

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DONALD E. COLLINS
Radioman, Submarine, Navy, World War II.

2002

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Collins, Donald E., (1924-2006). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 80 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 80 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 80 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Donald E. Collins, a Sunbury, Pennsylvania native, discusses his World War II service as a radio striker aboard the *USS Finback*, a Navy submarine, serving in the Pacific Ocean. Collins talks about graduating from high school early, enlisting, and being turned down from a Navy bombing squadron and a Marine parachute unit because he was too light-weight. He talks about boot camp at Sampson (New York), radio school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, learning Morse code, and volunteering for submarine service. He describes the testing he underwent prior to submarine duty including aptitude tests, psychological examinations, pressure tests, and a Mommsen Lung escape technique test. Collins touches upon additional training in encryption, sound gear operation, and how to handle any other crew member's job in an emergency. He characterizes Admiral Charles Lockwood and the officer who ran the submarine base, Chief Torpedoman Charles Spritz. Collins touches on volunteering to handle meat aboard a troop ship and being aboard a Fulton sub tender during a fire. Collins mentions assignment to the *USS Finback* (SS-230) at Midway Island. He describes his first patrol in the China Sea, shooting and exploding mines, sinking Japanese ships, and two weeks of rest at Majuro (Marshall Islands). He discusses qualification testing and his duties as a radioman, lookout, sound equipment operator, and Radio Direction Finder operator. Collins talks about hunting oil tankers off Iwo Jima and expecting air support that didn't come, and he mentions scouting Truk Island. He tells of being shot at by an American destroyer, techniques used by the Japanese Navy involving sampans to lure submarines for attack, and hearing depth charges approach the sub. Collins touches upon military life including the relationship between officers and enlisted men, drinking alcohol distilled aboard the submarine from "torpedo juice," receiving a brandy ration when the ship was under heavy fire, staying at Hawaiian hotels between missions, and eating free dinner at a Hawaiian restaurant. He describes air-sea rescue procedures and tells of pilots who were afraid of the submarine. While patrolling near Chichi Jima, the *Finback* rescued a downed Navy pilot (President George Bush) and he talks about being shipboard with Bush for about three weeks. After the war, Collins touches on joining the Navy Reserves, attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison on the GI Bill, working in an intelligence unit in the basement of a professor at the University of Wisconsin, marrying a woman from Madison, meeting George Bush when he ran for president, and pursuing a career in criminal justice. Collins states he resisted joining veteran's organizations because he didn't want them to influence his job, but he was made commander of the VFW for two years while helping them solve money-theft problems.

Biographical Sketch:

Collins (1924-2006) served twelve patrols aboard the submarine *USS Finback* during World War II. He was born in Sunbury (Pennsylvania), grew up in New York City, and eventually settled in Portage (Wisconsin). He worked for the Division of Corrections in Madison, Wausau, and, for thirty-five years, in Portage (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2002.

Transcribed by Hannah Goodno, 2009.

Transcript edited by Channing Welch, 2010.

Corrections typed by Katy Marty, 2010.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

- Jim: Okay, talking to Donald Collins and it's the 28th of June, 2002. Where were you born, sir?
- Donald: I was born in Sunbury, Pennsylvania.
- Jim: And when was that?
- Donald: 1924. 9/5/24.
- Jim: 9/24. I'm just a year older than you. I was born in 9/23. Okay and when Pearl Harbor arrived you were still in high school, your last year.
- Donald: Last year of high school.
- Jim: Right. What'd you think about that?
- Donald: Well, I thought that things were gonna be changed. And they were. And I was home, lying on the front room floor reading the funny papers or the newspapers, and my dad was down in the basement doing something, and it came flashing over the radio. And the first thing I did was run downstairs and tell my dad, you know. Well that was—then, I made arrangements to early graduate from high school.
- Jim: Oh, they got you out?
- Donald: And I went to sign up—oh yeah, they did.
- Jim: I know a lot of schools let the kids out—the seniors out six months in advance.
- Donald: And then I was going to join a Navy bombing squadron, but I was only about five foot four and I weighed about 114 pounds, and so I was too light for that, it was to be made up of local. And so then I decided that I would try. And so the captain in charge of the selection said, "Look, I'll help you. Eat everything you can, put on some weight, and the height we can take care of." He says, "I got a little trick," he said, "that you can use." And so anyway, I went back—and I worked at a store at that time.
- Jim: Doing what?
- Donald: I worked behind the meat counter. From the time I was about 11 years old I was working in—
- Jim: For your folks?

Donald: No, no. And anyway, the girls in the dairy counter, they kept bringing bottles of milk to me, and I had a girlfriend in the store next to us—big store. And she would bring me malts and the people in the produce would bring me bananas, and they were trying to—they knew. Got in there, I was able to pass the height using a little trick, you know. And [laughs] couldn't get the weight—I hadn't gained a pound.

Jim: Oh my goodness.

Donald: So then I was going to go into the Marine parachute unit that they were setting up, and the sergeant just took one look at me and started to laugh and said, "Son, you'd go up instead of down." And so anyway, I ended up going into the navy and then coming out to Wisconsin to the radio school after boots.

Jim: Where'd you have your boot training?

Donald: I had my boot training in Sampson, New York. It was up on the Finger Lakes. And it later became, I believe an Air Force and then I think now it's been taken over by the State University of New York.

Jim: So it's no longer the Navy?

Donald: Oh no, no it just was for a relatively short time.

Jim: How long was the boot camp?

Donald: Boot camp at that time I think was nine—nine to twelve weeks, and I think we went nine. And then—

Jim: Then they started training you for something. What?

Donald: Right, then I—

Jim: Qualified for radio?

Donald: Well, they didn't give you much choice [laughs] at that point. They decided where you were gonna go. And—pulled a little trick, though. I had a friend that told me, he says, "Don," he said, "you know," he said, "you are going to be called in the first group in the morning and you're gonna get your—you're going to radio school but it's gonna be right here at Sampson." And I thought, "Oh no!" So I said, "Where's the second group?" He said, "Well, I think it's at University of Wisconsin." And I said, "Well, how I can get into that?" He said, "Don't show up for the morning group and your supernumerary will take over." So I didn't show

up. They couldn't have found me if they'd searched. So then I was assigned to the University of Wisconsin Radio School.

Jim: Had you been this far west before?

Donald: Well, no. No, I had been all over the East with my folks. My dad had a job where—he was in show business and travel. I went to 9 different schools in 5 different states the first year.

Jim: But all in the East?

Donald: Pretty much in the East Coast, yeah.

Jim: So now you had to worry about Indians [laughs].

Donald: No, everybody was telling me how cold the weather was out here, and when I got out here I found the winters weren't any worse than they were back East [laughs].

Jim: Same level.

Donald: Right.

Jim: And you went to radio school at the University of Wisconsin.

Donald: Yes sir.

Jim: There's a lot of guys there.

Donald: Oh yeah. Yeah, they had—I forget how many divisions went through there. And when—

Jim: Was that training hard?

Donald: Well, yeah, it was speeded up. The part I liked the best was the physics. Because we had a gentleman who was crippled—I can't remember his name anymore—and he was a fascinating guy. And he wound up—we found out he said, "I've gotta leave," and he said, "it's very important but I can't tell you a word about it." He says, "but I wish you all well." And it turns out he was in the basement of Soldier Field working on the A-bomb.

Jim: Oh, the A-bomb. I was gonna say—did that training include Morse code?

Donald: Oh yes. And Johnny Le Blond (??).

Jim: And radio sending and receiving?

Donald: Yep.

