we did, which was now a fleet anchorage in the Western Pacific.

EMC: Did you stay at Ulithi until the next action that you were in?

ICS: The next action was Iwo Jima, which was in February. So I think we were in Ulithi until then. Somewhere in there we made a trip back to Saipan or to Guam, I forget which, for some reason or other, and returned to our force. We at that time switched from the-- We'd been in shore bombardment first, then we were with the amphib, and now we were going to Task Force 58, or 38, depending on whether it was Third Fleet or Fifth Fleet. They had those different numbers. So from there to the end of the war we were with that big task force.

EMC: What role did the ship play at Iwo Jima? Because that was a horrendous battle, but victory.

ICS: There was a night-fighter task group. I think it was Task Group 58.5, and it was the ENTERPRISE and SARATOGA, and they had night-fighters aboard. We were in the screen of that bunch. We went in to Iwo Jima one day. It was the day of the landing. These kamikazes suddenly appeared from Chichi Jima, or presumably from Chichi Jima, and they just piled into the SARATOGA, I think about six of them. They hadn't discovered how they made out best with destroyers. They hadn't discovered that yet. They continued with the big ships. They couldn't sink them. They did learn they could

sink destroyers. Anyway, it was tragic on SARATOGA. She was badly damaged. We escorted her back to Eniwetok after that and had several very pleasant days, I remember, getting ashore with beer at Eniwetok.

EMC: Did you go to the officers' club there, or was there one?

ICS: There was one at Ulithi on the island of Mogmog, but we were down at the southern part of the Ulithi anchorage. So I think it was all the senior officers that were up near the officers' club. No, there was no officers' club that I knew of at Eniwetok.

EMC: Well, at least you got ashore. Did you feel very confined on the ship? You were on it for such a long time.

ICS: No. You'd think you would be. But you did have a job, and that was the main thing. You're mostly so damned tired. That's the main thing I remember of the war. At first I was seasick. Afterwards I would wonder where I ever found the energy to be seasick because we were so tired. That's the main thing I remember when I was about a year on the MCGOWAN, being dog-tired.

EMC: Well, you were probably up or at general quarters a lot.

ICS: A lot, yes. During the day you had your job, and sleep, I could have used more.

EMC: Now as an officer, did you have to share a stateroom?

ICS: Yes, there were three of us in my room. It was a very nice room. I had the bottom bunk, and it went up two levels above. They were the ordinary pipe berths. Yet when the ship was jumping all over the place, you found that you could lock yourself against the chains or whatever, your feet, and your elbows and stuff, and stay still and sleep. Particularly if you were so tired you didn't care what was going on.

EMC: That's an interesting observation. You were really worked to the bone, despite the fact that you were young and could bounce back better.

ICS: Wow! Certainly that's why they use young people. Old folks-like today I would be useless. I probably was pretty useless then. But I really would be useless now.

EMC: Yes, because you don't bounce back as fast from these exhausting days of work. Well, was that your total experience at Iwo Jima, just being there for that experience?

ICS: Yes, that was the total experience. We went back to Ulithi

from it. Then at the end of March, the 31st, we sailed with a huge group for-- Well, the ships that were involved in the landing were going to Okinawa, but Task Force 58 was attacking Japan. So that there were just continual strikes against Japan. We left on the 31st of March and actually got back to Ulithi on the 31st of May. So we were at sea for two months that time, and, of course, refueling from time to time. The Japanese would sort of build up to where they could make a strike. Then there would be some days when they wouldn't. We would be in some forward position where the planes could reach targets. Then we would drop back every three days or so to be with a fueling group.

One thing that was interesting there was at one time-- there'd been a lot of casualties. We were just missed by a kamikaze, so close. We had no casualties. Well, I remember one guy had been scratched on his arm. I said, "Hey, you've earned the Purple Heart." He laughed at me. It was only a scratch. But a lot of ships were hit. We got back to the fueling group, and there was a hospital ship there. The destroyers were given the job of not only getting rid of their own wounded, if they had any, but also carrying wounded to the hospital ship from the big ships. That was a normal destroyer job. Of course, we got a big kick out of waving at a few girls that would come up and wave at us while we were alongside shipping these guys over in a breech's buoy, you know.

