

**Oral History Interview of
Victor Lively**

**Interviewed by David Marshall
December 28, 2012
Palestine, Texas**

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Preferred Citation for this Document:

Lively, Victor Oral History Interview, December 28, 2012. Interview by David Marshall, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

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Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 44.1k/ 24bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: David Marshall

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Elyssa Foshee

Editor(s): Leah Blackwell

Final Editor: David Marshall, Elissa Stroman

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Victor Lively, who served in the United States Navy during World War II. A native of Texas, Victor served in the Navy at Pearl Harbor. He also fought in Normandy, Okinawa, and Iwo Jima. This interview discusses Victor's war experiences.

Length of Interview: 01:21:03

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Keywords

WWII, Pearl Harbor, Navy Battleships

David Marshall (DM):

The date is December 28, 2012 and this is David Marshall interviewing Victor Lively at his home in Palestine, Texas, and if we could just begin—how about if you tell me when you were born and where you were born.

Victor Lively (VL):

July 25, 1921.

DM:

Okay. In Slocum?

VL:

Slocum, well about three miles out of Slocum, on the farm.

DM:

On the farm? Well who was—

VL:

Me and ten other kids.

DM:

Okay. They were all born out there? Brothers and sisters?

VL:

Yep.

DM:

Ten brothers and sisters?

VL:

My sister lives with me now. She just sold her house and she's getting ready to build a new home so she's living here for now.

DM:

I'll just set that right up there. All right, so where did you rank among these kids?

VL:

Well, let's see. I remember I was number seven, I guess.

DM:

Number seven, okay. And this was—was it a farm—?

VL:

I was born in July, the seventh month.

DM:

Oh, yeah. (Laughs) Okay. And this was on a farm?

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

Well what were your parents' names?

VL:

Marshall Lively and Ally Lively.

DM:

Okay. Were they from this area?

VL:

Yep.

DM:

Really?

VL:

Well see in those days, people didn't have cars, way back, and they had buggies and wagons and stuff, so they married somebody across the creek over there, maybe one farm or two farms away. Or maybe to Grapeland. They'd go all the way to Grapeland, nine miles.

DM:

Oh, nine miles? (Laughs) And it's how far from Palestine?

VL:

From?

DM:

From Slocum up to Palestine?

VL:

It's probably about ten miles.

DM:

Okay. Would you go into town once a week or once every couple of weeks, to either Grapeland or Palestine?

VL:

Well, we raised cotton and we'd go to the cotton gin at Slocum, and sometimes to the cotton gin at Elkhart and Grapeland. See, in those days, cotton gins were a big thing, see, you know. So we'd do that and buy a few things and go back.

DM:

Okay. That was once a week, pretty much?

VL:

Yeah. It depends, you know.

DM:

Okay. A big day?

VL:

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

DM:

Exciting. Was it Saturday or what?

VL:

Usually. Everybody went to town on a Saturday.

DM:

All the brothers and sisters? Everybody got to go? Well that's an interesting thing, because now we live out in cotton country, you know, and down here that transition happened—when do you think? When did things start changing here as far as the cotton?

VL:

Well, cotton hadn't been raised here in I'd say twenty or twenty-five years. I think they still raise some maybe down at Crockett, on the river, where they got good land down there. But mostly people have moved away from the farms.

DM:

Okay. When you got back from the service, did you come back to this area for a while?

VL:

Well, when I got out of the service, I looked for a place to live in Houston. I had just got married see, to the lady across the field over there, like I said. So we went to Houston, but we couldn't find an apartment because they hadn't been building anything during five or six years, you know, and they was all taken up, so we come to Palestine and found an apartment here, and she worked and I worked, you know, for a while, then I decided to go to Fort Worth and go to the G.I. school.

DM:

Oh, yeah. On the G.I. Bill?

VL:

Yeah. So my wife, she was kind of a CPA-type lady, and so she got a job in Fort Worth and I went to school and worked at a grocery store during the off hours.

DM:

What grocery store was it? Because all my family's from Fort Worth.

VL:

Yeah, I've forgotten now. But we were there about two years then we moved to Houston.

DM:

Okay. What part of Fort Worth were you in?

VL:

You know where the stock yards are?

DM:

Sure do.

VL:

Just a little bit west of the stock yards, on 28th Street or something like that.

DM:

Well I'll be. Okay. Well I was curious because if you were back in this area, were you still seeing cotton production in this area after the war?

VL:

Very, very little, no. Very little at that time.

DM:

So during the war sometime or around the war—

VL:

Yeah, and people were selling their farms, and weren't farming much down there anymore. Cattle raising, yeah, but that's mainly what they're doing now. Oh, they have a few gardens around, you know.

DM:

See that's the funny thing. It used to be cattle ranching in West Texas and cotton down here in East Texas and then they changed places.

VL:

You don't see any farms around here raising cotton or corn anymore.

DM:

You see any old defunct cotton gins sitting around still?

VL:

No, it's all gone.

DM:

All taken down?

VL:

Yep.

DM:

Okay.

VL:

Elkhart used to have two cotton gins, Slocum had one, Palestine had about four or five.

DM:

Oh, golly.

VL:

But all gone.

DM:

So were you mostly raising cotton on your family farm?

VL:

No, cotton and corn, and all kinds of stuff. My dad became a truck farmer, with watermelons, cantaloupes, all kinds of stuff, and he would sell it to these stores here in Palestine. He'd take orders and they'd bring them maybe once or twice a week, you know. Little stores, you know. Mom and pop stores.

DM:

Being that close to a sizable town—I guess Palestine was pretty sizable at that time.

VL:

Palestine, I thought, was a big town.

DM:

It's now about—

VL:

—until I saw Houston.

DM:

Oh (laughs) And Houston boomed during the war, I'm sure. Oh, my. Okay, so you grew up out here at Slocum, you were born at Slocum, or near Slocum. You grew up, I assume, working on a farm?

VL:

Yep, I did.

DM:

All you kids worked hard on the farm?

VL:

Yeah.

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DM:

And then somewhere along the way you decided you wanted to—did you go to school in Slocum also? Was there a school there?

VL:

Yeah, I finished high school in Slocum.

DM:

At Slocum, okay.

VL:

Yeah. Elkhart has a good school, Palestine, Neches, all these little places had good schools.

DM:

And now they're all gone, I guess. Are the school buildings still around?

VL:

Oh, yeah.

DM:

Is there one at Slocum?

VL:

In fact, my daughter-in-law teaches school at Slocum.

DM:

Oh, Slocum school's still operating?

VL:

Oh, yeah.

DM:

Oh, good.

VL:

It's really a nice school.

DM:

Oh, good.

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VL:

See, they still have good schools because they've got kids living all around here.

DM:

Oh, yes. Okay.

VL:

Palestine's got a brand new high school—just beautiful. Elkhart's got a new high school—just good schools all over.

DM:

I'm just glad to hear it because so many towns, especially the farther west you go, they've all consolidated to one big school and all the little schools, they're gone.

VL:

There's schools about every eight or ten miles around here.

DM:

Oh, okay. So you grew up out here at Slocum, and somewhere along the way you decided you wanted to join the military? Why'd you decide that?

VL:

No, I decided I wanted to get off the farm.

DM:

Oh, there you go. (laughter)

VL:

If I'd have been a marine it would've been the same thing. (laughter)

DM:

It wasn't because—

VL:

Just to get away.

DM:

Okay. An adventure?

VL:

That was the only outlet I had, see? They wanted people. There weren't any jobs much around here.

DM:

Okay. So you were looking at maybe being a farmer if you stayed here in Slocum?

VL:

No, I didn't want to be a farmer.

DM:

Yes, but you didn't have many other options around?

VL:

No, no.

DM:

Okay. Well, when you joined the military, I think you said you were nineteen?

VL:

I just turned nineteen, uh-huh.

DM:

Nineteen years old. You went over to Rusk, did you say?

VL:

No I went to Crockett to sign up. There was a local little paper, five days a week, from Elkhart, *The Elkhart Record*. And one time they had a write-up that any young man that would like to go in the Navy [should] report to Crockett, Texas on a certain day. So I hitched a ride down there and I hitched a ride back. In those days you didn't have a car or nothing. It was about three or four months before they called me. They weren't in no hurry.

DM:

Okay. This was in thirty—forty, maybe?

VL:

Yeah, 1940.

DM:

So were they trying to build up their numbers for the Navy at this time?

VL:

I don't know.

DM:

In preparation for what might happen?

VL:

I don't know. I guess so.

DM:

Why the Navy? Well, the Navy because that's what was available.