Jim: Did you repair?

Donald: Not too much repair. Basically, they were training you to be a communicator.

Jim; Did they teach you flag signals?

Donald: Well, we had that at boot camp.

Jim: Oh, that's right. So this is mainly radio.

Donald: Radio. It was strictly radio. And then from there—

Jim: Was the Morse code hard to learn?

Donald: No, I didn't find it very difficult. I got so I could kinda sing it. Da-da-da-da-da-da-da, you know. And the faster it would come sometimes, the easier it was to read. 'Cause you'd get a rhythm. And when it asks about what I did afterwards, well when I was going to the University, I signed up for the V-12—or not V-12, what was it? I can't remember what the program was, but you could sign up for it and then you were assigned to a unit and I went into MP unit. Colonel Haggardly. And I was also—at the time I didn't know whether you knew a Professor Bandy (??) who was teaching French at the University at that time.

Jim: No.

Donald: And Professor Bandy (??)—I signed up for the Reserve, Navy Reserve. And I wound up in an intelligence unit in the basement of Bandy (??) home.

Jim: This was while you doin' in radio school?

Donald: No, no, this was after the war when I signed up—

Jim: No, well, we're jumpin' ahead here.

Donald: Oh yeah, yeah. Okay.

Jim: You're confusing me.

Donald: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm confusing myself sometimes. [Laughs]

- Jim: Now the radio school lasted how long?
- Donald: The radio school I believe we were in twelve weeks. And then volunteered for submarines. And I think there were nine of us volunteered and they took three of us. And then I went back east going to New London but I went on delayed orders. And that gave me some time at home.
- Jim: Sure.
- Donald: But the dates—they had the dates, and they had the times. And they didn't coincide. And so I took the one that gave me the most time. [Laughs] And when I reported in at New London I was told, "Okay you start the next morning." And at first, the officer that shut me in said, "Hey wait a minute—you should've been here ten days ago." I said, "Sir, which is more important, the days or the number?" "Well, the dates." And I said, "Well, here's the date sir, and here I am." And then they started us the next morning through a barrage of tests. We went to a psychiatrist; we went to doctors of all kinds—
- Jim: What'd the psychiatrist want to know? Were you claustrophobic?
- Donald: That was part of it. But also whether you would be a stable individual.
- Jim: How the hell could he tell sitting down and talking to you?
- Donald: Well, it was funny. He said to me something to the effect of "How's your Aunt Ninny's horse farm at Sydney?" I said, "Oh, it's great, you know," just flip answers. And then he said to me, "Do you hate your mother?" And I said no. And he said, "Well if your mother and dad and you were stranded on a desert island"—And I remember this because I think it was a classic question—"And you had to eat either one or the other, which one would you eat?" And I said, "Well, sir. My mother." "Your mother? You hate your mother." I said, "No, sir. She has more meat on her." And he looked at me, he started to laugh, and he said, "You're okay." And that was the end of that.
- Jim: Oh, that's good reasoning.
- Donald: But then they put us through pressure tests. We went into a pressure chamber.
- Jim: [Laughs] How'd you enjoy that?
- Donald: Well, I didn't mind it at all. Some of the fellas—

- Jim: Freaked out?
- Donald: Oh, they'd scream and—
- Jim: Did it bother your ears?
- Donald: Well, they popped, you know. But some of them couldn't take it.
- Jim: What? Being enclosed?
- Donald: No, being in the pressure. And of course, the heat goes up when you're in the pressure. And—
- Jim: Is that what bothers you most? Is the heat?
- Donald: Didn't bother me at all, really. And there were quite a few that it didn't bother. But then there were some that did. But once they started that pressure building, they couldn't start to drop it down. So that meant some of these guys were really hurtin' for quite a time. And then they would bleed down the pressure, and after it had been bled down to a certain level then they'd open the door and out you would go. And the guys that couldn't take the pressure, they—.
- Jim: Okay. That's one way of gettin' at a bum bunch. What was the second test?
- Donald: Well, then you had a test—going in the tank. You probably saw these big towers.
- Jim: I know about them. Tell me about it.
- Donald: Well, they'd start you in at 12 and half feet, and then they go down to—I think it's to 50 feet if I'm not mistaken.
- Jim: How did they move you? Or did you just stay and they'd add water?
- Donald: No, you can go down the stairs on the outside and then you're entered into the chamber. And then once you get in that chamber, then you put on the Mommsen Lung, and then they start the water coming in. And when it gets up to a certain level and pressure equalizes with the outside, then they open the outer door and you go up, but the pressure below is greater, and so you actually go right up.
- Jim: You don't want to go up too fast.

- Donald: No, I went up—you can volunteer to go up from 100 feet, and I wanted to go up from 100 feet. So I think out of our class there were probably five or six of us and I was the shortest one, and at the lower level—it's funny, I'm standing there, you know, and the water's up to here on me and some of these guys—And so then when you go up though, there's a line, and you grasp the line kinda like that. And your feet go around it. And then you start going up.
- Jim: How are you supposed to do that?
- Donald: Okay, you go up like there's knots, and about every knot, you take three normal breaths. And then you go up again. And then, if your—and mine didn't and a lot of the guys did—my feet started to go up. And they had swimmers that would put your feet down and—
- Jim: You had to wrap your feet around it and I bet that wasn't easy to do.
- Donald: That wasn't easy to do because of the pressure.
- Jim: Trying to push them away.
- Donald: Right. Then when you got up out of the way then that—but those towers are gone now. They no longer—they took 'em down at Pearl. They had one, and at New London.
- Jim: How do they test for that now?
- Donald: I guess they use a pressure test, but see this was primarily the use of Mommsen Lung as an escape technique, and the Squalls when she was raised, that was the first time they had used—and Swede Mommsen is the guy that came up with it, and it was brilliant. In fact, he was captain of a submarine rescue vessel for a time. And I'm sure that he also may have at one time or another skippered a sub. I was going through some papers I had and I'm sure I saw his name in there.
- And then you went to simulator school where they had a control room simulator where you could dive the boat, you could take it to a certain depth—
- Jim: But you didn't do that.
- Donald: Oh yeah, everybody did that.
- Jim: You controlled the—
- Donald: Did the simulator, actually. But yeah—

Jim: How many guys didn't pass that Mommsen lung test? Did very many, or did most people—

Donald: Usually by the time—maybe one or two. They were pretty well screened.

Jim: And so the next thing is what you were just talking about.

Donald: Yeah, the simulator, and also, in your particular field. Like, our cooks got the best, I mean; we got the best cooks in the Navy.

Jim: Why?

Donald: Why? Oh, because we were on the type of duty which was considered—they didn't have the M.D.s aboard because they weren't expendable, I guess we were. No but, the thing where—then you would go—if you were a radioman you to a radio school—

Jim: Tell me about that.

Donald: Well, radio school, basically—

Jim: How much different was the one that you went to in Madison?

Donald: Well, to this extent. You went like six to eight hours at a time.

Jim: And of course, it was in a submarine that you were operating, right?

Donald: No, it was in like a classroom, like this.

Jim: Oh, similar to what you had in Madison?

Donald: Similar to that, except it was continuous for eight hours.

Jim: What was continuous?

Donald: The feed of the code. And you only broke like for a break in the morning, and lunch, and then—

Jim: Were you reading? Is that what you were—?

Donald: Yeah, copying. You were copying in five letter groups—in five number groups, on a typewriter, with caps, only caps.

Jim: And was it pretty fast?

