

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DAVID R. HOMAN, JR.

Career Military, Boiler Technician, Navy, Vietnam War and Cold War

1995

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Homan, David Ross, Jr., (b.1956). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 3 sound cassettes (ca. 126 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 120 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

David Homan, a Racine, Wisconsin native, discusses his career service as a boiler technician in the Navy from the Vietnam evacuation in 1975 through retirement in 1991. Homan mentions dropping out of high school, working in a machine shop, and being inspired by his father and grandfather, both Navy veterans, to enlist. He recalls noting that Vietnam veterans seemed changed after their return. He talks about his processing at an Armed Forces Entrance Exam Station in Milwaukee, boot camp at Recruit Training Command Great Lakes (Illinois), and A school at Service School Command, Great Lakes. He describes how the Navy caused him to become less racist. Homan explains he wanted to be an engineman but was ordered to be a boiler technician. He speaks of taking a bus from Clark Field to the Subic Bay Naval Station (Philippines) and going aboard his ship the USS Hancock. He describes the evacuation of Saigon, the hatred towards the Vietnamese refugees, pushing helicopters overboard due to lack of space, the refugee area in the hangar bay, and the evacuation of Cambodia. Homan speaks of work conditions in the fire room: high temperatures, long hours, noise, no freshwater for showers, fear, and his repeated heat strokes; he reports how he nearly went AWOL twice. He describes race relations and his chief aboard the USS Kilauea and how a warrant officer and an admiral convinced him to reenlist. Homan describes working at the Naval Air Station in Bermuda, first with a Seabee unit and then with security police. He portrays meeting VIPs and acting as driver for Walter Mondale, who insulted him for reading a novel. He recalls the Navy's budget problems in the late 1970s that resulted in supplies and personnel shortages and declares this was changed for the better after President Reagan's taking office. Homan describes reporting drug problems aboard the USS Biddle, being attacked by members of the crew while sleeping, and the positive effects of urinalysis tests and recruit quality questionnaires. He explains he made the Navy a career for financial reasons. Homan talks about combat support operations in the Middle East aboard the USS Nassau, describes learning that having a Palestinian flag was a crime punishable by death in Jerusalem, highlights being shown the Gaza Strip by Palestinians though it was supposed to be off-limits, and explains why he thinks Israel has no right to exist as a nation. He describes interactions and cat-and-mouse games with Soviet Union ships during the Cold War, the Americans' ships and morale being superior, the Russians' and Americans' going through each other's garbage, and going to red alert after a detonation at a Russian nuclear weapons storage depot. Homan discusses tense operations at the Gulf of Sidra (Libya) and keeping the ship equipment running at 110 percent. He declares the Navy is a top-heavy bureaucracy with too many officers and

downsizing made it worse. Homan talks about training students at Great Lakes Naval Station to prepare for the worst and being unwillingly transferred to the Temporary Disability Retired List. He describes the heart condition that developed due to his heat strokes, breaking his back twice, and getting a Purple Heart for being hit by shrapnel while in Beirut. He speaks about having difficulty finding a job and getting a business loan, starting his own floor sanding company, and resigning from the American Legion when they did not recognize combat service in Grenada, Beirut, or Libya. Homan expresses frustration at inadequate veterans benefits.

Biographical Sketch:

David Homan (1956-) began service in the Navy during the evacuation of Vietnam in 1975, was placed on the Temporary Disability Retirement List in 1991, and was honorably discharged at the rank of Chief Boiler Technician in 1995. He restarted the Zagar & Homan Floor Sanding Company and currently resides in Delavan, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.

Transcribed by Karen Emery, WDVA Staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by Susan Krueger, 2008.

Interview Transcript:

Mark: Okay. Today's date is September 29, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. David Homan, is that pronounced correctly? Presently of Delavan, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Vietnam Conflict and periods after that. Good afternoon. Thanks for coming in.

Homan: Thanks for having me.

Mark: I appreciate it. I suppose we should start from the top as they say and have 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.

Homan: Well, I was born and raised in Racine. I was pretty much a high school student. I got extremely bored with school so I quite high school and I had a job in a machine shop. And it was turning into a lifelong type job, and just before I was eighteen I thought, "Man, there's got to be something to this." The Navy had always been kind of a boyhood dream but when I got into my later teen years the war was just ended officially type thing, you know, in the news, and I started watching these guys that were in their forties that I worked with doing exactly the same thing that I was doing and I said, "I'm out of here. This is it. I'm going to go back to my boyhood dream and join the Navy and see what happens." So that's what I did.

Mark: I was going to ask you, what attracted you to the Navy? Perhaps we can expand upon this a little. It was a boyhood dream?

Homan: Well, my grandfather on my mother's side was a Navy veteran in the First World War and he always had some fairly interesting stories that he would, you know, let me know when I was a little kid.

[Microphone moved closer to Homan]

Homan: And my father was a Navy veteran and one of our, well, a bunch of our neighbors were Navy veterans and I always just seemed fascinated by it. And of course growing up near Lake Michigan and the family always had boats, either my parents or my aunts and uncles, so I grew up on the water and it kind of all just fell together. But I mean I wanted to go in the Navy from the time I was probably five years old.

Mark: Your father was in World War II?

Homan: No, he was a Korea vet.

- Mark: Korean War. Was he actually in the conflict or was just in the Navy at the time?
- Homan: No, he was just in the Navy during it. He went in the Navy to stay out of Korea. Those were his words.
- Mark: Now, as you also mentioned, the Vietnam War was winding down at this time. In many circles in American society there was kind of a distaste for things military. I'm interested in your -- in how that may or may not have impacted on your thinking in terms of joining the Navy itself.
- Homan: Well, when I got into my high school years, and even ninth grade, I had friends or friends with older brothers that were, you know, getting drafted or going in the Navy or the Air Force to stay out of Vietnam and a lot of these guys went over there. We saw the war on television every night with Walter Cronkite and Dan Rather and it was kind of just a everyday occurrence. It had no significant impact. I was impressed, you know, by a lot of what they did and the images you saw on television and stuff but I understood absolutely none of it. I guess I got kind of nervous because after some of the people that I knew came back they'd been changed by their experiences over there.
- Mark: What did you notice?
- Homan: They were more within themselves, they weren't as outgoing or social as they used to be, a lot of them were big drinkers or big drug abusers. It almost seemed like they were in a way, now thinking about it in retrospect, running from something. Well, I didn't understand any of this back then. You know, I just thought, "Boy, he's weird," you know. "What happened? He got weird." And then people would say, "Well, he went to war." "Well, he's not at war no more, you know. He came back. It's over with, you know." So it was never really a real or personal type thing with me. It was an abstract. It was something that happened on television or to other people. Well, then as I got closer to being of draft age it started changing my opinion a little bit. And I guess I got kind of hesitant, you know, chasing girls and drinking beer and my job as a machinist and just a lot of things going on. I kind of put it out of my mind for awhile. But then once I hit the rut, you know. School, I got absolutely nothing from high school. I still think one of the smartest moves I ever made in my life was quitting high school, believe it or not. I was in this rut and I was in the same rut that guys that I worked with who were in their forties were in and I thought, "Nope." So I went back to my boyhood dream and thought, "Well, the war's over, I don't have to worry about getting killed." So I went down and I joined the Navy with a couple of guys that I went to school with and after boot camp and A school the first place I went was Vietnam. Then it became very real.

Mark: I bet. I want to talk about boot camp first.

Homan: Sure.

Mark: We'll get to that. Uhm, why don't you describe your entry into the military. I remember very clearly getting on the airplane and going down to Texas and getting yelled at and the whole business. I remember very clearly going into the service. Do you recall going to basic training?

Homan: Oh, yeah.

Mark: What sort of training did you have?

Homan: Well, I guess in my own way I expected, you know, the old fat chief standing, waiting for us to get off the bus, screaming and hollering and, you know, like you see in the war movies and all this kind of stuff. Didn't happen with us. Wasn't even close. We went to Milwaukee from Racine. We stayed at the Marc Plaza Hotel and the entire eighth floor was reserved for people who were going into various branches of the service. It was one big, wild party. There was a woman there who was going into the Army and she was pretty drunk and her whole goal at the time was to "screw everybody that goes in the service tomorrow" and there was actually a line of about thirty guys outside her hotel room and she was doing them as fast as they could move through the door. They got kicked out. We had a big liquor party up in our room. We got kicked out of the hotel. So we wandered the streets of Milwaukee until six o'clock in the morning which was when we had to go over to the AFEE [Armed Forces Entrance Examination] Station which was like a block or two away from the Marc Plaza. So we went in and filled out forms and, you know, the doctors looked us over and I think probably the two most memorable things I remember about the AFEE Station were we went into this big, empty room and there was probably 300 guys and there was little footprints painted on the floor facing the wall. So the idea was you stand on the footprints, and you had a number, and a little shipping tag on your shirt, and you dropped your drawers, and you bent over for the doc to give you the "fantastic finger wave." Well, I was like the second guy done and when I turned around all I saw was a maze of male asses and I was kind of, "Oh, man, get me out of here," and I was disgusted by the whole thing and I think that's why I can still see it like it happened yesterday. I went in the Navy with a guy by the name of Ron Lipke (??) and another guy by the name of Jerry Jensen. Ron still lives in Wisconsin. Jerry's out in Seattle; he's a policeman in Bremerton or Seattle area. Haven't seen either one of them in many years. And we were all going to go to Orlando, Florida on the buddy plan because we figured anyplace where they're going to lock women up for two or three months, and they're going to lock men up for two or three months, it's got to be a pretty wild time when they let you all out on that Friday night. So that's why we picked

Orlando, Florida. Well, as we got through all this induction processing at the AFEE Station that afternoon we were called into a room and there was a Navy lieutenant there and he was, you know, typical young guy and he was conducting an interview of some sort and I think it had to do with classification or whatever; I don't remember. I was awestruck by all this, you know, this was the military, you know, this is big, this is like the monolith itself, you know. And he looked at me and said, "You're going to Great Lakes." And I said, "I'm not going to Great Lakes. I'm going to Orlando, Florida." And he said, "Well, we've got a hepatitis outbreak in Orlando, Florida so we can't send anybody else there so you're going to Great Lakes." And I said, "Well, what about San Diego?" "We have a meningitis outbreak in San Diego." I had never heard of either of the two of them before in my life and I said, "I'm not going to Great Lakes." and he looked me dead square in the eyes and he said, "Boy, you're going to Great Lakes or I'm going to call the FBI and tell them you're a deserter and you could be shot for refusing to go to Great Lakes." And I looked at that and I thought I don't believe this, you know, so I basically signed the paperwork and out the door I went. And later on that afternoon or evening we all got on a bus to go to Great Lakes. When we got on the bus we drove through Racine. We went through, down the very street I used to hang out on and there were all my buddies thinking we were flying down to Florida and they're all wined up on Main Street, downtown, parked with their cars and drinking beer and just hanging out and we drive by on this bus and it was like really rubbing salt in the wound, you know, and we had the jitters about what do I do next, you know, "Did I make a big mistake?" All this. Well, we went down to Waukegan which is only about a half hour drive from Racine, pulled in by the base, nobody was there, and it's probably nine o'clock at night I guess and we looked at the bus driver and said, "What do we do?" And he said, "Well, if you walk down to the building over there somebody will tell you where you've got to go and what you've got to do." So we walked into a building and there was an officer in there and she said, "Oh, go here and walk this way and somebody will pick you up." And here I'd been expecting, you know, this screaming and hollering, "Get off the bus you scum bag," you know, this kind of stuff. Didn't happen. Well, we got to this building and there was a tunnel that went under the highway from the main side of the base to the RTC side of the base. That's where they finally starting getting military with us and they went through their contraband list. I couldn't believe all the dirty magazines and the dope people threw down on the ground when these guys started to take us in and form us up as a company and actually try to walk us as a unit from where we were.

Mark: Was this kind of like an amnesty thing? Get rid of it now, no questions asked.

Homan: Yup. No questions asked, right here. Anything you get rid of we'll forget you ever had. And, oh, I'll bet you there were two pounds of marijuana just

flopping on the ground right there. I couldn't believe it. Really couldn't believe it. And at that point then we all started realizing we were in the Navy.

Mark: And so the training begins.

Homan: Yup.

Mark: And lasted how long?

Homan: I believe it was seven or nine weeks. I don't remember exactly, for boot camp.

Mark: And what sort of activities did you do? Classroom stuff, marching around the parade ground, did you have—

Homan: Well, our company commander was a crusty old chief engine man, was a sub sailor and he wasn't big on the military end of the Navy. It was New Years Eve going from '74 to '75 and he came in in the middle of the night with a gallon of wine and passed it around and said, "You guys are lousy recruits but you're going to make damn good sailors." And we did as little marching as possible, we did as little competition as possible. The things he was concerned about was learning how to swim, learning basic fire fighting techniques, damage control, and just basic indoctrination into the Navy and he really didn't care if we excelled in anything as long as nobody gave us a hard time. So we had our difficulties from time to time but he was pretty good. They fired him like a week before we graduated though and they gave us a real prick for the last week. But he took us through the dungaree issue line twice so everybody got issued double sets of dungarees and, you know, he had all those little angles figured out to how we could get indoctrinated into the Navy and he could have as easy a time as possible doing it without getting into the politics that happened at Recruit Training Command which I wouldn't know was politics then. That's hindsight speaking now.