Then all of a sudden, it became the WISCONSIN's turn, and her captain said that a destroyer would not be necessary, and he

took the WISCONSIN alongside the hospital ship. This could have wrecked his career. But he took the chance so that all of his guys could wave at girls, too. It was very important to us.

EMC: Yes, I guess so. You hadn't seen any females for over a year.

ICS: A long time.

EMC: How far away were you from Japan when you were conducting these exercises for those two months?

ICS: I had been in navigation early on. But with the CIC, the captain said I couldn't be assistant navigator, which I hoped I could, because he wanted the assistant navigator to be somebody who had a battle station up on deck. So I really didn't know just where we were because I wasn't doing anything like that. I think it was usually about 200 miles from wherever the target was--all the way from about Tokyo in the north to the Inland Sea and down to Kyushu, various places that they attacked to try to wreck all the planes as well as more or less harry all kinds of targets in Japan. Probably we would drop back a hundred miles or maybe 200 miles to the fueling group. I don't know really know what those distances were.

EMC: But you were there for a good two months. That's

interesting that they were attacking Japan at this point. Well, it's toward the end of the war, obviously. When you finished this two months at the end of May--

ICS: The 31st, yes.

EMC: Where did you retreat to?

ICS: Went back to Ulithi. Of course the ship had an awful lot of weed. By now she'd been in the water for a year and a half, I guess, and the amount of weed was immense. So we did get 24 hours at a floating dry dock. Of course floating dry docks had very few people aboard. So the people that did the work were off the destroyer. Everybody except the captain--the captain did have some things to do--but even the exec, everybody was over the side scraping. After they got everything off the hull, then painting one coat after another of the different things that the Navy requires to have the bottom right. We had just 24 hours in there. There were a lot of ships that wanted to get into those floating dry docks. We got the job done in the 24 hours because we damn well had to.

EMC: That's amazing.

ICS: We worked right around, of course.

EMC: The clock, yes. Absolutely. Well, that was interesting. So the ship was more or less in ship shape.

ICS: Well, it was clean.

EMC: Well, it was clean anyway, after that.

ICS: It might have made a couple of knots difference in our speed, I suppose.

EMC: Yes, without the seaweed and whatever on it.

ICS: But back aft where I was working, the weed was ten feet thick. Up forward she was clean. But where the water was eddying back aft was where the weed would grow. Long strings of kelp maybe ten feet long.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sake, interesting. Well, what happened next after you had this respite? The war isn't over yet.

ICS: No. I guess it was July we worked through there. I can't remember the dates. At some point we got sent to--we were going back to be overhauled and to return to the Pacific later. So with a small group of ships that were sent-- Now we had one sad thing. A calm day one time, the admiral wanted us to refuel by the old-fashioned method where the big ship would tow the small ship. The

big ship in this case was the ENTERPRISE. As we rounded to on this calm day, there was a groundswell, and the old McGOWAN, as she rounded, she just put her nose right into one of those things and scooped an awful lot of water.

We had a party right up in the bow, three guys to take the line from the ENTERPRISE when we got there. My dear friend, Dick Mackey, who was the head of our reunion group, he was hurt and so was the other guy. The third fellow, the youngest guy on the ship, Frederick Ross, and he went overboard. Probably knocked out and went overboard. We hunted for hours. He's the only casualty we had, and it happened to the youngest fellow on the ship.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sakes!

ICS: It was very sad.

EMC: That was very sad. Not action, but just a kind of odd occurrence.

ICS: Well, it certainly was an accident.

EMC: An accident is right, during refueling. Anyway, you said you were scheduled to go back for overhaul and maintenance.

ICS: That's right.

EMC: Where would they have sent you, or where were you sent?

ICS: Well, we went back on a great circle course from the Japanese coast to San Francisco, and that put us into the Aleutians. So we stopped at Adak and refueled at Great Sitkin Island, and then were at Adak for at least a day. I can't remember how long it was. It wasn't very long. But I did get ashore, and then I was able to call up home. I talked to Shirley; it was about three a.m. where she was.

EMC: Well, that was good. Some contact anyway.

ICS: We were in these little booths, and, of course, it was radio telephone to about Seattle and then land lines from there on.

EMC: Where was your wife at this point?

