

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Harvey C. Fehling  
Chief Water Tender, Navy, World War II  
1996

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**Fehling, Harvey C.,** (b. 1921). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 97 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 97 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

**Abstract:**

Harvey Fehling, a Lowell, Wisconsin native, discusses his service in the Navy during World War II. Fehling describes growing up on a farm in Lowell and serving in the Civilian Conservation Corps at Camp Madison as a youth. In 1939, Fehling voluntarily enlisted in the Navy. He describes a competitive selection process involving many physicals. The Navy did not accept many enlistees at that time because the U.S. had not yet joined World War II. Fehling discusses at length his basic training at Great Lakes Naval Base (Illinois). After six weeks of training, he chose an assignment on the *USS Milwaukee* where he served as a deck hand and an engineer. Fehling talks about his experiences on the *USS Milwaukee* in San Diego (California) and Pearl Harbor (Hawaii) in 1940. He discusses the large fleet docked in Pearl Harbor, which he and other sailors saw as a target for the Japanese. Fehling jokes that shore leave became less fun when the fleet arrived; before that, he would go to Waikiki beach and movies at the port. Fehling addresses gambling and drinking problems among sailors. According to Fehling, in mid-1941, the *USS Milwaukee* went on neutrality patrol in the Caribbean and the Atlantic. Fehling explains that the U.S. Navy did "spotting for the English Navy," warning the British about German ships. Fehling feels the neutrality patrol was part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "excuse to get us in the war." Fehling explains that the *USS Milwaukee* escorted merchant ships from South America to Africa. Occasionally his crew would board the ships to make sure no raw materials (like rubber) were being transported to Germany. Fehling vividly describes the Navy's hazing rituals for sailors who passed the Equator for the first time. He mentions hazing was not permitted after the U.S. entered World War II. Fehling relates that during the war his envoy sunk four or five German submarines. Once these ships sunk, the *USS Milwaukee* would leave the German crew in lifeboats all day before taking them aboard as prisoners. In 1944, the *USS Milwaukee* was turned over to the Soviets to boost their fleet. Fehling describes the voyage to Russia and characterizes Russian naval officers as intelligent and fluent in English. Fehling expresses sadness at handing over the ship because it had been his home for four years. He mentions standing near William Averell Harriman (famous statesman and ambassador to the Soviet Union) during the "turning over" ceremony. Fehling returned to England on a British destroyer. He describes British food and alcohol rations and animosity between British and American sailors resulting in fights. Fehling tells of visiting an isolated village in Siberia and rescuing a Russian merchant crew in the Arctic Circle whose ship was destroyed by German torpedoes. During the D-Day Invasion, Fehling served on British excursion boats that "looked like the Mississippi Queen." Fehling explains these

boats were designed for shallow water and were supposed to prevent another disaster like Dunkirk (France). His boat transported wounded soldiers from Omaha Beach (France) to South Hampton (England). After D-Day, Fehling was reassigned to the *USS Van Valkenburgh* in the Pacific Theater, where he was a chief water tender. Fehling mentions this ship was named for Captain Franklin Van Valkenburgh who died in Pearl Harbor. Van Valkenburgh's son served on the ship as did Henry Maier, future mayor of Milwaukee (Wisconsin). Fehling goes into detail about the differences between destroyers and cruisers. Fehling describes at length the Battle of Iwo Jima. The *USS Van Valkenburgh* bombarded Iwo Jima from the shore to protect the Marines on the ground. Fehling did not see the battle because he worked below deck. After Iwo Jima, the *USS Van Valkenburgh* went to Okinawa (Japan) and joined a line of destroyers that surrounded the island. They were targeted by kamikaze attacks, and Fehling states only twenty percent of the destroyers survived. He describes high casualties and a grueling battle lasting three months. Fehling discusses the atomic bombing of Japan and his views on it. He says none of the sailors understood what it was and thought it was just "a big, mysterious bomb." Fehling describes arriving in Nagasaki after the bomb was dropped. The *USS Van Valkenburgh* picked up American, British, and Dutch prisoners held in Japanese camps in Kyushu and took them to hospital ships. Fehling reveals he walked around in Nagasaki because nobody knew about the radiation. Fehling vividly describes a barren landscape. He states the dead bodies had been removed, but dead animals remained in the streets. He says "we couldn't believe what the heck hit" Nagasaki. After V-J Day, Fehling asked to be discharged because he had earned enough points. He decided against reenlisting because he "didn't want to go through that anymore." Fehling explains that, after his homecoming, he had trouble adjusting to civilian life in Horicon (Wisconsin). Fehling is joined in the interview by his wife Arlene Fehling and his sister Sharon Elskey. Mrs. Fehling relates that she met Mr. Fehling in Reeseville (Wisconsin). Her first husband was killed on the *USS Twiggs* during a kamikaze attack in the Okinawa campaign. The Fehlings comment on the amazing coincidence that the *USS Van Valkenburgh* sailed alongside the *USS Twiggs* that night, rescuing wounded sailors. Fehling reports using the GI Bill to attend sheet metal trade school. He worked in construction and as a machinist in Beaver Dam (Wisconsin) until retiring in 1985. He mentions joining veterans organizations because he enjoyed the camaraderie and felt it was his duty. He belonged to the American Legion for fifty years and was commander of the Reeseville post in the 1950s. Fehling also participated in the VFW in Lowell and shipmates associations for the *USS Milwaukee* and *USS Van Valkenburgh*.

### **Biographical Sketch:**

Fehling (b.1921) grew up on a farm in Lowell, Wisconsin. After working in the Civilian Conservation Corps, he enlisted in the Navy in 1939. Fehling served in both European and Pacific Theaters in World War II on the *USS Milwaukee* and *USS Van Valkenburgh*. After the war, he attended sheet metal school on the GI Bill and married his wife Arlene in Reeseville, Wisconsin. Fehling retired from Metalfab fabricating company in 1985. He lives in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, and is a member of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996  
Transcribed by Karen Emery, WDVA Staff, 1999  
Transcript Edited by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2008  
Abstract by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2008

**Interview Transcript:**

Mark: Um, okay. Today's date is April 9, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Harvey Fehling, presently of Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, a veterans of the United States Navy in the Pacific Theater during World War II. Good afternoon. Thanks for driving down. And we've got some visitors along with us as well. Would you please introduce yourselves. Ma'am.

Mrs. Fehling: My name is Arlene Fehling, nee Schultz, Harvey's wife. We were married in October 1947 so our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary will be coming up next year.

Mark: Oh, that's true.

Mrs. Fehling: We're laying great plans.

Ms. Elskey: And I'm Sharon Elskey (sp??). I'm Harvey's sister. I was born after he was in the Navy for quite a few years.

Mark: Okay. So I suppose we should start at the top, as they say. Why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to your entry into the Navy in 1939.

Fehling: Okay. I was born in the Town of Lowell.

Mark: Is that Dodge County?

Fehling: Dodge County, but lived in Beaver Dam for a number of years and then moved to the Village of Lowell, on the edge of the Village of Lowell, on my grandfather's farm.

Mark: And so you were farmers?

Fehling: Yeah, yeah, we lived right on the edge of the Village of Lowell on a farm, and I was there until I went in the Navy. Prior to going in the Navy I was, after school, I went in the CC camp for six months at Camp Madison.

Mark: I'm kind of interested in that experience. How did you get involved with the Conservation Corps?

Fehling: Well, mostly it was looking for something to do. You couldn't buy a job then in them days. You couldn't buy a job.

Mark: And as a farmer's son, who had just graduated high school ...

Fehling: Yeah, right, couldn't, so I decided I'd try that for awhile, for six months, and got a little experience because the CC camps were run by the Army and they were all military everything.

Mark: Did you like it?

Fehling: Yeah, I liked it. I enjoyed it.

Mark: What sorts of things did you do?

Fehling: Well we, I didn't, most of the guys out there went out in the field around the Arboretum and built all those stone fences, and planted trees, and different things in the Arboretum, but I stayed in the camp most of the time. I was working with the maintenance pool there, at the camp.

Mark: But you eventually started looking at the military then?

Fehling: When I was there, me and another friend down there, went down to Milwaukee and put our name in for the Navy.

Mark: Why the Navy, out of all the other services?

Fehling: Well, I did have my name in for the Army. I wanted to go to Fort Riley, Kansas in the Calvary. Of all places. Clean the horse barns. Anyway, ...

[JUMBLED VOICES]

Mark: Well, he grew up on a farm. What, it comes natural.

Fehling: But anyway I had known some guys in World War I around home there that were in the Navy and they always told me, kind of took it from there.

Mark: Now, did your experience at Camp Madison sort of attract you to the military?

Fehling: Yeah, it did, it did. We got a lot of military discipline. That was the main thing. And they taught you a lot. I think it had a little to do with my getting in the Navy.

Mark: Yeah.

Fehling: 'Cause I had the experience, military and discipline.

- Mark: Uh hum. Now, when it came to enlisting in the military, this is 1939. It's before, it's quite a few years before America's involvement in the war.
- Fehling: Yes.
- Mark: And as you alluded to before we turned the tape recorder on, it was a little difficult to get in the service at the time. Why don't you explain what it was like to get into the service. How difficult it was for you.
- Fehling: Well, let me see once. We can say that now [unintelligible]. To get in the Navy at that time was very difficult because they weren't taking any enlistments. They were just, a few select few. You had to be in perfect health, number one thing. If you had any one little thing wrong with you, you were rejected. In fact, the first time I went down to the recruiting station in Milwaukee, they rejected me because I had two small cavities, which I never had any cavities in my life up until that time. So I had to have them filled before I could come back the next time. And I had them taken care of. And then, so then they sent me a letter then some time in September and said to report down to the Milwaukee recruiting station at 4:00 in the morning. We will be taking you down to Chicago first. Will examine you here in Milwaukee first to see if you will be acceptable yet and, because you have been selected out of 250 people or something like that, in the state of Wisconsin to go to the Navy.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Fehling: So then they examined me in Milwaukee. Then they took us down to the recruiting station in Chicago and we were examined one more time. We rode the elevated down, down in the Loop, and they examined us there again, and then they weeded out a few there. And then eventually they sent us that evening, then we got done there and they sent us out to Great Lakes, and there we were examined one more time, and they weeded a couple more out out there. So eventually ended up there was only 18 guys left and I was one of them so I considered myself lucky.
- Mark: Very fortunate, yeah.
- Fehling: Yeah. So from there on, in the training station, started there from.
- Mark: And did you do your basic training at Great Lakes?
- Fehling: At Great Lakes, yes.
- Mark: So, why don't you just describe to me what sort of training it was you were doing at this particular time.