Mark: Yeah. In your basic training class what other kinds of guys were joining the Navy at this time? Where there a lot of guys such as yourself ...

Homan: I think it's safe to say most of them were just out of high school. We had a couple of college graduates who, for whatever the reason, joined the Navy as enlisted people. We had a couple of guys who were married. I remember a couple of them from Beloit. One guy in particular, his name was Larry Naplock (Neblock??), he was kind of interesting character. And another guy named Penny. But most of them were just kids, just kids looking for I guess their start in life.

- Mark: How about racial and ethnic backgrounds, and regional backgrounds for that matter? One thing I remember, it wasn't so much the Southerners but these guys from Maine who I couldn't understand whatsoever. I mean you meet a bunch of people from all around the country, different racial and cultural backgrounds. Was this your experience as well?
- Homan: Oh, yeah.
- Mark: And how did—
- Homan: And it continued through my entire time in the service.
- Mark: Were there any problems involved with that?
- Homan: Well, I grew up in a family of, I'll call them "wanna-be racists." They all hated blacks but they didn't voice their opposition. I remember one time we had a black guy going to move in the neighborhood and my dad got together with a bunch of his buddies and bought the house so that the black guy couldn't buy it. Well, the black guy was loaded so he bought a city block and subdivided it just to piss everybody else off, you know. And I remember the day they shot Martin Luther King. I was watching television, eating a pizza with my dad on the couch and he said, "Oh, that's one less Communist nigger on the face of the earth." And I had grown up in an integrated school. And you know, I really didn't have any opinions other than all my relatives, you know, it was "nigger" this and "spick" that, you know. Whatnot. So I grew up with that mentality and then when I went in the Navy and I had to eat in the same room, sleep in the same room, shower, use the same toilets, and live with them twenty-four hours a day—meaning other people of other races or ethnic backgrounds. There are differences but you finally realize we're all just the same, we all want the same things in life, you know. You want nice clothes, I want nice clothes. Maybe you want a tuxedo and I want a different type of suit, you know, but basically it's all the same, you know. And I think that boot camp was a good experience for me because if you couldn't put down your inherent prejudices and get beyond them, you were going to get the living shit knocked out of you real fast.
- Mark: Now, that sounds like it's kind of an informal arrangement, something that happens in the heat of basic training I guess. Were there any sort of Navy programs at the time to sort of promote awareness in this kind of thing? This is one thing that I remember from my service a couple of years later.
- Homan: None that I had. I remember defensive driving awareness. That was a biggie. But as far as any type of racial programs, no.
- Mark: So after Great Lakes then you went where?

Homan: I got out of boot camp at Great Lakes, went to A school at Great Lakes. And that was kind of a unique experience because I don't think I learned anything. I mean, I got to look at a boiler and see what it was but as far as the theory that they taught, I walked in there dumb and I walked out just as dumb as I did when I went in. And I graduated in the upper portion of the class which was kind of scary.

Mark: Now when you went it -- when it came to your Navy job, I don't know what it's called.

Homan: I was a boiler technician.

Mark: Yeah. In the Army it's an MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], in the Air Force it's an AFSC [Air Force Specialty Codes]. I don't know what it's called in the Navy.

Homan: In the Navy we call them NECs, Navy Enlisted Classifications, or ratings.

Mark: Did you have any sort of expectations as to what you wanted to do?

Homan: Oh, yeah. I wanted to be an engineman. I wanted to work on those, like if you've seen the movie Apocalypse Now, the PBRs [Patrol Boats, River]. That was me. I wanted to do PBRs. I thought they were just the neatest thing. Gun boats, you know, the old PT boats from World War II to swift boats. That was me. And I could learn all about internal combustion engines of different types and play with machine guns and just have a great old time and still be around the water. And the day I checked into my school, I was given a group of schools. It was machinist mate, boiler technician, or engine. And the day I checked in I went into the service school command check-in building for engineering schools at Great Lakes and they made me a BT and I swore if they make me a BT, I'm out of here, I'm going AWOL. And one thing I remember is around the quarter-deck or the main entrance area of this place there were all these pictures of these guys—silver star, medal of honor, Navy cross—and they were all ENF and engine men/firemen, E3s, E2s, EN3—and they were all killed in Vietnam and they were all in riverboats in Vietnam. And I looked at that and I thought, “Well, maybe this being a BT ain't going to be so bad after all if all these guys are dead.” And I didn't have a choice in it. They said, “You're going to be a BT.” And I said, “I don't want to be a BT.” And they said, “You're going to be a BT or you're going to jail.” So I became a BT.

Mark: No question about it really.

Homan: Yup.

- Mark: So you finished that school and you ended up on the *Hancock*.
- Homan: Yup. Went to the USS Hancock, CVA-19, old World War II vintage carrier, and I picked it up out of Subic Bay in the Philippines.
- Mark: How'd you get from Great Lakes to the Philippines then?
- Homan: I had a commercial flight from Milwaukee to San Francisco and then I had a commercial flight I think from San Francisco to either Honolulu or Guam. At some point I got on a military airplane and wound up flying into Clark Air Base in the Philippines and had to make the infamous bus ride from Clark Air Base to Subic, Nawangapo [Olongapo?] City and into the Subic Bay Naval Base.
- Mark: Why is that so—?
- Homan: The buses they use had grenade cages on the windows and no brakes and it was pretty much downhill. You go down the mountain and the bus driver's wailing away on that horn, you know, it's move it or lose it all the way back. The potholes were bigger than the bus and some of those mountain roads you go down. And understand, this is all foreign. I've never been out of the United States prior to this.
- Mark: I was going to say this must be an adventure for you.
- Homan: Oh, yeah. It was just an awesome thing. Half way around the world. Ten thousand miles from home. And there was like water buffalo walking across the road, you know. Gooks, and jungle like you saw in the movies, and you know, people with guns all over the place, and I was in my whites and they were getting to be a light shade of khaki by then, you know. But it was twenty-eight hours of flight. That's airborne time, from Milwaukee to Clark, and then the bus ride was another hour, hour-and-a-half.
- Mark: And you got on the ship then. So, when you got to the ship, did you take off on a cruise fairly soon after that? Or what—?
- Homan: Well, when I got to the ship they were at sea and I checked into the transit barracks at Naval station Subic which used be an old Japanese POW camp and the two buildings that we stayed in were actually buildings that were built by the Japanese for American POWs back then, or by the Japanese for their officers or whatever, but in a—
- Mark: Yeah, prison camp.

Homan: —prison camp. And one building was just regular call them card carrying U.S. military guys that were on their way someplace, coming or going, and the other one was where they had all the Filipino recruits and they had it like a prison with concertino wire around it and bars on the windows and armed guards and all this stuff and we were all in the same compound. And you got up in the morning and you had a personnel inspection and then you went to check on where your unit was at and if they had a port call for your helicopter flight or boat run or whatever. And after that, if you didn't have a boat run, you got assigned to a working party doing something, you know, and that's how they used you. I had probably four dry runs before I actually got out to the ship. My sea bag beat me. I got bumped for mail but my sea bag was already on the bird so the sea bag went and I didn't. Then the next day I got out there and then that afternoon they pulled in. So they flew me out to the ship and then the ship pulled in a couple of hours later.

Mark: Makes sense.

Homan: You know, I could have walked right over to the pier.

Mark: Now, this has to be about May, maybe June of '75.

Homan: Yup. May.

Mark: And this is at the time that Saigon is falling.

Homan: Yup.

Mark: Is that correct?

Homan: Yup.

Mark: Describe your role and the *Hancock*'s role. Where were you when all these events—?

Homan: Well, when I first got there *Hancock* was coming back with refugees, loading out Marines, they off loaded the fixed wing air wing and they had done some of that in Hawaii I guess before I got there and there was tons of Marine helicopters all over the place, and then we went back for the actual evacuation. And the history books talk about it as being April 29. Well, it went on before that and it went on a hell of a long time after that as well, but I think April 29 is what everybody likes to say because that's the day that the flag came down from the embassy and things like that.

Mark: That's a very convenient date but that wasn't necessarily your experience.

Homan: Well, the last operation we conducted was in October so, you know, we were still picking people up in October, Vietnamese refugees. But we'd go there and they would get out to the ship by whatever means, boats, floating on debris, helicopters. I was there for the massive helicopter exodus. I was awestruck by all this. I mean, here this war was supposedly over and an abstract in my mind and all of a sudden, gee, this is real. You know, I could get killed here. There was wounded people getting off helicopters, refugees missing legs, people that had napalm burns, you know, all kinds of stuff, and here I was, this fairly, I don't want to say innocent, but fairly innocent young boy from Racine caught up in what was going on in the real world right now and it was just overwhelming. And the guys that I worked with, you know, their attitude was, well, everybody called them "fucking gooks." "Fucking gook" this and "fucking gook" that, kill all these bastards, you know. And we, I guess, in the grand scheme of things, you know, we were just cheap labor for whatever it was the goals were but there was a lot of hatred there, lot of hatred. And me, I was just confused and scared shitless.

Mark: About the Vietnam War.

Homan: Yeah. Well, that and going to a new ship and working with all these insane guys that were, I mean some of these guys were seriously whacked.

Mark: No. I'm interested in what they were angry at exactly. I mean, is it the situation? Is it—?

Homan: Well, the general gist of it was here's a people who had this war for however long Vietnam had been at war and they wouldn't fight for their own country and now we're pulling them out by the thousands, you know, and where are they going to go? They're going to come back to the States, they're going to take jobs that some of these guys are going to be applying for as soon as we got back and they were released from service and stuff.

Mark: Is this something that's discussed at the time? Or is it in retrospect?

Homan: Oh, yeah, it was all discussed at the time. I know we had a little refugee camp in the Philippines and I spent a week there, two weeks there working food handlers thing for all the refugees on Grande Island and the general consensus by anybody who had anything to do with any of this prior to my coming into the service was, the attitude was blow that whole island up, just kill them all. And these were supposed to be the good guys we were pulling out. Just kind of amazed by it all. Didn't understand a bit of it and it was just chaos and pandemonium, you know. Everything was insane, it was just going crazy so fast you really didn't have time to form any kind of an opinion or really have a thought about it. It was just something you had to do. I wasn't that ingrained into the Navy way of thinking yet to be able to fit in like that. I questioned in

my mind everything and I tried to reserve making any moral judgments. But it was pretty spooky.

Mark: So, as South Vietnam is falling, the *Hancock* is just sort of cruising around off shore somewhere and these people would come to you.

Homan: Yeah. And we had parties going in helicopters and things to pick people up and pick designated equipment up and stuff like that. It got to the point where there were so many helicopters coming out with people hanging off the struts and just, you know, the Hueys were just packed with human beings that they couldn't land, they could barely fly and there was no place to put them all so a lot of them would fly adjacent to our ship or other ships and they'd just all jump out of the helicopter and let it go in the drink. The ones that did set down, we'd push them over the side right away. I mean, it wasn't, the engines were still hot, their rotor had just quit turning and we'd take and just push it in the water and take the refugees out and they would get searched for weapons, some kind of identification, or belongings, if they had any with them, would be gone through, then they would be ID'd. And the hangar bay was kind of a refugee area.

Mark: Yeah, I was going to ask where'd you keep them all.

Homan: In the hangar bay. And the rule of thumb was put them in the hangar bay and if they want to run anyplace else, shoot them or kick them over the side. And these are the good guys, now, we're bringing.

Mark: Did that actually happen? Or was a lot of hot air.

Homan: Hot air. I never saw anybody do anything like that. We did have, we took a woman out of a helicopter that had two Samsonite suitcases, she was very well dressed, she was probably a downtowner or something from one of the cities, and when we took her out one of the Marines that provided security with us ran over there and grabbed those suitcases right away and there was an interpreter there, and they were talking back and forth, and they opened up them suitcases, and it was full of \$20 and \$50 bills, both of them, American money. And I looked at the Marine, and I looked at the money, and I looked at the refugee, the gook, and I thought where did she get all that American money, you know. This was a foreign country, it ain't supposed to have that amount of American money laying around anyplace, let alone in this woman's suitcase. And he looked at me and he shook his head and he said, "Man, if I'd have known that's what was in here, I'd have just shot that fucking bitch and grab the suitcases and throw them down with my stuff." Never did hear what happened to that woman. I don't think I ever ran into that Marine again either, but I've always wondered.