ICS: She was in Narragansett, Rhode Island.

EMC: Oh, I see.

ICS: But one odd thing I did notice. You could hear people in the next booth. There was a rear admiral next to me, and I did hear that he got connected. He said, "Hello." Then he couldn't think of a thing to say. Maybe the person on the other end was

talking; I don't know. Anyway, finally he said, "Goodbye." I was waiting all that time for my call to get through. Not a word, not a word.

EMC: That was strange. Well, maybe somebody on the other end was talking. You finally made it to San Francisco.

ICS: Right. By then it was...let's see. I'm wrong. We didn't go to San Francisco. We went to Pearl Harbor. Navy Day in those days was Theodore Roosevelt's birthday, October 27th, and that's when we were in Pearl. They sent us to Kauai, a little port, and I think it was called Nawiliwili. We were there overnight and got leave ashore. I'm afraid considerable potatoes were consumed, and people weren't in very good shape.

EMC: Well, that was after the war ended.

ICS: It was after the war ended. Yes, I meant to say that when we were at Great Sitkin Island fueling, we had just arrived, all of a sudden the radio announced the war was over.

EMC: Oh, fantastic!

ICS: So when I made my phone call from Adak, within the next day, it was nice that the war was over.

EMC: Did people celebrate at all on the ship?

ICS: Or do I have this right? There was another thing, yes. We were there. Then our orders got changed. About an hour after the war came to an end, the McGOWAN got orders to go back to Japan. There was no need to overhaul her again. So we went back. We went to northern Japan, Ominato, and were there and over at Muroran on-- No, it was Hakodate on Hokkaido. I should have mentioned a couple of pieces of action we had. They really weren't much action. We accompanied battleships which bombarded. One bombardment was on Muroran on Hokkaido. The second one was right down by Tokyo, the Tokyo Plain. I remember a steel mill was the target the first time.

Anyway, the destroyers just patrolled around the battleships while they were shooting. The one down near Tokyo was at night. Goodness knows what they hit. In any event, they were two kind of actions. The planes were very busy for the carriers, and we almost got hit by one of our own planes, a Corsair, which wanted to make darned sure that we saw him before he ditched. He nearly took the head off of an officer who had just arrived aboard the day before. The poor guy had been obsessed about kamikazes. Here one of our own planes almost got him.

EMC: Friendly fire. Oh, boy.

ICS: I didn't say that we picked up a lot of pilots who put

their planes in the water alongside. We'd get them back to their carriers. The carriers were generally swell to us. The standard thing was 30 gallons of ice cream for a pilot. But we got to the SHANGRI-LA one time, and the ship advised us that they were all buttoned up at general quarters so there wouldn't be anything. I think some of our fellows were making noise: We won't pick up your pilots!

EMC: If you aren't going to give us anything for it, right. So you were back in Japan. Now how did you feel about going back?

ICS: Well, we didn't want to go back, but you had to. This was up at the north end between Hokkaido and Honshu in that Sugaru Strait which was full of mines. So most of the time we were watching for the minesweepers and making sure nobody interfered with them. And sinking a lot of mines. That was another thing we did. The mines that were released by the minesweepers would float high like a huge basketball up on the water. I remember one calm morning when we were shooting at them with 30-caliber rifles that we had on board. I distinctly remember at something like 600 yards I could hear the bullet go plop right into the mine. When you made enough holes, they would sink. But we discovered better ways of doing it with the 40 mms and all. Actually we saw another destroyer one day shooting with their five-inch battery at mines, which I think was an impossible thing for five-inch shells to do. It was certainly a wasteful way of trying. But we got rid of a

lot of mines that way.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Because that would be treacherous. Well, when did you finally leave Japan?

ICS: It was, let's see, we were in Pearl Harbor on October 27th, so it must have been two weeks before that. It's a long way. It's 4,000 miles from Ominato to Pearl Harbor. Let's see, at 15 knots, I'm guessing that was our speed, that's 360 miles a day. Certainly a ten-day trip or a little longer than that.

EMC: You must have been thrilled to be back on terra firma and in an area that wasn't a war zone.

