

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

WORLD WAR II VETERANS

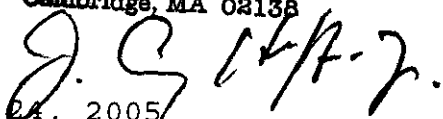
WORLD WAR II VETERANS

NO. 328<sup>30</sup>  
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October 24, 2005



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
2004

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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND  
WORLD WAR II VETERANS

INTERVIEWEE: J. CRAIG HUFF

INTERVIEWER: DR. EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: WORLD WAR II VETERANS

DATE: AUGUST 27, 2004

EMC: This is an oral history interview with Mr. Craig Huff. Today's date is August 27th, 2004. The interview is taking place in my office at the Naval Historical Collection at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. Mr. Huff, I'm pleased that you could come over today to tell us about your experiences in World War II and in LST and in other capacities as well, and I'd like to begin the interview by asking you where and when you were born?

CH: I was born in Philadelphia, August 2nd, 1920.

EMC: And what did your parents do there?

CH: My father was a long-time Philadelphian. He was in the lumber business. My mother came from Shepherdstown, West Virginia. She was a housewife and a mother.

EMC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

CH: No, I was an only child.

EMC: And did you get your education in Philadelphia, your early education?

CH: Yes, I went to two schools. The first was kindergarten through third grade and in 1930 I went to the Episcopal Academy out in Merion, a Main Line suburb.

EMC: And did you go to college after that?

CH: I went from Episcopal to Williams and graduated as a member of the Class of 1942.

EMC: Okay. Great. Well, you were in college when World War II broke out?

CH: Right.

EMC: And do you remember your reaction to the attack on Pearl Harbor?

CH: Oh, I remember it very well. It was a miserable day in Williamstown and a number of us had gone to the movies after lunch. In the middle of the film Cane Prindle, the proprietor of the theater, cut the projector off and appeared on the stage and

told us what had happened. We all rushed back to our dormitories or fraternity houses and turned on the radio and listened for the rest of the day.

EMC: Yes, that was a big shock. Did your family have any military connections at all?

CH: No, although my maternal and paternal great grandparents were on opposite sides in the Civil War. My father did not serve in WWI for reasons I have never known. He may have been too old.

EMC: Well, after war broke out and we declared war on December 8th and 1942 came, can you comment at all on the patriotism that was apparent in this country at that time at the outbreak of war and as war started?

CH: Well, I have to speak mostly about the atmosphere at Williams College. I think that anybody who had been paying attention knew that sooner or later we were going to become involved; but the way Pearl Harbor was pulled off was an enormous shock. Many of my close friends made immediate decisions on what they were going to do. I didn't hear anybody bellyaching or protesting about the war. I think there was a unanimous feeling that it was time to do what must be done and just get at it.

EMC: Oh, that's good. That's very interesting. Now, did you graduate in '42 from Williams?

CH: The college was very responsive and helpful. They telescoped schedules so that we were able to graduate in late April with all requirements met.

EMC: So you kind of missed a year, but you --

CH: No, no, not a year, because we were seniors by then.

EMC: Right. Right. You would be. Yup.

CH: The Class of '42 instead of graduating in June graduated in April.

EMC: Oh, so they pushed things up so you could join the service.

CH: Yup.

EMC: Now, were you -- did you -- why did you choose the Navy?

CH: Well, I got some advice from my mother. I couldn't get my home by phone on Pearl Harbor Day but I did get through to Philadelphia the next evening and my mother asked what I was going to do. I said that I hadn't decided but I certainly would

join something. She said, " Well, why don't you join the Navy?". I asked her why, and she said, "You'll have a bunk to sleep in, you'll have water to bathe in and I have found that naval officers were more apt to be gentlemen than those in the other services."

EMC: That's true. Interesting observation. Yeah, your life would be a little more comfortable hopefully in the Navy than in the Army if you were in a foxhole or something. Well -- so that -- did that convince you to join the Navy?

CH: Yes. I went to Springfield, Massachusetts to a naval recruiting office there. They told me all about the V-7 program and it sounded like what I wanted. They asked me what I had for mathematics and, to tell the truth, I'd been a liberal arts student and had not taken any college mathematics. So they said I'd better find a way to learn some trig and calculus. I went back to Williamstown and arranged with the dean's office to take two six-week cram courses, one in trigonometry and one in differential calculus. I had to drop my honors work in English Literature but that was secondary. I went back to Springfield in mid-May and enlisted in the Navy.

EMC: Oh, you signed up in May.

CH: Very shortly thereafter I was ordered to report to the Midshipmen's School at Columbia University on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1942

EMC: So how long was your training at Columbia?

CH: We were there from the third of July until the 21st of October. We were the eighth class of midshipmen to go through the Columbia program. Several of the earliest classes used the USS Prairie State.

EMC: The Prairie --

CH: The Prairie State was an old World War I battleship, the Indiana I think. She was moored alongside a dock in the Hudson River off the Westside Highway at about 120 St.

EMC: Oh, I see.

CH My group was the first V-7 class to use the facilities at John Jay Hall at Columbia.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting. Did you have to march and drill?

CH: Oh, yes, we had to march. There were 1,200 of us divided into two battalions. There were three battalions in all, one from the Prairie State and two from the Columbia yard. We drilled daily and paraded on weekends for Commanding Officer and the neighborhood folks and visitors to the city.