- Mark: So you must have dropped them off somewhere and gone back for more.
- Homan: Yeah, we took them to the Philippines.
- Mark: So, like, how often did this sort of round trip—?
- Homan: Every couple of days.
- Mark: —across the south China Sea. A couple of days.
- Homan: Yeah, uh hum.
- Mark: Now, as you mentioned this would go on until about October or so but I would imagine it had to have—
- Homan: It slowed down. In June it slowed way down. In June, basically, we started thinking it was all over with and then we started going back and you would pick up a boat load here or they would have helicopters going in and snatch some, you know, and it was a lot less, but the mass exodus was prior to that.
- Mark: Now, in this fax you sent me you also mention Cambodia too. Did you get off the coast of Cambodia at all?
- Homan: Right. I didn't do anything personally with leaving the ship or anything like that but they went and evacuated all the Americans out of Cambodia and I thought, oh, boy war in Cambodia, war in Vietnam, here we are going to Cambodia. And some friends of mine, guys that I had worked with, had gone in on a refugee handling team, you know, gone and pulled out, basically, I believe it was the embassy compound and any American citizen and then they took out all the gooks they could get out. But that was just a basically one or two day gig.
- Mark: Yeah, probably. And this lasted until about October or so you said?
- Homan: Yup. We came back, we pulled into Alameda on October the 23rd, or 21st, 1975 and we were picking up right through the end of September, picking up refugees, maybe even the first week in October.
- Mark: That's a very interesting introduction into the military I suppose.
- Homan: Mm-hmm. Then you add to that all the heat strokes I had, the insanity of working in the fire room and the heat on an old World War II ship was atrocious—upper level 140 degrees, lower level 110 degrees—crazy hours, no fresh water at sea. It seemed like every time I got off watch they shut the fresh water off so you'd go days without a decent shower

[End of tape 1, side A]

Homan: So you'd go days without a decent shower or you were taking salt water showers. Had a lot of problems, lot of problems and I swore, we pulled in to the Philippines at one point and I swore I was leaving, I'm going AWOL, fuck this, I'm done. I had saved up, back in those days you got paid in cash and you filled out a pay chit and if you only wanted \$50 cash, you only put \$50 on your pay chit and then they would give you \$50 and the rest would be carried over to the next payday. And you could do this forever, you could do this for your whole time in the service if you wanted to. Well, I had enough money to buy a plane ticket from Manila to San Francisco on the books so when we pulled into Subic I went and got all my money which was about I want to say right at \$2,000 which was a hell of a lot of money to be running around Longapo with. And I went and got very drunk in Longapo, got on a victory liner to Manila, actually bought a plane ticket to fly back but I didn't have a passport or a set of orders so they wouldn't let me board the plane. So I was kind of stuck and I thought, okay, they got me, I'm going to play this insane game that's going on here until I get back to the States and when I get back to the States then I'm done, screw this, I'm going AWOL, you know. The people that I worked with and for didn't give a damn about anybody but themselves. The hours that we worked were beyond human comprehension in that kind of heat and noise. Constant fear of the war situation and stuff although that didn't, that had more of an effect on me being a first time than it did on any of the guys that had been on a ship for a few years. And then just the daily rites and rituals that they expected you to just do. It was crazy. It was. I had a lot of heat strokes, I was a heat casualty a number of times, and I always felt like I was all on my own. Nobody gave a shit about me but me. At that point I resigned myself to this is what the Navy is like, fuck them, I'm out of here.

Mark: Were there others, do you think, or perhaps that you know of, who felt the same way? I mean, you came extremely close to actually leaving the service under your own volition. I mean, was there a problem with desertion that you could tell?

Homan: A lot of the guys I went to school with at one point or another had gone AWOL or deserted or whatever. And the ship pulled into Alameda, California, I went to the Oakland Airport and got on a plane, got a plane ticket to fly out of San Francisco to come back to Wisconsin. And I was proud of everything but I didn't know if I had what it takes to do this, especially for another three years, you know. I just was drained by all this—physically, mentally, emotionally, you know, it just tore me right up. Well, I came back to Racine for the weekend, which you weren't supposed to do in those days, you were supposed to stay within fifty miles or whatever. Well, you know,

who cares. And I had no intention of really going back although I never voiced that to anybody until it came time to get on the bus. Then I thought, screw this, I'm not getting on the bus. And when you came back to Racine, you were kind of a celebrity, you know. There were places where we would go and I'd be in uniform and they'd spit on me. And there were other places where I'd go in Racine with a uniform on and they'd buy me dinner and drinks and the girls were crazy and it was, you know, fantastic. So I had kind of this mixed emotions about it all. Well, one of the guys I grew up with was a deserter, got court-martialed out of the military, got a dishonorable discharge, all this stuff. And he wasn't a good friend of mine; his brother was. I came in the Navy with his brother, Ronnie. But Roger looked at me and said, "You got to go back or you're going to fuck your whole life up." Well, Roger's father was a deserter, Roger was a deserter, his brother Tom was a deserter. And I thought about that for a couple of minutes and I thought, well, he's probably right, you know. And *Hancock*, at the point we got back to the United States, was going to be decommissioned so I was going to get another set of orders and I thought, well, I'll go back and give it another try but if I go back to the same kind of bullshit and insanity and abuse that I went through the first time around, forget it, I'm packing my bag and I'm out of here.

Mark: But you obviously didn't.

Homan: No, uh-uhm.

Mark: I suppose we can talk about the late '70s then and the military. Where did you go after the *Hancock*?

Homan: I left the *Hancock*, I had thirty days leave, it was December of '75, came back to Racine, and then I went to Japan to catch another ship which I finally caught in Subic Bay in the Philippines again.

Mark: That was the *Kilauea*?

Homan: *Kilauea*.

Mark: What type—?

Homan: Ammunition ship.

Mark: I was in the Air Force. Navy never ceases to confuse me.

Homan: That's a government, if you know anything about the Merchant Navy, that's now a USNS [United States Naval Ship] ship. It's not an active, combatant, or Naval vessel anymore. It's, although it's still a Naval vessel, it's commanded by a Navy officer, but it's got a civilian crew now.

Mark: I see. And so what did you do on this ship?

Homan: Worked down in the fire room and the engine room. And when I got there I was kind of salty for an E2. I mean I had been on another ship and I went to Vietnam and, you know, I was a salty dog, I wasn't a recruit anymore. I got there and it was a fairly new ship, it was commissioned in I want to say '68 so it was relatively new compared to the *Hancock* which was commissioned in '43 and saw World War II service, you know. The people that I worked with there, there were some crazy ones but they weren't as crazy. And we had a real good chief that his attitude was, you know, we're going to play their fucking games and I'm going to take care of you guys and we're just going to do what we got to do, you know, but we're going to do it with a method and a mentality instead of this mindless, insane crap like went on aboard the *Hancock*. And his name was Glover Fitzgerald Collins, and he was big, he was black, and he was ornery, and he's probably one of the best men I have ever met in my life.

Mark: So, as I read through this, you went to quite a few ports—all over the Pacific and then you went into the Atlantic as well.

Homan: Yup. After my tour on *Kilauea*, well, I wasn't going to re-enlist and we had this warrant officer for division officer named Cecil Hendricks and Cecil Hendricks wanted me to re-enlist and I told him—I was an E5 then, went aboard the *Kilauea* as E2, left as E5, second class—and I said, “You don't need me and I don't need you.” And he said, “Yeah, but you're the kind of guy we like to have around.” And I said, “No, uh-uh, no. I've had enough of this.” And I was good, I was accepted and was considered, you know, a company man and all that kind of stuff but it just wasn't for me. And it wasn't the Navy or the work; it was just the crap you had to put up with. The politics, the back stabbing, the lying, the BS that they all did. It was part of the corporate world, you know. So I was on the ship one day, we were anchored out at the, tied up at the Navmag [Naval Magazine] in the Philippines and I get a phone call. Well, when you get a phone call in the Philippines, it's usually bad news; somebody died or, 'cause there's just no phones there back in those days, you know. And I went up to take the phone call and it was an admiral named McClinton and he said to me, “I understand you're getting short.” Well, I was going to get out in December; this was August. And I said, “Yeah.” And he said, “Well, how would you like to consider staying in the Navy?” And I said, “Nope. Who are you? Come on, this is a joke. You're not really an admiral.” And he said, “Oh no, I'm Admiral McClinton. I'm the commander of the task force over here and I would like to discuss your naval career with you.” And I said, “Well, I really am not interested and I don't really believe you're an admiral and this is all bullshit. And I'm just glad this isn't a Red Cross phone call saying my mother died or something,” you know.

He said, “Well, I’m going to send my driver over, pick you up at six o’clock tomorrow morning. We’ll come over to my office, have breakfast, and we’ll talk about your career, see what maybe we can get for you.” He says, “You’ve got to remember one thing. We want you, so you’ve got us by the balls. Tug a little bit. See if we can make it work for you.” So I, you know, took all this with a grain of salt and it was kind of a novelty that some guy just called me and said he was an admiral and they were all “Bullshit. What would an admiral want with you?” And I said, “Yeah, I know but he said he was an admiral and he’s going to have his driver” and all this. Well, I got off watch, I had the watch all night from six at night until six in the morning, got off watch, went into the berthing compartment, was smoking a cigarette, sitting there in my skivvies, drinking a soda, and officer of the deck called down and said, “There’s a master chief so-and-so here from group to take you over to meet the admiral.” And I was like, “Get out of here,” you know, and he said, “Yeah.” I didn’t even have a decent dress uniform to wear so I had to borrow a set of whites real quick and go up to the quarter-deck. And I went over there and basically he said, “Tell me what you want. I want to keep you. What’s it going to take?” He had my service record on his desk in front of him and that really threw me for a loop. How did he get my service record, you know. Didn’t understand it. Well he would up serving me breakfast, a couple days later re-enlisted me, called Washington, got me the orders I wanted, all this kind of stuff. And the connection was Cecil Hendrick. When the admiral was a captain and Cecil Hendrick was a chief, he worked for the captain and they both worked at Navy recruiting. And Hendrick told the admiral if he stroked this guy’s monkey just right, he’ll do it. So that’s how I re-enlisted.

Mark: So what did you want? What did you get?

Homan: I wanted my bonus and I wanted to go to a civilized, English-speaking foreign country where there were no ships.

Mark: Which is Bermuda.

Homan: Right. So I rode the *Kilauea* back to the States and the day we pulled in I left to go to Bermuda. I had like, I think, six weeks leave or something accumulated. I took most of it, you know, before I went but I checked aboard in Bermuda in November of ‘78.

Mark: And what did you do there?

Homan: Well, initially I got assigned to a public works detachment which was a Seabee unit and they made me in charge of the base plumbing and heating shop. And what we were supposed to do was take care of all the government buildings and housing, plumbing systems, furnaces, all that kind of stuff. It was a military/civilian shop. I had civilians working for me, and I had

Seabees working for me and I wasn't a Seabee by training. Seabees are their own little group, okay? I was a "fleet tweet." And I got in there with the gung-ho, you know, I can do all this hands-down attitude and I got problems from the civil service union. And I went to my chief and I said, "This is bullshit, man. I'm in the Navy. I'm not going to put up with this union crap." And he said, "Well, let me tell you something, kid."—his name was Phillano (??). He was a chief builder and he'd come in the Navy like December the 8th, 1941. Well, Phillano (??) said, "Crabs are like a disease. You can manage them but you can't get rid of them. You have to keep it." You know, "So, you just keep what you're doing and any time they make you made or get out of line, you come and see me or your first class," which was a guy by the name of Mick Jones, "and we'll take care of all that." And they tried, they tried. But I had guys that worked for me that were civilians that were trying to get the job opened up as a civilian job and all this. Finally, after probably four months of this or whatever, I went into my officer in charge, was a full Navy commander, and I said, "This is bullshit. I've had enough. I'm done." And I tore the Seabee patch off the pocket of my shirt which, you know, we used to wear them on the pockets, and I put it on his desk and I went up to base police and told them, "Here I am. Put me to work." I actually quit my job and got another one. The chief that ran the base police was an old boatswain mate, river boat sailor, "fleet tweet" type and he said, "Well, they didn't tell me you were coming." And I said, "Well, they told me to come up here and go to work." And usually guys got shit-canned to base police for one reason or another—they did something wrong or they had a problem or they had family problems or something so they'd just well, send them to security and we'll get rid of them. Well, here I come walking in the door and he didn't know nothing about it so he was happy to get another fresh, warm body, you know. After about three days the UA list came around and there I was on the top of the UA list being as I was this ranking AWOL person from any of the units on the island. I was from the Seabee unit. He called me into his office and says, "What is this shit?" And I said, "Oh, well, I kind of forgot to tell you I didn't get no orders to come up here. I just quit and came." And he laughed, and he said, "I like that. You got balls. I'm going to keep you." And, you know, we wore different uniforms and I got basically indoctrinated as a military policeman. We didn't wear any rank insignia or standard Navy uniforms. We wore khakis with Bermuda County Sheriff patches on them and things like that. We did everything from crossing guards to full blown criminal investigations, you know, all kinds of things. And I enjoyed that. It was fun.

Mark: Yeah. And this lasted about two years?

Homan: Yeah.

Mark: Now, it's been in the news lately that Bermuda has sort of a country clubish-type of place.

Homan: Clique.

Mark: Yeah. I see Walter Mondale's name on here among others.

Homan: Yes. Vice President of the United States.