- Donald: Oh yeah, it got faster. And then, to get out of that, and to graduate from that, what you had to do was to copy like ten or fifteen groups—five letter groups, but they wouldn't tell you where they would be in maybe 200 groups, and they'd take out five or ten somewhere [laughs] and if you had any mistakes, boom, you went back all the way again. And kept that until you got proficient.
- Jim: Did you have a typing test or--?
- Donald: No, that was—see usually, usually I could copy it as far as like five, six groups behind. And after we got aboard the boats, I always knew what the key words were to look for. But then in training—I also was trained in sound gear operation and usage. And they did that by setting up a demonstration-type things. And you'd hear shrimp crackling and you'd hear whales and you'd hear porpoise, and you'd hear shipboard noises, and screws, and you could tell from the sound of the screws whether—
- Jim: Whether they're coming or going?
- Donald: Coming or going Doppler, and then also, the type of ship by the pitch of the screws and so on, so forth.
- Jim: Now how long did it take you for you to get pretty good at that? Is that something you'd learn in a couple weeks?
- Donald: Well, you learn it, and then you have to begin to apply it later on when you have—well, they do try to put in a little excessive noise, and that's another thing in the radio school too. They would put in jamming. So that you had to learn how to toss out the extraneous matter and be able to pick up—they even threw some Tokyo Rose in there. But then you had to learn a little bit about everybody's job. You had to know what the high pressure oil system was, what the different systems were, how they operated, what their purpose was. You had to learn what the Christmas tree was—
- Jim: Wait a minute—what's a Christmas tree?
- Donald: Oh! Christmas tree—there's a board. And on the board were red and green lights. So when you'd go, the board had to be green.
- Jim: That was a board you were looking at?
- Donald: No, I wasn't, but they had a man that worked that board, but you had to learn how to operate it in case of an emergency.
- Jim: Did everybody have to have one or two other tasks?

- Donald: Well, actually, you were supposed to be able to handle any emergency, like firing a torpedo. You weren't an expert. But you would know what buttons to push. In the hydraulics, you had to know what this valve would do in an emergency. Would that shut off a particular section? In other words, you had to become proficient at least in being an emergency person on board. And you didn't learn how to fix a motor, or a diesel.
- Jim: Or cook breakfast?
- Donald: Or cook breakfast. [Laughs] That's the one thing they never let us—but you learned all these things, then you graduated, and you were assigned to a unit.
- Jim: Tell me how long this training took.
- Donald: I think it was 12 weeks. A long time ago.
- Jim: Did you feel confident after that 12 weeks?
- Donald: Oh yeah. Pretty much you bet. Ready to lick the world.
- Jim: It seems that everything they wanted to teach you, you learned to your satisfaction.
- Donald: I felt that I was ready to go. And I didn't have to go to Spritz's Navy, which—Spritz was an old Chief and he used to call musters of his people every morning out by the NCO headquarters or club, and also there was a brig—a marine brig nearby, and he would call this muster and he would tell the admiral, "Wait until I finish my muster." [Laughs] But he ran the sub base; really, I mean he was a crusty old buzzard. When we were all lined up by the loading dock getting ready to go out, they had a special car for us and there were fifty of us. And we were waiting there and Spritzzy—we always called him his Gestapo—and anyway, he had his people and he'd say, "Got any liquor in there?" And the guy would say no and wham! You could smell it. [Laughs] And so, there were three of us, actually—I had a bottle of brandy that my dad gave me, so when he said, "Get any liquor out of your sheet bag, put it on the dock." I put it right beside my sheet bag. He came here, he said, "That looks like good stuff, son." And went right on, put it back in the sheet bag. But everybody that said no, whack! [Laughs]
- Jim: Oh, if they tried to get away with it, it was lost.
- Donald: Yeah, but see, he was fair. And he was tough. But they still talk about him; they even have a patch.

Jim: Now he was a chief on the dock—he had nothing to do with—

Donald: On the base.

Jim: On the base. So he was separate and apart from the sub (??).

Donald: Right, right.

Jim: So you got aboard your boat.

Donald: Okay, well, we got aboard the train. We went out to California. We went to—

Jim: Oh that's right, you weren't getting your boat there. Oh my.

Donald: So we went up through Canada and we had the best of service from Canada. Then we went on out of Detroit, and we went down through Kansas. And have you ever heard of the Harvey girls?

Jim: I know all about them.

Donald: We went to Harvey's and along the way in. They'd have breakfast for us or whatever. And then we went to—

Jim: The whole—excuse me—the whole crew?

Donald: Well, fifty died.

Jim: But you're all gonna be on the same boat.

Donald: No.

Jim: Okay, you weren't really the ship crew then.

Donald: This is where it kinda—we get down there, and of course, on the West Coast, then they had blackouts, so we didn't know where we were going. We went to Port Hueneme and we picked up one of "Kaiser's Coffins."

Jim: Say that again?

Donald: Port Hueneme. It'd be north of San Francisco.

Jim: How do you spell that?

Donald: H-U-E-N-E-M-E, I'm not sure, but Hueneme. And we got aboard one of "Kaiser's Coffins", and we didn't know where we were going.

- Jim: You mean you were on (??) one of his LSTs.
- Donald: No, he put together those ships in 48 hours.
- Jim: Cargo ships.
- Donald: Yeah, and we went aboard on of those. I was one of the fortunate individuals. I didn't take too seriously that idea don't ever sign up for anything—don't volunteer. But they asked if anybody knew anything about cuttin' meat. Well I did—sure. So I said yes. So they assigned me to work with the cook and so I made a little money too because we had I think a thousand seavees aboard and picked [unintelligible] and we were in the upper level. I know the seavees used to get a little angry, "How come you guys are up there?" And I said, well, "You're expendable and we're not." [Laughs] You know, I mean—but working in the kitchen, I was able to eat probably the best.
- Jim: How'd that give you money?
- Donald: Well, because I'd make sandwiches—
- Jim: On the fly—
- Donald: On the fly, and sell them to guys [Laughs].
- Jim: Did the cook know that?
- Donald: Yeah.
- Jim: Didn't care.
- Donald: Oh, no. You see, that was a ship that was—let's see, I think it was an Army ship with a civilian crew and Navy gun crew. And then we pulled into Pearl and I was put aboard—I think it was the Fulton sub tender. And she had a fire while I was aboard. I was down having a haircut when all the alarms went off and she caught fire. And it didn't delay her because a couple of days later we took off and we went to—oh where was it? Midway, I believe.
- Jim: On the tender?
- Donald: On the tender. And then I was on the tender for a relatively short time. And I kinda conned my way into getting aboard the boat, I went up to the boat that was tied up alongside which happened to be the Finback.
- Jim: You knew that was gonna be yours?