EMC: Oh, and did you attend classes during the week?

CH: Oh, you bet. We had navigation, ordinance, seamanship, damage control, signals, naval customs, the Blue Jacket's manual, the whole works. It was a very good program.

Fortunately, I had been around salt water in the summer from the time I was about six so I knew how to sail, how to handle a power boat and something about piloting, ship handling and ropes and knots as well.

EMC: Right, so you had sailed as a youngster?

CH: Right, I'd sailed a lot.

EMC: Did you sail in Philadelphia on the Schuylkill River?

CH: No, we were on the Jersey coast. We spent our summers in Beach Haven, New Jersey.

EMC: Oh, good, so you fit right in with the Navy, which is very good. Did you have any time off during that period, during your training and indoctrination?

CH: No, we went right straight through, and we were commissioned on October twenty-first at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. We all had all gotten our orders about three weeks before graduation and everybody knew where he was going.

EMC: And where were you ordered to?

CH: Well, they gave us all ten days off and I used that time to get married.

EMC: Oh, really.

CH: Well, you see, if you were in the V-7 program you couldn't get married until you were an officer.

EMC: Oh, I see, they had rules.

CH: So Ann and I got married in Boston the following day and then we had a little less than ten days worth of leave. On the 31st of October I went by rail to Norfolk to report to the new Amphibious Naval Training Headquarters.

EMC: Oh, so did that involve more training?

CH: Well, they weren't terribly well organized at that point but within about two weeks of arriving in Norfolk, we were sent by a ferry to Solomon's Island which is in the Chesapeake just south of Annapolis and Baltimore. That's where the Navy had established an amphibious vessel training base for crews using LCIs, LCVPs, LCTs and LSTs. I was assigned to a crew that ultimately went aboard LST-389 in Norfolk. That same day I came

down with Cat fever.

EMC: Cat fever?

CH: Catarrhal fever. It's a form of pneumonia.

EMC: C-a-t-a-r-r-a-h.

CH: Cat fever the Navy called it and I wound up in the Portsmouth Naval Hospital and the LST 389 crew took off without me. My orders were cancelled and I stayed in the hospital until just before Christmas. My wife came down from Boston and we got a hotel room at the Chamberlain Hotel in Old Point Comfort. I don't know how she arranged that but she did and I was soon released from the hospital and joined her at the Chamberlain. It took two weeks for the Navy to figure out what to do with me. I was assigned to another crew and ordered to go to Pittsburgh to report to the officer in charge of the shipbuilding unit at the Dravo Company, D-r-a-v-o. They had a contract to build about 150 LSTs --

EMC: Wow.

CH: -- along with six or seven other yards up and down the Missouri and Mississippi rivers and were the sole suppliers of that class of vessel, the LST. Dravo had the low numbers and that's how I happened to get on LST-4.

EMC: What were you doing in Pittsburgh? Were you --

CH: Well, the ship was already in the water.

EMC: Oh, it was finished.

CH: We partially commissioned her there with a raw crew and did a lot of training while the ship was being finished and fitted out. Finally a small Coast Guard crew came aboard and we took her down to the Algiers Naval Base in New Orleans under Coast Guard command because we were in "inland waters". We spent a month there fitting out and getting ready to go to sea.

EMC: And was that in '43 already?

CH: That was in February, March.

EMC: '43.

CH: Late January, February and part of March. In the middle of March we headed for Norfolk via Panama City and the Florida Keys. We stopped in Norfolk for a couple of days and then went to New York and got there about the end of March, and we were -- do you want me to go on now?

EMC: Oh, sure.

CH: We moored alongside at a dock in the Brooklyn Navy Yard and were there for about two weeks during which we took on ammunition and stores. We then we moved over to the piers on the East River and -- I'm sorry, on the Hudson, on the West Side, and in various stages loaded to go to North Africa. We took aboard all kinds of navy and army vehicles and equipment, but no -- there were no army or civilian passengers. There were a few naval passengers. We sailed from New York in an enormous convoy on the 21<sup>st</sup> or 22nd of April, '43 and got to Casablanca exactly 30 days later.

EMC: Great. Now, can I just interrupt and ask you what was your assignment on the ship; what was your billet?

CH: Well, we had a complete crew. There were seven officers, six officers and a skipper. I was the commissary and stores officer.

EMC: What did that entail?

CH: I had to secure all the food, stores, clothing and other gear as well all the equipment and supplies that the entire ship needed.

EMC: Yes. And --

CH: At the same time the four junior deck officers had qualified to stand "top watch" as Officer of the Deck. We did this gradually starting in Pittsburgh and by the time we left Panama City, Florida to go around the Florida Cape we were all appointed watch officers. Neither the Chief Engineer nor the Exec stood watches.

EMC: How many enlisted were on there?

CH: In those days about 72.

EMC: Oh, so you had about almost a crew of 80?

CH: Yes but as the war wore on and more and more people signed up we were flooded with enlisted men.

EMC: More people on the ship.

CH: More hands than we really needed.

EMC: And how large was the LST?

CH: She was 328 feet long.

EMC: And what was the purpose of an LST?