Fehling: Well, all we did there was mainly learning how to march, and discipline, taking care of your clothes, and all the clothes in them days was all wool. They weren't laid flat or ironed or anything. You had to roll all your clothes up in a little round, little balls and about 10 inches long. And then we had, slept in hammocks. We had no bunks then. And everything was march to this and march to that, and all discipline.

Mark: Now, was that discipline a problem for you?

Fehling: No, not for me, no.

Mark: Was it a problem for some people though? I mean, ...

Fehling: It was for some of them, yes. Some of them couldn't, they had a hard time coping with it.

Mark: I suppose some people washed out at that point, too.

Fehling: They did, yeah. They sent some home, yes.

Mark: Were there some things about military life that you had trouble with? For example, I went to basic training 40 years after you did. There was a lot of foul language and that sort of thing.

Fehling: Well, that didn't really bother me 'cause, see, I was used to it being in the CC camp.

Mark: Uh huh.

Fehling: And it was, some of the guys had trouble with the marching. See, we used to have to march 6, 8 hours a day, marching out in the field, and they couldn't handle that but I was used to it 'cause being, working on the farm, so I was used to any hard work and anything.

Mark: Was there any weapons training? Did you shoot pistols or rifles or anything like that?

Fehling: We shoot a rifle at Great Lakes, with a big bayonet, a World War I rifle with a bayonet, and that was our, had to stay with us all the time we were in training. Then we had all kinds of different competitions you had to go through while you was in training. You had to each, you was assigned to companies, see. And then the companies would compete every week for who would be the best company. On everything. On marching, on athletics, on everything.



- Mark: Inspections and that sort of thing.
- Fehling: Inspections, your barracks inspection, your personnel inspection. They all got rated. Well, anyway, the company I was in, we had up above-average guys, see. Maybe, I'd say, intelligent or something. But, anyway, we were able to, we'd come out of there four times, the Rooster Company, well, out of six weeks we were there. So that was something we was always kind of proud of.
- Mark: Yeah, well, I'd imagine.
- Fehling: So.
- Mark: And so this training lasted how long?
- Fehling: Six weeks.
- Mark: Six weeks?
- Fehling: Six weeks.
- Mark: And what happened after that?
- Fehling: Then I got, go home for I think about a week. I think they sent us home for a week and then reported back to Great Lakes, and there we were assigned to, we could sign up for different ships. They had a bunch of ships on the bulletin board and you could sign up for the one that you thought you would like.
- Mark: And which ones did you sign up for? And why?
- Fehling: Well, I thought I would, they had battleships there and I thought I don't want to get on a battleship because there's too many people on there. And then there was a couple beat up destroyers and I didn't think I wanted to get on one of them. So there was a light cruiser, they called it a light-stout cruiser, USS Milwaukee, and I thought it sounded like a good sounding name, so that's how I got on that one.
- Mark: Especially coming from the Badger state I suppose.
- Fehling: Yeah, right. I thought, well, Milwaukee, that's my ...
- Mark: And so the Milwaukee was where at this time?

Fehling: It was in San Diego.

Mark: San Diego.

Fehling: It was her home port.

Mark: And so you went then to San Diego.

Fehling: Then in the middle of January we all got shipped to the, rode a regular passenger train. We had bunks, not a troop transport, but a regular passenger.

Mark: I suppose that's a good time to travel from Chicago to San Diego. January.

Fehling: January. It was because they all was fools going across Nebraska because it was 20 below zero. So anyway, well, we got out there in the night. I went to lay down in the bunk, I used to lay in the bunk and watch the mountains go by, and then it was still snowing, the high Sierras there yet. The next morning I woke up and looked out the window and I saw all the green trees, orange trees, and everything. I never saw anything like, you know, in my life like that. Then they took us right down to San Diego.

Mark: And so you got to the ship, and you got on the ship.

Fehling: Yup.

Mark: What was your specific, what were your specific duties on the ship? What was your duty station?

Fehling: Well, they assigned me to the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. That was a deck division, deck hands. And then I stayed on there for three months and I thought I don't know, I don't really like this swabbing those decks anymore. Polishing brass. There was a lot of brass on there to be polished. So I signed up for, they had an opening in the engineering department, so I signed up for that and I got in there right away.

Mark: And so the mission of the Milwaukee, militarily was what? What did you do?

Fehling: Well, we, our job, the Milwaukee's job was they, we trained with the fleet all the time on different things. Out firing, go out, we went off of San Diego around San Clemente out there. All during the week we'd go out and Friday night, afternoon we'd come back in to San Diego. And once in awhile we'd go up to maybe San Francisco for a weekend. They spread them out up and down the coast. But then we were, there about four or five months, four

months maybe, and then we went, they sent us to Pearl Harbor for an overhaul, 30-day overhaul. We were out there for all of 1940 and then the fleet came out there. We were put in Western Pacific Frontier Forces at that time and Milwaukee, and there was another bunch of cruisers and destroyers but there were no battleships out there. But then all at once they brought all the battleships out and all the heavy cruisers and stuff and they were all in the carriers and they operated out of Pearl then, see, back and forth out of Pearl. We'd go out around the islands and operate some during the week and at nights we would anchor between the islands. They called them Lahina Roads, off of Maui—Maui and Lanai and Molokai. It was an area in there where you anchor. That's where the whole fleet anchored during the, at night. And then at weekend we'd go back into Pearl again.

Mark: I suspect that's a pretty, it was a pretty impressive sight—all those ships.

Fehling: Yes, it was. At night it was especially because you go out to sea and they were all lit up. I thought it was a city out there. The next morning I looked out, I couldn't see nothing. All I could see was the islands, you know. Anyway, that's what we did. But we left on Pearl Harbor then, we had been out there for the middle of '41, they were going to send three groups of ships back to States for recreation and we were on the first bunch to go back, so we left before, that was in the middle of '41, see. Anyway, we got, we didn't get to go on no recreation. When we started back they sent us through to Panama Canal, through the canal and go to the east. We got assigned to the East Coast automatically. Our home port then was the Brooklyn Navy Yard so we went up there for a couple of days. Then we would go back down to the Caribbean and they sent us out in the Atlantic Ocean and we were, that's when, then Roosevelt, they put that neutrality patrol in, if you remember that.

Mark: Why don't you explain that to me.

Fehling: Pardon.

Mark: Why don't you explain that to me.

Fehling: Well, I think that the neutrality patrol was a kind of a, we were a, actually what we were doing was spotting for the English Navy. When we would see German ships or anything like that because, see, Germany was at war with England at that time.

Mark: Right.

Fehling: Anyway, we were out there one time—I was going to show you something here. This is maybe a little propaganda, I don't know. This is what one of

the boys wrote when we were out there one time. That's where I got a [unintelligible].

Mark: So, did you see a lot of Germans out there?

Fehling: Yeah, we would see them.

Mark: And when you would spot them, what would happen?

Fehling: Well, then I think somehow they had a secret code that they would notify the English where they were, the English Navy in Touse [or "in twos"??] somehow. But anyway, see, Roosevelt wanted an excuse to get us in the war with England. I mean, everybody, that's no secret anymore.

Mark: Yeah, that's no secret now but as a young ...

Fehling: At that time it was ...

Mark: ... "swabby" at the time.

Fehling: ... yeah, no, we didn't know what we were doing there. And then when we got over there to the Azores and here was this German pocket battleship in there, well, my God, what are we doing here? We wouldn't last two seconds with that German, with that Schornhorst. So that was the object I guess to but, anyways, somehow they cancelled that. When they knew that ship was in there—they got secret orders—somehow they were getting them—that we would be, we'd pulled out of there and got out of there. But we were actually going to go into Ponta Delgada for a little recreation, for a little leave. But when that Schornhorst was in there, we said no, no, we don't go in there. So that was...well, then anyway after that we pulled, we used to patrol and escort a lot of ships and protected a lot of convoys in the Caribbean. We went back and forth out of the Caribbean. Then we operated down the coast of South America, between South America and Africa. They had four of those older cruisers down there—the Cincinnati, the Detroit, the Omaha, and the Milwaukee—and they operated, ran a blockade between South America and Africa.

Mark: And so you're escorting British ships? Or American ships?

Fehling: Oh, no, we were escorting American, or Allied merchantmen, protecting them. But we also stopped every ship that we met, or picked up on our radar. We had a pretty good radar on there then, a pretty new one, 'cause when we were in the Brooklyn Navy Yard we had a new radar put on. We would spot them at night or pick them up at night and then we'd follow them, see, until the next day, and the next morning, daylight then we would

have them lay to and we'd send a boarding party aboard and inspect what they were carrying.

Mark: And you're looking for what?

Fehling: For German blockade-runners that were bringing raw material around from Indochina. See they were, that's the only raw material they could get. They were bringing rubber around and all kinds of things from Indochina, see. And then we would stop them or, we operated with two destroyers. And also we were looking for submarines also, and we did sink about four or five of them down there, the destroyers did. And we also captured some German crews down there.

Mark: Now, is this before Pearl Harbor?

Fehling: Yeah, that was after Pearl Harbor. Some of it was before but it was, most of that action took place after Pearl Harbor.

Mark: After Pearl Harbor.

Fehling: Because we weren't allowed to do any shooting, see.

Mark: Right, that's what I was wondering.

Fehling: 'Cause we were on what they called that neutrality patrol. We were just out there for sitting ducks what we were.