VL:

So they called me in about three or four months and I hitched a ride to Houston. You know, you always hitched a ride. You didn't have a car, see. A lady from Palestine picked me up over here at Salmon, Texas. I was out on the highway thumbing a ride. She took me to Houston and I went and signed up over there.

DM:

Well, I'll be.

VL:

But there was about probably two or three hundred guys. But they turned back a lot of them because if you had a missing tooth or anything they'd turn you back, you know. So a lot of them didn't make it.

DM:

If they were turned back—

VL:

Now later they probably were called back, called in.

DM:

Would they have been more likely to be drafted into the infantry?

VL:

Probably.

DM:

Okay. Well had you ever been on a boat before you—?

VL:

No, never even saw one. (laughs)

DM:

Had you spent—?

VL:

I saw a little fishing boat, yeah.

DM:

Had you spent any time down along the Neches River as a child?

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

But that was your limit of aquatic—

VL:

When I first saw Galveston I thought, That's the biggest pond I've ever seen.

DM:

(laughs) And it just got bigger from there, huh?

VL:

Yeah. A lot bigger.

DM:

Oh, that's really interesting. I guess a lot of these guys were inland fellows that just happened to end up in the—?

VL:

Yeah, I met a lot of guys from all over in the boot camp in San Diego.

DM:

Oh, is that where it was?

VL:

And I never had ridden a train before, see?

DM:
Okay.

VL:
We got on one that was air conditioned.

DM:
Oh, really?

VL:
I thought, Man I'm in high cotton now.

DM:
That's 1940. Good.

VL:
They used ice, you know, to cool it. It took us about four or five days to get to San Diego.

DM:
So really you weren't on the water yet? You headed out of Houston? It was just signing up and getting enlisted in Houston and all the training started in San Diego?

VL:
Um-hm.

DM:
Okay. What was training like?

VL:
Training? Well when I first got to San Diego—of course we had our watches, we had our ring, and there was a first-class gunner that came out there and said, "All you recruits get out, take all your rings, we're going to have to send it back home for you." Couldn't keep anything like that. So it was okay, but I slept in a hammock for a few nights. I didn't know how to sleep in a hammock. You know, turn over, and I turned over.

DM:
Oh no. Did you flop out?

VL:
Oh, yeah. But it got better as the time went on, you know.

DM:

That was during training. You were still—

VL:

Oh, yeah. Um-hm. Um-hm.

DM:

You know, that seems like that would be a—

VL:

September, 1940.

DM:

That seems like that would be a difficult thing. You sleep in a bed all your life, suddenly you're in a hammock; your feet are turned up like that.

VL:

Tell me about it. Well when you fall on the floor it was difficult.

DM:

How long does it take to get used to sleeping in a hammock?

VL:

That didn't last long, see. They finally found some bunks for us, see. Then we got different companies, you know; signed with different companies, about one hundred and fifty in each company. Something like that.

DM:

You said you went down there and you caught a ride. You didn't go with anyone you knew, then, it doesn't sound like.

VL:

I didn't know anybody.

DM:

Well, okay. All right. This was quite an experience. Had you been away from home like that before? I mean, at all?

VL:

Well, I visited in Houston. I had some cousins down there. I think I'd been to Dallas one time.

DM:

Were you homesick? You were only nineteen years old.

VL:

Nah, I wasn't. Glad to get away.

DM:

Was training difficult?

VL:

Nah.

DM:

Did you train onboard?

VL:

Well I kind of—you know. It was September and it was hot down there and you have to get out and walk with your rifle and stuff like that.

DM:

Just basic training. Just trying to get you in shape and all that.

VL:

But there was a T-unit, what they call a T-unit, which is transfer unit, that had been there a good while, so we didn't have to train very long and they needed to get them guys out of there so we went with them. But we were only there about six weeks.

DM:

Okay. Well that's enough anyhow. That sounds like a lot of—

VL:

Yeah. I thought it was.

DM:

Well where'd you go then from San Diego?

VL:

Well they put us aboard an aircraft carrier. We went all the way to Pearl Harbor.

DM:

Oh really? Which carrier was it? Do you remember?

VL:

Saratoga.

DM:

Was it? I'll be.

VL:

And you talk about a big ship, now. But they made us work on there, all the way across.

DM:

They did?

VL:

Bringing up stores and stuff, you know. It was like a big city.

DM:

Golly. How many seamen were on it?

VL:

I don't know, a lot. But about halfway over, the list came out to where we were going and they said USS *Nevada*. I didn't know what that was. And they wanted to know what would you want to strike for, and I said, "Electrician." Ended up on the deck force.

DM:

Oh. You don't always get what you want, huh?

VL:

No. Oh, no. Deck force. So the deck force had the gunnery department, see.

DM:

Right, okay. Well that's kind of a vulnerable position, seems like, up there in one of the mastheads.

VL:

Yeah, well, see, I was—it was about four of us up there, but we were director-operators for the broadside guns, which we had been training a lot, you know, shooting. But that day I just couldn't use them, no way.

DM:

But when you say director-operator, you were giving them coordinates or telling them—?

VL:

Yeah, we'd go out there and practice, and the range was so-and-so, and stuff like that.

DM:

You were kind of spotting for them?

VL:

Yeah, spotting for them, yep.

DM:

That's interesting.

VL:

But they didn't need that in Pearl Harbor.

DM:

Yeah. Well so here you are, you were on an aircraft carrier, you ended up on a big battleship. It was probably—how did it rank with the other battleships there at Pearl Harbor as far as size and armaments?

VL:

Well our ship, being an old ship—but it was kind of modern for those days. But there was several that were a lot newer than we were. *California* and some of those.

DM:

Oklahoma was your sister, wasn't it?

VL:

Yeah, uh-huh. *Arizona*, *Oklahoma*, *Nevada*, *Utah*—*Utah* was a training ship, an old training ship. But see, there were seven battleships in there. Well, actually it was eight. But there was seven and we were the last—they were tied abreast, they couldn't get out underway, but us being by ourselves, we had steam up enough, after about three or four hours, we started out of there, and that's when the Japs really come after us. So we got word to pull it over on the sandbar so it wouldn't block the harbor, and so we pulled it up on the sandbar. The picture's in here.

DM:

Um-hm. I've seen some pictures of that.

VL:

That's all that saved that ship, I think, from sinking.

DM:

The way I've seen it, it looks like *Nevada's* right here at the end, no ship moored beside it so you could maneuver out—

VL:

Yeah, back out and go.

DM:

Arizona's right in front of you—you had to see that thing blow up.

VL:

And being foremast there, I saw that bomb when it hit the *Arizona*.

DM:

Oh my.

VL:

Being way up, you know. It went boom, just like that, and the whole ship just jumped up, like that. It [the bomb] went down the stack into the magazines.

DM:

Um-hm, it was an armored piercing bomb, from what I understand. Oh my. So you saw the bomb coming down?

VL:

Well I just saw the ship when it—yeah, um-hm. We were still sitting behind it, see, before we got underway.

DM:

Right. It kind of lurched up like that when it blew. Oh my goodness. There was—it looks like from the photos of the harbor that there was a ship off to one side of the *Arizona*, also. Not a battleship but something else.

VL:

It might've been one of the old cruisers or something, I don't know. There were a few small ships in there, you know. Some tugs in there.

DM:

Then on up was the *Tennessee* and *West Virginia*, *Maryland*, and *Oklahoma* and all that. You can easily tell, looking at the photos, some of these Japanese photos, you know, that the *Nevada* is back there kind of by itself.

VL:

Yeah, we were. It was two, two, two and then one. We were the one, see. And *Utah* was over there across over that way.

DM:

With cruisers and destroyers and all of that. Yeah, that fellow [Lee Soucy] told me that, you know, being a target ship he saw these planes playing around out there and thought, Well, I guess they're going to do some target practice, and then the bombs started exploding and he said his first impression was that they had accidentally put in live bombs. But anyway, what was going on, on the *Nevada* that morning, before all of this? You were already up in the—

VL:

Well it was Sunday, and we were getting ready to have church service on the ship back there—the fantail, they called it—and five minutes to eight I believe is when they hit. And I was mess cooking at that time.

DM:

Oh, you were?

VL:

Know what that is?

DM:

Mess cooking? I just figured it was cooking.

VL:

Well, all the young guys on the ship, a lot of them had to do what they call mess cooking. That's letting the tables down and going down to the galley and bringing the food up for the guys. So I was doing that for the electricians. We had about fifteen, twenty electricians. And I just got through and put my tables back up and a chief gunner's mate said, "We've got war, fellas. The Japs are here." So I never saw him alive anymore. That's the last time I saw him. He was our head gunner's mate on the ship—my division. Anyway, a bomb went right down through the casemate where he was, and killed all those guys.