Mark: It sounds like you got to meet some notables there.

Homan: All the time. They came there to play golf. They would have a twenty minute meeting and spend five days there playing golf. Bermuda was like, if you go to Christmas Mountain from Madison, Washington was Christmas Mountain, Bermuda was Christmas Mountain for Washington, you know. We always had VIPs coming and going. And we had an ambassador, and we had the commanding officer of the base was also called coordinating authority for all of the military activities there and all the NATO military activities there, and he was the CO of the base, and he was the Naval attaché to the ambassador, so there was always big shots coming and going from England and a lot of different countries. But shit, every week we had congressmen, and senators, and heads of government departments and bureaus, we had admirals, we had generals, we had admirals' and generals' wives. I referenced Walter Mondale there. We had an old Bermudan driver and he had this 1972 Chevy Nova which was a very big car for the island of Bermuda, and it was all armored and bullet-proof glass, and this ole Bermudan guy drove this car for the United States government. He was their paid, professional driver. Well, he was sick and he couldn't drive, and he got sick on short notice, some kind of heart problem—he was an old guy—so the Secret Service people said, “We want to use a military guy to drive for the Vice President instead of scrapping the whole trip.” Now this was just so he could come down and play golf, that's all it was, and then there was going to be dinner for all the officers and all this social grace, kiss ass political bullshit. Well, I got stuck, and I do mean stuck, driving for the Vice President. What they did was they got with the Bermuda police and I had to drive that Chevy Nova at fifty miles an hour on these roads which the speed limit there is normally twenty-five kilometers, or thirty-five kilometers, which is twenty miles an hour. Well, I had to do fifty miles an hour down these roads. Now, I lived off base so I had a little more daily integration with the roads and whatnot so that's how I got “drafted” to be his driver. So I drove him around all day and he paid a call on the governor of Bermuda, and he paid a call on some civilian that was from the United States that owned a home down there, and with the ambassador and all this kind of crap, and then there was this dinner party that night. Well, I took a book with and I sat out front. Usually, when you had to drive for somebody, an admiral or whatever, when they go to them parties they would tell you, “Be back at ten o'clock,” or “Call the OOD and leave a phone number with him and I'll call there to get you,” or, you know, they didn't make you sit and wait, you know,

unless it was going to be an hour or maybe two hours. Well, they made me sit and wait. And I sat in front of the officers club for about three and a half or four hours, and I was reading a book in the car. Well, I wasn't paying attention to what was going on and as the Vice President came out of the building I was late, I didn't notice, I didn't hop out quick enough, I didn't open the door quick enough, and I didn't solute quick enough, and I threw my book down on the seat to do all this. He got in the back of the car with his aide and a couple of other people and he looked at me and he said, "You fuck. You're reading a book." And I turned around, and I was actually kind of impressed. You know, here I'm driving the Vice President of the United States and the Secret Service "drafted" me to do this, you know, I was impressed with all that. And he calls me a "fuck." And I turned around and I looked at him and he says, "Give me that fucking book." And he reached over the seat, 'cause there was no divider in the car, picked it up and tore it in two, and he said, "I'm going to have your fucking ass for this." And I thought, "You know what, you just lost a whole lot of votes buddy because I'm getting on the telephone." I drove him back to the admiral's, or the captain's quarters where he was staying at, the Naval attaché was a full bird, at the VIP cottage there and I went and took the car over to my chief's house, and I still hadn't been released by the Secret Service. They were, "Where the hell are you going?" And I just drove off, just drove off. I knocked on my chief's door at his quarters and I said, "I ain't driving that asshole no more. You drive him." I threw him the keys and I turned around and I walked away. So needless to say, the next day I got called on the carpet for all that and I said, "If they want me to drive for them, that's fine. But if he calls me a "fuck" again, I'm going to hit him." You know, I could see if I did something wrong, if I was derelict or unprofessional but I don't think sitting and reading a novel, you know, was a bad thing—and neither did my chief. And I told them, "I'll beat his ass if he ever says that to me again. I'm going to pop him." You know, so it was, well, Homan's not going to drive for VIPs anymore. Never did after that.

Mark: Not the most flattering portrait of Walter Mondale.

Homan: I wouldn't vote for the son-of-a-bitch and I wouldn't vote for anybody in the Democratic party anymore either because of Walter Mondale.

Mark: Well, speaking of politics, I suppose it's time to get on to Reagan and some changes in the military that came about as a result of that. Perhaps we should start out by talking about everyday life in the Navy before 1980. Sort of morale, who was in it, etc., etc. Then how it changed after Reagan became the President.

Homan: Well, you hear about the "hollow force of the '70s" is the catch phrase, and that's very true. I remember one year, I think it was 1977, our paychecks were no good. We were in San Diego, I was on the *Kilauea*, when a bank in

San Diego would cash a government check, you know, that kind of infuriates people. We would run out of money for no reason. You know, we'd need a part and maybe it was a safety thing or something like that, and we couldn't get it, you know. Drugs were pretty rampant and they were trying to come up with systems to combat that but there were so many people that the people who were tasked with coming up with the plans and the policies were all, we used to call them "rope smokers," were all "rope smokers" themselves. And we got undermanned. It got hard to get a ship underway. You know, we worked long, long hours. We went days and days and days doing this stuff. Weeks and months at sea, you know, and it was pretty bad. It was pretty bad. They came up with what they called the Human Relations Council Navy-wide where you got to go, it was go bitch to the XO, basically. It started coming out, instead of well, we're not getting our mail or why did they run out of socks in the ships store, I get sick and tired of eating rice five nights a week, you know, this kind of stuff, to why can't I get money for parts, you know, when are we going to get some more people, you know, things like this. You had this Iranian stuff going on at the time. And none of us liked the way that was being handled. I think everybody I knew in the military at that point, their basic attitude was invade Iran and take the embassy back. You know, or bomb them back to the stone age and make it a parking lot for Iraq, you know. And Carter was pretty wishy-washy. And he was wishy-washy with everybody so as that filtered down to us we played a lot of stupid games with the Soviets at sea. I mean, it's like they say it is now. You never knew from one day to the next what the game was going to be anymore, you know. When President Reagan came into office, it all changed. We never hurt for parts after that. We were not hurting for people. If we had people shortages, you know, once it was documented and they sent a message out, I guarantee within a week if they couldn't find us fresh meat to send to the ship to stay there for ever, they would find a ship that was in overhaul someplace or something and instead of taking people from other fleet units that were operating, they'd take them from inactive fleet units down for maintenance and send them to us. And the pay raises came. We started, my pay actually doubled two weeks after Reagan got sworn in. And I loved him, I really did. You know, that alone was a good reason but, you know, pay allowances and everything doubled. I mean, it actually went up 100% net for me. We still had real extensive off tempo but—

Mark: What was off tempo?

Homan: Pace of operations. But we had money, we had parts, we weren't hurting for things, you know. Things started happening. And when they told us to go do something as a unit we went and did it, we had everything we needed to do it with for a change which I had never, ever up until that point in the Navy experienced any of that. So I loved him. I thought he was great.

Mark: So, morale did improve drastically.

Homan: Oh, yeah.

Mark: Within that year.

Homan: Yeah. And in the early '80s they ironed out the, you know, the drug programs and stuff. I know when I went aboard the USS Biddle, coming off Bermuda I caught the *Biddle* in Norfolk, she was getting, I went aboard at three o'clock in the afternoon, she was getting underway at eight o'clock the next morning, so I checked aboard the ship, they didn't have any BT1s at the time or E6s—I was an E5 and there was a couple of those—and then they had two BTCs and then we had a master chief BT who functioned as the senior enlisted guy for the whole ship and he ran the engineering, you know, all this kind of stuff. Well, they were so glad to see me and this one chief looked at me and said, "You're lighting off at midnight so be back then. We're getting underway." And I was kind of disappointed 'cause I had to find a place to live and all this kind of stuff, you know. So I came back at midnight, never lit off a 1200 pound plant before, got down there with the light-off watch, and everybody was getting high, you know, and I had smoked an occasional joint here and there but I wasn't a part of the drug culture. I never did it on the ship, never did it on duty, none of that. And I knew a lot of guys were pretty much that way but it was still rampant. Well, I busted them all. I busted every one of them for smoking dope. I was up thirty-six hours before we got away from the pier and I could get some sleep and when I went to pick a bunk, you know, being a second class I could bump people so I found a rack I wanted, said, "I want that rack. You're out of here." And the guy who had that rack was a druggie. So after I crawled in the rack, stowed my gear, went to sleep—now I'd been up thirty-six hours without no sleep, this is day two on a new ship—they tried to beat the living daylights out of me while I was asleep, you know. And I thought, man, this is going to be a long tour here, you know. And I went and I turned them all in. I went and saw the captain. I didn't know who else to go to, couldn't find anybody in my chain of command, so I just went up to the bridge and told the captain and he put a guard on me, you know. Then I became the designated division LPO. I was the junior second class at the time. But by appointment I just became the senior second class in the division. The one chief was all upset with me. The other one was fine. Brown, the master chief, said, "I wish you would have came to me instead of going up on the bridge," you know. And then I spent three months, basically watching my back. I never went anywhere without a heavy crescent wrench in my hand. And we got rid of all the dopers. Not just by my doing but everybody else in the positions-that-be cracked down.

Mark: And would you have done that four years ago, four years prior to that?

- Homan: No, because I didn't know enough about the Navy. I would have gone with the flow. I would have just closed my eyes and took the path of least resistance.
- Mark: Yeah. Now, as time went on, the drug use went down.
- Homan: Oh, yeah. Piss tests. Sole reason for it, sole reason for it. Once they started doing urinalysis, that was the end of it.
- Mark: And how often was that?
- Homan: Any time they wanted to.
- Mark: I was in for four and a half and never had one, ever. But that's not always everyone's situation. Aboard ship for example—
- Homan: The first year I was on the *Biddle* I bet you we had them, shit, every three or four days. She was in overhaul in Philadelphia before I picked it up and she had a real bad drug problem from being in the shipyard for a year. You know, there's not enough labor, shipyards are hard periods but they didn't do a whole lot to that ship. Weapons-wise, yeah, but engineering-wise they did the bare minimum and all those guys just sat around and rotted, you know, and they kind of fell, by their own choosing, they fell victim to it.
- Mark: Now, this gets into the issue, who is being recruited into the Navy at the time? These drug users, were they new recruits? Or were they people left over from the '70s?
- Homan: Both. Officers, enlisted, chiefs, you know, senior enlisted, all that stuff.
- Mark: It didn't really seem to matter to you.
- Homan: No.
- Mark: I mean, new recruits did it and some of the old salts.
- Homan: As far as the military classes were, it didn't matter at all. Age groups maybe was where the distinction was made. Basically, anybody under thirty was suspect.
- Mark: Now, when it comes to new recruits that came in after 1981, when McKay had gone up (??), did you notice any change in the kinds of—
- Homan: Oh, yeah.

- Mark: —people who were bringing into the military? I suppose there were more recruits. That is, the military is expanding as well.
- Homan: Right. And they had come back to the jumper-style uniforms for sailors. And that's a big pride thing. That was a very big pride thing. And they were cracking down on them with prior screenings and things. And you're always going to have that ten percent that shouldn't be doing what they're doing but there was a conscious effort to expand the military. There was a conscious effort to retain quality people and there was a conscious effort to recruit quality people. I started getting questionnaires from schools. When I'd get a fireman apprentice from Great Lakes, the school, after he was there six months, I'd get a questionnaire—how's he doing? What could we have done better here? And in the beginning I thought that was all a crock of crap, you know, it was just going back and sitting on some officer's desk and they're not reading them or doing anything about them, this guy's filing them away, creating a job for himself, which was a lot of that went on too. But basically in the Navy there is no leadership in the officer corps until they're all senior officers and then only for a short term but it made a big difference. It really did. And it started cleaning things up. The days of the "Z" gram—Admiral Zumwalt and his "today we're going to have long hair" and stuff, you know. Everything was getting a little more standardized. And not everybody was real comfortable with that but it was being more easily accepted, you know. And it was good, it was good. I think that they should have urinalysis screening in schools today because of that, just at random, period.
- Mark: What about race relations pre- and post-1980? Is there any change that you noticed?
- Homan: Well, yes and no. You got to understand that when I was on the *Kilauea* the guy that made one of the biggest impressions that anybody will ever leave to me, in my lifetime, was black. After six or eight months on the *Biddle* we got a master chief boiler technician named Joe Saunders who was also black. And he's probably the second most important person in my Navy life, you know, that left good waves with me. And neither one of them went for that race stuff. I mean, they would get in a corner, you know, four black guys and they're all chucking and jiving and stereotypical and "hey, bleed," "brother," "bro" and this kind of stuff. But that was kind of, like if you took five historians and put them in a corner. What are they all going to talk about? You know what I'm saying? Or if you took five floor contractors and put them in a corner. What are they all going to talk about? But when we functioned as a unit, there wasn't any of that stuff and if either, on both units, if anybody ever brought up anything about race, the first two that were down their throats about it, be they black or white,

[End of tape 1, side B]

Homan: anybody ever brought up anything about race, the first two that were down their throats about it, be they black or white, was Collins or Saunders, right off the top. Saunders had a unique outlook on life. Everything was the Navy, nothing else existed beyond the Navy, except sex. That was it. Those were the only two things that mattered. And his attitude like, you know, how you go to quarters with a decent uniform and all this, not with him. Saunders' philosophy was if you've got time to put on dress-up work clothes for the morning formation, you ain't working hard enough, and that was his attitude. And he took care of us. So whenever the race card came into play, he was usually the first one to jump. I mean, you didn't even have a chance to say anything about it, you know. He'd be telling them, "Hey, you're not pulling this useless street nigger crap with me," or "You can hate him all you want but you can't hate him 'cause he's black." You know, "You can hate him 'cause he's black but you can't practice that hate. We're all sailors here and nothing else matters," you know. To this day, I have very warm thoughts of those guys and I would place either of those two guys in real high esteem. I really would.