Mark: I've got a couple of questions about Navy life before Pearl Harbor. And then I want to talk about that particular incident.

Fehling: Okay.

Mark: When you weren't on duty, what did you and the other sailors do in your spare time?

Fehling: On board ship?

Mark: On board ship and then if you got some shore leave.

Fehling: Well, we would go ashore. Well, we didn't, when we were in Hawaii you could go ashore but after the fleet got out there it was no fun no more.

Mark: Why was that?

Fehling: Oh, because there was so many sailors, see. [LAUGHTER] But anyway, before that we used to go out to Waikiki Beach, see, but at that time it was only two hotels out there and that was the Monalona [probably means Moana Hotel] and the old Royal Hawaiian. That's all that was out there. But we used to lay around on the beach and do a few things like that. Walk around, 'cause we didn't have a lot of money in them days. We were getting probably \$32 a month so we didn't splurge on anything too much. And on board ship, well, we just sit around and we had movies every night in port.

Mark: Now, was there a ship's library for example? I know some of the bigger ships had libraries.

Fehling: Yeah, we had a small library on there. But then we had our, every other day we'd be on a duty, see, and we'd be standing watches—four on and eight off—in the engine spaces.

Mark: So, I remember in the service there was some drinking, gambling and that sort of thing. I don't want to offend anyone's sensibilities here but did you see much of that sort of thing?

Fehling: Yeah, there was a lot of gambling. Payday, a lot of them guys would spend all their money gambling on payday and lose it, but I never got involved in any of that 'cause I loaned them guys money, \$5 for \$5 a payday. When they would be broke so they wanted to spend all of their money gambling and then I would lend them \$5 and on payday, \$5 I'd be standing at the pay line collecting my money. And they want to go ashore.

Mrs. Elskey: So what, you mean they just repaid you? Or you got an additional \$5 for that?

Fehling: Well, I got an additional \$5.

Mrs. Elskey: Oh! So you got \$10 for every \$5.

Fehling: Yeah, I got \$10, I got \$5.

Mrs. Fehling: Yeah, \_\_\_\_\_ [LAUGHTER & TALK OVER]

Fehling: But they were glad to get it because they were broke, see. Some of them guys just couldn't control their gambling. And some of them got pretty drunk ashore. I'll admit that. I know one time we were in St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, and they got over there and got all drunk up on rum and so they had to send a working party ashore with a big whale boat and load them up and bring them back. You can imagine what kind of a mess that was. They got, drank a lot of rum, and then the heat down there got to them.

- Mark: Yeah. The so-called Shore Patrol, isn't that what it's called?
- Fehling: Yeah, well, those guys here were just a general working party they sent over. They normally didn't do that but they had to do it at that time. Yeah, we had a, every time we went ashore, any port we were in, we had Shore Patrol go, every time.
- Mark: I suppose boys will be boys.
- Fehling: Yeah.
- Mark: So, Pearl Harbor. December 7 of '41, on that day, do you recall where you were and what you were doing?
- Fehling: I wasn't in Pearl Harbor.
- Mark: No, I know, but I mean ...
- Fehling: Oh, where I was, yes. I was, we were, happened to be in the Brooklyn Navy Yard that day. We were having a new radar put on, that's what we were doing there. So we were on the ship, in the Navy yard. When the sirens started blowing we didn't know what the heck was happening. They thought the German planes were attacking New York so we all went to general quarters on the ship. But anyway, everybody got excited there in New York but there was no, it was just a false alarm.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Fehling: But anyway, it was kind of scary after they, Pearl Harbor got broken that night.
- Mark: Yeah. Now, for many Americans, Pearl Harbor was a surprise, and getting into World War II was something that people hadn't expected. But you had been out in the Atlantic chasing German boats around for quite awhile now. Was it a surprise to you that we're going to get into the war?
- Fehling: No. Well, it was a kind of surprise like how they did it, the Japs.
- Mark: Uh huh.
- Fehling: It was surprise, but it didn't surprise us that they bottled them up in there because we always said to, talked to another during, you know, when we were out there yet, that they should never have all those ships in here at one time. All they've got to do is sink one in the entrance and they're trapped in

there, they can't get out 'cause it wasn't room enough for just one battleship to go out of that entrance.

Mark: And so, after Pearl Harbor, how did things change for you? What happened to you as a result of Pearl Harbor?

Fehling: Well, not too much. We just continued on our, but ...

Mark: In the Atlantic.

Fehling: Yeah, we were in the Atlantic all the, most of the time but, except for right after Pearl Harbor they, we got assigned to take a convoy across the Pacific. We went through the Caribbean, through the Panama Canal, picked up a convoy there and was taking it to the Philippines to try and relieve the troops on the Philippines. And all we had at that time, they kept most of the good ships in the fleet up at, around Pearl Harbor and around Midway and those places, you know. So they assigned the Milwaukee, an old cruiser, a destroyer, and one submarine and we took a convoy all the way across the Pacific, through the Society Islands, down the southern route, to Australia. But, anyway, when we almost got to Australia, they got word that they were going to divert the convoy into Australia because Bataan fell. So then we were, we turned around, come all the way back then, to Australia, and picked up the convoy then and took it into Australia. And they were for the MacArthur defense there then.

Mark: And so, as the war went on, what sort of duties were you doing? Were you doing more escort duty and that sort of thing?

Fehling: Yeah, a lot of, yeah, still running the blockade. One time during the war when Juan Peron down in Argentina was getting kind of, rattling his sabers down there 'cause he was kind of in sympathetic with Adolph Hitler, why they sent down two cruisers and a squadron of destroyers down to Buenos Aires and Montevideo. We went down there for a week and just anchored down there. Well, then, he settled down. So then we left down there. But anyway, we spent a week down there. We anchored in Montevideo across the river from Buenos Aires.

Mark: In Uruguay.

Fehling: In Uruguay, yes. That's Uruguay, yes. And then we come back up to the coast of Brazil. We used to operate out of Brazil. We'd be in Rio, we'd go in there and refuel. Our main operating was Recife, Brazil. That's up around, up a little further. Then there was another place we used to always stop was Bahia, Brazil. Once in awhile we'd stop up at, in Trinidad, Port of Spain in Trinidad. And then the other spot was when we get across on the



other side of the Atlantic, over towards Africa, we would stop in and stay for a couple of days and fuel at Sierra Leone, British West Africa.

Mark: Yeah. These are some pretty exotic ports of call.

Fehling: Well, that one was because they were nothing but head hunters there.

Mark: I was going to ask you to describe some of these different ports. Why don't you just describe Sierra Leone.

Fehling: Well, Sierra Leone, that was all, mostly coming out of the bush yet except for the British colony there.

Mark: Yeah.

Fehling: And in South America, well, we got along pretty good there in South America because, well, they talked Portuguese, see, the language is Portuguese in Brazil but they were fairly modern. We could go in the restaurants and eat, nice restaurants and everything. They liked us because we had money and we'd buy all kinds of things.

Mrs. Fehling: You and the British, how you had to fight in ...

Fehling: Well, we never got along with the British very good. After the war one of the British cruisers came around, got away from the Japs and came around the Horn of South Africa and they came up the south, and they stopped at Trinidad and we happened to be in Trinidad at the same time, in Port of Spain. Well, the British and the Americans don't get along. I can tell you that now. The sailors anyway, they get in a fight right away. So they're upstairs one night in some honky-tonk up there with one of them windows swing out and open, and the Yanks, they were dancing with the-- all black girls, see. They were dancing with the black girls. So the Limeys, they were dancing with themselves. So all at once they started pushing around there, see, with one another. Well, then a big fight started and they threw the Limeys all down the steps. Then the Shore Patrol come and, well, we beat it out the back. We got out. So that was ...

Mark: Boys will be boys. There we go again.

Fehling: Yup.

Mark: Um so, after Pearl Harbor, there was a lot more money going into the military because we had to build up the war effort, of course. From your perspective as a young sailor, did you see how the war was beginning to change the Navy? Did you see more equipment? More modern equipment?

And could you detect any differences in the personnel, in the quality of the personnel? Were they better sailors? Worse sailors? Just more of them? How would you characterize this?

Fehling: They were getting a little bit, yeah, when we were getting the new ones on. We got a lot of new ones on the Milwaukee. They brought them on there for training, see, mostly to ship to other units in the fleet after awhile.

Mark: Now, this is after Pearl Harbor.

Fehling: The ones that were in the combat zones like in Halsey's fleet and stuff like that.

Mark: Yeah.

Fehling: And we, but they were getting, they weren't as good a disciplined as we were, see. You had trouble with some of them, you know. They couldn't cope with it, you know, like we did.

Mark: I see.

Fehling: Because, see, we came up in the Depression.

Mark: Yeah.

Fehling: You know, and we were used to hard times and we knew what to expect. But those guys now coming in then, that was a different story.

Mark: They didn't take well to military discipline?

Fehling: No, they didn't take well because most of them, a lot of them were drafted, see. But even though they were drafted in the Navy but [that did not] necessarily mean that they volunteered for it.

Mark: Now, in terms of equipment and that sort of thing, did you notice any changes, you know, perhaps like some new radars or, did you have problems getting parts, or not have problems getting parts?

Fehling: No, I don't know. No, we always got parts. The only thing new that we had was the radar, see. We got a new radar and we used that to follow, to pick up the ships. We could pick them up about 100 miles or so ahead of us.

Mark: Now, you're escorting the convoys.