DM:

About how many did it kill in that blast?

VL:

About ten or fifteen right there.

DM:

Was that the first one that you knew of? The first hit?

VL:

No, I didn't know all this till later, because I was up in the—

DM:

Right, right. I've heard that a torpedo hit the *Nevada* somewhere along the way. Do you remember—?

VL:

No, I don't remember much about it. But see I came down after about the first—it was two waves of them that came in. I came down after the first wave because I couldn't do anything up there, and I started tearing bed sheets for wrapping up the wounded. It's all I could do, down below.

DM:

But the first indication you had that something was going on was him yelling out, then, "The Japanese are—"

VL:

Well I went out to dump my dishwater and stuff and I saw a plane, some planes coming around with a red circle on them and I knew right then, so I ran back to the casemate and the chief said, "The Japs are here. Man your battle stations." Just like that.

DM:

Golly. What did you think? You know, we always hear of Pearl Harbor as being a surprise attack. Were you completely surprised by this?

VL:

Oh, yeah. Everybody—

DM:

Was anyone—

VL:

Everybody was.

DM:

Did anyone ever talk about the possibility?

VL:

Oh, no. Never heard of it. Had no idea.

DM:

They say that over on the *Utah* some of the people yelled out, "Is it the Germans?" Because they didn't know—

VL:

Well I can see that.

DM:

Yeah. Yeah. Well it's awfully far away for the Germans, but they—

VL:

If I'd have had me a .22 rifle up in that foremast, I could have gotten me a few of those pilots too.

DM:

You could see the pilots?

VL:

Oh, as far as from here to that house right there. That's how close they come.

DM:

The next door—it's about thirty feet over there.

VL:

Yeah, they were flying all around.

DM:

Could you see anything about them? Could you see their helmets, their—

VL:

Oh, I didn't pay much attention. Yeah, if I'd have had a .22 rifle I could've gotten me some pilots.

DM:

But with the guns you had—

VL:

Everything was locked up, see.

DM:

Locked down.

VL:

There wasn't any war going to break out. Everything was locked up.

DM:

In fact, now correct me if I'm wrong, I've heard that one of the things that helped the *Nevada* was the transition of powder. Some of the powder had been taken off. They were going to reload some—

VL:

Well, it was on a Saturday we took on ammunition, and the old ammunition barge was still tied up alongside, and they started bombing that but it was empty. We'd already taken it on the day before.

DM:

And you were waiting for it to be restocked?

VL:

Yeah. See the Japs knew everything that was going on there and we didn't realize it. They'd had spies in there for months and months and months and months. We didn't know it.

DM:

Were there a lot of Japanese inhabitants of Oahu at that time?

VL:

I don't know. We'd go downtown once in a while, you know, but I didn't pay no attention to stuff like that.

DM:

There are a lot now. I just figured there might've been a lot then. But plenty of people who could report.

VL:

We'd catch a taxi and ride about five miles downtown.

DM:

Oh, did you? Down to downtown Honolulu?

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

Oh, okay. How long had you been there before the attack? It was December seventh. When did you arrive at Pearl Harbor?

VL:

Well we'd been in and out, you know, practicing firing and stuff. I never did pay much attention to how long they had been there. But, you know, a good while. I'd been in the Navy a good while when that happened, see. In fact, I was on the boat with the captain's gig, you know; me and three other guys. We did that for a while.

DM:

Do you want to tell me what that—

VL:

You'd pick up a captain, take him to the beach and bring him back.

DM:

Oh, shuttling back and forth, then.

VL:

Yep, captain's gig.

DM:

Well you'd been in the Navy for over a year it seems like. September of '40 to December of '41.

VL:

Yeah, about fifteen months. Something like that.

DM:

Yeah, you were pretty seasoned.

VL:

Well I was enjoying it. Better than the farm, anyway. It paid better, too.

DM:

(laughs) It's just amazing to me to think you can go from a little farm in Slocum and then a year later be out on the Pacific Ocean on a battleship. What a change of life.

VL:

Yeah. I enjoyed it though.

DM:

Oh, yeah.

VL:

Anyway, anything to get away from the farm.

DM:

Yeah. Well then you got a little bit more excitement than maybe you bargained for. I don't know.

VL:

But after Pearl Harbor—of course our ship was sitting down on the sandbar, but there was water all the way down, see. So we had to sit there for weeks and weeks pumping out water to get the ship ready to bring back to Bremerton Navy Yard. They transferred most everybody off. Kept about a hundred and fifty of us, I guess, on there.

DM:

Okay. Well now, when you got underway, did you steam on past the battleship row? You headed on—

VL:

No, we were already down, see. We had already passed the battleships, trying to get out of the harbor.

DM:

Right. Right.

VL:

So we were on the North or whatever end it was down there.

DM:

You know, all I know is what I've read about it, and some accounts said that as the *Nevada*—that the *Nevada* steamed past *Arizona* right off—

VL:

Right, right.

DM:

And that a few survivors swam out there and *Nevada* took them on. Did you know anything about that?

VL:

Well they were jumping off of—see some of those guys were way up high, you know. The ship—they were jumping off yard arms, they call it, into the water, but the water was all on fire. It was just fire everywhere, and we see them out there swimming and it'd be fire everywhere. Of course we couldn't stop and pick them up, you know. There were just all kinds of things going on.

DM:

How did you react to that? That would've been pretty traumatic, or was it just too busy, too much happening?

VL:

It was just too busy I guess.

DM:

Yeah, okay. So you went on past the *Arizona* and you went on past the *Tennessee* and all that—*Oklahoma*?

VL:

Yeah. All those and pulled up on the sandbar and there was a cane patch out there. A big old cane patch, yep.

DM:

Okay. They were hitting you by now with bombs, trying to sink you in the channel?

VL:

Yeah, um-hm.

DM:

I've heard that command called out there and said, "Get that thing grounded."

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

Is that the way you have heard it?

VL:

Um-hm.

DM:

Okay. And then—so you took it into the cane patch, it settled down, water came up, and was that difficult? Did it lunge into the—

VL:

No, no. It just went up. It just stopped up on the sandbar, just stopped like that. And everything down below from the main deck all the way down to the water was full of water. Machine rooms and all of that, full of water. So we had to pump it all out to get the ship ready to go back to the Navy yards.

DM:

How long do you think it took to get that ship back out?

VL:

Oh, it took several weeks.

DM:

That's pretty fast.

VL:

Yeah, yeah.

DM:

Those are big ships.

VL:

But there wasn't but—when we got to Seattle, there was only about probably one hundred and fifty guys on there; had been a lot more than that.

DM:

Yeah. Were there any fears, going back across the Pacific Ocean all the way over the Puget Sound, worrying about if this ship was sound?

VL:

No, but we worried—we got a report there was Jap subs out there.

DM:

Ooh.

VL:

And one of my—see, I—and one of the guys kind of went berserk when he heard that, one of my friends. And they took him off. His name was Wiseman. They took him off but I never did see him anymore. Took him off at Bremerton, and he was in my division. Never did see him anymore.

DM:

Were y'all going out there unescorted? Did you have any—

VL:

Oh, yeah. Didn't have any escorts at all.

DM:

All by yourself out there.

VL:

I mean they was all somewhere else, you know. That's why it was kind of scary.

DM:

Um-hm. By the way, on the day of Pearl Harbor—the attack—after the first two waves, did y'all hear rumors of a Japanese invasion of the islands?

VL:

Yeah we did.

DM:

Were you worried about that?

VL:

That evening late, yeah. We were on the alert, you know, for that, but not much we could've done, really, I guess.

DM:

By the way, I heard that before y'all ran aground that the ship was on fire.

VL:

Yeah, it was quite—um-hm, yep.

DM:

And someone said there was an awfully big hole blown in the side of that.

VL:

It was.

DM:

How big was it? Do you know how big it was?

VL:

No, I don't.

DM:

Okay. Whew, that's—you might be lucky to have gotten through all of that. How many men were killed or wounded on the *Nevada*?

VL:

I don't really know. In my division—I've got them listed right here in this book, but in my particular division there was probably about ten or twelve.

DM:

Yeah, okay.

VL:

All of them was on one gun crew, and it just come right down through the middle of them. And the guy that said, "The Japs are here," he was the gun captain. I got them all listed right here, and I remember all those guys. See I got them marked right here. That's the barrel right there.

DM:

You got the ones that were killed right there?

VL:

Yeah, guys that was in my division—

DM:

Yeah, they got a little mark right there.