- Donald: No. Nobody knew what they were—they were in the relief crews until they got an assignment. And I found out from a guy aboard that they needed a radio striker at the time. And so I talked to the exec and just kinda casually and you know, “I’m a radio striker, and right now, I’m up at the radio shack up on the upper deck here.” And he says, “Would you like to come aboard?” I—“Oh yes sir, that’d be fine. Do you think you could arrange it with—“ “Oh sure,” so I finally got aboard.
- Jim: The Finback?
- Donald: The Finback.
- Jim: What was the name of that? SS what?
- Donald: The Finback? SS-230.
- Jim: That was the boat that you were on?
- Donald: Yeah, and the tender. SS-230. Finback. And if they needed a motor mac or something like that they would see if there was one in the relief crew. And so they’d have all the motor macs stand too and then they’d choose one. I kinda beat the thing by not having to stand to. [Laughs] I arranged it myself I guess. But yeah, that was it and then from there, why, we went out on the first patrol and I think the first patrol, if I remember correctly, was in the China sea.
- Jim: Tell me about the first patrol. What happened that was as you expected or was it different?
- Donald: No, it was as I expected. No real surprises—some interesting things. I guess we had gotten into the China Sea, and there were mines all over the place, and a lot of them had broken loose. And so for a time there, we were shooting them up, you know. The Old Man would --
- Jim: How? You mean your [unintelligible] shot ‘em with a [unintelligible]?
- Donald: Yeah, you’d shoot ‘em and break ‘em up. Blow ‘em up. And then the Old Man says, “Well they’re as much a danger to the enemy as they are to us because they’re floatin’ free.” So then we made a dive one time and if we didn’t run into a minefield and you could hear the cables scraping along the sides which is hairy because if they pull ‘em in, you’re done. And we sneaked through that. Well, that patrol, I think we sank two trollers and one of ‘em with a torpedo and the other one we shot up. They were still having some torpedo problems.

Jim: There were a lot of torpedo problems.

Donald: Right. But I know Lockwood was a prince, he was a great guy. And I think we came back in that time after we completed our run.

Jim: To what base?

Donald: I believe at that time we came into Majuro which they had set up as a rest area. Majuro. And they had a tender out there, and we tied up alongside it.

Jim: Majuro was where?

Donald: In the Marshalls. And they had a rest area out there. And we'd go for two, sometimes three weeks in the rest area.

Jim: Where you'd get re-supplied from the tender.

Donald: Well, you'd be re-supplied and they'd clean up the boat, they'd repair anything that had to be repaired, and so—

Jim: Recharge your batteries?

Donald: Well, those you'd charge—**[End of Tape One, Side One]**

As you were –

Jim: Underway?

Donald: At sea. Yeah. But during that first patrol also—

Jim: And these were all diesel that—

Donald: Yeah, diesel.

Jim: Two diesel engines, oil powered, right?

Donald: Yeah, and a dinky which was an auxiliary which was down below.

Jim: To help the engines?

Donald: Yeah.

Jim: Yeah. Yeah. For what? Running little things?

Donald: Well, in an emergency. And I can remember the bearings where the screws went through the hull were made of lignum vita which was like iron. And they took it because it was waterproof, it wasn't affected by water, and what have you.

But during that first patrol, you had to qualify.

Jim: To who?

Donald: Well, first, the lead man in the particular compartment would take you around and he would ask you questions about different valves, different systems, and so on and so forth. And in that compartment, you would answer and if you didn't get the right answer why then he would correct you and so on. And then following that, you'd go through each compartment the same way. And then after that you would go through with like the chief of the boat, who really was big time operator. And he would really lay it out on the line, you know, and you had to do this—I should've brought along—I have a card that I've preserved which had every system and who had qualified me on that particular system. And the chief of the boat would then put you through your paces. And then the executive officer would come in like you're a duty assignment like I was radioman. And sometime when I wasn't busy he'd come in and he'd start asking me questions about different things. And that's what he would do. Also you spent time up on the—as lookout. And that was kinda hairy when you had to dive in a hurry and you had to get down below.

Jim: What about the sonar? How long would you sit in front of the sonar?

Donald: Sonar was only when you were making an approach.

Jim: Oh, that's what I thought—you didn't have that on all the time.

Donald: No, no.

Jim: So you depended on—the reason is you depended on the lookout.

Donald: Right.

Jim: And you had what, two lookouts?

Donald: There were three. Three. Let's see—on the Finback, there were one on either side, and one on the periscope shears. And you'd swing down, boom, to the deck, and boom, down below. And you better get down below in a hurry because—[laughs].

Jim: When the horn sounded?

- Donald: You got below.
- Jim: How much time?
- Donald: Very little, never took the time to figure it out, but it was very little time and if anybody was ahead of you or behind you and you weren't moving, you actually jumped down to—
- Jim: Without bothering about hanging on?
- Donald: Right.
- Jim: A lot of guys must have busted an arm doing that.
- Donald: You could. But I know one time the last man down didn't get the hatch closed quite right and the water started comin' in, and there were about four of us hangin' on to that lanyard there [laughs] making sure that there was—you know, so they can—
- Jim: And the captain screaming at somebody—
- Donald: Yeah. But no, actually the relationship between the officers and them I thought was very good. You were made aware pretty much of what was going on and what your mission was after you got out in a ways—
- Jim: “This is what we're gonna do.”
- Donald: Yeah. “We're going to go into this harbor, we're gonna be on air-sea rescue, we're gonna be doing scouting work in this area.” Off Iwo I remember we were told to get the oil tankers—they wanted to keep the planes down. I can remember I think that was my third patrol. You're supposed to keep the planes down, so get the oil tankers. And I remember somebody said, “Well what about the troop ship?” “The hell with the troop ships, the marines will take care of the troops, keep those planes down!” They wanted to protect the fleet. And we'd be between and I remember we were to rendezvous one time with some of our planes. This was on, I think, the first assault—it was not an invasion, it was the first hit on Iwo, if I remember correctly. And the—[laughs] so we were out on the surface, and we were between the fleet and the shoreline. And part of our job was to seek out radar and different things by exposing ourselves or by using electronic means.
- Jim: To attract what?

- Donald: To get them to—to get radar, to get gunfire perhaps, to open up emplacements and what have you. And the thing was, we were supposed to have air cover. [Laughs] They never showed up, the only thing that showed up was a couple of Bettys and I go,” Wait a minute, we don’t—
- Jim: Wrong plane.
- Donald: Yeah. On the first patrol though, I was sitting eating breakfast. I think we were just getting to the China Sea a little bit. And all of a sudden, one of the lookouts came tearing through the after battery, “I saw it leave the wing! I saw it leave the wing! I saw it leave the wing!” And he was kind of frantic. And just then, there was a hell of an explosion. And I looked up, and here the hatch, I swear, lifted that much, and there was a blue flame, but that was because they were wired so that you could tell on the Christmas tree whether there was an open hatch or an space anywhere (??)
- Jim: It wasn’t dogged down?
- Donald: It had been dogged down, but it had just lifted enough that it showed that flash. And so I dropped my fork, I was eating, when the guy says, “What’s up Collie?” And I said, “Nothing.” “Yeah, well, we’ve got your cherry.” (Laughs) That was it. My first depth (??) charge of a bomb. And so then the next time we came back to Pearl—oh, no, we scouted Truk [Island]. And they were undecided whether to hit Truk or not. And so we went out around Truk and tried to arouse some interest, we even went into the harbor a little ways. And no, I mean --
- Jim: Nobody wanted to shoot at you.
- Donald: No. And so we just passed the word along, heck, bypass them, you know.
- Jim: How many crew did you have?
- Donald: We had, I believe there were 68 of us plus the officers.
- Jim: How many officers?
- Donald: Um, let’s see, six officers.
- Jim: And the chief of the boat—he answers to who?
- Donald: He answered, actually, to nobody, really. [Laughs]. I mean, let’s put it this way—theoretically, he answered to the captain, all the rest of ‘em, but they were smart enough to let—because he knew the boat inside and out.