- Fehling: Well, we escorted convoys in the Atlantic. A number of times we escorted some passenger liners up from South America.
- Mark: Now, as I think you mentioned, you did in fact run into Germans at times.
- Fehling: Oh, yeah. Well, we were running into German submarines all the time.
- Mark: And so what would happen if you're doing a convoy and you detect a German submarine? What would happen?
- Fehling: Well, we had two destroyers with us. They took over that duty. See we didn't have no sonar gear on the cruiser and they would take over the depth charges or the sonar gear and find out where they were. But they usually didn't tangle with us too much unless we, two destroyers out there. They tried to get out of our way as much as they could but we did, when we would board, like we'd pick up one of those blockade runners and follow it all night and the next morning in the daylight we would move up on them, see, and tell them to lay to, we're sending a boarding party aboard. Some of the times they would go off the other side and blow the ship up, see, and it would go down, sink it. And then we'd, well, we let the crew out, let them out all day and then in evening we'd pick them up. One time they sunk one that was loaded with those big rubber balls. The raw rubber comes from Indochina. And it blew that thing open and all that rubber floated around out there. So then we had to stay around there for a couple of days because they sent some tugs and barges out to pick up all that rubber.
- Mark: It's still useful.
- Fehling: It was, it was, you know. There was nothing wrong with it. They could use it.
- Mark: Now, were there incidents in which your convoy was attacked?
- Fehling: Not physically attacked, no, no. But like I say, we did sink some submarines and pick up the crews. We picked up one crew, one time comes to my mind, that submarine crew, and we left them out there pretty near all day, and then in evening pick them up and whatnot. The old skipper of that submarine, they dropped the sea ladder over the side and he'd come up on the deck and the first thing he did was spit on the deck, see. He was so damned mad. So anyway, they put them, locked them up, kept them on there until the next day or so, then we went into Brazil and they had a prisoner of war camp there where they kept all those guys, Germans, that we'd pick up—merchantmen or military, whatever they were.
- Mark: Now, as I see from your cap here, you were also on the Van Valkenburgh.

Fehling: Right.

Mark: When did you change ships?

Fehling: Well, that's another little story that I've got to tell you on Milwaukee.

Mark: Okay.

Fehling: We were in the South Atlantic and we got orders one night to go to, to proceed to New York as fast as you can. So I wake up in the morning and we're going 100 miles an hour. You could feel the ship shaking. A couple of days later we, it took us about four days, we were way down in the south Atlantic, and we stopped in at Trinidad and fueled and went right up to New York. We didn't know what was happening then yet, see. Nobody says nothing. So they took off a lot of stuff off of the ship—books and information and records and all that stuff was taken, so we don't know what the heck is happening. Anyway, we were there about four or five days in New York, in Brooklyn Navy Yard. We took off from there and we were, then they said well, we're going over to Europe so we don't know what's happening then. See, Europe, the war was on over there but we weren't in it yet. The front hadn't opened up in it, the second front. Well, first we stopped at Belfast, Ireland. Then we proceeded from there, we went around to Edinburg, Scotland. We don't know where we're going yet, see. We're over here. So out of Wompton (??), a few days there, we went up northern end of Scotland in the Shetland Islands and we formed up with a big convoy. Well, then they told us—we're going to Russia 'cause we're going to turn the Milwaukee over to the Russians.

Mark: Oh, I see.

Fehling: So, we're on our way to Russia the next morning. It took us about a week and a half to get up there I think. Something like that. But we battled all the way up there. The Germans tried to get the Milwaukee all the way up there.

Mark: Really?

Fehling: They put her in the middle of the convoy but they tried to torpedo it all the way up but they couldn't get a shot at her. The British, they done the convoy duty work and they had a screen of destroyers all the way around the convoy. But anybody that went to Murmansk on a convoy knows what it was because that was really a dangerous—at one time they went up there, they lost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the ships at one other, earlier in the convoys, the Germans sunk. Anyway, we got up to Murmansk and so then the Russians came aboard, highly educated Russian sailors and they could all talk English. So

we were to train them so we stayed, we were up there then for oh, about three weeks, four weeks, something like, training them. I've got to take me a cough drop.

Ms. Elskey: Do you want some water?

Mark: Sure.

Fehling: No, I've got one.

Ms. Elskey: Or you want some water?

Fehling: Well, anyway, the Russians, we told them everything, got everything, all the training and they wanted to know how fast it could go. Well, we said it could do about 32 knots, 34 knots maybe.

Mark: Which is how many miles per hour? I don't know.

Fehling: Well, that's a mile and an eighth is a knot, see. So they didn't believe that. They couldn't believe that a ship could go that fast, that cruiser, that old thing could go that fast, you know, that cruiser. But she was well-maintained and engineering department was well, in good shape. So we're going to, we'll take you out on a run. We took them out into the North Sea out there, the Bering Sea the next morning and they were going to have two destroyers, their destroyers that were tied up to this dock follow us, escort us. Well, when we went out there, it took us about half an hour to build up speed and we built it right up to 34 knots and they lost them destroyers, they couldn't keep up. The Russians, they couldn't believe it. We left them in the smoke. Well, anyway, then they believed that so we came back. But while we were in Russia there, why, we weren't in Murmansk itself. We were out at some boondocks out at Cola Bay, way out in the godforsaken place that no buildings, no nothing. And there was a little village about four or five miles off to one side down there so they said if anybody wants to go over there, we could walk over there some day. Well, anybody that knows what some of them Russian villages up in Siberia are like, so we walked over there and—the movie on, they said, you can go and see it. So we went where the movie was and it was an old barn, no heat in it, and it was about two, three below zero, and planks in there to sit on, and they had a movie at a Western Front. You know, the Russians fighting on the Western Front. So anyway, we stayed awhile and watched it and, oh, we don't need this. Anyway then, so then we walked around in the village a little bit and we went back to, walked back to the ship.

Mark: I suppose there's not much to do, huh?

Fehling: Nothing, absolutely nothing. Oh, they still run around with reindeer on a little sled so you know what kind of a place it was. There was no cars or nothing, just, and that's what they traveled with, reindeer, little reindeer, on a sled. So we went back to the ship and just sat around on there. Then we got orders one day—well, when we first arrived there they sent part of the crew back right away with the first convoy.

Mark: Right.

Fehling: Then after five or six weeks they said, well, the rest can go, so they split us up in another convoy going back, yeah. They didn't put them all on one ship, Americans.

Ms. Elskey: But didn't they decommission the ship while you ...

Fehling: Pardon.

Ms. Elskey: Didn't they decommission the ship, or turn it over?

Fehling: No, no. Yeah, they took it, yeah, that's right, they—well, we had a turning over ceremonies and old Averell Harriman come up.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Fehling: He was Ambassador to Russia at the time.

Mark: Yeah.

Fehling: And when I remember the ceremony, we were on the back catapult deck, that's where we carried two seaplanes on there. Anyway, that's where everybody was lined up with something. I was only standing about four or five feet from old Harriman when the turning over ceremony was so I remember him. And then they, but it was kind of a sad moment, when I seen that flag come down, and Russian flag go up there.

Mark: Well, see, I was going to ask. I know Navy guys get very attached to ships.

Fehling: Yeah.

Mark: And I'm wondering if it was a difficult thing for you and your fellow crew members of the Milwaukee to turn that ship over.

Fehling: Yeah, it was. They had, they were a little sad about it because, see, like me, I was on in early 1940 to 1944.

Mark: That's a long time.

Fehling: Yeah. And, you know, it's your home for all those years and then the Russians, you know, another thing they wanted to take everything, we weren't supposed to keep anything at all. They wanted to keep the life jackets and everything, see. But finally the captain intervened and said, no, you get your life jackets, you get all your bedding, but they didn't want us to take any tools, see—I was in the engineering department—but we did smuggle out a lot of tools off of there. And then they wanted to check our bags when we went off 'cause they knew that we had taken some of them. But the officer, the American officer of the deck, said, no, you don't look into Americans' bags so we got off a few tools, small tools and stuff., souvenirs more than anything. Well, anyway, I come, I got assigned to come back on a British destroyer, an old World War I destroyer on the way back. I lived, I mean they all slept in hammocks yet but I didn't have a hammock so I slept on some footlockers. I had my little mattress along. The Navy, you know, don't have a very big, thick mattress. You roll them up and that's what you sleep on, and I slept on. I ate with the Limeys. They eat a lot of big, square, maybe about two foot square pans and they line that with a dough, and then they put meat and vegetables and stuff in there, and cover it over, and then they bake that. It's like a pot pie. That's what they, they eat a lot of that stuff, and a lot of fish. Well, anyway, then they served, every day you get your tot of rum, see. And so we were allotted our little tot of rum. That's two shots of Whiskey, like our shots, but I didn't drink any 'cause that was, my stomach wouldn't stand that after being on that destroyer in that Arctic Circle up there.

Mark: Pretty choppy up there?

Fehling: Oh, yeah, it's very choppy. And there was even icebergs up in there yet. We had to go up, see, in order to get around Norway—that's where they had their air bases, the Germans—the convoys had to go way north of Bear Island [Norway], up in the Arctic Circle and then come down past Iceland to get there. Well, anyway, one day about three or four days out, there was one merchant ship that carried a whole bunch of Russian sailors that were coming back to the States to take over, bring up some mine sweepers, and them Germans torpedoed that thing right out of the middle of the convoy. Blew her right in half. Well, I was on the deck, happened to be up on deck on the destroyer that day and, oh, once I seen that thing fly in half. So the destroyer I was on right away got orders to go over there and pick up the survivors. The front half went down right away but the back half stayed floating so they picked up what they could but you only spend about two minutes in the water up there and you're dead, in that Arctic Circle. Anyway, we picked up a bunch of them. We had 18 or 20 we picked up yet that's still living yet, and they put the bow up against the back float on that

one and they jump over. Some of them made it and some of them didn't. Anyway, then they said, so then they had to sink that thing so then the Limey destroyer backed off and tried to shell it. Well, the shell didn't sink it so then they finally set a depth charge real shallow and that sunk it. So then we continued on back to England. We got into Glasgow then. I think that trip took us two weeks to come down with that convoy. That was quite an experience.

Mark: Yeah, I bet it was. And so what happened after that then?

Fehling: After that, from there they took us up to an Army base there in Scotland, right near Glasgow. It was deserted already 'cause the troops all had moved south for the invasion. That was in May, in the middle of May, see.

Mark: Right.