CH: Well, an LST was designed to carry large vehicles,

including tanks, six by six trucks loaded with shells, various kinds of artillery weapons, jeeps, anything with wheels that the Army needed to make an amphibious landing was fair game. All this was loaded through the bow doors on a ramp. We had an elevator that went from the tank deck to topsides and many vehicles were parked there. When we went to the Med several LSTs including ours had pontoons almost as long as the ship welded to its sides. They were to be used as bridges. If the gradient of a beach was very shallow you could unload vehicles by way of these pontoons and drive right off on to the beach.

EMC: Wow, that was something then. You were a transport ship?

CH: Yes.

EMC: Material and heavy equipment. Well, that was quite -- quite an assignment. Was it a happy ship would you say, was it cooperative?

CH: Oh, I think so. I have to talk a little bit about the Captain.

EMC: Yes, I was going to ask you.

CH: He was a Mustang. You know what a Mustang is?

EMC: Yes. Yes.

CH: Well, he was a remarkable fellow. He had been a chief quartermaster before being promoted to lieutenant after the start of the war. He was a fine navigator and ship handler. He had been a chief of the boat in the submarine service. He wore the submarine dolphin. He had also been a chief aviation pilot and wore a pilot's wings. He was the only Mustang I ever ran into who had both a dolphin and a chief aviator's license.

EMC: You could do that in those days, you know.

CH: Yes, and he had been to the South Pole with Admiral Byrd.

EMC: For heaven sakes.

CH: He was altogether a remarkable man and here he had six greenhorns some of whom had been on active duty for less than three months. He was very good about it, you know, and he nursed us along, but I had to mention it, because he --

EMC: Sure.

CH: -- he had an unhappy end. We got through the landings at Sicily and at Salerno and we were getting ready to go to Anzio when he took to not being aboard at night when there were apt to be air raids. He'd find an excuse to be on the beach. The Executive Officer talked to several of us about it. I don't know



whether the Captain ran out of gas or ran out of nerve, but the Exec ultimately went to the flotilla commander and explained the situation. The latter very quickly relieved him and sent him back to the States. The Exec became skipper and we all moved up a notch.

EMC: Oh, yes, that's something. Well, you were talking about your trip across the Atlantic to Casablanca and --

CH: It was long and boring.

EMC: So what -- how did you amuse yourself during that time frame?

CH: Well, we did a lot of drills. We'd have a fire drill almost every day somewhere. We shot at towed aircraft targets once in a while to get the crew used to the 20 millimeter anti-aircraft guns and the three-inch 50 caliber gun that we had on the fantail. We kept ship, chipped and painted and exercised and tried to get rid of the hours. It was a seven knot convoy so it took a long time. We had a lot of merchant vessels with us --

EMC: Did any -- oh, continue, sorry.

CH: Go ahead.

EMC: I just wondered if you were under attack at all or any of

the merchant vessels?

CH: No, we weren't. We were one convoy that did not have much trouble. Oh, every now and again the destroyers would steam around and drop a few depth bombs but we didn't lose any vessels in our convoy. We went directly to Bermuda and then right along to Casablanca.

EMC: Oh, that's fantastic. Well, Admiral Hewitt was over there, you know --

CH: Yes, he was.

EMC: -- in November '42.

CH: He was waiting for us.

EMC: Oh, yes. I'm sure. So when you got to Casablanca and you unloaded your material, what did you do there?

CH: After about three days we were ordered to go through the Straits of Gibraltar and head East along the North African coast a little past Algiers to a place called Arzeu, A-r-z-e-u. We were there for about a week doing landing exercises with army troops that were training for assault landings. After a week we went further east to Tenes and did the same thing. We were moving gradually down the coast toward Tunisia because the

Allied Armies were by then squeezing the Germans, the British Eighth Army from the east and the American Army from the west. They were pushed into a pocket near Tunis and so, in very late June, we finally went into the port of Bizerte, B-i-z-e-r-t-e, within 48 hours of the departure of the last German soldier. There were still fires in dumps that the Germans had deliberately set. They had destroyed vehicles and everything else they could not take with them. The port of Bizerte was pretty much of a mess particularly in the entrance channel but it got cleaned up pretty quickly.

EMC: Did you get off the ship?

CH: Oh, sure. We'd go ashore. One of the first things that most of us did was to send people to the vehicle dumps to see if they could salvage a German VW jeep. We were successful and our engineers soon put it in running order. The mailman loved it because it saved him a lot of time and walking. Almost all of the LSTs had one. Finally one day the Captain called the First Lieutenant and said, "Wolfe, I want you to open the bow doors, drop the ramp and drive the jeep into the drink." We were anchored outside of Bizerte in the Med.. Wolfe said, "What's this all about, Captain?" The latter said, "Just do what I tell you." Well, the next day the Captain was called to a meeting by the flotilla commander and he knew that the subject was going to be, "I want your jeep." So when he went to the meeting and Captain Morris came around to him and said, "Well, Reeves, where

is your jeep?" and the Captain went over to a chart on the wall and said, "Right there, sir" and put his finger on the spot where he had dumped it overboard. End of captured jeeps.

EMC: Oh, boy, he didn't want anybody else to get it. Oh, that was kind of comic.

CH: Well, we were in Bizerte for some time. We finally loaded for the landing at Sicily. We were in the Dime Task Force.

EMC: D-i-m-e?

CH: D-i-m-e. I think the admiral's name was Hall.