ICS: Then, of course, when we left Hawaii, this Operation Magic Carpet, I think it was called--I think that's what it was called--getting the guys home. So we had about 250 Seabees aboard as well as our crew. Gosh, the poor guys! They were lucky to find anyplace to be comfortable. I think a steel deck was the best they could find a lot of times. But I remember a guy who was so seasick. He got a sandwich as we left Pearl Harbor. He fell down right outside the wardroom with this sandwich in his hand, of which one bite had been taken, and the bite was in his mouth, except it got pushed out by a lot of other stuff. He didn't move for the five days or whatever it was it took us to get to San Francisco.

EMC: He had just gotten on the ship.

ICS: Yes. There was no place else for him to go. But we just stepped over him for five days.

EMC: Oh, how awful! The guys got home; that was what they wanted.

ICS: They didn't care how they got home.

EMC: So when the ship did get to San Francisco, were you discharged shortly thereafter?

ICS: Since I'd gotten married early, I had ten extra points. That meant that I had leave coming. I was released. I guess we went to Hunter's Point or something like that. I had an hour or so to shop. Let's see, the ship was out by-- Yes, she was anchored out by Treasure Island, I remember that definitely. I got back, and the gig got me aboard about two o'clock. While I'd been there, I'd managed to get a ticket on Western Pacific across the country. So I'd gotten back to the ship. I did manage to get to whatever the name of that big store is in San Francisco.

EMC: Oh, Gumps?

ICS: Gumps and bought something for Shirl. I just got back to the ship about two o'clock. The captain was having a nap, and my train left Oakland at four o'clock. The OD said, "Well, look, I'll take care of your papers. Get down, get packed, and get back here quick, and I'll send you right in." So probably about, I don't know, it must have been, it was two o'clock.... Well, anyway, it was awfully late when I got ashore at Treasure Island, and everybody got out of work just at that time. I was perfectly awful. There was a line of people waiting for cars. I went up and used my elbows and was the first guy into a car. I made the train as it was pulling out.

EMC: Oh, good for you!

ICS: These girls that were driving the car, they very kindly drove me to the train station. I don't know what I'd have done with the ticket if I'd missed it.

EMC: Right. Oh, gosh, then that was a trek across the country.

ICS: It took me about five days to get home, but I finally did get home. But it was sometime in November.

EMC: But you were discharged at that point.

ICS: No, no, no. I had to return to the ship. I had a couple of

weeks, I think. Something like that. Then my mother loaned us a car--we had prewar tires, of course--and told us not to drive over 35. We could drive back to California.

EMC: Oh, my word! That would take you two or three weeks.

ICS: Well, it didn't take that long. I did get back. We took that coast road up from Los Angeles to San Francisco, and it was raining, and we ran into a huge mud slide. I was all dressed in my blues and a white silk scarf and everything, and we got onto this mud slide. Then the car sank, and there was nowhere to go. I managed to pull practically all my clothes off. It was winter, raining and blowing off the sea. I just about froze. Got mud all over myself. Then it stopped raining, and the water stopped coming down, and the mud got hard. A guy came flying by. He didn't stop at all. He went over the mud fast. But about a half an hour after he went by, a truck came and pulled us out. It was too late to get to the ship. We got to a place I'd never heard of, but it's famous today, Big Sur.

EMC: Oh, yes!

ICS: We managed to find a place for the night there. I think it was freezing cold. No heat. I got to the ship the next day. I think that was about December 1st. I had a month's duty left. So Shirl and I had a half a Quonset hut in Mare Island. The ship was

in Mare Island Navy Yard and out of the water when we got there. So I spent the month of December, and we had Christmas there in our little half Quonset hut. We had parties with the other guys. We had a great time. Finally, New Year's Day came, and I was free, and we started home. I got out of the Navy about a week later in Boston.

EMC: Great! That's quite a story.

ICS: I didn't quite get out of the Navy. But eventually I resigned.

EMC: Oh, were you in the Reserves?

ICS: Yes. I guess I took courses and things for a while, but nothing seemed to work out. You really need a yeoman who knows all the rules, and I didn't know any of them. So the things I did I don't think I got credit for them. In any event, I eventually did get out of the Navy.

EMC: Right, resigned from the Reserves.

ICS: Then when John Chafee was governor, he made me naval aide, I said, "I'm not even in the Navy." He said, "It doesn't matter."