Fehling: So then a couple of days later we were there, we got orders to go south, too. They split the Milwaukee crew up into three crews and they took us down to—I can't think of it—Wales, Carthage (??), Wales. They had three, oh, moon ride excursion boats that just operate out of Atlantic City and they, how they got them over there I'll never know. They look like the Mississippi Queen, really, they were so old. They had hurricane decks on them, and promenade decks. But anyway what they wanted with those things, they didn't draw much water, see. And we found out later what we was supposed to do. We took them over then we, when the invasion started, we went over with the convoy, with the invasion force, but we laid out in the outer rim. We were off of Omaha Beach. What they were going to use them for is if they couldn't make the landing we would go in and try and get as many on there as we could to get them out because they didn't want to happen what happened to Dunkirk, where the British troops got trapped on the beach and couldn't get out, see. So they were prepared. That was our job. Well, then after about three or four days then they found out they were going to stick, see—the troops were going to be able to stay. You know, the Americans and the British, and so then we started hauling wounded back across the Channel. We went over to South Hampton with them then go back. So then we did that the rest of June. Then in, some time in June then, end of June, first week in July, we got orders to leave. We left then on a ship. Some other Sea Bees took it over. And we went on an LST that took us over to southern, South Hampton again, and from there they took us by truck all the way back up to Glasgow, Scotland. I rode from one end of England to the other end in an Army truck. From there we loaded right onto the Queen Elizabeth, transport, hauled troops back and forth across the Atlantic.

Mark: Right.



Fehling: So all of the Milwaukee assembled there at about the same time. How it happened, I don't know, but they finally got that straight. Anyway, we all got back to, come back, it took us five days to get back on the Elizabeth and she traveled alone. She never traveled with anybody. Traveled at 35 knots. And so then we got back to England, not to England, I'm getting confused here—back to New York. We tied up on pier, off of pier 90, New York Harbor, and then they transferred us out to Liedel (sp??), Long Island. That's where they send all the survivors from the ships, out there. They had a bunch of hotels taken over out there, the Navy.

Mark: That's sort of a convalescent kind of thing?

Fehling: Yeah, kind of like that, yeah. Where all the survivors went but for reassignment also. So from there they sent us home on 30-day leave then. And then I went back to Long Island after my 30 days was up and there I got assigned to a new destroyer, the USS Van Valkenburgh that was just commissioned. It was going on a shake-down cruise and when I picked it up at Charleston, South Carolina. Just as I got to South Carolina she came out for her shake-down cruise.

Mark: Yeah.

Fehling: Stayed around there about a week and then we headed for the Pacific water right away. I was a chief water tender then.

Mark: Now what does that mean? I was in the Air Force.

Fehling: Well, that's a chief boiler technician.

Mark: I see.

Fehling: In the boiler rooms.

Mark: So you're way down in the guts of the ship is what you can say.

Fehling: Yes. As low as you can get.

Mark: Yeah. So you went through the Panama Canal I would imagine.

Fehling: Went back through, well, we yes, we went through the Canal right away. Then we went up to San Diego for some big boy, an admiral there, wanted to inspect them before they go to the Pacific, see, so we had to go up there for an inspection in San Diego. We laid around there for a week and then we went with a bunch of other destroyers and stuff headed for the Pacific.

We went to Hawaii. And at Hawaii, after we got there, then we got there in about January sometime, first part of January, 1945 that must have been. Yeah. Anyway, we trained right away with the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division for a landing, for Iwo Jima. And they had some fake landings, mock landings, on Maui with the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division.

Mark: Right.

Fehling: To coordinate what would be happening and stuff for the landing. So then we went, after that, took off for the Pacific right away. Crossed the Pacific and went to Iwo Jima.

Mark: And describe, well, first of all describe what a destroyer does and how that was different than the Milwaukee. And then tell me how it functioned during the Battle of Iwo Jima and what was your personal, if you have particular memories of, that battle.

Fehling: Well, let me see. Yeah, the destroyer was, well they were a lot smaller than the cruiser. The Milwaukee was 555 feet long. This destroyer is only 300 and something. And went about a 35 foot beam. But that light cruiser had a width of 55 feet. But there's a lot more, every spot on that destroyer is used for something. It's either to stack shells, or ammunition, or a gun, or something, or food, or whatever it is, it's used. It's utilized. There's no room for nothing on there. In fact, I slept on a bunk under the number two turret up forward in the chief's quarters where I had shells all around my bunk on the back side, stacked in. And when I was asleep, my arm would hang over the shells, it's for resting them. But anyway, and not only that but the life is a lot tougher on a destroyer.

Mark: Why is that?

Fehling: Well, it ride rough, you know. In storms you got to strap yourself in your bunk. And then you don't eat as good on there because you don't have all them annuities [amenities] that you do on a cruiser. So a destroyer man's life is a lot different than being on a bigger ship—a carrier, or a battleship, or something.

Mark: So when you got to Iwo Jima, the ship was doing like off-shore bombardment or something like that?

Fehling: Yeah, we went in right away for bombarding the first morning. But they had, the fleet had been there prior to that and bombarded the island for three days.

Mark: And so as you pulled up to Iwo Jima the bombarding had already begun.

- Fehling: Yeah. They had already softened it up, see. But we went in there bombarding for the support to the troops, for the Marines when they started landing in the morning. We were on the inner screen. The cruisers laid out a little further. The battleships were out further yet firing over the heads of the other ships.
- Mark: And as for yourself, during the battle, you're in the guts of the ship.
- Fehling: Yeah, I'm down below.
- Mark: And so what, do you have any idea of what's going on above you?
- Fehling: Very, you really don't know what's going on because on a destroyer there's only very few men on topside. The ones on the bridge and the ones on the 40 millimeter and 20 millimeter guns.
- Mark: And I suppose in a battle they keep people down below decks anyway.
- Fehling: Well, they all got their job below deck, see. Like some of the guys are in magazines, some of them are on CIC, central directors for the guns, and they're all down below decks except some of the rescue parties on top side. Very few of them. But like I say the only ones that are on topside are the 40 millimeter gunners and the 20 millimeter gunners. The gunners on the five-inch turret gunners are all inside their turrets. There's nobody outside. And the only information we had, we had what is called a smoke watch—one guy assigned up there from the engineering department on the bridge with direct phone contact to the boiler room so if we were making smoke or something you can clear that up right away, and then he passes a little information on down. But other than we knew nothing what's happening.
- Mark: So as the guns are going off, for example, can you hear them?
- Fehling: Oh, yeah.
- Mark: Or is that noisy you can't hear them?
- Fehling: The whole ship shakes. We know when we're going into action. When they start shooting we say it's getting hot now. But then, well, we didn't get any real hits there at Iwo but we fired for the Marines, or we stayed there, the whole time the invasion was on, and fired for the—we had a spotter on the forward Marine positions.
- Mark: Yeah.

- Fehling: And he would tell us where he wanted the fire directed.
- Mark: Now this battle went on for weeks.
- Fehling: Well, that, yeah, Iwo Jima, that was, well, over a month.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Fehling: Yeah. Well, let's see. I can tell you. The battles of Iwo Jima started on the 19<sup>th</sup> of ...
- Mark: February.
- Fehling: ... February and we ended up some time in March. Because then we went, after the invasion there then we went back to Saipan, Tinian and we picked up another convoy and that one, then we were getting ready to assemble to go to Okinawa.
- Mark: If we can backtrack a little bit. This battle is going on for weeks. Did you get above deck at all?
- Fehling: Oh, yeah, yeah, no, no. We don't stay down there. Only when the battle, when they have general quarters or battle stations. When they were firing just for the general firing, they just kept a couple of gun crews on, see. Keep essential personnel. The rest of them were, like in the boiler rooms we kept extra crews down there to keep everything warmed up and ready to go.
- Mark: And so you got up on deck and what did you see? When you went up on deck, when you weren't in combat, what did you see up there?
- Fehling: Well, we ...
- Mark: Did you see the island and the battle going on?
- Fehling: Yeah, we couldn't see too much, you know, really. You're a little bit too far out to see anything. But you can see the puffs of smoke and stuff going on. But we couldn't see the beachhead, you know, like where everybody was laying like you see in the movies.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Fehling: Or I mean on the newsreels. No, we couldn't see any of that. But we could see the LCVPs and LCMs and stuff going in with the troops, all in and out, in and out, all the time. But we were as close to the beach as any of them were because the rest of the ships were all out further.

Mark: Yeah. So, you went to Saipan. Then it was off to Okinawa I guess.

Fehling: Then we assembled with another convoy, a bunch of Marines and Army, and went, got to Okinawa so we were ready to go on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April. And we was with the group, the convoy group and support groups. We landed on the south end of, the tip of the island. Didn't land. The landing was in the middle of the island. We only went for three days. We would go in, they would put the Marines on the boats and they'd go in so far until they drew fire and they'd come back out again because they wanted the Japs to think that they were going to land there. But it was just a ploy to keep the Japs off balance so they bit on that and they kept most of their troops in the southern part of the island. Well, why we were there though, then when the suicide bombers start attacking.

Mark: Did they attack your ship?

Fehling: Well, they attacked an LST loaded with tanks and ammunition a little ways from us. The Van Valkenburgh, the one I was on, the USS Van Valkenburgh—I've got to get this in first—and the Van Valkenburgh is named after Captain Van Valkenburgh. He was the captain of the Arizona that sank in Pearl Harbor at the time and was killed on the bridge.

Mark: And who I think is from Milwaukee, oddly enough.

Fehling: He was originally from Milwaukee. Yes, he was. Yes. Anyway, that's what the Van Valkenburgh was named after him. And we had his, his son was on there, was a lieutenant on there at the time. And also Henry Maier, the ex-mayor of Milwaukee was on there with me, and he was on there until the end of the war, too, Henry. Anyway, he was a lieutenant. Well, anyway, the LST was hit right away with a suicide bomber. We went to his aid right away with the firing, they abandoned it, see, and left it float. We went over alongside of it and fought the fire and, well, we saved it. Then the tugs came out and towed it into some island they had taken over already. And let's see. Then the invasion continued on from there. We got assigned to, the kamikazes started taking over then. They were really getting—they put a screen all the way around Okinawa with a screen of destroyers and that's when they were, they were about 150 miles out, the destroyers, and they would pick up the kamikazes as they came in and report them back to the invasion force, see.