VL:

The barrel over there, see.

DM:

Yeah. "Lost in my division." Okay. Dukes and Corbin and Bingham—

VL:

Corbin, he was the one that said, "The Japs are here." He was gun captain.

DM:

And so y'all were having to help the guys that were wounded? You were making tourniquets and all of that.

VL:

Oh, yeah.

DM:

Out of bed sheets. And this is not—was this anything you were trained for? (VL laughs) Were you helping to patch wounds and that kind of thing?

VL:

No, I was just tearing up the sheets and getting all kinds of bandages and stuff.

DM:

Well in the days that followed after the attack, was there a continuing fear that the Japanese might come back?

VL:

No, I don't think after—we got kind of scared that first night though, you know.

DM:

Right, right.

VL:

But after that we would just—because I think some planes came over from the United States, you know, just in case of something. But I don't know.

DM:

Okay. They were trying to take some kind of countermeasure, I guess. Well you got over to Puget Sound and you got refitted, I guess, and repaired.

VL:

Yeah, we were in there about six or seven months. They had women welders. I had never seen women weld before. They were day and night, working day and night. Never stopped. It must've been two or three hundred people working at one time. They took the whole top off that ship, you know, except for the main battery. That's all they left, and they redid it.

DM:

It's amazing they can do it that fast.

VL:

Oh, yeah. It's just—

DM:

But if you have people working around the clock—Rosie the Riveters, huh?

VL:

Oh, well yeah. I'm telling you, yeah.

DM:

How did they treat you guys who were over there at Pearl Harbor? You showed up in Seattle. There had to have been a lot of people interested in what you'd been through. Did they talk to you or welcome you home or anything?

VL:

No, not really.

DM:
Really?

VL:
Not really.

DM:
Okay. Too busy, I guess. (laughter)

VL:
Too busy. See that's the way the ship looked after it got—

DM:
After refitting?

VL:
All new guns—see it don't even look nothing like the old one, see.

DM:
You ended up with a pretty nice ship, didn't you? Now see that's got a two-gun turret right there.

VL:
Yeah, see that's the only thing that stayed on was the guns. Everything else is new. Everything else is new.

DM:
And then you headed out to Attu, I believe. You went up to the Aleutians?

VL:
Yeah, we did.

DM:
Was there any action up there or were you just patrolling?

VL:
We didn't see any of the action really, up there. Had to stand watch there though, you know, in that zero degree weather out there.

DM:
Oh golly, I imagine.

VL:

And that's where that—they call it The Land of the Midnight Sun, up in there, pretty close to Russia, way on up.

DM:

Right. And you were up there how many feet above the surface of the water?

VL:

Oh, probably twenty-five feet, thirty, something like that.

DM:

Cruising along at maybe twenty-five knots or—?

VL:

But you know, when you're young you don't pay no attention to stuff like that. It don't bother you.

DM:

It's a little different from Hawaii, though, isn't it?

VL:

Yeah, yeah. Quite a bit.

DM:

Well, and then after Attu, you went to Norfolk? Does that sound right? Over to Norfolk for a refitting?

VL:

After Attu we went to—yeah, Norfolk.

DM:

Okay. Were y'all back in Fort—

VL:

Norfolk was our home port, you know, on the East Coast. We went over there waiting for a while to go to Normandy.

DM:

Did you do any convoying during that time?

VL:

Yeah we did, a lot of it.

DM:

So did you go back and forth across the Atlantic?

VL:

Taking troops over, back and forth, yeah.

DM:

So you crossed the Atlantic a few times, then?

VL:

A few times.

DM:

Golly.

VL:

Of course we had escorts then, too. Small ships, you know.

DM:

You got to see a lot more of the world than a lot of men who were in the Navy in the war.

VL:

Oh, yeah. Didn't cost me nothing either. (DM laughs) All vacation, no cost.

DM:

All vacation, huh?

VL:

A lot of people pay to do that nowadays.

DM:

Yeah. Were y'all back and forth through the Panama Canal?

VL:

Went through there maybe three or four times.

DM:

Okay. Every time you went from Atlantic to Pacific? You didn't go down around the Horn, did you?

VL:

Unh-uh.

DM:

Too bad you didn't get to circumnavigate once, but you didn't have time for that in wartime. (Laughs) Well, okay. So some convoy service—did you ever see any action out on that convoy service?

VL:

Not on a convoy service. You'd see—we'd get some reports about subs being out there, of course, but we had some tin cans with us—you know, small ships—and they took out after them, you know. But we dropped a lot of depth charges.

DM:

Did you?

VL:

Sure did. We'd throw depth charges off the fantail.

DM:

Oh, you'd throw them off of the battleship?

VL:

Oh, yeah.

DM:

Oh, okay.

VL:

And we also had two planes on there too, see.

DM:

Yeah, I don't know about the guys who are in those little planes when they're launched. It's kind of a sling thing, isn't it?

VL:

Oh, yeah. Shoot them off. (DM laughs) Boom.

DM:

Was it mostly the destroyers that they would send out after the subs?

VL:

Yeah. We got in some bad weather, though, between Norfolk and overseas. A lot of times—one time it got so bad that these planes all went off the fantail and we lost two or three or four boats back there and it was just really bad. I mean, really bad.

DM:

Golly. Did they talk—

VL:

Had to lock down everything for three or four days. Couldn't go topside.

DM:

How deep do you think the waves were?

VL:

I don't know, but if it was topside you could see a destroyer up here, and you'd miss him. He'd be down here. You couldn't see him. After a while here he'd come back up. Then he'd go back—

DM:

(Laughs) Did you ever get seasick?

VL:

Never did get sick.

DM:

Not even from the beginning?

VL:

Nope. Never did.

DM:

Some people just don't get seasick. Good thing you went into the Navy. You were one of those people.

VL:

Yep. No, I never got sick.

DM:

Well after—

VL:

Never got homesick either.

DM:

Oh, okay. Let's see—you were at D-Day before you went over to the Mediterranean, I think. After this convoy work you were at D-Day? At the D-Day invasion? Were you involved in that?

VL:

Oh, yeah. We'd done a lot of convoying, see, and then after that we went and invaded Normandy.

DM:

Where were you shipping out of? Did you harbor over there in England somewhere before the Normandy invasion?

VL:

We went from Norfolk over there.

DM:

Oh, did you? Okay.

VL:

And *Battleship Texas* was over there with us. Of course some other smaller ships was over there too.

DM:

When you lived at Houston did you go over there and visit the *Battleship Texas*?

VL:

Yeah. Being topsides, you know, I could see—see I was on a forty millimeter then, see, after Pearl Harbor. But all new forties, new twenties, new five-inch, thirty-eights—all that was new, see. I have a gun cabin on a forty millimeter.

DM:

Okay. Pretty good fancy equipment. So you intercepted the Normandy invasion, launched out of England, but the *Nevada* came over and kind of joined them en route?

VL:

Well see we went over there, *Nevada* and *Texas* was ordered to be going there by midnight before the invasion the next morning.

DM:

You've got someone at the door. Someone's knocking.

VL:

My sister's in there.

DM:

Oh, she is? Okay. Okay I'm sorry, I missed that.

VL:

I said the *Nevada*—*Texas* and *Nevada* was ordered to go over there before the invasion the next morning.

DM:

Right. Softening up?

VL:

We didn't know what was going to happen, so we did that. There were German tanks back over there about thirty miles—twenty-five, thirty miles—and we were supposed to try to knock them out, and so we had spotters back there telling us left or right or what range and all that, see.

DM:

All you knew was y'all were over here off the coast of Europe somewhere firing your armaments?

VL:

We just did what they said to do. (DM laughs) But see, me being topside, those Germans were good shooters, you know. They had them big old twenty-inch guns and one would pop, boom, one over here, and we had to keep moving, see, so they wouldn't get our range and everything, see. Keep moving.

DM:

Could you hear those things coming in?

VL:

Oh, yeah.

DM:

How close would they get?

VL:

Maybe one hundred yards here, two hundred yards over there, you now, splashing.

DM:

I heard that you didn't get hit but you got straddled by twenty-seven or something like that?

VL:

Oh, yeah, a bunch of them.

DM:

Golly.

VL:

They had us in their sights some way, and they could, you know, try to hit us. But we kept moving, see. We kept moving around and they couldn't hit us. And I was on topside all that time, see. In fact I was on topside all my six years.

DM:

(Laughs) Where things go whizzing by. Well I understand that the *Nevada* got some recognition for accuracy and shelling during all that.

VL:

Yeah, it did. It had some good gunners on there. Main battery, gun—oh, yeah. Put it right on the money.