EMC: John Hall, maybe, yes, right.

CH: And we took off from Bizerte. We went, you know, in an easterly direction until we got to a little island called Gozo, G-o-z-o, which is just slightly north of -- oh, shoot.

EMC: Sicily?

CH: Malta.

EMC: Oh, Malta. Okay.

CH: And there we changed course to almost due north and headed for the beach at Gela, which is where our task group made its

landing and put its troops ashore.

EMC: So you were carrying army troops then?

CH: (Inaudible?)

EMC: You were carrying army troops?

CH: We were carrying part of a regimental combat team of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. We had frightful weather on the night of the 8th. A mistral blew down from the north, creating very heavy seas. It was as rough as can be until we turned north about midnight. It was still blowing hard but over the next three hours the wind miraculously dropped and by the time we got to our assembly area off the beach it was pretty much normal. I'm sure the Admirals -- Admirals Hewitt and Cunningham, as well as Gen. Eisenhower were quite concerned about possibly having to postpone the landing, which would have created a terrible mess for everybody..

EMC: Oh, so you delivered troops to Sicily then.

CH: Oh, sure. We put our group and cargo ashore without any real trouble. We had -- we had a little -- quite a little excitement on that beach. One LST -- LST-313 was sunk by a Messerschmidt bomber and an ammunition ship, the Rowan, R-o-w-a-n, was hit midships by another bomb at about the same

time. Her crew got off but she blew up, ammunition and all. I'd never seen such a cloud of smoke and flame in my life. We were on the beach unloading at the time this all happened.

EMC: Oh, you had to do the physical work too?

CH: Well, I didn't do much but you know you have to lend a hand when it's needed.

EMC: The enlisted did then, you --

CH: Yes.

EMC: -- supervised.

CH: After leaving the beach we finally assembled with a group of LSTs and went back to Bizerte where we picked up more equipment and more troops and returned to Sicily. We made this shuttle run for the next five or six weeks. When Patton finally got far enough north to take the port of Palermo we stopped going to the southern beaches. We unloaded in Palermo which is on the northern side of the island.

EMC: Did you manage -- could you get off at all there?

CH: Oh, yes, we went ashore.

EMC: You went ashore.

CH: We were quite welcome there. The Army didn't do much damage in that area. Montgomery was heading north on the east coast and Patton's troops were heading east toward Mount Etna as well as going up the west side of Etna opposite Montgomery. That's an oversimplification.

EMC: That's okay. That's quite a -- quite a trip that you had there, convoying these troops and when you finished that --

CH: H'm?

EMC: When you finished --

CH: It took quite a time, you know, before they finally got the Germans out of Sicily, longer than it should have.

EMC: Because you were there in June, wasn't that in June '43?

CH: July and most of August

EMC: Yes, up the --

CH: Patton joined the English Army in Messina eventually. The Germans escaped to Italy without much trouble.

EMC: How many people -- when you say you were transporting troops, how many people could the LST hold?

CH: We'd have 75 to 100 army men.

EMC: Oh, okay, as well as your own.

CH: We had separate compartments for them. Each had four tiers of three or four bunks and a head. The one thing we did that seemed to make LST-4, and others I'm sure did the same thing, popular was that we fed the Army exactly the same rations that our enlisted men had.

EMC: And what kind of rations did you get?

CH: Oh, we had a great deal of fresh, canned and frozen foods including ice cream once in a while. The food in the Navy was excellent.

EMC: Now, well, you had to get that from the locals, didn't you?

CH: Well, no, We had big transport vessels that brought supplies over from the States and we got our beef, pork, sausage, potatoes, onions, coffee, tea, sugar, whatever.



EMC: Oh, I see.

CH: Sometimes it was a long time between getting refills but it was there eventually. Certainly nobody suffered.

EMC: Oh, I see.

CH: No one ever went hungry and the only time we ever subsisted on K rations and the like was during landing operations, when we too busy to make anything in the galley except coffee.

EMC: Right, the galley. You had cooks to do that. Oh, that's interesting, so you were well provisioned then most of the time.

CH: I think so. We made out very well for the most part. Cigarettes, tobacco and candy (often called "pogey bait") were readily available in the ship's store.

EMC: Oh, that's good.

CH: We went into Salerno on September 9<sup>th</sup> putting part of the 45th division ashore on the beach at Paestum, P-a-e-s-t-u-m, which was an old Roman city. The trip from Bizerte to the Gulf of Salerno was not a pleasant trip. The Germans -- the lack of security surrounding the Salerno operation was appalling.

EMC: On our part?

CH: Oh, everybody in the world knew what we were going to do, and knew where we were going to do it.

EMC: Oh, I see. I see.

CH: We had more air attacks going into Salerno than we certainly did at Sicily or at Anzio or Southern France for that matter. Salerno was a tough operation and the Army had a very difficult time hanging on. At one point there was talk of the possibility that we might have to take the Army off the beach.

EMC: So it was that dangerous?

CH: But thanks to several different things, including naval fire support by cruisers and destroyers, that didn't happen. It was very important, and if you read Morrison's book on the Salerno operation it makes it very clear that Naval gunfire was really what saved the beachhead. From Salerno we made three trips to Tripoli in Libya and delivered men and materials to the British Army that had landed north of Paestum near the town of Salerno. These men were desert troops out of the Eighth Army. They were just delightful. They wouldn't eat our chow, because they were afraid that --

EMC: The Brits?