Mark: Right.

Fehling: And our job out there was, like I say, to report them, but they would always attack the destroyers first. There was three destroyers, or usually two

destroyers and a smaller ship like an LCI or something like that out there. And they called them pallbearers. The reason they called them pallbearers was they picked up the survivors from the destroyer. The story goes on those destroyers was that they called them the “sacrificial lambs” at Okinawa. It was 158 destroyers that were hit there and 20% of them, of the destroyers, survived that attack. The Van Valkenburgh was one of them and we were there for three months. Every day and every night we were out on the picket line except for a few times we would come in at night and we’d fire star shells over the island for the forward Marine or Army positions. But anyway, I just want to say this one part here, the land battle killed 13,000 killed on the land in Okinawa. Five thousand sailors were killed by kamikazes and 18,000 casualties on the destroyers. And there was 158 of them were committed to that battle and they were all knocked out except 20% of them. I got this someplace but it’s too hard to find now. Oh yeah, here it is here. The life expectancy of a destroyer out there at that time was 10 days. At Okinawa, at radar picket duty. We went along, I don’t know how many we went alongside of and helped that got hit on our patrols always.

Mrs. Fehling: This just came out now.

Fehling: A guy just wrote this book.

Mrs. Fehling: It’s been secret, the Navy ...

Fehling: The Navy never wanted that out, see.

Mrs. Fehling: And now after 50 years ...

Fehling: But now after, this guy here, he was on a destroyer out there, the USS Wren so he knew what it was about. The Wren was hit with a kamikaze also.

Mark: Yeah, it’s pretty remarkable luck or whatever, that your ship ...

Fehling: Just plain luck, that’s all. I say it was to hell and back out there with that thing. We would be attacked by two suicide bombers at one time and two destroyers, but during the day they had, the Air Force and the Marines, they would send out ...

[END OF TAPE, SIDE A]

Fehling: ... water, see. And the radars, we couldn’t pick them up when they come in for their attack. We were, it was just shooting them down, one right after the other.

Mark: And this went on for, again this is weeks.

Fehling: Went on for three months almost.

Mark: Yeah, months.

Fehling: Yeah. It went on from April 'til ...

Mark: July I think.

Fehling: ... 'til July, yeah. Then, well, then we survived that. Van Valkenburgh survived that but there was so many of the other ones that went down and most of, a lot of those guys are still laying on the bottom yet, north of Okinawa, out there yet, where destroyers, they had to sink them. That one guy had a story in there, they'd come in, they had a place they took over, the Navy, at Pramarritta (sp??) Islands where they brought all the wounded destroyers into. And they had repair ships in there and they had a floating dry-dock, and patch them up and send them back to the States. Some of them they patched up enough to put them back into battle again.

Mark: Yeah.

Fehling: And send them back out. One guy was describing, when they would come in there they would have the guys piled up on the decks, on the back, like cordwood, on the top decks. Well, 100 destroyers got hit. You can imagine. And they would just blow them things completely, almost out of the water. Well, one of them got hit out there with a suicide bomber and then another one came around and sent a torpedo into it and the whole ship engulfed in flames and then went down. Just, boom!, like that. Anyway, I've got a lot of stuff here to read but I don't want to read it now. It tells the whole bit, in detail, of how this thing progressed out there. Nobody ever knew anything about that, see. They could never report any of that in the news because they didn't want the Japs to know how bad they was beating us with them kamikazes, see. But anyway, then after July then Okinawa fell and then they kind of tapered off a little bit and they didn't come down no more and send them. So anyway, then the Van Valkenburgh assembled with a fast task force, two new battle cruisers that we had—the Alaska and the Guam—they never were in combat. And them and a couple of carriers and a couple of squadrons of new destroyers and we made a sweep along the China coast. We were trying to pick up the troop ships coming out of there but we didn't find any anyway. We went through, between Formosa and China.

Mark: Right.

Fehling: And filled a couple of air bases on the way but we didn't really see much action there because they were a little scared of us.

Mark: Yeah.

Fehling: Well, then after that, then the Japs decided—we happened to be laying, got back and were laying in the Buckner Bay at Okinawa. And one night, all at once, at 10:00 at night, all hell broke loose. The sky lit up and everybody was shooting, see. We didn't know what the heck was happening., an attack, you know. But some guy got the word that the Japanese were going to surrender and they started celebrating prematurely. So anyway, they finally got that settled down, the old generals and admirals got their units, cut it out, there ain't no peace yet.

Mark: And this is before the atomic bomb, I take it.

Fehling: Just before the atomic bomb, yeah. Then they dropped the bomb, see. The two bombs. But we didn't know what they were either.

Mark: Yeah, I was going to ask you if you recall when you first heard of the atomic bombs and what your reaction was, and those around you.

Fehling: We had no idea what they were. No idea whatsoever.

Mark: It was just a big bomb.

Fehling: Just some kind of a big, mysterious bomb. Well, anyway, then right after that, before the surrender in Tokyo Bay, they sent the Van Valkenburgh, the squadron of destroyers to lead two hospital ships into the Nagasaki. That's where the bomb was. Because they were supposed, they brought all the prisoners of war in there, in the Kyushu (Island) that's in southern Kyushu, see, and they were supposed to, they had orders to bring—now this is after they send those envoys down to talk with MacArthur's people, and he told them what they had to do, and the first thing they had to do was bring all them prisoners in, what they had collected over Indochina, Philippines, and Americans, and British, and everything. And they had them working in Kyushu in the mines and stuff. Well, anyway, we went, we were the lead destroyer because we had a commodore aboard the destroyer I was on. The destroyers, we filed back up in there but we had a Japanese pilot to lead us up in there 'cause that was all full of mine fields. So they took us up in there and we got in the inner harbor of Nagasaki and we tied up to the dock right away and the hospital ships would come up in there then, behind us, and they anchored out in the bay. And then the prisoners start coming in the next day, on the trains, some open boxcars and stuff. They, we hooked up



water, hot water and steam over there so they can wash them off a little and examine them and they were just skeletons. You never saw anything like it.

Mark: Did you get to talk to them at all?

Fehling: No I didn't. No, we didn't talk to any of them. No, we weren't allowed to talk to any of them. But when them guys seen that American destroyers tied up there with their flags flying, they went crazy. But anyway then, I'm ahead of myself a little bit, the waterfront wasn't damaged too bad. There was a few buildings along the waterfront standing yet from the bomb. But the rest of the town we could see was completely flat, completely nothing, nobody moving. In fact, when we came up that bay, that was quite a ways back up in there, we didn't see a soul on the beach. Nothing, nobody. They were hiding. Anyway, we got in there, I say tied up to the dock and started unloading the prisoners then, and they were taking them out to the hospital ships, and to the different ships. They were Americans, or English, or Dutch, or whatever they were. I think we stuck around there about a week, they brought them all in there. We got to go ashore. I walked right, walked around in that over there, that radiation.

Mark: Yeah.

Fehling: I can't believe it. I mean, if I'd known what I know then—when we saw that town, we don't know what, we couldn't believe what the heck hit that. We didn't know what it was, see because it's kind of built around, surrounding mountains around it.

Mark: Right.

Fehling: And the mountains looked, the trees looked like they took a comb and combed them all down. All laying down. And the rest of the town was flat. There was nothing standing but once in awhile there was a steel girder or something standing here or there but anything that was brick or wood, completely disintegrated. But they had, at that time they had most of the dead items picked up out of there 'cause we didn't detect any, you know, bodies. But there was some dead animals laying around. Well, we stayed there about a week and then we left and after that we went out and some of the Japanese submarines surrendered to us out at the entrance of some of the harbors. We went up to Sasebo, Japan—the big Naval base there—and there we saw, we stayed there. That was in November. Then they started, said, well, anybody that wants to go home, if your time is up, you can go home but you've got to have the points, see. At that time you had to have so many points, see.

Mark: Right.

Fehling: Well, I had so many points. I had oodles and oodles of them.

Mark: I was going to say I can't believe there were many people who had more points than you.

Fehling: I had so many that I didn't, they didn't even ask any questions if I could go or not. So I said I want to go home. So the next day they said be ready to go the next day so I got on, got out, took me over to a transport that was loaded with troops and different things, and Marines, and they headed for the States. They pulled into Port Hueneme in California and there we stayed a couple of days, and then we got on a troop train, then went down around through Arizona, through Texas, then back up to Great Lakes, and there I got mustered out. But anyway the story is that right after I left the Van Valkenburgh they got orders to come back to the States and they beat me back.

[LAUGHTER]

Mark: Kind of funny how that works sometimes.

Fehling: I wasn't about to take any chances to get stuck out there on occupation duty, which I thought there is an outside chance that we could because being a new destroyer, see.

Mark: And there were a lot of guys who did, too.

Fehling: Yeah, there was a lot of them.

Mark: So the war's over and you're discharged. What did you want to do with the rest of your life? What did you want to do to get things back on track?  
[TALK OVER]

Fehling: I had thought once about re-enlisting. I went down to Milwaukee to re-enlist. I had 90 days to make up my mind. Well, I went down there and I got down there and I changed my mind. Said, no, I guess I don't want to go through that anymore so I come back home. So then I went to work for a construction company.

Mark: I see.

Fehling: No, first I went to work for John Deere in Horicon. That's where it was.

Mrs. Fehling: You were going to Hong Kong.

Fehling: Yeah.

Mrs. Fehling: You were going to Hong Kong.

Fehling: Yeah, I was going to Hong Kong first. But anyway, I went to work for the John Deere plant in the boiler—they made their own electricity over there at that time. So I stayed about a month there I guess. I didn't like that because I didn't have no car and I was living in a boarding house and I couldn't get adjusted to that kind of a life over there.