DM:

While you were out there, could you see other ships participating in this barrage?

VL:

Oh, yeah. *Battleship Texas* and a lot of destroyers and cruisers out there.

DM:

They were all just firing into the coast?

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

That would be a sight to behold.

VL:

But the most exciting thing I ever saw when I was in the Navy was when those troops started coming from England. You can't believe how many planes—and they were pulling a little—what do you call it?

DM:

Gliders?

VL:

Gliders full of troops, and they'd cut those gliders loose and they would go down. Some of them didn't make it, see. And they'd glide down and the guys would get off on shore.

DM:

You could see all this coming over?

VL:

Oh, it was just black. You couldn't even see the sky, there were so many of them. I mean, kept coming, kept coming, kept coming, kept coming.

DM:

Amazing.

VL:

I mean, for hours!

DM:

Amazing.

VL:

There wasn't anything like it.

DM:

Could you see the landing craft as they were coming in?

VL:

Yeah. See I was up there where I could see all of that, see.

DM:

I understand the weather wasn't real good.

VL:

It wasn't that bad. See they delayed it one day. Don't count on the weather.

DM:

Right, okay. Ended up on the 6th instead of the 5th. Did you continue fire after troops were on the beach?

VL:

Oh, we stayed there for—we kept firing for several days and nights.

DM:

Okay. So they kept—

VL:

We'd get calls to fire so-and-so, put a round to so-and-so—those little towns along in there.

DM:

So you not only softened up the beach, you were supporting troops?

VL:

Oh, yeah, with our big guns, you know. We had some good gunners too.

DM:

Do you happen to know which beach you were off of, if you were over near Omaha?

VL:

Omaha Beach.

DM:

Omaha. Golly.

VL:

The old *Texas* was down there firing too.

DM:

He was off Omaha also?

VL:

Yep.

DM:

Incredible. Just incredible.

VL:

But the most exciting thing I ever saw was all those planes coming from England, just kept coming, kept coming, kept coming, kept coming, for hours and hours and hours.

DM:

I bet you would think no one could resist this kind of assault.

VL:

But a few days later you could see all the dead guys washed up on the beach. Oh, gosh.

DM:

Yeah. How close in did y'all get to the beach?

VL:

Pretty close. I don't know how close it was, but it was—we could see the beach out there pretty good, you know.

DM:

We'll get to Iwo Jima later but I understand in Iwo Jima you were only about six hundred yards off or something like that.

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

Golly.

VL:

Now over in the Pacific it was pretty scary because they had those suicide planes.

DM:

Right. Right.

VL:

See, they got—they knew they'd lose in the war if they didn't do something different, so that was pretty scary, I'll tell you that.

DM:

It would be scary enough, because I know the Germans had some big guns over there on Normandy Beach.

VL:

Yeah, they did. Yeah.

DM:

Oh, my. We've gone over there and we've walked along that Omaha Beach and those bunkers are huge.

VL:

We could hear them coming. We could hear *whir whir whir whir*.

DM:

Is that what they sound like? It's kind of a—

VL:

Whir whir whir whir whir boom.

DM:

They're whirling through the air.

VL:

Yeah, big old—I guess twenty inch, I don't know. Of course the ship would keep moving, you know. Had to keep moving. If it didn't they'd get your range and that'd get you. So nobody really got hit very big with those big guns, you know.

DM:

When these guns were firing, were you worried? Were you frightened? Were you just doing what you had to do?

VL:

Didn't really worry about it.

DM:

Did some men? Was there any panic?

VL:

Well, none of my crew really got scared. I'll put it that way.

DM:

I guess you're trained, so just do your job regardless.

VL:

Well you'd seen so much, you know, in different places, you didn't pay much attention. But really, the scary part was in the Pacific, because those people are crazy over there. Japs, you know.

DM:

I know a kamikaze—I think a kamikaze hit the *Nevada* eventually but we'll come back to that in a minute. After D-Day, I think y'all went over to Toulon then, didn't you?

VL:

We went to Toulon, yeah.

DM:

You went over to the Mediterranean? Can you tell me about that dueling with the big guns over in the fortress at Toulon?

VL:

Well, I don't remember too much about it, but, you know, you don't think much about it. I guess you just don't try to remember some of it, you know. But we was in North Africa and places like that, had liberty [shore leave] down in Italy—Taranto, Italy.

DM:

Oh, really?

VL:

Down at the boat down there. Of course I had to stay on the short patrol because I was gunner's mate and we'd wear our forty-fives, you know. Go ashore.

DM:

Would you go ashore?

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

And this was enemy territory. Why would they send you ashore?

VL:

Well, just to make sure some of the Americans didn't get in trouble.

DM:

Right.

VL:

If they did, we'd be there with them, you know. We had liberty, you know. They didn't know what might happen.

DM:

So it was kind of a combination of military—you were temporary military police? (Laughs)

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

Were you ever worried—in these kinds of situations, were you ever worried about sabotage? Someone getting an explosive out there and blowing a hole in your—

VL:

Not really, no.

DM:

Okay.

VL:

You know, when you're young, you don't think like you do when you get older I guess. You just don't worry about it. Anyway, I had a good time in the Navy. (laughter)

DM:

And you got to see the Mediterranean.

VL:

Yeah. But see, after the war was over, they had never tried an A-Bomb on a ship, so they chose the *Nevada*, because [it was] an old, old ship, you see. And they took everybody off, took it way out somewhere—

DM:

Bikini Atoll.

VL:

And they couldn't sink it! (DM laughs) They had to get the airplanes and drop bombs on it and stuff. It's out there somewhere.

DM:

It's out there on the bottom, rusting away.

VL:

But see, they sent me back to Texas here, and I went down there to Texas City—a recruiting place down there—and they put me in charge of the mess hall. I was a first-class gunner's mate, see. So they put me in charge of the mess hall and I was there about two or three weeks and I thought I'll ask the chief if I could have a leave to go—you know, a few days off. He got to looking at me [and said], "Lively, you're not even supposed to be here."

"What?" So they shipped me back to California and put me on an LSM. Small ship. And I was on there about three or four or five months.

DM:

Okay.

VL:

Went through the Panama Canal again.

DM:

Did you?

VL:
Killing time, you know. The war was over.

DM:
Well when were you finally mustered out?

VL:
Well, 1945.

DM:
'45?

VL:
Yeah, um-hm.

DM:
It was late '45?

VL:
Yeah, late '45.

DM:
Because you were at—I guess you were at Iwo Jima and Okinawa weren't you?

VL:
Iwo Jima, Okinawa. Both those battles, yeah. And I went down to the Philippines for a while. In fact, I had my [head] phones on one day, we was almost into the Philippines and it said we dropped a big bomb on Japan, and everybody started—I've got a picture of it in here. Everybody started cutting up and broke out the band and started playing. People started dancing with each other and stuff like that. But it's got the picture of it in here, see, somewhere, where they did that. (DM laughs) But anyway—

DM:
They knew that meant the war would be ending soon, huh? There you go.

VL:
See right there's where they were rejoicing.

DM:
Termination of a war, yeah.

VL:

They were dancing, cutting up.

DM:

This is when they heard about the bomb being dropped, huh?

VL:

You know, we had a good band on our ship and some of those guys used to play for big bands like Glenn Miller.

DM:

Really?

VL:

Four or five of them, and one of them was Jack Teagarden.

DM:

Golly. They had some talent. They had some real talent. Was the operation at Iwo Jima and Okinawa kind of like the D-Day one? You just got your orders, you fired in, you didn't—

VL:

Yeah, we just got—yeah, yeah.

DM:

You didn't know exactly what all was—

VL:

You know, we had somebody spotting for us.

DM:

Right.

VL:

Um-hm, yeah.

DM:

How about the landing craft assault on Iwo Jima? Did you see any of that?

VL:

Well they had—they tried to fool them one time, you know. They had a mock landing but they went over there to another place.

DM:

Um-hm. Um-hm. Could you see any of that? The landings?

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

Golly.

VL:

We had a lot of fun over there, though.

DM:

You didn't happen to see the flag up on Mount Suribachi?

VL:

I was on watch when they raised—they tried to raise it one day and then they couldn't. We were just—oh, just a quarter of a mile or half a mile off the beach, see, and they couldn't do it so later they did. I saw that.

DM:

You witnessed the raising of the flag on Suribachi?

VL:

Sure did.

DM:

(laughs) It's nice being up in the masthead if things aren't whistling past you. Did y'all take any fire from Iwo Jima?

VL:

Well yeah. Oh yeah, we did. Sure did. Yeah. That's where our forties come in handy. I was on the forty millimeter.