Mark: So, about 1984, was it? No, 1982, it's time for you to re-enlist again.

Homan: Yeah. I re-enlisted, well, I re-enlisted the end of '81, on the *Biddle*.

Mark: I'm interested in why. Was it the direction of the Navy and the military in general?

Homan: Well, it was a combination of both. The Navy was going someplace it should have been going for years and didn't for big picture reasons that I had nothing to do with. But when I re-enlisted in the Philippines the first time I got my \$12,000 bonus which I basically partied away. You know, I bought things and threw parties, you know, that kind of stuff. Didn't put a dime—as a matter of fact, this watch I'm wearing is the only thing I bought that I still have from that first twelve grand. The second time around, it was a money thing. Gee, I can drop two years of this enlistment, re-enlist for four, max on the bonus again, and pull \$16,000 out of them this time. And I was married to my first wife then and she had exactly the same option. So we did that and we bought a house, we had like nothing for a house payment. You know, basically, for being twenty-three years old, we were loaded. I mean, I had five digit bank accounts, I never walked around with less than \$1000 in my wallet, anywhere, new cars, you know. And I liked the way the Navy was going and they were doing this kind of thing and why shouldn't I take advantage of it. I could have re-enlisted for technical training. Didn't really want to. I mean, I could get the training eventually anyway. But career-wise I was satisfied personally with the path I was going and I liked the way the Navy was going so I thought I'm going to do this and take the money while it's there, you know. I used to

tell people after you put your first hash mark on, you're no longer doing, in service to your country. After you put the first hash mark on, you just became a mercenary.

Mark: So, again, as I page through here I see one of the [master copy tape side A ended] or did they all blend together? I mean, for a long, long time—

Homan: Well, they kind of all blend together but they're kind of separate. I have always been partial to the Orient and I think a lot of that comes from the World War II movies and my boyhood, and being in the Navy, and whatnot. I've never been anyplace in Europe that I ever would want to go back to, basically. I had a good time in Bermuda but Bermuda's not really a foreign country. It's an island off the coast of Carolina, you know. [hearing aid squeals] This thing is squealing. I've got to turn it off. I guess I had good times wherever I went and we saw horrendous poverty, horrendous oppression, terrible, terrible things. I know I, getting into—are you Jewish?

Mark: No.

Homan: Okay. You don't look Palestinian either so I'm going to assume this is a safe topic.

Mark: Just don't pick on the Dutch.

Homan: Okay. Well, I never went, what is it? What's Dutch? Holland.

Mark: Holland.

Homan: Never went to Holland but was in Scandinavia. But anyway, never had an opinion of Arabs or Israelis or anything like that one way or the other. And then I got involved in the Beirut thing when I went on the *Biddle* and I went back again with the *Nassau* and spent quite a bit of time in the Middle East, ashore and afloat, in combat support operations. The way that the Israeli people treat the Palestinians is just atrocious. We went into Jerusalem, when I was on the *Nassau* we went into Jerusalem. This was in 1984. There was me and two staff sergeants on liberty. We were in the old section of the city. We were on our little R&R thing. And we were just walking around, shopping, checking the place out type thing, and we went into a rug shop and, you know, of course when you're talking about rugs they'll give you beer, coffee. It's, you know, it's not like here where you go buy something. You get into it there. It's like this whole societal ritual you have to go through. It's like that everywhere else in the world too. And with the Palestinians, instead of bad mouthing them like you would if he was a Korean, you speak respectful to him but you can still call him a son-of-a-bitch, say, "Oh, excuse me you son-of-a-bitch. Your rugs are very, very nice and they would look great in my

home but you're just being a cheap bastard and you want too much money." And you can do this. I mean, actually do this like that.

So we're talking to this guy. I bought a couple of rugs and he gave me a rug as a gift, a souvenir. He knew we were American GIs but he didn't know to what extent or anything like that. We were in civilian clothes. So he says to me, "Is there anything else I can do for you while you're here in Jerusalem?" And I said, "Yeah, I collect flags from all the countries I've been to and I don't have an Israeli flag yet." Wrong thing to say to a Palestinian rug dealer. This guy's name was Samir Giltae (?). He blows up, becomes the enraged, passionate Palestinian that he is, and he says to me, "You want a— You're not in Israel. You're in occupied Palestine." And this is 1984, this isn't 1948, you know. And I'm thinking, oops, wrong topic. The two Marines that were with me, oops, wrong topic. We hit the nerve. Boy, oh, boy, watch your back now, 'cause they've been known to do things crazy like this. So he says, "You come with me. I'll get you a flag." Well, I wanted the flag and I didn't care if it was Israeli flag or Palestinian flag or what. We were nervous but not nervous enough to find a graceful way out or whatever. We were all kind of shocked that we had actually hit the nerve, you know. So we go down this alleyway. You know how the streets are there, they're all narrow and old stone carved out of the ground-type buildings and all this, and he takes us into this shop with an old Arab. Guy's got a beard and a mustache, gray hair, and he's wearing the robes and the *kiafa* [keffiyeh] or whatever they call it. We used to call them "rag heads," or, you know, "towel toppers" and he had that on. And we walked in there and he says something to this guy in Arabic, and this guy was sitting up in kind of a chair that was set up kind of like a throne, you know. Come to find out, this older Arab guy was his uncle. And they're speaking in Arabic back and forth and then we were introduced to him by Samir, "This is my uncle" whatever his name is. And the guy looked and he, you know, kind of bowed down and we kind of bowed down back and, you know, pleased to meet you and all this, and he said, "My nephew tells me you want a flag." And I said, "Yes." And he said, "You are American military." "Yes." "What do you do?" "We paint ships." That was our story, we paint ships. That's all we do, we just paint them, you know. We don't do politics, we don't do none of this war fighting shit, we just paint ships. And we're looking around the room and watching for anything that's going to come out of your peripheral vision, and the two Marines were really keyed, you know. And I'm thinking how are we going to get out of here gracefully, you know, where they don't shoot us in the back as we're walking down the street or whatever. So this older gentleman looks at me and he says, "Do you know what the Israelis will do to you if you have a Palestinian flag?" And I said, "No." He said, "They'll kill you. The penalty for having a Palestinian flag in Israeli is death." And I said, "Well, I'm sorry." And he said, "Do you still want a Palestinian flag?" and I said, "All I do is paint ships, buddy," you know. "We came here, we had a nice time, I bought some beautiful rugs from your

nephew, I really enjoyed looking around the city, and its history, and its friendly people and all the culture, I mean, this is where time began.” I remember telling him that, “This is where time began. I don’t do politics, you know. As you were born here in Palestine, I was born in America. We had no choice, you know. So I guess maybe I shouldn’t have a Palestinian flag.” The guy smiled at me. He said, “I will get you an Israeli flag and I will see to it that a Palestinian flag is delivered to you.” Well, don’t go out of your way, you know. Well, just don’t worry about it. Thank you very much and this, that, and the other.

So we go out of his shop with Samir and Samir says to us, “You want to find out how the Jews treat us, you come with me and I’ll take you to Gaza and then you can really see.” He says, “You people treated niggers bad. The niggers never had it so good when they were being treated bad.” Samir, in socializing, this was like a whole morning event, had said he was educated in the United States, he went to college in the United States, he was a PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] soldier for awhile, wounded in Beirut, he was married to a woman of old Arab culture that he liked that with, you know, [claps hands] and in the room they come, and he wanted his daughter who was about three or four years old raised Western and educated in the United States and all this, and he dressed Western. You know, shirt and jeans like you and I are dressed now basically. Well, we said, “We’ve got to work tomorrow. We’ve got to paint this, a big ship pulled in in Haifa. We’ve got to paint that sucker.” You know, so we’re all working tomorrow and, you know, thank you but no thank you, and we hopped in the car and drove back to Haifa. We get back to the boat and we’re sitting around in the mess telling this story, right? Well, I get the word that there’s a visitor on the quarter-deck for me. Visitor? There’s no other ships in here are there? No. And I’m thinking, “Who would I know here in Israel?” It was a Palestinian, brought me my Palestinian flag and they brought it to me on the ship knowing that the Israelis would never catch me with it there and I wouldn’t be in any danger by it. And I was, “Wow!” you know. And the shipyards were off limits to all but very select few non-Israelis. Armed guards everywhere. We had a Marine who was wearing a kiafa [keffiyeh] that he was given inside the shipyard and they shot at him just ‘cause he had the rag on, you know? They pumped two rounds in his direction and when he went down they ran over, they didn’t hit him, but they ran over there to arrest him and then when they realized he was a Marine with a souvenir, they were like, well, you don’t do this around here buddy, you get shot for wearing them things, you know. It was like, well, I’ll put it in my locker and it will never be around. So anyway, we go back in the mess and we’re telling this story, the three of us, about this Palestinian, this whole incursion, and a guy by the name of Don Tinnen (??), was a first class boatswain mate with the Seal team that was with us says, “So let’s go.” And I says, “What are you, nuts? Yeah, you’re a Seal. You’re nuts,” you know. I said, “I don’t want to wind up on the front page of the *New York Times*, you

know, American Sailor Killed on Liberty in Jerusalem, you know. This is bullshit. I'm not doing politics. We had politics by mistake. Believe me, it was a thrilling experience and I got my flag but I'm not getting into this any more." So Don looks at me and he says, "Well, they don't know if you're coming. You already told them you're working so how's he going to plan anything for you? And if you want to go do something like that, who's a better person to go with than me?" And I looked at that and I thought, you know, you're right. And I did have a genuine curiosity about what Samir had to offer us in alleged friendship in doing all this but I said, "No."

Well, the next morning I got up, I changed my tune. I went in the first class mess to get a cup of coffee and Don was sitting in there and I said, "Let's go." So we went and rented a car, drove back, just popped in on Samir, and we got the grand tour. We went down to Gaza and he had us treated like royalty down there. When we went into a check point to get into the Gaza Strip, which I found out later was all off limits to us and we shouldn't have been down there but we did anyway, it was a Swiss check point with Israeli and Swiss UN observers, and Samir had his cousin who didn't speak no English with him, and that made us both nervous but I figured, well, I've got Don here, Don's trained for all this crap so if Don makes any kind of funky moves—and we had set up a code word—then it's just time to just kick ass and take names and get the hell out of here, you know. And we had it set up where it was going to be every man for himself. I wasn't going to worry about Don and he said, "Well, I'll worry about you but don't—" and I was, "Yeah right." Well, we went and we ate, and they took us to a coffee shop—oh, talking about the check point—well, we pulled up to the check point. The Israelis came out, pulled us out and they were going to do a strip search. And they had the mirrors looking under the vehicle and all this kind of stuff. So we start taking our shirts off. We had our Navy IDs in our teeth and that's when this Israeli soldier came over, I think he was an officer or senior enlisted guy, and he says, "You guys are Americans." I said, "Yeah." He said, "Why are you with a Palestinian?" I said, "Free meal, man." You know, sailors and free meals go together. He says, "Yeah, but you know how you guys treat niggers in the States? These guys are worse than niggers. They're unfit to live." "Hey, man. Guy said free meal. I'm broke. Free meal sounds great and he's driving." So they got nice to us and let us into Gaza. Took us to a sea-side restaurant in the one edge of Gaza and it was all shot up, there was bomb craters all over the place, Israeli combat patrols everywhere, and they were all giving us the funny eyeball like why are you guys here? type of thing. We ate a fish. It was probably half the size of this table, you know. Two and-a-half feet long and about yea high, and it was deep fried, and it had what looked like shad all the way around it, and pita bread. I don't like fish so I was like, oh, geez, I came all the way for this, you know. Was disappointed in the meal but I filled up on the salad and, you know, other things that they had. Arabic coffee if you've ever had, you have the opportunity, try some. You get it in

shot glasses and it will really do you a number. But then afterwards we went to a coffee shop after we had this meal. I mean, he's just showing us Gaza, you know, so you look. And how many houses in Chicago got bullet holes and grenade craters in front of them because niggers live in them, you know? This is what they do to the Palestinians, all this kind of stuff. We go to this little coffee shop and we're sitting there and out comes an old guy with a hookah pipe and he had a chunk of hash on there bigger than the size of my fist and we were the distinguished American visitors, he wanted us to get high with him. And they do that there. That's like routine, you know. You eat a dinner, you know, you and I may have a cigarette or cigar or whatever. No, over there, they get stoned, you know. And they're offended by those who don't get stoned with them after you have a meal when you've had your coffee. And I explained to him we paint ships for the Navy, we can't do this because in our country it's against the law and, you know, we really appreciate your hospitality but we can't. And they accepted that from us. And we just drove around, you know. Looked at things, walked around, all that stuff, got harassed a little bit by the Israeli Army checking us out. They all knew we were there, you know. And then when we went back they turned us in, through the embassy, they called the American Embassy and told them that there were two sailors running around in Gaza and that, you know, Gaza was supposed to be off limits. So we got it filtered back through. The only thing that kept us out of trouble was that Don was a Seal. He was doing intel work.