Mark: I see. Did you have trouble finding that job? I mean, there are lots ...

Fehling: No, no, they sent me over there.

Mark: ... a lot of guys coming back.

Fehling: They sent me over there right away.

Mark: Who sent you over there?

Fehling: The employment office.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Fehling: Yeah. Because I had, you know, the qualifications.

Mark: Right.

Fehling: But I couldn't get adjusted to that over there which—in Horicon at that time, they rolled the sidewalks up at 8:00 at night, see.

[LAUGHTER]

Mrs. Fehling: Used to being around people, you know. Action, activity, conversation, and here there was nothing.

Fehling: And I didn't have a car.

Mark: It was kind of quiet. Yeah.

Fehling: I was living in a boardinghouse with an old lady, an old maid.

Ms. Elskey: And probably there was a lady in Reeseville that you were ...

Mrs. Fehling: Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

Ms. Elskey: Her husband was killed in the war. Her first husband.

Mrs. Fehling: Yeah, this Okinawa campaign.

Fehling: He was on a destroyer that was hit with a kamikaze. In fact, we went alongside that night and took the wounded people off of there that night. The Van Valkenburgh. He was on the Twiggs.

Mrs. Fehling: Isn't that amazing? It's hard to believe that.

Mark: It is amazing.

Fehling: Yeah.

Mrs. Fehling: That these two people ...

Ms. Elskey: Most important two people in your life.

Mrs. Fehling: ... in your life and they were side-by-side.

Fehling: He lived in Reeseville and I lived in Lowell. That was only about three miles apart.

Mark: So after, in Horicon, that job. You did what, again? Construction, did you say?

Fehling: Well, then I come back home and I stayed with my folks on the farm, then I drove to work. I got a, I went to vocational school for, to be a sheet metal trade.

Mark: Did you use the GI Bill by some chance to finance that?

Fehling: Yeah, I used the GI Bill. Yes, I used it, I was on the GI Bill and went to sheet metal school for sheet metal trade. Then I went, worked for a construction company. But they were paying me, they got paid so much for the training there, see, also, this company, while I was working for this construction company.

Mark: Yeah.

Fehling: 'Cause they had a—this was a big one. They had all their own workers and all different departments. They had sheet metal department, masons, carpenters, and finish, and all that stuff.

Ms. Elskey: Was that Starkweather?

Fehling: Yeah, it was Starkweather Company.

Ms. Elskey: In Beaver Dam.

Mark: And that job worked out a little better for you I take it.

Fehling: Yeah. Well, I stayed there for 12 years. Then I, that was in 1958. Then recession hit the building industry. Well, then they laid a bunch of people off and so the employment office sent me down to Metalfab in Beaver Dam. Metalfab and Company, fabricating company. So I went to work there. I went in there and I worked in the machine shop, tool and die shop, and that's where I stayed because that, machinist, I was able to handle that pretty good because I had done some of that in the Navy, see. So that's where I ended up. I retired there in 1985.

Mark: So, I can't resist asking how you two met.

Fehling: How we what?

Mrs. Fehling: How you met.

Fehling: Oh, I don't know.

Mrs. Fehling: Well, I do remember. Evelyn and Jim ...

Fehling: That's my brother.

Mrs. Fehling: Jim is his brother.

Ms. Elskey: Our brother.

Mrs. Fehling: His brother, her brother see? And his girlfriend was Evelyn. And I wasn't really friends with her but I knew her. We went to school together and I knew of her. Well, everyone else was gone, see? No men. Then Evelyn said "We have to go to Watertown tonight and pick up Harvey" 'cause his brother was not in the service. And I said to Evelyn, "Who is Harvey?" And, "Well, that's Jim's brother, you know, who is in the service." But I didn't know him, or see him. This is the first time I knew there was a

Harvey. Then the war was on. I can't remember. I think I met you on the street.

Fehling: Yeah, I think so. Something like that.

Mrs. Fehling: No, and then there was this tavern, see. This Frieda's Place out in the country. You know Frieda? Yeah. And I was, this is when the war was over and Jim and Evelyn again and I went with them and we went, and here is this person.

Fehling: That's me.

Mrs. Fehling: And then I said, "Well, this is Harvey." And then I thought, well, gee, you know.

Fehling: That's the Van Valkenburgh.

Mrs. Fehling: He kind of liked this person because she could sing and dance and tell stories and he thought "I never saw one like this yet." And I said: "Now you will!"

Fehling: This is the poem that Henry Maier wrote out at Okinawa.

Mark: Oh, really? I'd like to make a copy of this if I may.

Fehling: Go ahead make one. I don't think it ...

Mark: I've just got one last area of questions. That involves veterans' organizations and reunions and that sort of thing and I can see by some of the things that you've brought that you've been involved in that sort of thing. I want to start with the first few years after the war though, when you first got home. Did you join any of the major groups like the Legion or the VFW?

Fehling: Yeah, I've belonged to the Legion for over 50 years already.

Mark: What, I mean for what reason did you join the Legion?

Fehling: Well, everybody else joined, and military outfit, and I figured it was my duty to belong to it. And I also belonged to the VFW. But I had belonged to the VFW during the war. I had signed up as a member-at-large. They signed guys up during the war.

Mark: During the war.

- Fehling: As a member-at-large. You didn't belong to no individual post.
- Mark: Now, were you what you call "active" in the organization? Did you hold any offices or anything? Or did you just sort of ...
- Fehling: Yeah, I was commander of the Legion post in Reeseville, Post 190, for a couple of years.
- Mark: When was this?
- Fehling: Oh, boy. I hate to say—it's in the '50s.
- Mark: I see.
- Fehling: Yeah, in the early '50s probably.
- Mrs. Fehling: It would be, yeah, about '56—around there—'56.
- Fehling: Yeah, '55. Somewhere's in there, middle '50s maybe.
- Mark: Aside from feeling obliged to join, what sort of experiences do you get out of it?
- Fehling: Well, camaraderie, you know, and Memorial Day, we always have big ceremonies, go to the cemetery and ...
- Mrs. Fehling: I feel like this, that I did my duty, I served for my country ...
- Fehling: I belonged to both ...
- Mrs. Fehling: ... the rest of you stand back here because we did our part. If you didn't do your part, you stand and watch us. That's the way I feel.
- Fehling: There's a Legion post in Reeseville, Post 190. And then there's the VFW post at Lowell which were pretty active.
- Mrs. Fehling: [TALKED OVER] ... and knew them all, too, you know.
- Fehling: I don't belong to any in Beaver Dam. But I belong to shipmate's associations.
- Mark: Right, and I was curious about that, too. When did you start getting involved in that? Was it fairly soon after the war? Or was it a little farther on?

Fehling: No, they didn't organize them until—I didn't have nothing to do with organizing. They had a bunch that retired and they stayed in California, see, out there. They had put their full time in the Navy, maybe 25-30 years or something in the Navy, and then they all retired in California. And they started the reunion, the Milwaukee reunion. And that was about 1976 or something like that.

Mark: And so you're middle-aged by this time?

Fehling: Yeah, yeah, right. So I went, the first one I went to was 1978. I went to one, it was in San Diego, right? Yeah, San Diego.

Mark: And do you go very often now?

Fehling: I went about every, they have them every two years. We managed to get to one. And then I also belong to one—the Van Valkenburgh. They organized that bunch, it was from Florida, the retirees down there, organized that one. So I went to, managed to get to one every, not every year I think but every couple of years I go to one or the other.

Ms. Elskey: And he's going to one in a couple of weeks.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Fehling: I'm going to one in San Diego in the middle of May.

Mark: And so when you go, what do you do?

Fehling: Well, they have, they usually set up, well, you get the hotel. They have a hospitality room where they all set up a bunch of drinks and talk over old sea. Then they have a banquet one night. Then during the days they set up tours, take bus tours that take them to points of interest. See like in San Diego they're going to take the harbor cruise, then they're going to take the, go out to the wild animal park, and different things like that. One time we had the reunion, the Milwaukee reunion, in Milwaukee. They had it at the Red Carpet. So one day we got to go down to Great Lakes. They took us down there. We were special guests down there on Friday, on inspection day and parade day down there. We got, the Milwaukee crew, got to sit in the reviewing stands with all the big boys.

Mrs. Fehling: It's a destination, you know, that's set up for you and it's fun.

Fehling: Yeah. You get the hotel room. See they negotiate a deal with the hotel. And then they have a banquet on Saturday night. Then on Sunday morning



they have the final breakfast-brunch. And then it's over with. Then you go home.

Mark: Yeah.

Fehling: But that's about it.

Mrs. Fehling: All those people he knew or served with, they are, have all passed away though, see.

Fehling: All the ones that I knew passed away already.

Mrs. Fehling: Well, you don't know anybody but we don't care, you know.

Ms. Elskey: Still want to go.

Mrs. Fehling: They're not that friendly, that say who are you? You just don't talk, you do your own thing. They got these little groups, you know, that were officers I think.

Mark: I think that's, those are about all the questions I have. Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything you think we skipped over or anything?

Fehling: No, not really.

Mark: I've gone through my standard spiel of questions.

Fehling: I think I've, well, I skipped over a lot of things but anyway, you know.

Mrs. Fehling: I keep thinking, too, as he was talking, did he miss and I don't think he did.

Mark: Oh, there's always going to be something.

Mrs. Fehling: I enjoyed the fights, what he told about. The fights, throwing the Limeys down the steps. I remember they do fight and you lose your teeth.

Fehling: I lost a tooth there, too.

Mark: In Trinidad?

Fehling: I lost a tooth there.

Ms. Elskey: Well, you, I remember a long time ago telling about crossing the Equator. All the times you crossed the Equator.

Fehling: Oh, yeah.

Ms. Elskey: Ceremonies.

Mrs. Fehling: That's true.

Fehling: Well, the first time we crossed the Equator—I don't know if you want to hear of this. This is the one here. This is the, crossed the Equator in 1940 and they don't do that like that anymore, initiation.