DM:

Right. Right.

VL:

We moved in close. Boy, we just—they said just take a point and train it, and pick out what you want to shoot at because they were all over there.

DM:

Okay. So you could see it. You could see it. You could see the smoke.

VL:

Oh, yeah. You didn't go by the radar, you just picked out your—you know. I got a picture of me on my gun right there.

DM:

Oh, do you?

VL:

Yeah, well, it's my crew, you know.

DM:

Can you show me? Well okay, that was then just by sight.

VL:

Yeah, just by sight, you know. But Normandy had the radar—had a controller that would—like you're shooting at planes. All of them on the starboard side would be shooting off on that control, you see.

DM:

It seems like this becomes a little more personal when you can see them over there shooting at you and you just start shooting back, instead of just the radar.

VL:

Yeah, yeah.

DM:

When you're talking about this stuff being shot at you from land, were you more worried about the Germans or the Japanese? Who seemed to be more—

VL:

The Japs, because you couldn't trust them guys. We were worried at Normandy—and other places too—but those guys over there—

DM:

But were some of them more accurate? Were the Germans more accurate? Or were the Japanese more accurate?

VL:

The Germans were real accurate on that big long-range gun. Oh, yeah. They were.

DM:

Do you remember when that kamikaze came in and hit the *Nevada*?

VL:

We had—I forget what—see he was headed—what they would do, the kamikazes—they would, early in the morning when you couldn't see them—they wouldn't come up when the sun was up—and when you couldn't see them, they'd come in real low, see. And they were on you before you could—but radar would pick them up in time for the forties and twenties to hit them. And one was coming towards me, and I kept shooting at it, shooting at it, shooting at it, but it kept moving back toward the main deck, and it went back there and crashed. It killed about fifteen marines back there.

DM:

Back on the *Nevada*.

VL:

On the fantail back there.

DM:

Golly.

VL:

It was headed right toward me, and I kept shooting him and it kept—no, he was dead by then, see. The planes just come on in and killed a bunch of guys back there.

DM:

Yeah. You think you hit him?

VL:

Oh, yeah. Well we've had several of them do that.

DM:

Yeah. So there was more than one kamikaze that hit?

VL:

Oh, it was a bunch of them.

DM:

That hit the *Nevada*?

VL:

Every morning, every evening, real late, see.

DM:

Oh, my! Oh golly.

VL:

I'll tell you, it was something else.

DM:

That just wouldn't—

VL:

Here's my guns. You can see it right there. See that right there?

DM:

Oh, yeah.

VL:

That's five-inch right there. That's my gun right there on the starboard side.

DM:

Okay. How big was your gun crew?

VL:

Well, on topside there, there was about eight of us, but then we had—just below there, where all the shelves were stored—they'd hand it up through the hatch, see—so we had about four guys in there. It was about ten of us, ten or twelve of us on one gun. We had the horse coming up from down below, see, coming up. Them guys would be in there, taking it and bringing it up to us, see.

DM:

When the war was over, you said that the [atomic] bomb was dropped when you were down around the Philippines somewhere?

VL:

Well when the war was over I was on watch with my gun crew and we were about two hours out of the Philippines, the word came over that there was a—I heard it—that a super-bomb had been dropped on Japan.

DM:

Oh, okay.

VL:

And you could hear the guys all over the ship hollering, cutting up.

DM:

(laughs) Y'all didn't go up to Tokyo Bay did you?

VL:

No, we didn't go up there.

DM:

Okay. Okay. Did you—

VL:

We was all set but we were told—when we were down there, we were told that we were getting ready to go up there.

DM:

It was going to be the next phase of war?

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

The Japanese islands? I'm glad y'all didn't have to do that. Have you ever heard the figures of what it would've taken to conquer the Japanese islands?

VL:

I just don't know.

DM:

Yeah. [It would've been] a whole other phase of war then, it seems like.

VL:

Yeah. Well see the A-bomb probably saved my life, I'll put it that way. I'm sure it did.

DM:

Oh, yeah. Very well could've.

VL:

Yeah. Saved a lot of people's lives, except for the Japs of course.

DM:

Yeah. Here you'd been with the *Nevada*. You must've had some kind of attachment to this ship. Do you guys get a strong attachment to your ships?

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

I mean, you spend a lot of your life on them.

VL:

Well in fact, sometimes, say that we're going ashore, you know, from different ships, and they get to fighting about who had the best ship. They'd be halfway drunk—drinking, you know.

They'd start arguing and start fighting. Of course I've heard that. I never did see them, but I've heard that they do that.

DM:

Well I know that a lot of fellas still wear their hats that have the name of their ship on it. It seems to mean a lot, the ship that you were stationed on, and you were on the *Nevada* through thick and thin. What did you think when they said, Well we're going put it out there at Bikini Atoll and we're going to hit it with an atomic bomb. Did that bother you that they were going to take the ship—?

VL:

Well it's like your home being destroyed. Put it that way, you know, I guess. Because I'd been on there about five years, close to it.

DM:

Yeah. Were you upset about that?

VL:

I didn't like it. But they did that—of course I can see why they did that. They had to do that to test the bombs. And that old ship would've never been in service anymore anyway.

DM:

Yeah. I guess maybe that's better than watching it rust away in a harbor somewhere.

VL:

Oh, yeah.

DM:

I don't know.

VL:

They still have the *Texas*, you know, down there at—I went aboard that thing one time.

DM:

Oh, did you?

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

Was it at all similar to the *Nevada*?

VL:

Similar, but it was an older ship, but it didn't have all the good stuff we had on ours.

DM:

Yeah.

VL:

You know.

DM:

It looked like a smaller ship.

VL:

Well see we went in the Navy yard and spent six months having everything put on topside, all new. Everything was new.

DM:

I guess that's an advantage of getting your ship torn up, huh? Someone tearing your ship up—you really got refitted.

VL:

Oh, yeah. Sure did.

DM:

I heard that when you were in New York that there was a refitting, and they put one of the turrets from the *Arizona* on the *Nevada*. Did you ever hear anything about that? They replaced a—

VL:

One of the guns.

DM:

One of the guns, okay. From *Arizona*?

VL:

Yep. Um-hm.

DM:

So they were able to salvage something.

VL:

We come into New York because we were coming into Norfolk, you know, and there was a big bad storm out there and we got orders to go into New York to avoid that.

DM:

I see. I see.

VL:

That's why I was in New York one time.

DM:

Okay. So—

VL:

First time I'd ever been there. Only time.

DM:

Oh, really? Okay. So somewhere along the way, they had taken—they had salvaged some guns off of the *Arizona* apparently.

VL:

Yeah, they did. They had the same caliber, same size, you know, guns.

DM:

Right. What size were they?

VL:

Fourteens.

DM:

Fourteens.

VL:

Now the newer ships had sixteens.

DM:

Yeah. So fourteen-inch guns. How many of those *Arizona* guns did they put on?

VL:

I don't remember, you know. I don't have no idea.

DM:

I think that's just kind of interesting that they were even able to salvage something off of the *Arizona*.

VL:

But the *Nevada* was known for its good gunnery on the main battery. They were pretty accurate guys, I'll tell you.

DM:

Okay. What was your range with the big guns—the fourteen-inch guns?

VL:

Well we were shooting at those German tanks over there so probably twenty-five miles, I guess.

DM:

That's amazing.

VL:

Um-hm. But we had spotters up there, see, to tell us, Lower the range, or left or right, or up and down. Whatever.

DM:

These were up in the mast somewhere, or did you have—?

VL:

Yeah. The fact of—we went in the night before the invasion next morning, and we could see paratroopers being dropped back behind the line—American. We could see them, and the Germans had search lights on them.

DM:

Oh, golly.

VL:

And we could see them guys being dropped down and some of them didn't make it. They shot them down before they got on the ground.

DM:

Could you see the parachutes themselves?

VL:

Yeah, yeah, you could see them about midnight that night.

DM:

You were there on the front row.

VL:

So we didn't know what was going to happen.

DM:

When did you find out how the war was going there? I mean I guess for a while you would be uncertain.

VL:

Not really. Didn't really know that much. I know we were in there for weeks and weeks in Normandy, up and down, firing at night—day and night, just back and forth. Then we finally went down to Italy. But we went down to Italy because we heard there was a German battleship down there and we went down to see about it. And luckily he was gone.

DM:

Oh, wow. That would've been something.

VL:

That big battleship they had? German? He was gone.

DM:

That would've been something, to have to duel with another battleship.

VL:

He would probably have got us, yeah. They had big guns on that thing.