- Jim: How much more experience had he had than anybody else? I mean several years, or--?
- Donald: Oh yeah, he had maybe a couple of years of more experience. But he also had a certain training to be chief. And then later on, they had super chiefs.
- Jim: With what, bigger boats?
- Donald: No, no it was guys who had—this came after the war—and they were guys who had had years of experience. And I know one of my good friends was a super chief after the war.
- Jim: Well, I just—I always wonder about the relationship between the skipper and the chief of the boat. Describe that for me.
- Donald: Oh, it was a very good relationship.
- Jim: It had to be.
- Donald: Right. And as a matter of fact, we had one officer who didn't get along with the crew very well. He was kind of obnoxious in many ways. And the Old Man told him, he said, "You know, Edwards, you either shape up, or you're gonna ship out. Now, get acquainted with the crew, get to know 'em." And so he did. And I met him at the reunion in 1988, and I said, "Can I call you Bill?" And he said, "Oh, sure." And I said, "Did you know you were a pain in the neck?" And he says, "That's what I've heard." And I said, "But you've changed." And he had. He turned out—he was the one that took the pictures of—when we picked up Bush on our tenth patrol for the boat. But the second, I believe, for me.
- Jim: So, after your first patrol, you had two weeks?
- Donald: Two weeks' rest at Majuro in the Marshalls.
- Jim: And that was a pretty big base? Just submarine--
- Donald: It was an atoll. And they had crews were in there and they had other ships in there. And I know they had a CINPAC meeting while we were in there, Commander in Chief Pacific and I can remember, it was funny, Admiral Lockwood, who I say was really a great guy. And they had all these admirals coming aboard for this big meeting and they had the rails manned, you know, and—
- Jim: [Unintelligible]

- Donald: Right. So this went on, and we could see it 'cause we were tied up alongside the tender which was just down the—and so then they blew the—so we went back in. That's it, you know. And all of a sudden there's on this one MC here comes the announcement, "Man the rails! Man the rails! Man the rails!" And the boatswain, be [unintelligible] away like to beat the band.
- Jim: They had to scrambled back up on top?
- Donald: They had to scramble back up on top, and what it was, was Admiral Lockwood, he came late, and he was wearing brown khaki with no insignia on his cap—he was just one of the boys. The others were all resplendent in their white with all the fruit salad and everything. But he was a real square guy and everybody liked him. And we did rest camp there and we had Gilly, you probably heard about that. They would—the torpedo men would drain the torpedo juice when we'd pull in.
- Jim: That's not healthy stuff.
- Donald: Well, at that time, you could run it off. They could run it off. And so they would, and we had a guy who was a utility man who had been a brew - master in Iowa at one time, and he rigged up a still.
- Jim: Good job because right out of the torpedo it would kill ya.
- Donald: Oh no, it had Pink Lady—
- Jim: It was methyl alcohol instead of ethyl.
- Donald: But later, well, at that time you could run it out and clear it, and you never had a hangover.
- Jim: Yeah I know, but it made you blind if you drank methyl.
- Donald: Well, yeah, if you drank it—but you see, what happened was a bureau of ships along toward the end of the war— maybe in the last year—six months to a year, put an additive in there without notifying that this additive could not be run off, and several guys did suffer.
- Jim: Yeah, you bet.
- Donald: But otherwise, there was no hangover.
- Jim: Yeah, we had a couple come aboard our ship in Korea. Drank some of that stuff they shouldn't have been drinking. Got pretty sick.

Donald: Well, we carried brandy aboard and if you were undergoing really heavy depth charging, why the Old Man could—

Jim: Did you have a pharmacist mate aboard?

Donald: Oh yeah, we had a Pharmacist Mate.

Jim: Did he prefer to take out your appendix?

Donald: Well, I suppose he would have.

Jim: Did he do any surgery?

Donald: He just removed like bullets or shrapnel.

Jim: What shrapnel? What bullets?

Donald: Well, the Japanese—the planes come in and if there was somebody up on deck and they didn't get down in time, they might get hit. And then two, sometimes—I remember one of the guys, one of our torpedoes prematured and blew up, and he was hit by a piece of the battery and it went into his arm, and he removed that.

Jim: Did you sleep along the torpedoes?

Donald: I didn't, no. I slept in the after battery which was—

Jim: 'Cause they needed you close for the radios—

Donald: Radio shack. And, well, that was the main bunking area anyway.

Jim: How many radio men were aboard?

Donald: Three.

Jim: Three of you?

Donald: Yes.

Jim: Were one of you available at every moment?

Donald: Oh, yeah. Yeah, as a matter of fact, sometimes, depending on circumstances, like if one of the radio men had a battle station on sound gear, which I did—

Jim: You mean a second duty --

Donald: Yeah, and then usually, you worked your hours, sometimes it's four on, four off, sometimes it's four on, eight off. Sometime's it's twelve on, and—depending.

Jim: And generally there was one on duty—

Donald: At all times. Oh, always, always.

Jim: Always one, and sometimes more.

Donald: Right.

Jim: And you manned the sonar gear and you manned the radio.

Donald: Right.

Jim: And what else?

Donald: Basically, that was it.

Jim: How many radios?

Donald: Well, let's see—one, two—we had two and then we had a transmitter, and, let's see—

Jim: Two receivers, and one transmitter?

Donald: One transmitter.

Jim: What about your aerial?

Donald: The aerial we plugged in up through the hall—

Jim: Alongside the periscope?

Donald: It was after the periscope.

Jim: Oh, it was after that.

Donald: And then it went back to the T-bar on the after end. Ours did anyway—some went forward, some went after. And we'd string it when we—

Jim: Just out there floating?

Donald: No, no they were hooked onto the T-bar.

Jim: And did it break water?

Donald: Oh yeah, yeah.

Jim: It had to break water.

Donald: It had to break water, right.

Jim: It wasn't easy to see though?

Donald: No. Well, usually, by the time it had broke water, I mean, your conning tower was pretty low.

Jim: That kind of thing is when you're submerged.

Donald: Well, when you're submerged—

Jim: --then there's no radio contact?

Donald: No radio contact. We had a T-Bar(??) on the deck for—

Jim: T-Bar(??)?

Donald: Well, yeah—

Jim: You mean a bar with two arms--?

Donald: No, up like this, crouched over—and that was a sound operator, pressure. And then below the hull there was a round ball and that was also had crystal, and was sound operated. And if we were in close contact—relatively close contact with another boat and had to communicate—

Jim: With a boat on our side?

Donald: Yeah. We could communicate through the sound gear.

Jim: Oh. I thought that was dangerous. I thought all boats would assume every other boat was an enemy.

Donald: That's true, except that we knew who was operating in our particular area.

Jim: How would you—you know, you picked up—your sonar picks up another sub—

Donald: You pick up another sub—

- Jim: What's the drill here?
- Donald: Okay, what you would do when you picked up the other sub—ordinarily, you wouldn't do anything. But in an em—
- Jim: You wouldn't care to identify it?
- Donald: No, not always, because, like you say, it could be the enemy. But sometimes in an emergency situation you had to take a chance on things like that. But ordinarily you wouldn't have another friendly sub in your area.
- Jim: You knew by your plotting that you were the only one—
- Donald: Right. In that particular area. I can remember off Saipan one time that a destroyer started making a run on us, and we were coming in to Saipan. And Saipan hadn't been fully secured at that point. And there was another boat that was probably four miles away on the other side of this destroyer. So we communicated through the sound gear and we told the other boat, "We're going to expose ourselves, and when he turns the spotlight on us, let 'em have it!"
- Jim: Oh!
- Donald: "Let 'em sink! Sink it!" And we found out later, that—and in the meantime we sent an urgent OUOUOU to the MPM in Hawaii.
- Jim: Tell me about this now, OUOU?
- Donald: OU is super-urgent.
- Jim: That's the signal?
- Donald: That was the OUOU. You put it OUOU, and that meant very urgent.
- Jim: This was by air through an aerial sticking above water?
- Donald: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. And we sent an OU out, and—
- Jim: Told 'em our boats are being attacked by—
- Donald: Right. "We're being attacked!" And they're gonna be sunk if they don't call off. Well, right away they sent out—
- Jim: They were ready to sink an American destroyer.