Mark: And so what happens when you cross the Equator? I've seen the photographs and I've seen ...

Mrs. Fehling: They're bad!

Fehling: Read about it?

Mark: Well, no one really talks too much about it.

Fehling: Well, no.

Ms. Elskey: So tell us.

Fehling: Well, okay. We're on, we go on what they call a fleet "problem" to Hawaii. Go down around Christmas Island and down there, the fleet goes, down for a little training exercise. While we're on the way down there, we're crossing the Equator. So then all the old shellbacks—shellbacks is one that's been across the Equator and been initiated. Them that haven't been initiated are called pollywogs. But they go through a whole ritual of things before you get there. You get a paper that says what are you guilty of? I think I was guilty of something like serving the queen some kind of tea and doubting the birthmark on her shoulder. Different things like that, you know. Well, then all that stuff then, then the day you cross the Equator, you line up for inspection, all the pollywogs. In the meantime, the ship is turned over to the shellbacks. The captain turns the ship over to the shellbacks. They have a big ceremony up in front. Well, as you can see on that picture, what them shellbacks looked like.

Mark: This it?

Fehling: Yeah. This is, I'll tell you what that is.

Ms. Elskey: They're all dressed up.

Mark: Getting ready to scrub here, it looks like.

Fehling: Okay.

Mrs. Fehling: Well, he didn't tell ya' about rotten eggs.

Fehling: Well, I'm going to tell them that now.

Mrs. Fehling: Oh.

Fehling: Well, anyway, then they get all the shellbacks. You got, the pollywogs you line up for inspection like you do for a regular Saturday morning inspection. Then the shellbacks go up and down the line and they're looking them over, see. Some of them bringing along a, they got a bunch of eggs and they got them rotten for about three weeks out in the sun in the Tropics there. And so one comes along, he picks your hat up and lays a egg under there. The next guy comes along, or so down the line, and he hits you on the head, and that rotten egg runs down your face.

[LAUGHTER]

Fehling: Well, that's the start of it then. And then they put you in stocks. They had, you know, years ago they put your neck and your arms in the stocks—welded to the deck so just so your knees can touch the ground. And then they would beat you with what they called a shillelagh. They made a round thing out of canvas about two foot long with a handle on it and filled it full of sawdust and soaked it in water and that's what they beat you with on the rear-end. And they beat you on the rear-end 'til it was black-and-blue, absolutely black-and-blue. You couldn't tell. Then the ceremony starts out then, you go down through the initiation in a line-up. First you go through, you got to tell them what you're accused of and everything, and the guy says, then one of them, they take you over on the operating table they say. So they got a steel table there and it's wet and you're naked, see, just about. Almost naked. By that time they've got you soaked down. And lay on that table, and the operating guy, the doctor, he's all dressed up like a big doctor. He's got a great big knife to charge you with electricity. And he lays that across your stomach and you think that you've been cut wide open. You come flying right off of that table. Well, then you go up on a platform and you got to get in a chair where the dentist wants to look at your teeth, got to check your teeth now. Well, then they open your mouth, and you better open it or else they'll open it for you, and he's got a big spoon with a big pot, you know, a regular pot used for a toilet, and he's got some stuff mixed up in there. Well, it was quinine and stuff. Well, he gives you a big spoonful of that and then he shuts your mouth, see. Well, you've got that in your mouth. Then you go to the next station and you sit in a chair which tips

over backwards. But while you're sitting in that chair, a bunch of them cut your hair, all over, with a scissors. And then they smear it full of cut (??) grease and graphite. And that's in your hair. Then they dump you over backwards into a big tank of water, canvas tank of water. I mean about six foot deep. And there's a bunch of big guys in there and they grab you and hold you down, see. And then they'd say, "What are you?" And you'd holler, "I'm a pollywog." "I can't hear you. What are you?" you know. Until you can't hardly, you're drowned, then they finally throw you out. Well then, the next thing is, you go through a big long chute where you can just crawl through and that's filled full of garbage that's been around for a couple of weeks. And you crawl through there and while you're crawling through there, they're beating you, and when you come out on the end they hit you with the fire hose and rinse you off. Well, that's the end of it then. But when you come out of there, you've had it.

Mark: I bet you have.

Fehling: Well, they had another thing I missed there at the start. You've got to lay, they've got a coffin which you've got to lay in. And that's filled full of, half full with garbage and it's clear soup, and you've got to lay down in there, and it comes up right around your ears and your mouth. And a couple guys, if they didn't behave very good, they had some old rotten meat, one would have to bite on one end and the other bite on the other end and then see who could pull it apart.

Mark: And so every time you crossed the Equator, there's always a new batch of pollywogs.

Fehling: Well, after the war started we didn't do any of that anymore.

Mark: Oh, I see.

Fehling: See, they cut that out. You couldn't disrupt the, you know, the ship like that. Because some of them guys really got, you know, the worst you fought them, the shellbacks, the worst it made it for yourself, if you didn't go along with them. And there was a couple of them, you know, that they got a chip on their shoulder, they're going to show them that they don't have to do that, what they want to do, so they just—one of them got his teeth knocked out. One got a broken arm. That's part of the, part of the game. But when you've gone through there, why, you can see when you look through here how bad it looks. Well, that's the Milwaukee there when she come back from Russia, when we were up in Russia.

Mark: Interesting stories.

Fehling: Pardon.

Mark: Very interesting stories.

Fehling: Yeah.

Mark: Well, thanks for coming in.

Fehling: Okay.

Mark: I absolutely appreciate it.

[TAPE ENDED – THEN RESTARTED]

Fehling: I'd like to say that this guy at the Smithsonian Institute that wanted to engineer the American, or the history of the war to suit some liberals in Washington, D.C. there, why he should have been out there in the Pacific and I think he'd have changed his mind and know some of this stuff what happened.

Mark: You know, actually, I meant to ask you, a lot of the veterans will say that the bomb saved their lives.

Fehling: Absolutely.

Mark: There's even a famous essay written by a veteran "Thank God for the atom bomb." Your opinion on that.

Fehling: Well, absolutely, it did because the Japanese had thousands of those suicide bombers still holding in reserve. That if we'd have had to invade that place, they would have just slaughtered us out there with them. Because those guys, they had, not only did they have the atomic bomb, or not the atomic bomb, the suicide bomber, this guy that was driving this plane, you know, they also had the, they called a "Baka bomb." They would bring it in on a bomber and let him go, and then he would guide that bomb right into the ship. And then they also had suicide boats. What they had, they would use for, would come with them, like torpedo boats and drive them right into the ships. And then also, if you were firing on the beach for the invasion like at Okinawa, they would float out under a cardboard box or a crate, you know, or a log with a bomb under it and float out there. You couldn't see them, under some twigs or something. Towards the last year when we were there, we would go into Okinawa and with shelling—we had rifles or 30-ought-sixes hanging all over the ship and we had orders whenever we see something floating, shoot at it.

- Mark: So, especially after the battle of Okinawa, did you and other sailors discuss an invasion of Japan and what it would entail?
- Fehling: Well, I don't remember that. I can't ...
- Mark: Or was it always just sort of an assumption?
- Fehling: We always kind of went day-by-day 'cause we never really knew what the heck was happening with us, see. See, they never tell you until it's happening.
- Mark: I was in the military. I know.
- Fehling: Yeah, you know.
- Mark: It didn't happen to be a wartime but it's the same thing.
- Fehling: That's the way they operated there, too. Like when we went to Iwo Jima, we didn't know we were going there until we, about three or four days before we got there. We didn't know that we were going to—and nobody knew where the heck Iwo Jima is. We never heard of that place. I mean, that's just an example.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Mrs. Fehling: And we didn't have, you know, televisions at that time. Not everybody even had a radio, really. Or electricity to play a radio, or a battery radio but the batteries are dead and not the daily newspapers so it was difficult to ...
- Fehling: I just want to say what medals I got, we got the Navy Commendation Medal out there. I hope I'm going to find it in a minute here. Well, here it is. Well, let's see. I got Navy Commendation Medal for Okinawa, the American Campaign Medal, the American Defense Service Medal with one star, the European/African service medal with one star, the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with three stars, the Russian Victory Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal. So that's what I have, which one's I'm authorized to wear. This is, see we got a medal from Russia for taking the ship up there and this is what, this is, yeah, that's what it looks like.
- Mark: I've actually seen this before.
- Fehling: That's just a picture of it.
- Mark: Yeah. Interesting.

Fehling: The slip that I've got at home Boris Yeltsin signed.

Ms. Elskey: Oh, really?

Fehling: Yeah. It's ...

Mrs. Fehling: Well, this is a happening, how you found this. This was just recently within the last 10 years, say. This person from Waupun had an article in the paper, a Beaver Dam paper that he had gotten his medals, see. And, so Harvey called him. He came down and told him how he got this and Harvey says, "Well, gee, I am eligible for this also." So he wrote for it and he got it. Had it not been for the article in the paper and the guy from Waupun, and it's quite recent—and it took a long time to get it after he sent the qualification. Let's say three years or so.

Fehling: Where I live in Beaver Dam, up block and then around the corner, about the second house, is a guy lives—his wife is dead now but he always walks a little dog past my place, see. So we got talking one day here a couple of years ago about something, about the Navy and something—that might have been during Desert Storm. Well, anyway then he was telling me he was in the Merchant Marine, see, during the war. And he said, "You should have been on, when we took the Milwaukee up to Murmansk." See he don't know that I'm on the Milwaukee, see. He said that was something.

Mrs. Fehling: It's a small world.

Fehling: Yeah. And he said, "They tried to torpedo that thing all the way up there but they couldn't get it." And I said, "Well" I said. "I was on the Milwaukee then." So that's a strange world.

Mark: It can be a small world. That's very true.

Mrs. Fehling: It seems it's supposed to fit together like that. I always feel it has to be this way and you're here today because we're supposed to be here.

Fehling: Well, okay then. I hope I helped you out.

Mark: Well, it was very interesting.

Fehling: See, this was my ...

**[END OF INTERVIEW]**