DM:

That wasn't the *Bismarck*, was it? Do you remember?

VL:

Bismarck, yeah.

DM:

Bismarck. The one they finally got down there in South America. Golly.

VL:

After we went to Italy down there, we came out to Corsica, a little place—

DM:

Yeah, yeah.

VL:

And the captain—we threw an anchor out there and he said, “All you guys that want to swim just get out there on—” So they trained the barrels out on the guns (DM laughs), you know, way up high, and the guy would run out on the barrel and jump in the water. Two hundred feet, looked like.

DM:

Good grief! That seems like that would hurt. (laughs) A diving board.

VL:

Yeah, we'd go swimming out there.

DM:

That's amazing. That's a long way down.

VL:

But I didn't go swimming. I didn't want to get out there.

DM:

Did you ever become a good swimmer? Were you a good swimmer?

VL:

Well I was—yeah. We was raised on a farm. We had a big lake down there.

DM:

You swam before you got in.

VL:

When I went to boot camp, some of those guys couldn't swim. Shoot, I could swim all day. Boot camp, back and forth, on my back, on my front. Anyway—

DM:

Oh, okay. Well that's good.

VL:

But some of those guys had to learn to swim, really.

DM:

Would they train you in basic training? Would they train you to swim?

VL:

Yeah, that was part of your training, to be able to swim, see. They had a big old pool out there. Of course I could swim all day, wouldn't bother me.

DM:

Good. (laughs) I'm glad you didn't have to swim through any flaming oil or anything like that.

VL:

No.

DM:

Oh, gosh. Well that's just really interesting. I appreciate you telling me about that. You know, I—

VL:

Of course, a lot of it I've forgotten, you know, being ninety years old.

DM:

Did you go through any period when you didn't feel like talking about it or were you always willing to talk about this?

VL:

Don't bother me.

DM:

Yeah.

VL:

They come down here from TV from Tyler a couple times and interviewed me and had it on TV and stuff.

DM:

So never any trouble, even after right after the war, it didn't bother you?

VL:

No, unh-uh.

DM:

Some people it really does. Some of them—

VL:

It bothers a lot of them, I think.

DM:

Now what about attitude toward the Japanese? How do you feel about—

VL:

Well I never did buy one of their cars. Never did ride in one. What does that tell you? (laughter) My brother had one. I wouldn't ride with him. That's silly, but—I guess it's kind of silly, but that's the way I feel.

DM:

Well it's understandable considering what you went through, you know.

VL:

I wouldn't buy anything Japanese. Nope.

DM:

Well, that's understandable.

VL:

Of course that wasn't those people's fault, really. It was just the soldiers and the big shots over there.

DM:

Well some of those guys that were there for the sixtieth anniversary, over at Pearl Harbor, they were concerned about how they were going to react when they met these Japanese aviators, you know. But fortunately the Japanese were very apologetic and they were okay.

VL:

Well, see, they had to do what they were told to do.

DM:

Right. That's what they said.

VL:

You know what I'm saying?

DM:

They said that they were eighteen-year-old boys and their country said, this is what they need to do for their country, so I guess that's kind of understandable.

VL:

Well next time I go in I'm going to have me a rifle with me, and when they come around again I'll get some of them.

DM:

(laughs) Isn't that something, how you were kind of over-armed with the big guns that you really couldn't use.

VL:

We weren't ready. We weren't ready.

DM:

Is there anything that really sticks out in your mind from that era that you haven't already mentioned? Any momentous event or any feeling or just anything that you could tell me that you haven't already mentioned? Like something you really vividly remember.

VL:

You mean about the war itself?

DM:

Like the war—any part of the war itself. Kind of like you told me, you know, you remember men jumping off of the *Arizona* into the water, you remember the—

VL:

I remember one thing. I was on watch one night and we heard—we were out at Okinawa, I guess it was, and we heard something, you know. No lights on topside at all. So we heard something that sounded like somebody swimming, so they turned on the search lights and it was two Japs swimming to our ship. We got a picture of them in here. And so we took them aboard. They were trying to get away from all the marines over there. They were mopping up over there. They weren't taking any prisoners.

DM:

Golly.

VL:

So they swam to our ship and we kept them in the brig all night and took them on deck the next morning. I got their picture in here.

DM:

Golly.

VL:

So I kind of remember that, you know. But anyway, they're in here somewhere.

DM:

Well I think it's also—

VL:

See they used to have to holystone the decks

DM:

You used to what?

VL:

Holystone the decks.

DM:

Oh what is that?

VL:

That's wood topside in peacetime there were wooden decks up there.

DM:

Oh yeah.

VL:

And every Friday we'd turn—we had these little holystones and we'd holystone the deck to make it real pretty.

DM:

Oh yeah, so you were pretty much kind of sanding it down?

VL:

Deck force did that. I might be one of these guys, right here, see? Holystoning.

DM:

(laughs) That's a lot of work.

VL:

Yeah. But anyway, somewhere I got the picture of those two Japs in here.

DM:

Oh, okay.

VL:

But we used to—there would be a ship pulling alongside somewhere, and they'd need supplies and we would pass them over to them.

DM:

Oh I see, yeah.

VL:

That's what they're doing there.

DM:

Yeah.

VL:

That's a gun like I was on. In fact I think that was my gun right there.

DM:

Yeah, I see it. I remember going on the *Texas* as a kid and climbing up in some of these little gun turrets and all.

VL:

I remember a lot of these guys here. See that's other guns like mine we're shooting. See right there? See there's the clips of them—shells.

DM:

So forty millimeter?

VL:

Forty millimeter. We had twenties and forties and five-inch.

DM:

Yeah, okay. You said that when you were holystoning the decks, the wooden decks, that was peacetime? Did you cover the decks with metal in combat situations?

VL:

Yeah, later all they did is painted over them, you see.

DM:

Okay. I see.

VL:

They used to have what they call bright work on topside—shiny—painted all over.

DM:

I see.

VL:

So it wouldn't—

DM:

Couldn't see it.

VL:

Couldn't see it.

DM:

Yeah:

VL:

Had bright work all over that ship.

DM:

Golly, and then just paint over it.

VL:

Clean it, shine it, polish it.

DM:

Ooh. (laughs)

VL:

But anyway—

DM:

Did y'all ever paint camouflage on your ships?

VL:

Yeah. Oh yeah. Uh-huh.

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DM:

So you had stripes.

VL:

Yeah, uh-huh.

DM:

Just different variations of gray?

VL:

See there's where their loading the five-inch, you see.

DM:

Okay.

VL:

See that shell there?

DM:

Oh yeah. That's a good-sized shell too. How much do those things weigh?

VL:

Oh I don't know. Here—we had twenty-millimeters on there—a lot of those. We had one hundred and twenty marines on there.

DM:

You said the marines were the ones that the kamikaze got.

VL:

Yeah, well they got a few of them, sure did.

DM:

Now tell me again why the Japanese were coming onboard. They were trying to swim out there? The Japanese were trying to swim out there?

VL:

There were two of them. See, we was in those islands over there and the marines were mopping up and they wasn't taking any prisoners.

DM:

Right. Right.

VL:

And those two guys swam to get away from them.

DM:

I see. Okay. Uh-huh. Golly.

VL:

I'll find them here in a minute.

DM:

Okay.

VL:

We even had—see, we had the boxing matches and all that on there. Wrestling matches.

DM:

I see that. Oh yeah. You had some down time, didn't you?

VL:

They called it the Saturday Smoker. (laughter) Entertainment.

DM:

Oh, yeah.

VL:

But anyway—

DM:

By the way, after VJ-Day I guess you were still out there on the Pacific. When did you get to the States side for the first time after the war ended?

VL:

I don't remember, really.

DM:

Was there any hoopla? Any welcoming or anything like that?

VL:

Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

DM:

Do you know where you went?

VL:

See we had several doctors on, we had dentists. Some of the guys were pharmacist mates, you know, had barbers.

DM:

It was a floating city.

VL:

Yeah, oh yeah.

DM:

When y'all came back when the war ended, where did you first go to port?

VL:

We came back from?

DM:

—after the war ended in Japan?

VL:

Pearl Harbor.

DM:

You just stopped at Pearl Harbor?

VL:

Uh-huh. Last time I was there.

DM:

Okay. Where'd you go from there? Did you go to San Francisco?

VL:

We came into our home port with San Diego and Long Beach.

DM:

Oh, okay. Came in at San Diego. Was there a welcoming?

VL:

I think so. I don't know. I don't remember much about it. See at one time we had about eighteen hundred people on this ship. Before the war there was only probably less than half that many.

DM:

So that's the combat size?