We spent basically two weeks running around with Samir and he's the one who allowed me to form my opinion of the Arab/Israeli situation in the Middle East that holds through to today. Basically, I think Israel has no modern right to exist as a nation and that the Israelis—now I'm not talking about Jews, I'm talking about Israelis—are probably one of the most barbaric nations on the face of the earth and they quash human rights for all but anybody who doesn't have the money to live there basically, and any other Arab. Basically, they shouldn't exist as a nation. Samir, in his home where we spent quite a bit of time with him because we did this for two weeks, going up to see Samir but we never told him when we were coming again, we just pop in on him when he closed his business and we'd go do things. He showed us his weapons cache, we met his family, stayed in his home, ate at home with him which was really going way out on a limb for him, extending his friendship to us, and we were real alert. I didn't know Don was doing all these intel reports but he had two grenades with him and a weapon the whole time we were doing this. He was prepared. Anyway, Samir says to me, and this was in his living room, "People, what the Nazis did to the Jews during World War II was a terrible, terrible thing. Aside from religion, aside from politics, no human being should be massacred because of their faith. But why they got to do this shit to me?" He said, "If the Jews have a right to anything, they have a right to Germany." And I never thought about it one way or the other. And I thought, and I still think to this day, he's right. He told us a story

about a terrorist network here in the United States. We were like, yeah, right, now we're getting the Palestinian indoctrination-type thing, you know. After that tour was over I was driving up to Stanton, Virginia with a shipmate of mine and we stopped at a little mom and pop 7-Eleven-type place to get a cup of coffee and a sandwich and we had T-shirts on that said "American Embassy, Beirut" and we walked in and ordered a sandwich and a coffee and we were going to go drive on and there was a "rag head" behind the counter and he said, "Oh, you come from Beirut." and we said, "Yeah, as a matter of fact, we just got back yesterday." You know, from so many months over there. "I have friend in Beirut. He sells rugs. His name is Samir." "Samir, what?" "Samir Giltae (??). Old City. Jerusalem." He knew him. And we were like, well, we didn't know him, you know, we just partied and whatnot and I thought I can't believe this, maybe everything this guy said to me is true. So we farted around in Stanton for a week and went back and then I went up to the JIC center, Joint Intelligence Center on a ship, and I filed a report at that point. And probably about three months later that store closed down. Nobody was around anymore. So who knows?

Mark: That's an interesting geo-political education I guess.

Homan: I tell you, it was something. It brings it all home.

Mark: Now, in the 1980s there were, I suppose, two different theaters of military operations. One would be the cold war and the other would be some of these smaller Lebanon, Grenada-type of things.

Homan: Right.

Mark: Let's just talk about each of those I suppose. The cold war with the Soviets and world Communism, you were in a lot of different ships, duty stations, duty jobs and those sorts of things. But I'm interested in the enlisted sailor's attitude toward the whole conflict. Did you perhaps, you mentioned confrontation at sea and these kinds of things. Did you have any direct sort of involvement?

Homan: Oh, yes, oh, yes. We were better than Ivan. We were better than Ivan even today has aspirations of becoming. We trained to kill Ivan at sea, swift, quick, and dirty with conventional and nuclear weapons. And we played a lot of cat and mouse.

Mark: Like what? From you experience.

Homan: Submarines following you around and every once in awhile they'd let you know you were there. In the Black Sea, we would go up into the Black Sea and do actual harassment and interdiction operations with the Soviet navy

where they, see they just didn't, in the '80s, the late '80s, developed the technology and the skill to be able to do underway replenishments. Have you ever seen two ships tie up? Well, we do that at twelve to fifteen knots and we don't stop. We just keep right on going. The Russians, up until the '80s had to stop. And then in the '80s they figure, well, we'll stop, tie the two ships together and then we'll start going again and we'll see what happens. Well, we'd been doing that shit since the first world war, you know. We would maneuver and get in their way, cut them off, and do all kinds of things. We had a frigate one time, a Russian frigate, got inside, and it was just a big cat and mouse game but everybody's fingers were on the buttons and they're waiting. You know, they'll call Washington and say "Can I please, please, please?" and Washington would say "No." But this frigate got inside our formation and at that we were the flag ship—this was on the *Biddle*—and the admiral said, "Fuck Ivan. Surround the son-of-a-bitch." We took all the combatants into formation. He told a carrier to come up along side the Russian. And all the combatants are going to come around at flank speed and circle that sucker in a wagon train and he wanted everybody on all the allied ships to go topside and yell "hip, hip, hooray" as they passed its port quarter. And I'm talking 100 yards between a Russian cruiser and a carrier, which is not a lot of space for a warship at sea doing a flank bell, and yell "hip, hip, hooray" and throw your hat up in the air. And what the Russian did, we had no communication agreements. Under international law at the time, the only thing that the United States and the Soviets agreed to answer as far as communications were, was flag hoist during the day and blinker lights at night. So what Ivan did was he dropped his guns and he came dead in the water, stopped, dropped his guns, and he did a flag hoist that said, "My engines are stopped. Please let me out." Well, then we broke off and set up the formation again and I mean we were so close to USS Pratt we had the wake of the *Pratt* coming over the bow of the *Biddle*, doing this little wagon train thing. And then Ivan, you know, he was appropriately humiliated. And all the guns are trained on them while this is happening, you know. He just kind of went out over the horizon for a couple of days and disappeared.

We used to pick their garbage up, they'd pick our garbage up. Guys in the forward fire room, my guys, well, were defecating in a five gallon paint bucket they painted white and spray painted "top secret" and a bunch of numbers on it and all this stuff. Well, I went down to the fire room one night and it's stinking like crazy from just sitting in the hot, nasty bilges, you know. So I'm thinking I've got a fan in the shitter down there. Well, I'm looking around and I found this bucket and I said, "What is this?" and I pulled it out of the bilge and it was painted red letters "top secret" and all these numbers on it and everything else and the guys said, "Well, it's a little present we're going to give Ivan as soon as it's full." "What is in it?" "Well, we've been shitting in it for like a week." Said, "What?" and I took the top off of this paint can and that's what was in it, was human feces, and I said, "What's this for?" and I'm

getting ready to explode, you know, about this. “Well, we thought Ivan would get a kick out of that.” And what we did was we dropped it over the side. Ivan saw us drop it over the side and away they went to pick it up. And of course they’re going to take into their intel center, open it up to see what it is. [laughs] We used to give them magazines, newspapers, we rounded up all the girlie magazines one time—we had an XO who was against girlie magazines so we got them all together, bagged them up and tied them to the inflatable Mae West vests and waited until dark, popped them, and turned on a marker light, one of the strobes for the Mae West vest, and slipped it over the side and let Ivan have all the magazines and the newspapers and, you know. We’d throw garbage, they’d pick it up and go through it. They’d throw their garbage, we’d pick it up and go through it, you know. You never saw a Russian sailor topside at sea though. They won’t let them do it. We’d moon them, throw potatoes at them. We’d get that close.

Mark: And this happening how often? I mean, like every cruise you went on?

Homan: Daily, daily in some form or another. We were up in -- we were doing a NATO exercise on the *Nassau* in the North Atlantic in ‘85 maybe I guess it was, and there was something going on in Romansk (Murmansk??). There was some sort of a detonation at a nuclear weapons storage depot—now I found that out later—but because of that detonation at the Soviet nuclear weapons storage depot in the harbor of Romansk (??) which is where their boomer boats are home ported. They went to battle stations. Somebody’s trying to sabotage our nuclear plant here, whatever. So they got intermingled with us. We had backfire bombers flying overhead and all this and we were administering tests for E4 at the time and the admiral gave the order to go to battle stations. And this is all coming over the communications net down to the control rooms for the engine rooms and weapons control and things like that. And the captain said, “I’m giving a third class test. I’m not going to battle stations in the middle of the third class test, Admiral.” and the admiral said, “Ivan is hot and tangling. We are going to red alert and I’m talking to Washington. Now get your god damn ship at battle stations.” So then we all went to battle stations and, you know, we were actually wondering, gee, is this going to be the one? You know. I mean the bomb bay doors were open when the bombers went overhead and a lot of submarine activity, a lot of surface combatants, and all within site, you know, of the horizon, and we spent about three days doing that. And then whatever political ramifications all this had kind of died and they went their way and we went our way and somebody drew a line in the water, you know, you don’t fuck with us we won’t fuck with you, and it quieted back down. But that happened all the time, all the time.

Mark: So, by 1990 or so, I mean, the cold war started to wind down and you were still in the service at the time.

Homan: Yup.

Mark: Was this noticeable from your end.

Homan: Well, yeah, because things were getting a little more relaxed, you know. We knew we could kick the piss out of the Russians. Basically, we have the attitude we could have beat the shit out of anybody if we wanted to. We could have invaded Nicaragua and taken the country in a month, you know. That kind of stuff. And the military was now a good profession to be in. They didn't call you "baby burning murderer" anymore. It was something you could do and be proud of. Raise a family while you served, all this kind of stuff. And we had money for training, money for parts, we were getting a better crop of recruits. All the interactions we had internationally that I saw with the Soviets, we would just beat the shit out of them doing normal operations. A lot of times their ships couldn't even keep up with ours. We'd be doing five knots and they'd come up alongside; we'll go to ten, they'll go to ten; we'll go to fifteen, they'll go to fifteen; we go to twenty-five, they dropped the load, you know. And the confidence was expressed in us by everybody in the country and if we had something, we got it; we needed something, we got it. And the Russians couldn't do that. I mean, they had rusting hulks at sea. And morale was real poor. We were in Yugoslavia and they were tied up to the other side of the pier from us and they have to go places in groups, they couldn't go alone. Well, we were going alone only because they wanted us to go in groups but to put us in groups in front of the Russians like that wouldn't look good, so we all got the three dollar lecture about don't go anywhere alone while you're out there but we're not going to stop you, and they made us all wear uniforms so we were readily identifiable. We'd walk into a bar or restaurant and there'd be a Russian officer with five enlisted men, or Russian chief with five enlisted men, and then we were told to leave. You know, don't go in the same places. There were KGB agents crawling all over the place and the more you had to drink the better their questions got. But, you know, they were no competition. You know, he didn't seem like a worthy opponent. He had no morale, from what we saw, and his qualifications at sea, you know, weren't all that great. They couldn't do things that we did routinely, you know. Yes, they had a big army, they had a lot of ships, you know, that kind of stuff, but you know. He would have made a formidable opponent though, don't get me wrong here, but we'd have still kicked his ass. Even in a nuclear confrontation, we'd have still kicked his ass.

Mark: I want to come back to this. We should, I suppose, talk about this Beirut and Lebanon sort of hot spots that were popping up at this time. Now, you were in the Mediterranean during the Lebanon thing, weren't you?

Homan: Yeah, I did two tours in Beirut. Went to Grenada. And for the Libyan incursion in 1981? Yeah, '81.

Mark: There were a couple of them.

Homan: Well, I did it all before it got popular. Okay.

[End of tape 2, side A]

Homan: Well, I did it all before it got popular. Okay.

Mark: I mean, how life threatening were these do you think? On a tension scale, how seriously do you guys take these sorts of things?

Homan: Oh, real serious. We had a CO on the *Biddle* named it's either Hollis or Harlan Robertson, and he was a desk sailor from Washington. He had very little sea experience and he—I don't know what his claim to fame was in the Navy, why he made captain—but before he could go on to his next step he had to command a nuclear capable capital warship which was the guided missile cruiser *Biddle*. And he wasn't a bad CO but he was kind of a little pompous, you know, he wasn't a sailor, he was an officer kind of guy if you pick up on my drift there. And we got assigned to go into the Gulf of Sidra, a couple of hundred yards off shore, because we were the conventionally powered missile cruiser. All the rest of them in the group were nucs, so we were the sacrificial lamb. Now the one thing that I will always think Captain Robertson did right in my time under him was, the day before all of this happened, the night before we went into the combat ops, he briefed everybody and we had television, you know, closed circuit television on the ship, and he laid it all out, he didn't hide anything. He told us exactly what we were going to do. He told us exactly why we were going to do it. He showed us maps that told us where the carrier was, which was the *Nimitz* about 450 miles back. He told us how many birds they were going to have in the air. Everybody was doing war shot, none of this training shape shit. Submarines, we had fast attack boats coming, staying in international waters but coming well in with us. They had a tanker ready if we got sunk to pick us up and take us, you know, and all kinds of good things. And what we were going to do was go into the Gulf of Sidra, a couple of hundred yards off shore, and shoot a missile at a drone. Okay. How would you feel if the Soviet navy came into Lake Michigan and did that? Can't do that stuff. Well, and realizing Lake Michigan is a little more restricted than the Gulf of Sidra, but we could see the license plates on the cars we were so close. Well, of course, they sent planes out to repel us and we were actually engaged by those aircraft. We fired missiles but the tomcats got them, the *Nimitz* got them, shot them down. And war at sea is different because, you know, you're a hundred feet from your bunk, you're not out in the jungle running around in the mud, there's a mess deck right over the fire

rooms with hot meals or box lunches, the rules change a little bit for conduct of the ship while you're in a battle station situation.