CH: -- they had been subsisting on bully beef and that sort of thing for so long, that anything really fresh would get them all -- their systems all messed up.

EMC: Yes. Yes.

CH: And beyond that they brought an infestation of sand fleas with them. We were weeks getting rid of those mean little buggers that would bite you around your stomach. The English were good sports and we enjoyed their company. We also operated with a number of Royal Navy escort vessels on all our trips to Libya. We made particular friends with a converted North Sea trawler. The Captain was an RNR lieutenant commander. The Limeys didn't have any to much soap, sugar or candy. So we would negotiate and when they went to A NAFFI supply dump, which always had a supply of liquor for Royal Navy rations, we would find a way to swap a few things.

EMC: So the British must have pressed any kind of ship into service, if they had a trawler there.

CH: Oh, yeah. That was interesting. After Salerno, we didn't have a lot of work supporting the Army moving up the Italian peninsula in the late fall and early winter. While getting ready for Anzio we spent a lot of time in the port of Naples as well as in Pozzuoli, a port about 20 miles west of Naples. The latter eventually became an operating base for LSTs. We either moored

at the docks or anchored out in the stream.

EMC: Did you get off the ship?

CH: Oh, yes, we'd go ashore from time to time, There was an officers' club in Naples, but it was almost impossible for us to get to. There was very little transportation for personnel between Naples and Pozzuoli.

EMC: Right. Right.

CH: We'd just bum a ride in a jeep or something like that. I recently discovered a little notebook in which I had recorded the dates of sailing, the ports we visited and the books I read, all 127 of them.

EMC: Books that you read. Well, you had a lot of free time then.

CH: Yes, we had a lot of free time. There was a lot of poker, black jack, cribbage and solitaire played for small stakes. We were quite lenient about gambling in the crew's quarters and only ruled out "Red Do." I had a daily no- money game of cribbage with the chief quartermaster. We played three games of cribbage every day and if, for one reason or another, we couldn't get them in, we'd make up at a later date. There were times after a landing when we had to play a dozen games a day

to make up for lost time.

EMC: Oh, for heavens sake.

CH: We'd kill time doing it. In port there was a poker game in the wardroom almost every night and a lot of solitaire, both of which the Captain liked. From time to time he would get officers out of the sack to make up a table of five for poker. The stakes were a 25 cent limit and no more than three raises per round. When I left the ship I was about ninety dollars ahead of the game.

EMC: So there was a lot of camaraderie on the ship, I imagine?

CH: Oh, yes, we had to get along. The captain and others would have guests from other vessels from time to time. Captain Reeves once invited the skipper of LST-3 for dinner and as we sat down he beamed and said, "Well, Butler, I just painted the wardroom. Doesn't it look nice?" Butler replied, "Looks good, Reeves. Did anybody help you?"

EMC: No, I don't think a captain would have done that..

Yes. Interesting. So you were in this port of Pozzuoli for --

CH: Pozzuoli.

EMC: Pozzuoli, pardon my Italian.

Ch: We practiced for Anzio with the Army in the Gulf of Naples. The weather was sometimes terrible and not a few soldiers drowned when their duwks swamped between ship and shore. We sailed from Pozzuoli on January 21<sup>st</sup>. and went ashore at Anzio the following morning against light opposition on the beach itself.

EMC -- : Were they easy?

CH: Not very difficult. The initial landings weren't at all hard. Nevertheless it was on D-Day that we came the closest to receiving real damage that we did during our entire time in the Med.

EMC: What happened?

CH: It was in mid-afternoon. We were unloading tanks directly on the beach. We were at General Quarters under a red alert. An LCI (Landing Craft-Infantry) was also beached unloading troops about fifty yards on our port side. I was on the fantail at our 3 Inch Fifty Calibre gun which was my GQ station at the time. I heard a plane and out of the afternoon sun came a Focke Wolfe dive bomber about 300 feet above us. I saw a bomb leave the belly of the plane and thought: "That's going to hit me on the

head". It didn't but passed over us and went through the LCI midships and blew up underneath her. There was a hell of a fire and we did what we could to fight it and to help those on board get out. There were a lot of casualties among both Navy and Army personnel and the LCI soon had to be abandoned.

EMC: Wow.

CH: And I have to tell you a little story. My father was in business, as I said, in Philadelphia, and he used to go to the Translux, which was a one-hour news movie, in the middle of the day

EMCV: Oh, newsreels.

CH: Newsreels, that's what I'm looking for. He went to the Translux several days after the Anzio landings, and they were showing D-Day at Anzio and he was astounded to see an LST carrying the number Four on the beach and with a little LCI on its port hand burning furiously. So Pop went up to the projector room after the show was over and got a single small negative from the film reel and took it to a photographer's shop and sent me a whole bunch of enlarged prints.

EMC: Oh, boy. He witnessed it practically a few days later.

CH: Yes.

EMC: But anyway, that's interesting.

CH: Isn't that interesting?

EMC: Yes, I didn't know they had theaters where they just showed newsreels of the war.

CH: That's all they did; it was a one-hour show. Oh, they'd throw some cartoons in along with the news

EMC: Yes, maybe. That's interesting. Wow, well, you survived that one. Did you have anymore attacks?