Donald: Right.

Jim: Wow.

Donald: We'd have done it.

Jim: And vice-versa, yeah.

Donald: You bet. And so anyway, the—

Jim: You stopped them in time—

Donald: Right. But the captain, he wound up, believe it or not, in the paradise of the Pacific—Midway. [Both Laugh]. White sand and Gooney Birds.

Jim: Which captain?

Donald: The captain of the destroyer.

Jim: He was court martialed because—

Donald: He wasn't even court martialed. They didn't do that. They just replaced him.

Jim: What did he do that was wrong?

Donald: What he did that was wrong was attacking us because he knew where we were. He knew where the channels—

Jim: He shot at an American sub? Is that what you're—

Donald: That happened outside the Panama Canal. One of our boats was sunk by a Flyboy, and you know—

Jim: Were they just not paying attention or--?

Donald: Submarines have no friends, that was always our—and he knew that we were coming in, he knew the other boat was coming in I'm sure. He must've had the word.

Jim: What did you think? He's a jock (??) or just --

Donald: Well, I think the thing is, he might've gotten gung-ho and said "Hey! I can sink a submarine."

Jim: What are you talking about—

Donald: There were some gung-ho contenders—

Jim: Sure, I know. So he was put on the beach then?

Donald: Yeah.

Jim: That was the end of his career?

Donald: Yeah, he never went beyond.

Jim: No, course not. So that was a pretty close thing?

Donald: Yeah it was.

Jim: So tell me about getting depth charged.

Donald: Well, first of all, you can hear it.

Jim: You can hear it when they're shot in?

Donald: Well, what happens is, on the sound gear you can hear the splash. But anywhere in the boat you can hear the "click-click, ka-boom!" There's a detonator.

Jim: So the "click-click" is just before it explodes?

Donald: The detonator is kicking in, and "boom!"

Jim: How did they have you dropping tin cans on you?

Donald: Well, they'd pick us up some way.

Jim: I mean you were attacking each other and then they notified the destroyers?

Donald: Well, the destroyers—we'd have to work around the destroyers.

Jim: So you assumed then, if you ran into a group—

Donald: That you might get hit.

Jim: That you were gonna get yours.

Donald: Yeah. And sometimes, believe it or not, you could hear the cannon bounce off the boat—

Jim: And not explode?

Donald: And not explode because they were depth-charged.

Jim: Oh, and you weren't low enough?

Donald: Right. And also, we could get under gradients—temperature gradients, or salinity gradients, or something like that which would screw up their pinging. And the pinging is what they—

Jim: Oh, the pinging, where they identify—

Donald: Ping! Boom. Ping! Boom. They could tell how far away we were. The pinging was kind of like water-born radar. You send out a signal and it—and also, believe it or not, when we were on silent running and I'd have the cans on, I could hear somebody drop a hammer on one of the ships nearby.

Jim: What on?

Donald: On the earphone.

Jim: Earphone.

Donald: You could pick up the sound of—

Jim: The sound transmits through water beautifully—

Donald: It sure does.

Jim: So anyways, so now one sub picks you up and then there's one destroyer that picks you up and droppin' this stuff—

Donald: And pretty soon others are usually joining in.

Jim: And you went to the bottom?

Donald: Well, you went down, as far down as you could get. The main problem—actually, you didn't like depth charges but you didn't worry as much about the depth charges as you did about the hedgehogs they'd come up with toward the end of the war. And the hedgehogs would go off on contact. If the hedgehogs hit you, you were done.

Jim: Even though that was a small thing on the depth charges.

Donald: Well, they were a pretty good size. but you know the—I know we were in a wolf pack on one, and mines—we went through a pass—Tokara, we called it, and it was narrow, and it couldn't be mined because of the current. So we went in, the three of us and when we came back out, we had to rendezvous. So two of us rendezvoused. The third one, we heard an explosion, and she never showed up. She must've—but then we found out from naval intelligence that they'd been able to mine Tokara. And we were already in before they got the word out. So we lost a boat there. And we did air-sea rescue.

Jim: [Unintelligible]. How many ships did your boats sink?

Donald: Altogether I think 23.

Jim: And how many missions? I mean, how many, what do you call it, tours or?

Donald: 12.

Jim: I can't think of the word right now.

Donald: On patrol—

Jim: Patrols, yeah. How many patrols were you involved with down there?

Donald: Three.

Jim: Three patrols? That encompassed what period of time? A year?

Donald: Oh, a couple years. Because you would be off—like I went into wolf pack procedure training. And then another time I was off and was working in the lab up on the—and that was just to kind of refresh.

Jim: A lab where?

Donald: In Pearl up on top of this—

Jim: Oh. You came back to Pearl then a couple times.

Donald: Oh yeah, if they were all Hawaiian. Great duty.

Jim: It was set aside for submariners?

Donald: Oh yeah, definitely.

Jim: Seriously?

Donald: Yep, the only time they broke it was after Iwo. They had a Marine group that came in and used one of the upper decks.

Jim: Well, I was speaking in jest. I didn't know that --

Donald: No, it was, and I think it cost us a quarter a week, and that was for linens.

Jim: Yeah I know, but they reserved places for submariners only?

Donald: Oh, yeah. Right.

Jim: I'll be darned.

Donald: Well, a lot of the places that we ate, like P.Y. Chong's. P.Y. was a great guy. He was one of our admirers.

Jim: That was in Honolulu?

Donald: Yeah, and he would set up for us every time we'd come in, we made it a point to— come in -- he'd set up a seven-course dinner, no charge.

Jim: No charge? That's a lot of guys.

Donald: Yeah, there were. And, well, everybody didn't go. You know, but most of us did.

Jim: And the officers didn't eat with you.

Donald: No. Well, some of them did. And then we had another one—"Lousy Chow's" we called it—Lau Yee Chai. And when we were over in [unintelligible] why we found, my wife and I and these friends—we found "Lousy Chow's" in front of the Royal Hawaiian. What they did is they had beautiful grounds and I was telling my wife about the beautiful grounds they had, and they put up some kind of a mall on stilts right down along Kaala Kaala Boulevard right directly in front and took off about half of the beautiful grounds.

Jim: When was this?

Donald: '87 or '86. And we—I was disappointed.

Jim: I'm sure. Okay. Now tell me about air-sea rescue.

- Donald: Air-sea rescue, what you did—there were two ways that they did it. They had Dumbos, they called ‘em, and they would circle a downed pilot if, you know. Or they would receive the signal and then direct the sub to the particular area.
- Jim: How did you know the pilot was there?
- Donald: Well, because the Dumbos would let you know.
- Jim: In the circling?
- Donald: In the circling. Or, they might be 100 miles away but they’d picked up the signal and then they plotted it and gave you the coordinates.
- Jim: And you’d have your aerial, above water to pick up the—
- Donald: Oh yeah, yeah. And then sometimes we could see ‘em. I remember the first 29 raid on Tokyo, we couldn’t figure out why they waited so long when we could, we were sending weather reports about three-four times a day. It seemed like beautiful days, oh boy! If they didn’t come today, we knew what was coming. And then, finally, on a day we never thought they would come, they did. But coming out we had two-letter codes like RA for a particular time period. And some of the fliers would not have the right code book or they wouldn’t get the right numbers and they were afraid of us. They were going down and they’d try to coast away from us as far away as they could get.
- Jim: They weren’t sure you were on their side.
- Donald: Right. And so some of them really did get away from us ‘cause we couldn’t catch up with some. But we did get some. But that was off Chichi Jima which was—
- Jim: Oh, that’s where Bush went down. Tell me about that.
- Donald: Actually, it was kind of—one of the planes was circling, and let us know that there was a flier down.
- Jim: Just a Flier?
- Donald: Just a flier. And so we headed in that direction, and we spotted him.
- Jim: He was picked up on a ship though first.
- Donald: Nope, no.