Mark: And that was.

Homan: Everybody's serious. There ain't no more clowning around, you know. We were worried about a chemical attack at the time so they told us we couldn't have any coffee which kind of made things, you know, that wasn't good but we made our own anyway. Some of the repair locker chiefs and things were issued side arms, all that. But where I worked at, down in the fire room, if the missile that they fired was a heat seeking missile, what's it going to go for? It's going to go, and the main thing you want to disable on a warship is its propulsion plant, period. Screw the weapons. No propulsion plant, no nothing, you know. So we did the best we could to keep that equipment running at 110 percent because we wanted the missile launcher to work right and the Vulcan guns to work right and the chafe launchers to work right and the electricity to be for everybody that, all the twidgets that do all this stuff, we wanted that five inch gun to be able to wrap when it had to. And we sit in this, basically it's a coffin full of machinery. You can't see anything. You can turn the net on, you can listen, but you can't see anything, wondering what's going to happen. And that was my first leadership position where I was exposed to any combat and I was terrified by this but I had a conscious thought of, "I can't let anybody see me terrified because if I lose it, my guys are going to lose it and if they lose it and we get hit, or we have a problem, or we have a feed pump that goes down, or whatever, we could get killed, you know." So I was trying to be all cool and nonchalant. And I had a guy that worked for me that was in the Marine Corps for a number of years and he says, "What are we supposed to do? Throw nuts and bolts at these assholes?" I said, "No, the name of the game is you keep fires in that, you keep that gauge at 1200 pounds, and you make sure the screw turns, and the generator whines." And you'll believe me if they start pumping missiles and a Vulcan gun cuts in, you'll hear them and you'll know. When they're doing that stuff no matter what you keep it running, you know. You do not ever want to lose power in a combat situation. And after the whole thing was, we steamed like that for three days after we shot down those two planes. After that was all over with everybody was all, "Yeah. We kicked their ass," and all this kind of stuff and, you know, they did, and we were ready even though we kind of invaded his turf and did a bad thing in his backyard. We pulled into Piraeus, Greece and I went and got myself a motel room and just kind of took a day and "thank God this is over with" you know. I held myself together. My people performed 110 percent, you know. And it didn't get out of control. We didn't get hit. You know, the world didn't go to war. You know, we splashed a couple of Libyan pilots and embarrassed the daylights out of Khadafi [Gaddafi] and it's all very real, you know. I remember writing my mother a letter while I was at battle stations telling her "I don't know what

they're saying about any of this in the States but don't believe it. If I don't come home, if I get killed, don't believe a word they tell you. You know, remember that. Don't believe a word they tell you." And I asked her to keep the newspapers clippings and stuff like that. I've got a cartoon in one of my photo albums that says CTF whatever '63 or whatever the task force was—two Olivia zero—and shows two pilots walking out of the water, you know, with flames coming off their tailbones.

Mark: So, at the end of the Cold War then, how does the Navy start to change as they talk about winding down?

Homan: Well, they started down-sizing. That's the key word, down-sizing. One thing you have to understand and I worked for a lot of good officers. Don't get me wrong. I served under some of the finest commanding officers the Navy had. Zulu Bobby Roberts, Gary Goodman, and a lot of these guys. And they'll probably never be internationally famous or anything but I'd go to sea and I'd go to war with any of them. But the Navy is a top heavy bureaucracy. They have senior officers who just do paper work, there's no function. There's a ratio in the Navy of one officer for every five enlisted man. It should be at least one officer for every forty enlisted men, or fifty enlisted men. That would be a more functional unit. And as this all starts down-sizing, and the total number of ships in the fleet gets cut back and the training money goes away and some of the select duty stations are, ticking punching goes away. All them officers get real cut throat. You know who they take it out on? Us, the working dogs, the guys who wear the dungarees that are down on the deck plates that go to sea every day. You know, you get an officer, he spends two years on a ship, then he goes to school, or he goes to the Pentagon, or he teaches someplace. We're out there five years, if you're lucky you'll get a two year shore tour, you know. And you go through this crisis all the time. Well, as ships get more scarce, sea billets for officers become more prime choices and they put you through all this bullshit that, you know, is really a lot of nonsense. You know, they spend tons and tons of money on things that they shouldn't even bother with. And most of the officers in the Navy today, and I base this solely on my personal experience, my years, are idiots, are all idiots, you know. And I did serve with some real fines ones and senior engineer officers alike but the majority of them are just ticket punchers, you know. They don't understand the ramifications, a lot of them don't take it seriously. You get these young lieutenants, you know, they think that, "Oh, yeah, I went to school about destroyer tactics with the Russians." Well, you know what? We've been out there doing destroyer tactics with the Russians, buddy. I hope you've read them damn books while you were in school, you know, 'cause it's real. It happens. And they were like, "Well, I've got to do my thesis on naval strategy with Soviet third fleet interactions in the Black Sea and then I go on to Monterey, you know. I'm not going to be here." It's all bullshit. And it just got worse; just worse and worse and worse and worse and worse as the

down-sizing occurred. When the Gulf War started then the officer corps was going, “Whoa, hey, hum, how we going to deal with this?” you know. I think a lot of the students actually started taking it a little more serious, too. I told my kids, in my, when I taught, I told them, “If you’re in here with the attitude that you’re going to pussy-foot around and fuck around and have a good time while you’re here at Great Lakes, I will get you assigned to a Marine Corps line company and you’ll get your ass killed within thirty days. This is real. There’s a shooting war about to happen and you may or may not get involved in it and when you leave here, you better have your shit together. And if you don’t, I’m going to see to it you’re crawling in the sand with the Marines ‘cause anybody can shoot a rifle, you know. But it takes a sailor and a trained engineer to operate a warship, you know. And it keeps it from getting close and personal.” All the grade point averages went up, they started putting in more hours, and a lot of my instructors were, “Oh come on Chief. You know it’s not going to be that bad. They’re going to be on a ship. They’re going to be eighty-five miles over the horizon pumping missiles out. So they got silk worms. Big deal. We’ve got all the best air defenses and missile defense systems money can buy.” And I told them, “Yeah, but what happens when the first one gets through? What happens when they hit a mine, you know? Do you know? No. Prepare for the worst. Expect the worst.” And as it turns out the few little naval casualties that were taken, you know, they hit a mine and had a few fires and things, all the crews performed miraculously and admirably because the fleet, the guys in that unit, had that kind of a mentality. And then the officers, now, they’re all, “Oh, you know, I came in here because I want to get my masters. I don’t know if this is a good place to be now.” You know, the worst thing about the Navy is the officers.

Mark: So you left the service in what year?

Homan: I was retired Memorial Day, 1991.

Mark: Which is not quite twenty-four years is it?

Homan: No, I did like sixteen years and eight months of active duty.

Mark: Yeah.

Homan: I transferred to what they call a Temporary Disability Retired List and I’m still on that. And I’m a disabled veteran. I’m just about deaf in my left ear. I’ve got a heart condition. I broke my back twice while I was in the service. I’ve got some permanent leg damage and some paralysis on my left side and in my legs and in my hand. Almost lost an eye once. I wore glasses prior but I’m, you know, I’m lucky. I’m eighty percent, on paper, eighty percent disabled and I retired with my normal twenty year pension-type plan and they leave you on the TDRL for five years. Now this year or early next year I’ll go back for

my final exam with the Navy and the results of that exam will get me put on what's called the Permanent Disability Retired List and then I'll get my certificate from President Clinton that says, "Thank you for your—," you know, the time I've been out since Memorial Day of '91 still counts for total years of service even though I have a retired ID card and I've got a beard and long hair now and whatnot. The theory is if your medical condition ever corrects itself or you recover completely then you can go back in active duty again. Well, it's a nice thought but with the things that are wrong with me, it's not going to happen. So I miss the Navy quite a bit.

Mark: Yeah. I was going to ask why you left earlier than you did. I thought perhaps it was due to the down-sizing.

Homan: I didn't have a choice. In a way, it kind of did have to do with down-sizing. There was a chief at Great Lakes that ran a different school than I did and he had been on limited duty for like five-and-a-half years, okay? And after five years of limited duty, Washington has to approve or deny you for staying in the service again. And he was granted permanent limited duty until retirement, okay? So he could finish his twenty out or whatever the duration of that enlistment was be it twenty-one, twenty-two, if he got injured at nineteen and he re-enlisted prior to that for six years, so, you know, they granted him explicit permission to finish that tour out and all he would ever do was stay there as an instructor running this school. He was an optical instrument man. Well, I wanted to do that, too. But with the down-sizing, the Gulf War was, well, I mean it wasn't much of a war, you know. It was a neat thing for people who shot missiles and people who flew planes and the rest of them sat around in the desert trying to wonder what they were going to do most of the time. You know, I'm not trying to take away from the character of their service but it was a cake walk, you know. And when they got into the down-sizing mode and the changes in the military with the Cold War, they didn't want to keep me on the books because if they keep me on the books, as they start decommissioning ships, steam ships, and those guys that did it in the fleet there's no sea billets for them, well, they're going to send them to teaching billets and general duty billets and things. Here I am locking up a billet for basically four-and-a-half years at Great Lakes, you know. So they said, "No, you're going," and I fought them for about, I was actually going to be retired in '90 but when Desert Shield came about they said, "Well, we'll just sit here and see what happens." In '91 I taught a couple of seminars for officers going to combat units in the Gulf because I'd been on ships that had sustained battle damage and nobody really, in the Navy, had been on any vessels that had done that since 1970 or something. And, you know, they're trained by checklists and the checklists go away. You know, there's no rules in war, you know. Well, we taught some seminars for these GOs and they kept me around for that and just training sailors as we did prior with the idea that we don't know how many hits the pipeline's going to take and what's

going to happen here so, you know, let's keep him. And then I wound up spending -- I blew my back out again, I blew another disc. I spent like three months in the hospital during the Gulf War at Bethesda Naval Hospital. But they hung on to me and I came back and they were going to some surgery, I was going to let them do the surgery but then war broke out and they were waiting at the hospital for mass casualties and I was kind of an elective type, I was in no life threatening problem so they just put me off to the side and basically my condition improved enough to where I, if I'd asked for the surgery, they would have done it but I thought I'm going to try it without it. I went back to Great Lakes and they said, "No problem, but you're done. You couldn't hack it anymore. You're unfit for sea duty and you're unfit for combat duty so we're not going to keep you." And then with all these, I mean they had thousands of Reservists which is probably the greatest public relations ploy pulled off since World War II was bringing all the Reservists in. But, you know, they said, "You're done." And I said, "Well, I don't want to. I want to stay here and teach school." And they said, "Well, we're not going to let you." I guess, financially and benefit-wise, it hadn't changed a thing, you know. I'm a proud veteran and I'm a proud disabled veteran.

Mark: So, these injuries occurred over time.

Homan: Right.

Mark: If you would describe briefly the nature of -- you're in the engine room when you slipped—?