CH: We got through with no further real problems. The Anzio operation was a real nuisance for the U.S. Navy because that's where the Germans regularly used the guided missile bombs first seen at Salerno. They had made a lot of progress in their accuracy and operating technique. The Navy responded by stationing a destroyer in the bay off the beachhead equipped with jamming equipment and whenever one of the big bombers would fly over and launch a missile they'd try to divert its course with jamming devices and, more often than not, they were successful. Every now and again though one would get through and hit a ship or the town of Anzio.



EMC: But when you say, jamming, what -- how -- were they deflected or would they destroy it?

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CH: No, it was a form of radar, confusing the signal that was controlling the missile from the airplane.

EMC: Oh, oh, okay. So he'd fire it somewhere else?

COH: Right, or fall into the sea.

EMC: Into the sea, yes.

CH: A week or two after the landing the Anzio operation became relatively stagnant and we spent our days as a ferryboat between Pozzuoli and Anzio. We would take empty six by six trucks and wounded soldiers from both sides as well as prisoners of war back to Naples. We would discharge them in Pozzuoli and return to Anzio the next evening with six- by-six trucks that were loaded with 155 artillery and 105 howitzer ammunition, supplies of all kinds and more troops. We did that for weeks on end. At one time Germans had an enormous railway gun. It was said that it fired a 200 millimeter shell. It was mounted on a railroad car kept hidden in a tunnel during the day. Between eleven am and noon it would be wheeled out to fire about a half dozen rounds in the general direction of Anzio. It would then be put away for the day. It was chiefly a nuisance but nobody liked the idea of being in the unloading area in the middle of the

day.

CH: After Montgomery and Clarke finally staged the breakout for Rome we followed -- we continued to leapfrog material to the troops going up the boot of Italy. We landed in ports like Livorno (Leghorn) and Civitavecchio. We made our last trip to Anzio on June 25th.

On June 17 we were part of a small assault group that left the Corsican port of Ponte Vecchio and made a landing on the island of Elba which is west of Leghorn. Napoleon had been in exile there. There were German infantrymen on Elba and it was decided that they should be removed. We were one of four LSTs selected to do the job. We went to North Africa and picked up native French troops, Goums by name.

EMC: How you do spell that?

CH: G-o-u-m-s. They were North African natives, not very clean. speaking nothing but French. I mean they couldn't speak any English at all. They brought their pack animals and women with them. We had donkeys on the tank deck where they made a hell of a mess.

EMC: What did they bring them for?

CH: Well, they were in support of the combat troops that we were to put ashore on Elba to chase the Germans out. They did a

good job of that.

EMC: With donkeys, yes.

CH: Churchill and Roosevelt wanted to get the French involved in the Mediterranean . These men were under the command of a French General named de Lattre de Tassigny.

EMC: I've heard of him.

CH: You'll find him in Morfison's history although he doesn't talk much about Elba. Nobody does because very few knew about it. As I said, we staged from Corsica and it took the better part of two and a half days to secure that small island because there were a lot more Germans there than anticipated. The Royal Navy finally had to bring in destroyer fire support. That cleaned up matters in a hurry. Two of our small boat coxswains got Bronze Stars for successfully landing their troops under very heavy enfilading fire. We then went back to Naples and got ready for Southern France.

EMC: August '44.

CH: And that took place in August. We left Naples on August 12<sup>th</sup> and landed in St. Tropez on the 15<sup>th</sup>. We participated without any real problems except that one of our small boats hit a mine and we lost one member of the crew. He was reported as missing in

action. To tell you the truth we never did know whether he had been found.

EMC: So you were bringing over army troops then, was that --

CH: We took one trip from Naples back to St. Tropez and then made several runs from Oran to the beachhead as well as Marseilles during September and early October. We spent the rest of that month and most of November supporting the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Infantry in its Riva Ridge operation in northern Italy.

EMC: Yes, the mountain troops against the Germans in Italy.

CH: Yes.

Sometime in late October or November Churchill became obsessed with the idea of making a landing in Greece, "the soft Axis underbelly." He had no Royal Navy amphibious vessels in the Med. They were all busy supporting the cross channel campaign. The joint chiefs of staff didn't want any part of Churchill's plan and the Americans didn't see any sense in it either. Somehow or other Churchill and Roosevelt made a deal whereby the United States would give the British some LSTs and Churchill could do what he wanted with them. LST 4 was one of the six that were turned over to the Royal Navy. We kept busy until mid-December and then sat in Bizerte for two weeks before heading west to Oran for the transfer to the British. I left the ship on December 28, 1944 and on the 31<sup>st</sup> left Oran on a Navy AP and

landed in New York on the 11th of January. Parenthetically, LST 4 survived mine damage in Greece and ended the war in the Far East as a troop carrier.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes, that ended your career in the Mediterranean.

CH: It did.

EMC: Now, did you -- I won't say enjoy that duty, but how do you feel about it? How did you feel about it?

CH: To tell you the truth, I think I fought a very lucky war. Considering what we did over twenty-one months and making five assault landings you have to say the ship was lucky. As I said, we only had one casualty. We did a lot of work in terms of the amount of time we spent underway. I've got a list of the trips we made and it's as long as your arm.

EMC: Oh, I bet. Oh, yes.