VL:

With all the new guns and stuff.

DM:

Oh, yeah.

VL:

You had to have a lot of people.

DM:

Oh. Well that creates complications. Where do you house these people? How do you feed them?

VL:

See some of these guys sitting up one of them five-inch guns. They're watching this wrestling match or something, sitting up there. And these are all new guns, you see. All that's new. And there they are—look there. (DM laughs) There's the marines. That's the seventh division. Those are all marine guys, see.

DM:

Well how many marines would you have onboard at a time?

VL:

Here's a picture of me and some of my guys—my division. I'm right there.

DM:

Yeah, there you are.

VL:

That's my division. Forty-millimeter.

DM:

Forty-millimeter crew, yeah. Okay. Pretty good. Well that's—

VL:

There's a lot of guys on there.

DM:

Yeah. How many marines would be on there?

VL:

There was a hundred and twenty-five. We had chaplains, see.

DM:

Did you have a little—

VL:

To prove I went to church, there I am right there.

DM:

There you are. (laughter) Perfect attendance.

VL:

I've got to prove I went to church.

DM:

You put: "I'm in this picture." There it is, right there. It looks like kind of a makeshift spot to have chapel.

VL:

We had Catholic and non-denom. We'd take saltwater baths sometimes, in saltwater.

DM:

(laughs) Gosh, you could only carry so much freshwater on those ships I guess.

VL:

There's a Catholic priest, see. Yep. Barbershop, barbers and—anyway. I'm trying to find those Japs.

DM:

Japanese?

VL:

There's the chow line. Beans and cornbread on Saturday morning.

DM:

Well what was the typical fare? What would you have, breakfast lunch and dinner?

VL:

Everything—we had good food, yeah.

DM:

You were well-provisioned?

VL:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. We were.

DM:

Had good cooks?

VL:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. We did.

DM:

What time was breakfast?

VL:

Too early. I don't know.

DM:

(laughs) Do you know what time they'd get you up in the morning?

VL:

We had reveille—well it depends on where we were, you know. If we were out at sea somewhere it'd be—we were just on watch all the time, really, you know.

DM:

Oh. That's right. So you had rotating shifts?

VL:

Yeah. You had to—

DM:

Did you use terms like “third watch” and that kind of thing? “First watch,” “second watch,” “third watch,” or—

VL:

Yeah. We did that. Yeah.

DM:

You must’ve had to learn a new vocabulary when you got into the Navy. Was it—did you know what starboard and port—

VL:

Well, like that Slocum stuff.

DM:

(laughs) Did you have any idea what starboard was before you got into the Navy?

VL:

No. Never heard of it. Nope. Anyway, somewhere they’ve got pictures of those Japs. I don’t know if I can find them for you here, but—

DM:

They’re hiding in there somewhere, aren’t they?

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

There were some mini submarines out there at the Pearl Harbor attack. Did y’all hear about those?

VL:

Yeah there was, there was some, yeah.

DM:

Did y’all know about them until later?

VL:

Unh-uh. No. Speaking about entertainment, there. This is Bob Crosby and his band. You know Bing Crosby? His brother, Bob Crosby.

DM:

Yeah. Where's Bob?

VL:

There they are, see?

DM:

Oh, yeah. Do you know which one is Bob?

VL:

This is Bob Crosby here.

DM:

That's him right there. Golly.

VL:

Yeah. His band. Yeah, we had a good time, you know, really, a lot of the times. And Ray Anthony?

DM:

Um-hm, yeah.

VL:

That's Ray Anthony.

DM:

Golly.

VL:

Look at the guys. See them right there?

DM:

All over. You got a lot of guys on that ship.

VL:

Oh, yeah. Now see that's the results of the kamikaze right there, see.

DM:

Oh, yeah. So that's back in the fantail.

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VL:

Yeah that's kamikaze out there at Okinawa or Iwo Jima or somewhere.

DM:

Are those little plain launches right there? No, I guess—no, no, that's a gang plank.

VL:

No, no, that's a gang plank.

DM:

Wow. There they are. There they are.

VL:

This is where we'd take our ammunition, see here? Oh there they are. There they are right there. Two Japs.

DM:

So they slipped off into the water and they retrieved them?

VL:

See I was on watch when we heard somebody swimming out there. We turned the searchlights on and there they were. Kept them in the brig all night. I often wonder what they did with those two guys, you know?

DM:

I sure am glad they compiled a book like that. I bet you've flipped through it a lot since then. Do you think about it much? Has it been—those years—have they been an important part of your life? I know you've had to tell the story a lot.

VL:

Not unless somebody talks about it. See, when the kamikaze hit there, see what it did to the main battery barrels? Fourteen-inch gun—that's shrapnel that hit the—

DM:

What did they do, load up with explosives and shrapnel—something that would scatter?

VL:

I don't know. Just all kinds of something—bombs, just anything that would blow up, you know. Anything they could carry that would blow up. Blow themselves up, you know.

DM:

That would just be awfully hard to defend against.

VL:

Yep. Can't hardly do it. Well they knew they were losing the war, and that was the last—

DM:

Well I don't have any more questions. Do you have anything else to add?

VL:

No. I just charge so much for interviews.

DM:

(laughs) Let me see this lady right here.

VL:

Now this is a—my brother flew B-29s. He was two years younger than me and we were over in the islands one time and somebody passed the word for me to come back and receive visitors, way the heck out in the islands. I went out there and there were three guys and a boat with no hats on, no shirt, and I think they had on shoes and pants, and that was my brother with some big kid—I mean it was a kid or guys, you know. (DM laughs) So the next day I went over there to visit them.

DM:

Oh golly. How'd he know how to find you? He knew you were on the *Nevada*?

VL:

This is the next day I went over there to visit him. He knew where I was.

DM:

(laughs) Isn't that something. You said later on he was in on bombing Japan?

VL:

He flew Old Tokyo from Tinian. He made a lot of missions. Yeah, B-29.

DM:

Did he come out okay?

VL:

Yeah.

DM:

He came home all right?

VL:

Yeah, oh yeah.

DM:

Okay. Good.

VL:

He lived in Houston. He was a—St. Claire Refinery down there—he was over the office department all those years.

DM:

Okay. What year did you move back up here to Palestine?

VL:

Eighty-two.

DM:

Okay. That's when you—

VL:

Built this house in '83.

DM:

That's when you retired?

VL:

We lived down on a farm. We had a house down there for about a year and then we built this. My son lives down there now. He built a new home down there. He's in the air conditioning business.

DM:

Okay. Which is what you were in, for all that time.

VL:

That's what I did all my life. In fact I helped him when he moved up here.

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DM:

You know, that was a good—did you start in to air conditioning soon after the war?

VL:

I went to school to learn about it after—on my G.I.

DM:

On the G.I. Bill?

VL:

In Fort Worth, um-hm.

DM:

That was a great thing to get into because air conditioning became awfully big by the fifties and all that.

VL:

Yeah, I've had—my last job was at the hospital—VA Hospital. I retired from there. But before that I had a job with other companies. And I worked for a big company called Grocery Supply for ten years and they had a bunch of stores out of Houston. I took care of all their refrigeration/air conditioning for them. Then I went to the VA and stayed there about twenty-five years. Retired from there.

DM:

Oh, okay. Very good. They say that air conditioning—you know, these advances in air conditioning and just the use of it brought a lot of—allowed people to migrate to the South, because people weren't coming down here. (laughs)

VL:

But it was a good thing to get into. People have got to be cool, you know. (laughs)

DM:

They do. (laughs) They sure do.

VL:

Even up in West Texas. Of course it's kind of windy up there, isn't it?

DM:

It is windy. It sure is.

VL:

How long y'all been up there?

DM:

And dry. Well I'm from Fort Worth originally.

VL:

Oh, is that right?

DM:

So I went out there to go school when I graduated from high school in '78, 1978. I'm fifty-three. And you lived in—

VL:

She's only about nineteen, right?

DM:

She's only about nineteen. (laughs) So she—

VL:

You know, I like Fort Worth. We lived there about two years.

DM:

Oh, yeah.

VL:

Right off of—yeah we could hear the cows bawling down at the stockyards.

DM:

Stockyards. Yeah, you were close to the old part of Fort Worth right there, where the camp was.

VL:

Off of 28th and 25th. Somewhere in there.

DM:

Okay. Well I love that and I love that area.

VL:

In fact, my granddaughter, she's a schoolteacher in Fort Worth.

DM:

Oh she is? Okay.

VL:

That's my son who lives on a farm—his daughter.

DM:

Well I'm going to shut this off. It's still running there.

End of Interview



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