EMC: Naval aide to him?

ICS: Yes, I was naval aide to Governor Chafee. There were several naval aides. There were quite a few. There must have been ten guys of all the different services. There must have been at least three, maybe four Navy ones. We had a wonderful time. I wasn't really in the Navy, but I still could in those days put my uniform on.

EMC: So was it more ceremonial?

ICS: Yes. He'd attend something, and he wanted some guys with him who were fun.

EMC: Oh, I see. That's as governor.

ICS: Yes. Of course I had to be in uniform then.

EMC: Oh, I see. Oh, that was interesting.

ICS: Gee, one time we went to the Eastern States Exposition where he had to do something for the Rhode Island building or something. He took a lot of his children and my children, and we had the state limousine, and we went up there and spent the night. It was very hot. I remember I was in whites. My job was to keep the kids out of trouble.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting. So you had a connection with the Navy unofficially.

ICS: For a while, yes.

EMC: For a while after that. Well, how would you sum up your World War II service? What were your feelings about it? What was its significance for you?

ICS: Well, I was very proud to be with such a marvelous group of people. I felt we did a good job. I don't know that I did a good job, but I think the McGOWAN did a good job. I screwed up a lot.

EMC: Oh, really?

ICS: Oh, yes. I don't want to go into-- I told you one of them.

EMC: But it was an enjoyable experience.

ICS: No, I wouldn't say that. Let's just say it was an experience.

EMC: It was an experience. Was it one you'd want to repeat?

ICS: You certainly would not want to repeat it. But I think you were glad you'd done it. You felt damned lucky, too.

EMC: Oh, right, to have survived.

ICS: Well, one thing was the Japanese kamikazes were getting pretty awful to the destroyers. Like, as you know yourself, Dick Sheffield's was sunk right away. But their plans for opposing the invasion of Japan were something. I have a copy of that. I don't think the destroyers--I think they would have all been destroyed, there are so darned many things that would have attacked them. So I'm one person who thanks Harry Truman for using the atomic bomb. It wasn't as bad for Japan as some of the bombing, the fire bombing of Tokyo, for instance. But it was a new weapon, it had shock value, and the war came to an end. I think otherwise the war would not have come to an end for a generation.

EMC: Oh, it would've continued.

ICS: Well, there were guys 25 years later, I think, a man was still discovered in Guam. He'd been hiding all those years. That's what I can say for Harry Truman: Thank you!

EMC: Thank you for doing that. You mentioned that you attended some reunions of the McGOWAN. Was this immediately after the war?

ICS: No, the association didn't start for many years. I'm trying to think of the head guy, Dick Mackey; he's such a good guy. I'm

terrible with names now. Anyway, I remember in '81 I went. I think that was one of the early reunions. They've had them every year recently, always in a different city. One has just been held--I think it might have been in Philadelphia this time. Being tied down because of the illness, I couldn't possibly go.

EMC: It's interesting that they do continue that tradition.

ICS: Oh, I think it's the most important thing in the year for some of the fellows. They just love that group of people. Mackey! Oh, gosh. I can't think of his first name now. But his last name is Mackey, a wonderful guy that lives up around Burlington, Massachusetts, somewhere. Dick, Dick Mackey.

EMC: Well, do you have anything else that you want to add regarding your World War II service?

ICS: We've covered it pretty well.

EMC: You weren't wounded, you weren't injured; nobody was.

ICS: Thank goodness.

EMC: Just one more question: Can you comment on the competency of the enlisted rates and the officers?

ICS: Well, they're all human, so they all varied. I think pretty darned high class. There were things that went wrong, but generally speaking I think the ship did her job pretty darned well, and it was because of people like Captain Cox and a lot of people. Dick Mackey was the--I couldn't think of his name at the time--that the McGOWAN stuck her nose under that swell, he was right up there in the bow and got flung back against a gun turret. He was really hurt, as was the other guy who survived. He was a boatswain's mate 1st class and a very dependable guy. One of many.

EMC: So a good crew and a lucky ship.

ICS: I should say!

EMC: Survived the war. Well, I want to thank you very, very much, Mr. Sheldon, for the interview. We'll get this transcribed, and then we'll have you edit it.

ICS: Okay.

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