CH: I can't tell you how many hundreds of miles we steamed in that little piece of water, the Mediterranean Sea. I consider it to have been a very interesting part of my life.

EMC: Sounds like it.

CH: I kept up with my Naval colleagues and shipmates for quite a long time but there are not many of us left now.

EMC: Right. Right. Did you ever get back to that area?

CH: Oh, yes.

EMC: Traveled?

CH: We've been to Sicily several times and we've been to Naples, Anzio, the Gulf of Salerno and Leghorn once each. I haven't bothered to go back to Southern France or Sardinia or Corsica, let alone Tunisia and Morocco. One thing I forgot to mention is that when we were operating out of Naples itself in the late winter of 1944 in support of the Anzio operation Vesuvius erupted. I can remember standing the mid-watch in Naples harbor with lava flowing like heavy oil down the sides of that mountain. It was -- it was something else to see.

EMC: Oh, I'm sure it was. That's quite amazing. Well, at least you didn't see Mount Etna erupt. You're in a volcanic area there. Well, you're back in the good old USA and where did you land? Where did you come in?

CH: I landed in New York and took a train to Boston. I had 30 days leave or something like that.

EMC: Did you go home to --

CH: Ann had stayed in Boston during the war and at that time she was living in Swampscott on the north shore of Boston. That's where I returned. My mother had died early in the war and my father was living with his mother and sister in Philadelphia. I ultimately got orders to go to a fire fighting and damage control school in the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes.

CH: So I figured, "well, here you go to the Pacific". I had asked for duty on a destroyer or larger vessel and my second choice had been to teach at a Midshipmen's School.

EMC: That would have been great.

CH: Well, by God, when we finished the damage control school I was ordered to report to the Midshipmen's School I had attended in New York. I figured out or I was later told that the reason I had gotten the assignment was because my request to BuPers had crossed the desk of an officer there who recognized my name and LST-4 because he had ridden on her and he had said to himself, "I'll give this guy what he wants to do." That's probably nonsense but it was a wonderful break for me..

EMC: Oh, so did you go to New York, Columbia?

CH: So I went to Columbia right off the bat. I reported to the executive officer, Captain Gaden, and he said, "Well, what have you been doing, Huff? So I told him. He said, "Do you want to teach damage control?" I told him that I did not know a whole lot about it but I would give it a go.

EMC: And you had just finished the school?

CH: He then said that he had a different idea. He asked me what I knew about steam engineering? And I said, "Absolutely nothing." He told me I could keep a page ahead of the class and assigned me to teach steam engineering. The group of Midshipmen that came into the first class I taught were engineers who had just graduated from Cal Tech. Early on a Midshipman stood up and asked me what the adiabatic expansion factor of a particular engine was. I said, "Young man, sit down. I ask the questions around here." I went immediately to Captain Gaden and told him the story and asked whether he could find me a berth as a drill officer. He quickly assigned me to one of the six companies at the School and that's how I served out my time in the Navy. The School was ultimately closed and I returned to the First Naval District on terminal leave in late November. I was discharged from active duty on December 30, 1945.



EMC: '45.

CH: '44 -- '45, that's right.

EMC: '45, yes, because you were in --

CH: And --

EMC: Did you enjoy your training experience at Columbia Training School?

CH: It was fun. We had an apartment in Scarsdale and I commuted by rail to the 120<sup>th</sup> St. station. There were a number people that were friends from college or elsewhere on the staff. There were more officers on the roster than the school really needed. A lot of officers had been assigned because there was nothing else to do with them.

EMC: Oh, to do -- at that point in time, oh, well, that's good. Can you tell us anything about the celebrations on VJ Day in August '45? You were in New York. Did you --

CH: I was the officer of the deck at the midshipmen's school on VJ-Day and we had to maintain a certain level of discipline. and --

EMC: You couldn't go crazy then?

CH: So I didn't really get to celebrate VJ Day or VE Day for that matter.

EMC: How did you feel about the end of the war? What was your --

CH: Well, I thought it was high time we got along with the rest of our lives.

EMC: Right, a lot of --

CH: It was sort of a relief to get through in one piece, you know.

EMC: Oh, absolutely. Yes, because so many people didn't. How would you sum up your naval service and --

CH: Well, I think it was a very satisfying -- a very interesting time in my life. I had, you know, demonstrated that I could do the job. I was everything on the ship except Captain and Chief Engineer. My best friend on the ship was its last American skipper because he had a lower serial number than I. I felt that I had done my duty in all aspects of the job. I made some friends that I've kept up with although in 2005 I must be one of a very few survivors of the crew on LST-4. It was an interesting experience. Perhaps I didn't have the best of duty.

The amphibious forces were somewhat informal. Some of my friends who were on larger vessels seemed to think that they had the best of it on their carriers, battleships and cruisers but it was nice to be part of a smaller ship where you knew everyone, especially the enlisted men.

EMC: Yes, it's more familial.

CH: Yes, right.

EMC: And less impersonal. Well, once the war was over, you were discharged in November, separated from service.

CH: Yes, separated from the service but I did not get a final discharge from the Navy until 1954.

EMC: Were you in the reserves?

CH: I was in the reserves all that time without really realizing it. I simply forgot about the Navy.

EMC: Oh, really active or inactive?

CH: Not active.

EMC: Inactive.

CH: Non-active. I was too busy to be active, you know, trying to make a living.