- Jim: Oh, then it was a sub and then to a ship. **[End of Tape One, Side Two]**
- Donald: The ships didn't know, the ships didn't come in that close. And so, anyway, we picked him up and took him aboard. And he stood watches and he stayed aboard for three weeks. And we also picked up four other guys. One of them is an interesting story. He was in relatively close to shore and he had a yellow life raft, and so we went in and there was no way of communicating with him, and so we had to dive. And so we dove and got in as close to him as we could, and the Old Man put the scope up, thinking, you know, he'll grab a hold of the scope. So then he didn't that time, so we went back and made another swing, and in the meantime, we're close enough to shore that the shore battery could get it. So anyway, put up the periscope again, and the guy did catch on, and he grabbed the periscope. But—he held on to that damn yellow life raft. And the Old Man said, "that crazy so-and-so is gonna get us killed!" [Laughs] So anyway, we started back out, going to [unintelligible] and the Old Man had raised the periscope and then he'd drop it, and then he'd raise it, and he'd drop it.
- Jim: And he didn't let go?
- Donald: And finally, the guy had let go of it and when we brought him in, why, after we got out beyond range, we surfaced and brought him below. But he was hangin' onto that [Laughs].
- Jim: [Laughs] He didn't really trust the submarine was gonna do it.
- Donald: No. But I operated the RDF at times, too, the Radio Direction Finder. And I had—at one point I had a pointer job on a battleship, and that was operating on the twin port 40.
- Jim: As a pointer?
- Donald: Yep. "Boom-boom-boom-boom—" boy, they were neat. And—
- Jim: What'd you shoot?
- Donald: Sampans.
- Jim: Oh, that's just something to do.
- Donald: Well, the Japanese, they were sneaky. Sampans, you know, for a while the sampans were pretty harmless. But then the Japanese figured out that they could put vehicles in them.
- Jim: Oh.

- Donald: I know one in particular we spotted him one night, oh about dusk, we thought it was a sampan and so the Old Man dove, and then we went hell bent for leather on the surface. [Laughs] And then we dove in the morning to make a trim dive, and who should pop up, but the same damn sampan!
- Jim: What did they usually carry?
- Donald: The sampans? Oh, they'd carry depth charges.
- Jim: What were they doing?
- Donald: Well, their purpose was to try to trap submarines. 'Cause submarines, for a long time—we never did—but a lot of the submarines, they'd run in the China Sea. They'd run into, like, a Chinese junk or something like that. And the guys sometimes had fresh produce or what have you, fish. And they'd make a swap with them. "Here's ten loaves of bread for some beans," or what have you. And, but the Japanese. They were quite devious, I know. We had one patrol there, there was a disabled—like a disabled destroyer—and the Old Man started to go in on him. And just as he started to go in, I picked up on the challenger. I picked up at two locations this sound of screws—destroyer screws. And so the Old Man felt he was committed at that time. And so the plan of attack worked out real well. He fired two torpedoes into the one that was standing still before it had the chance to get rid of enough, and then used it in the breaking up as a shield when we went around to the opposite side. And in the meantime, these other two destroyers were moving in on us. But, yeah, it was—
- Jim: Those sampans—what were they doing? Salting or seeding mines?
- Donald: Oh, they put mines down, but primarily they were to trap submarines by the fact that some of the boats had been trading with the sampans. So they figured that the boats would—
- Jim: Come in close?
- Donald: Yeah, or they'd think that the boats would—
- Jim: And then there'd be a destroyer or something that would --
- Donald: No, ordinarily, these—ordinarily the sampan was an offensive weapon. It had gun power but, you know, not a five-inch, but a little pea-shooter. But we had a five inch and that was—

- Jim: But when you took Bush aboard, of course, you didn't know who the hell he was.
- Donald: No. We didn't know until he started running. [Laughs]
- Jim: Until he had run for president?
- Donald: Yeah.
- Jim: And how did you know that it was him that was aboard your ship? Because the face probably didn't mean anything to you.
- Donald: No, the face didn't. But there was a friend of mine who had a nephew who was active in the Republican Party and—
- Jim: He tracked you down?
- Donald: Yeah, he did.
- Jim: Checked out which sub that was?
- Donald: Yeah, well see, Bush put on that little film clip, and I got a call that night—I think the first night it was on. My son called and said, “Dad, you were on Finback!” And I said, yeah. And then he told me. Well, then the lady that I knew, she contacted her nephew so when he came for his first visit to Wisconsin, when he was running for the nomination against Reagan, why, I got invited down with him. And it was kind of a funny situation because I had worked with the Treasury Department on a counterfeiting thing. And I was able to pinpoint the counterfeiter, where he made the plates and everything. And so they knew me and trusted me. And so, when I came, I didn't know that fish and all these other big wigs in the party, and so I went off, and I stood off to the side. And he came in, and he just went up to these people and they'd come up to him, and the Secret Service man went over to him. One of my friends whispered in his ear and he looked like a shot came over, and then he said “Let's go in the back room and have a drink, maybe a sandwich. We can talk.” So we did that, and he told the Secret Service. And then when he made his little talk, he said “This man right here—he said, “He represents safety,” and what have you. Salvation.
- Jim: [Laughs] You were representing the whole Navy.
- Donald: Right. At that particular point. And then we got the invitation to go to the inaugural for Reagan. And that was nice. And I had been asked—
- Jim: You went down to Washington?

Donald: Oh yeah. Yep. And we had the best. We went in and picked up our tickets—everybody was lined up, even the fancy ones from Texas. We just walked over to this table and I said, “Got some tickets for Collins.” “Oh, you’re Mr. Collins?” I said, “Yes.” “Okay! That’s fine.”

Jim: How many tickets did you have?

Donald: Oh, we had tickets to— balls. We all had tickets to everything.

Jim: You mean four tickets to everything or --?

Donald: Two.

Jim: You and your wife?

Donald: Yep.

Jim: So when he ran for president, did you get involved again?

Donald: We would’ve gotten involved again, except that I became ill about that time and—

Jim: It didn’t work out?

Donald: Didn’t work out.

Jim: So when was your last patrol?

Donald: My last patrol would’ve been in 1945. I think it was in April or May. And it was pretty lean pickin’s.

Jim: They choked all the shipping from Japan --

Donald: They did pretty well. Oh, we were off the Okinawa, too, when—

Jim: There was a base there called Kamaroto(??). Did you ever stop there?

Donald: No, we did stop at Guam, Camp Buey, which was up on the hill overlooking the harbor. That was a nice—but one of the people in the camp got shot. Because you had orders not to go out after dark.

Jim: So one of the guards shot him?

Donald: No. A Japanese fellow.

Jim: There were still some of the Japanese [unintelligible] for years.

Donald: Oh yeah, and all they took from the guy was his boots.

Jim: That was probably pretty important.

Donald: Right.

Jim: So when did you get back home?