Homan: Well, I've got a heart condition called idiopathic cardiomyopathy which means they don't know what it's—it's a muscle function thing—and what happens is the ability of the heart to contract and pump blood is diminishing and the walls are becoming thinner, okay. They say that it's idiopathic meaning they don't know where it came from, but I never had heart problems till after I had my first heat stroke on *Hancock* in 1975. Then there was a noticeable change in my heart beat permanently after that and they wondered if I was going to live through the night then, trying to determine what had happened to me. Now-a-days they call heat strokes heart attacks. I had eleven of them on *Hancock*. So no doctor will go down on paper with this but they basically say it's them heat strokes and living in that environment that, you know, caused your heart condition. My hearing throws them for a loop because my hearing in my right ear is fine and you know, if you've been in the service, how loud turbines are, you know. Well, engine rooms are just as loud and I never wore hearing protection until the '80s, you know, mid-'80s. They got real nasty about it after awhile and it was, "Alright, I'll play the game" and I started wearing it. So my left ear was the one I did, you know, where hand sets and things with so I always had it back but they still think that both ears should be as bad from gunfire and whatnot. So that's why I have a problem

with my left ear and not my right. I was putting a feed pump turbine together on the *Biddle* in '83 and I had to move a 700 pound steam turbine cover about a 32nd of an inch or less and I didn't want to have to rig up all the chain falls again and all this so I just got on it and just put my ass into it and pushed and I moved it. Well, something in my back went crunch and kind of quiver and weak and I was, "Whoa," you know. And I went up and saw the corpsman and he looked me over and I was having muscle spasms and he said, "I'm going to give you muscle relaxer. If you have any pain, you know, call the hospital." And he sent me home for the day. Well, I went home to my apartment and laid down on the floor and woke up paralyzed from the waist down, about two o'clock that morning. I had blown out the center of two discs and, you know, two vertebrae, and tore my spinal cord, not completely through but put a tear in it, blew a couple of discs out and so I spent quite awhile in a hospital. Went through surgery. And then again in '88 I had another back operation. I was doing my PT, the Navy came out with a weight control program and physical standards that we all had to do which is another big farce. With good ideas behind it but the way they do it is a joke. And I was doing my PT and I was doing sit-ups and I felt a strain in my back but it wasn't anything that debilitated me. Well, then when I got home that night I was sitting at a round table, just like this, talking to my brother-in-law—and they were leaving to go back to North Carolina—and I stood up and when I stood up, I blew the disc and I kind of went back down and I told my wife, "Get me to the hospital now." And I had another operation. I've smashed both my hands working on machinery and this one I have problems with carpal tunnel with still. This one is fixed; it works pretty good. This one is partially paralyzed. I've got numbness in my legs. I don't mean to sit here and sing the blues; I'm trying to list it all 'cause of the interview.

Mark: Yeah. No, I understand.

Homan: And I was wounded once. And it's funny because my wound was a nickel-dime chicken shit wound, shrapnel wounds, and I refused my Purple Heart initially and then when I retired at Great Lakes one of the personnel people there said, "How come you turned down your Purple Heart?" And I said, "It was a nickel-dime, bullshit, gee-dunk (??) wound and, you know, whacked. Basically if I hadn't been curious, I wouldn't have got hit." And she looked at me and said, "Well, you know, you're going out disabled. Why don't you take it now?" And I said, "Can I still get it?" And she said, "Well, let me call the old man." And she called the CO up and he said, "Yeah." They were ready to fall the base out and have a formal ceremony and everything else which I turned all that down. I said, "I just, I would like it," and I wore it one day, my last day in the Navy.

Mark: Describe the incident.

Homan: There was a fire fight going in—

Mark: In Libya.

Homan: In Beirut.

Mark: Beirut.

Homan: And I had a new kid that reported onboard the ship and he wanted to watch and I said, “Well, I’ll take you up and you can watch.” And we were probably 6, 700 yards away, and it was heavy machine-guns back and forth, and we’re here and, you know, abreast of where the fire fight is, and they’re shooting left to right at each other, and we were just sitting on the ship watching, and, you know, they turned and engaged the ship. Just heavy machine-gun fire. When the rounds hit the side of the ship, it punched a few holes in it, and it splatters and whatnot, and I got hit in the eye and the face and my left cheek and my crotch area with some of the shrapnel. The kid that was with me took a .51 caliber round in the hip and he later lost a leg and hand. I heard he died of an infection about a year-and-a-half later. So, you know, when I got hit I thought I broke my back ‘cause I jumped back and I fell down about twenty feet on another deck and I thought, you know, “I hurt from the fall,” and I thought, “Oh, shit, my back.” And I was wet, I was sweating, my heart was pounding, and all this kind of stuff, and I went to wipe my eyes like this. Well, it hurt when I did that and I looked at my sleeve, my glasses all mangled, I had glass in my eye and I had blood all over my sleeve and that’s when I thought, “Oh, my God, you know.” And they were all over the kid that took the round and when I got up there what they did they wound up doing a cornea transplant and I was fine, I was back on duty three weeks later. And if I wouldn’t have had anything in my eye, I’d have been fine the next day, you know.

Mark: So, it’s at this point in the interviews that I ask the old World War II guys about the GI Bill and veteran’s benefits and readjusting to civilian life. Now for you it’s just been, geez—

Homan: It’s still happening, still happening.

Mark: So some of these, well, let’s explore it. After you got out of the service one of the problems veterans sometimes face is making a living.

Homan: Oh, yeah.

Mark: When you got out, did you have trouble finding work?

Homan: Well, yes and no.

Mark: It hasn't been the best of economic times the last few years.

Homan: No. My attitude from the Navy was I can do anything, anything, I don't care. If I put my efforts to it, I can defend OJ right now, all this kind of stuff, you know. I used to tell my people the most dangerous weapon the Navy has is a sailor who can read. And I prided myself on being an over-achiever and a workaholic and taking care of my people. I didn't care to do politics in the military or any of that. So, okay, here it comes, I'm done. I sent out like 150 resumes, got one bite. One bite. Now, I'd never done any of this in my life since I was a sixteen-year-old kid so I didn't know the psychology of sending out resumes and how to conduct an interview and all this kind of stuff. We were living in Delevan and I was teaching at Great Lakes, driving back and forth. We'd bought a hundred-year-old Victorian home. And part of what that needed to have done to it was the floor sanded. Well, my dad and my grandfather did that. And my dad has been dead for twenty-five years and my grandfather was in his nineties and retired but I asked him, "You got any old equipment that I can sand my floors with?" and he said, "Yeah, sure, you can have what I've got left." So he gave me a machine and some odds and ends. So in the process of trying to work the house, I was sanding floors, and then a neighbor wanted me to sand his floor, and my grandfather said, "Why don't you do it on the side for a few bucks?" So when my release day from active duty came, yes, I wanted to find that civilian job that paid \$35,000 or \$45,000 a year and had all the bennies and, you know, a nice title, and I could have a briefcase and, you know, still be a somebody type thing. But it didn't look like it was going to happen and I figured well if I'm going to do basically menial labor and for-shit wages, I'm going to do it for me. So I just had some business cards printed up, I said to my grandfather, "Do you mind if I use the old company name for the business?"—Zagar & Homan Floor Sanding—and he said, "No." And that's where I'm at now. I have had some job interviews and I get really neat letters of rejection for being over-qualified or the position has been eliminated. I almost went to work for an international corporation and I wasn't political enough with them. And I found this out a year after it didn't work out. I actually worked for them for a couple of days, on a kind of a trial basis, and their engineer, so I've been told just recently as a matter of fact, got nervous that I was going to make him look bad and, you know, that's why that didn't work out. It wasn't because of me, it was just he didn't want me around 'cause I knew more than he. I had forgotten more than he ever knew type thing, you know. And I didn't have a problem with it, you know. He said do this, and I did it. Then I would say, we should do this. Think about it and if he came back and said do it, well, then I would do it. But if he didn't, so. Anyway, right now I operate a business from my home called the Zagar & Homan Floor Sanding Company and we do wood floors. Install—

Mark: Hence the fax here.

Homan: Huh?

Mark: Hence the fax here.

Homan: Yup. That's where it's coming from.

Mark: So, there are for example this department has economic loans for veterans and that sort of thing. Have you used such things before?

Homan: I went in 1991, to the Small Business Administration, and said I want my loan. I'm a disabled veteran and what do I have to do? And I went through eighty-five reams of paper work and I couldn't afford to have the package written for me so I went to their counselors from SCORE and all this kind of stuff, you know, put the package together, sent it up, and the only drawback was I was still on active duty so they couldn't give me the money. And I only wanted \$25,000. It wasn't like I wanted a couple of million. Okay, fine, no problem. When I got my retirement date I'll do it again. Well, it's either never been funded or there's one reason or another why I don't qualify but it's not because of me, it's because of congressional action, policies, things like that. And basically I got disgusted with it and I don't, I never foresee me getting any type of assistance from them, financially.

Mark: Now that's the federals.

Homan: And the state.

Mark: And the state, same basic thing?

Homan: Yup. I think 90 percent of all the veteran's bennies, federal and state, it's 90 percent bullshit and 10 percent substance. And I am becoming a bitter veteran because of it. You know, you work for the state, the state's a government. If the state says to you, "Mark, we want you to go to Beirut or to Kuwait City or whatever the current hot spot is and do a research project on Americans in Kuwait or whatever," and you think "Okay, I'll do this and I'm going to be over there for six months doing all this, you know, blah, blah, blah." And you get over there and they shoot at you and they blow up the building you're sleeping in, or your car, or all these things, you can say, "You know, this isn't really what I had in mind for career work and I'm not going to do this," and you can quit. Okay? In the military, you can't do that. Even in the volunteer military, you cannot do that. You're stuck. They will put you in jail for refusing to work in that type of an environment. They will make you a common criminal for refusing to work in that type of environment. Because of that reason, right there, and the fact that you may bleed and become maimed or killed in service to your country, you may have to do things that you morally and ideologically are opposed to but for the good of your nation

you have to do them or they make you a criminal, veteran's benefits are sacred. Welfare is bullshit. Unemployment is bullshit. Social Security, Medicare, it's all bullshit. Veteran's benefits are sacred 'cause you can't quit. You cannot quit. Now there have to be reasonable limits, don't get me wrong. But when I think about what I did in my seventeen years of active duty

[End of tape 2, side B]

Homan: I think about what I did in my seventeen years of active duty in the military, good, bad and indifferent. And I know that Peter Barca is getting a pension from the federal government for two years as a congressman, and Peter Barca never got shot at, and Peter Barca never had a fire in his space at sea, and Peter Barca never worried about falling out of a helicopter, Peter Barca never wondered if he was going to wake up and be alive to eat breakfast in the morning, you know. Why should he get a goddamn dime?

Mark: And a hefty pension at that too.

Homan: Right. Why should I have to pay any, any taxes, any taxes. Any veteran with combat service should be totally and completely free from all forms of taxation for the rest of his life. Property tax, sales tax. Excise taxes if you buy something that's made overseas, that's different. But I'm talking about property tax, income tax, sales tax. No Social Security, no Medicare, nothing. But the powers that be, at all levels of government, don't want to do that because it takes money out of their pockets and they can't spend on the, well, like this goddamn baseball stadium crap here, you know. They're going to give the Milwaukee Brewers \$190 million so a bunch of millionaires can play baseball but will they give Mark Van Ells \$100,000 to open up his own little military display someplace or, you know, to fund a history project, or will they give me \$50,000 for my business? No. They'll take my house when I can't pay my taxes though, you know. I get excellent medical care from the VA. I don't have any real qualms about that. I get swallowed up in the bureaucracy sometimes but I know how to fight with that and I've always been victorious.

Mark: I'll cut off right here. I've got one last question, I've got a couple of minutes here, and it ties into what we're talking about anyway and that involves veteran's organizations.

Homan: Misery loves company. I'm a life member of Veterans of Foreign Wars, I'm a life member of Disabled American Veterans, at one time I was a member of Vietnam Veterans of America and the American Legion.

Mark: I'm interested in why you joined these groups. Is it perhaps because they might address the problems that you were just describing to me?

Homan: Well, yes. I'm not involved with them.

Mark: You don't go to meetings?

Homan: Not at all, not at all. I don't have time. I would love to have time to be involved with them. There's, see I don't believe in political action committees, but I belong to two of the largest in history of the United States, okay.

Mark: The VFW?

Homan: Yes. Like the American Legion. The American Legion did not recognize combat service in Grenada, Beirut, or Libya so I sent in my membership; I resigned. And they've since amended their constitution and now recognize that. Well, what do you tell the guys in the bags you sent back? Gee, you didn't die in a war, you know? You weren't fighting, you know? Bullshit. So, I will have nothing to do with the American Legion. And the American Legion was originally founded to take care of the veterans who didn't serve overseas. Just be an advocate for veterans that stayed and did non-combat things. To be a member of VFW you have to have been awarded a service medal. You can't fake that. And to be a Disabled American Veteran member, you can't fake that either. So that's why I joined although I'm not active. I've, you know, written a few letter and things but I don't go to meetings. From what I've seen you have two generations here in the spotlight and a third one almost in the spotlight. You've got all the World War II guys, and they did wonderful things and they went through hell and nobody should ever, ever think of what they went through with any kind of a light-hearted attitude, okay? But they're still the generation that controls those organizations. And I don't necessarily agree with all of their ways or all of their means. Now that doesn't mean they're wrong, okay? It means that they don't want to change with the times. They're a different generation. And they're having their day this year. So then you've got the Vietnam veterans who were told we're all pieces of shit for so long and World War II guys say, "Well, I never cried and I never had post traumatic stress." I have post traumatic stress and I was the last person who ever would have believed it, you know. I still wonder about it. So the torch has to be passed from one generation to the next and I would imagine that probably within the next ten or twelve years, after my teenagers are out of the house and established in their own lives, I will have a little more time to get involved. You know, I'm involved in civic things anyway and it's basically the reason I'm not involved is philosophies that I don't agree with and I just don't have the time, you know.

Mark: Okay. I think that's a good place to stop here before we run out of tape. Anything you'd like to add quickly?

Homan: Nothing I can think of.

Mark: Excellent. And very well timed.

Homan: Well thank you.

[End of interview]