EMC: Sure.

CH: I was not called back for Korea, let alone Vietnam. One of the reasons I think I was not recalled for Korea was the fact that I was working for a textile machinery manufacturer. As in WWII there was a form of rationing critical materials during the Korean War. There were many industrial products, coal, coke, aluminum, steel, limestone and materials of that sort which were somewhat scarce and had to be allocated. I was appointed by the American Textile Machinery Association to represent the industry in Washington. My job was to see to it that the industry got what it needed in the way of controlled materials. It was called the Control Materials Plan, CMP. It operated in essentially the same way it was done in World War II. I think that the fact that I was already doing something related to the war kept me off the list of reserve officers who could be recycled.

EMC: So you were finally discharged in '54 and you were working I guess with the textile -- in the textile machinery business. Where was that located?

CH: That was located in Hopedale, Massachusetts and Spartanburg, South Carolina. Actually we also lived in

Greensboro, North Carolina for a while in the middle fifties.

EMC: Was that how you spent the remainder of your civilian career?

CH: Well, I worked for Draper Corporation for 25 years. We were acquired by North American Rockwell in 1967. And I worked for Rockwell for three years including running the Draper division for them for about a year. I finally decided that they weren't really interested in anything that I knew about the textile machinery business. They had their own ideas about what they were going to do so I accepted an opportunity to work for a fellow named Royal Little, the founder of Textron. Do you know Textron?

Oh, yes, yes, yes, sure.

CH: Well, Roy had put together a smaller edition of Textron called Amtel, A-m-t-e-l. They had a division down in Connecticut that needed a change in management and I became president of that operation.

EMC: Where was it in Connecticut?

CH: In Wethersfield.

EMC: Oh, yes.

CH: I was there for two years. We were still living in Hopedale in the southern part of Worcester County. After two years I got fed up with the commute and went to work in Worcester for the Morgan Construction Company, a hot rolling mill manufacturer. I left Morgan in early 1978. We had bought 45 acres of land in Saunderstown, RI and we had a house designed and built and moved there in '78. I didn't do anything for a couple of years. I found could only split one cord of wood at a time and got bored.

EMC: Oh, I bet.

CH: Bur I was fortunate enough to be on a board in the mutual fund business.

EMC: Oh.

CH: And a couple of colleagues there had gotten to their retirement points and didn't really want to retire anymore than I found out I did.

EMC: Yes, you were too young.

CH: So we put a little money together and bought a pump distributor in Concord, Massachusetts. I've been there ever since. I now go to work several days a week.

EMC: What kind of pumps, pumps for what?

CH: All kinds of industrial pumps.

EMC: Okay.

CH: And municipal and commercial. We sold a lot of pumps for the Big Dig for water evacuation, water tunnels and things like that. We have pumps at the Deer Island waste water treatment plant.

EMC: Sounds like quite an enterprise. How many people work there?

CH: About a hundred.

EMC: Making these things?

CH: Oh, no, we don't make them. We just distribute them. We're sales people.

EMC: Oh, you're sales. Oh, okay, so you're not a manufacturer. You are a distributor and you get them from other companies that make them.

CH: That's right. We represent.

EMC: Okay. Well, that sounds very interesting, and your friends are still in it, too?

CH: Yes.

EMC: That's great. Well, you've had an interesting career.

CH: Well, I am the last one of them that's active.

EMC: Yes. Well, that keeps you busy, and you're living in Cambridge and summering in Saunderstown.

CH: Green Hill.

EMC: Green Hill, pardon me. Do you have any other civic activities that you're involved in at all?

CH: I've been a trustee for a long time of the American Textile History Museum in Lowell, do you know it?

EMC: Yes.

CH: You do. Well, I went on the board there in the early 80s and I'm in my last years. I'm very much interested in the textile industry of this country and so it's been a real outlet for me. I do a lot of shooting and fishing.



EMC: And what are your navy connections? You've got some.

CH: My navy?

EMC: You're involved with the Navy kind of tangentially here at the college.

CH: Oh, yes, it's solely through the War College. As you know, you get little favors. I got an invitation the other day to something that was going on the Constitution on the 13th of September. The Midway gathering is fun too.

CH: I lost a classmate there in the torpedo bombings of the Jap carriers.

EMC: And you're a member of the Naval War College Foundation, are you not?

CH: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

EMC: So you support the college in that way, which is very good.

CH: And I still read the odd naval history book, one thing or another. Do you know -- I can't remember the name of the author now, oh, Carlo D'Este?

EMC: Oh, yes, he did research here a long time ago. Um-hum.

CH: Have you read any of his stuff?

EMC: I haven't, no.

CH: It's well worth it, very well worth it. I found that out of all the naval history I've read, Carlo D'Este is clearly the best. He's even better than Morrison because he paints with a finer brush.

EMC: Yes, he did come here a number of years ago.

CH: Yes, I --

EMC: I remember meeting him.

CH: I remember that but, unfortunately, I didn't meet him. He's written some darn good stuff and I'm sure you have it in the library here.

EMC: Oh, we do, I'm sure. I'm sure. Well, if you don't have anything more to add to your oral history, then we can close, and I thank you very much for coming over today.

CH: Oh, it's been my pleasure.

EMC: We'll get it transcribed and back to you.

Ch: Many thanks

EMC: Right.

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