Donald: I got back home in the middle of September, towards the end of September, and married October first. We pulled into Seattle and I got on the phone and I called, and I said, "Get that wedding dress ready, I'm coming home!" And I called my mom and dad in New York.

Jim: Was that back in Pennsylvania?

Donald: New York. See, I grew up in New York.

Jim: By this time they're in – oh, I see.

Donald: You see, I grew up in New York City—the first four or five years I spent in Sunbury with my grandparents. And then when I was old enough to go on the road, I went on the road with my folks. And then they moved and went into Binghamton. And I graduated high school in Binghamton. Which is upstate. Near Syracuse.

Jim: I know where it is. Cooperstown.

Donald: Yeah, not too far. The lakes area. The wine country.

Jim: Very nice. A lot like Wisconsin.

Donald: Yeah, it is, it is.

Jim: Rolling hills. Okay, so, did you get let out of the Navy right away?

Donald: Yeah, I did.

Jim: Didn't join the Reserves?

Donald: Well, no. I did join the Reserve, and that's when I got into that intelligence unit in Professor Bandy's (??) home. And he had code machines and stuff in the basement. And it was funny, his wife would come and she had to push a button, on the buzzer, and then there was a

curtain, and you'd open the curtain, and there was like a Dutch door, you know, split. And so she didn't even know what was in that room.

Jim: Where was this again?

Donald: It was in his home.

Jim: Where was it?

Donald: In Madison.

Jim: In Madison. How did you get back to Madison?

Donald: Well, actually—

Jim: Using your G.I. Bill?

Donald: Yeah. Yeah, I went to work in New York for a time, just maybe a couple months. They had the 52-20 and I wasn't about to sit around and collect 20 bucks for doin' nothin'.

Jim: And if you used your G.I. Bill, you got paid to go to school too.

Donald: Well, yeah, but what I was gonna do. But under the 52-20, I just felt that was a giveaway, and I didn't figure anybody owed me anything. I still don't. I just took advantage of what was there for me. We bought our home with the help of the G.I. Loan, and we—I went to school, and so—

Jim: So from Binghamton you got back to Madison.

Donald: Right.

Jim: And that was because?

Donald: Well, it was because Juanita's home was here. And me, I was used to traveling—

Jim: Was she a Madison girl?

Donald: Yeah.

Jim: Well, that explains everything.

Donald: But also because I had been to the University, and I knew the area, and I thought it was a nice area and the school --

- Jim: So what did you take at the University?
- Donald: At the University, I took sociology and psychology—criminal justice, basically.
- Jim: You got a degree in that?
- Donald: Yeah. And the Psychology was my minor. And then I went to a year's law school and then Juanita became ill, and we had bills.
- Jim: Had to give that up.
- Donald: Had to give it up, but I never regretted it. I got to know Barney Rommes (??), if you knew Barney —and the city—I guess, in a way, I made as many contacts as I could. I became acquainted with Russ Oswald, in the division of corrections, and with Barney Romnis(??), and with the city clerk at that time and different people.
- Jim: Eldon Hoel?
- Donald: Hoel, right.
- Jim: I just interviewed him.
- Donald: Oh, did you?
- Jim: Last week. Nice guy.
- Donald: Well, yeah. And he helped me. And then on the Board of Regents there was an Irishman—I can't think of what his name was—but as I was going through they had this thing about out-of-state students. However they had reciprocity with New York because of the Regents. Which was a big outfit then in New York and here, too maybe? I don't know. But, anyway, he helped me along the way.
- Jim: Was that a job—doing what?
- Donald: Well, I got a job working as a meat cutter up at Tibbles (??) on the square.
- Jim: After going through sociology or law school?
- Donald: Oh, this is while I was in school, and then I was a theater usher—
- Jim: Yeah, I know, but when you got out of your university—
- Donald: Oh, when I got out I went to work for the Division of Corrections.

- Jim: I see. Here in Madison?
- Donald: Yeah, well it was first Madison, then I went to Wausau. I was in the Reserve, and actually, Truman closed the reserve two days after my hitch ran out. [Laughs] So I went to Wausau to fill in for one of the guys that got called. And then I came back, and I had my choice—Portage or Madison or Milwaukee. I chose Portage because I thought, well, I grew up in the cities and it was nice, and I was glad I did it. I enjoyed it, but I thought maybe for my son, it'd probably be better.
- Jim: How long did you work for the state in Portage?
- Donald: 35 years, the longest of anybody anywhere.
- Jim: Boy, you must've got a big old watch for that.
- Donald: [Laughs] Well, they actually had sort of a problem, see, they didn't want anyone to be too long in one area. But the judges and everybody, when they said they were gonna transfer me, they went to my defense and said, "No way!" You know? We won't give you any office space. And as a matter of fact, I was the only—we had some Japanese people and they couldn't quite figure that out—I worked for the state, but the county provided me with an office. But most offices, they paid rent. Mine, they didn't. They provided the furniture, they provided me with telephone service except for 25 bucks, and then at night they'd take over, get my calls at the jail, where have you. And I had it made.
- Jim: That's a cushy job if I ever heard one. Wonderful.
- Donald: But I got to know a lot of people in Dane County. I knew a lot of guys in the Sheriff's department.
- Jim: Oh, I bet.
- Donald: Jack Leslie and Franz Haas.
- Jim: I know those people. Sheriff Leslie went to the high school that I went to. Earlier than I – he's older than I, but --
- Donald: And Dick Josephson. And we worked together, and I got to know these guys, and it worked out real well.
- Jim: Did you join a veterans organization?

- Donald: I had joined an organization, and I was doing an investigation and it involved civil people. And one evening, the president of the organization came up to me and said, “Hey, Don, you know, so-and-so’s brother—go easy on him.” And I said, look, if being a member of this organization means I have to go easy on anybody, I don’t want to be a part of it.” And so, for years—but then, the VFW got in trouble. People were stealing money, and there—you know. And so, a couple of them approached me and said, “Don, could you come and help us out of this mess?” And I said, “Sure.” So I went out, and what I hadn’t anticipated is they made me commander the first night. [Laughs]. But we cleared it up, cleared up the mortgage, sold the old clubhouse, and I was commander for two years. And I got a state diamond pin.
- Jim: Oh, that’s wonderful.
- Donald: But, I never wanted to be much of a joiner because in my job I felt that people would expect things from me, and they weren’t going to get ‘em.
- Jim: You raised a family?
- Donald: Oh, yeah.
- Jim: How many children?
- Donald: Just one. Michael.
- Jim: Is he around?
- Donald: Oh, yeah, he’s an attorney right up the street here. The building with the arches up there. What is it? The old dress shop. And they bought that and gutted it out. It’s right up on—
- Jim: That’s Aaron’s father?
- Donald: That’s Aaron’s dad, yeah.
- Jim: Aaron’s a nice boy.
- Donald: Yeah he is, he’s a really great kid. Well, they’re all great kids.
- Jim: Does he have brothers and sisters?
- Donald: Aaron has two sisters—one sister just got back from New York. She graduated from high school and decided that she would like to be on her own. And so at 18, she moved to New York, got an apartment, worked for an outfit for a year, and just came back, and now she’s going to one of the

universities. She's undecided, Penn State, or Saint Louis. And then the other—she graduated from the university this spring, and she's now out working at—she's going to go into graduate work. And she is working at a resort, and working with children, she loves children. She's in South Carolina now. They keep in touch.

Jim: Well, that's wonderful. Why, thank you, that was a good interview. You didn't forget anything, did you?

Donald: Oh, probably, [Laughs], if I didn't, I wouldn't— be me.

Jim: Okay.

[End of Interview]