

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JIM B. REEDER
Radioman, Navy, World War II.

2006

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Reeder, James B., (1922-2008). Oral History Interview, 2006.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 35 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 35 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Jim “Okie” B. Reeder, an Akins, Oklahoma native, discusses his Navy service as a radioman during World War II, including surviving the sinking of the USS Bush. After working six months as a carpenter in the Civilian Conservation Corps, Reeder states he enlisted in the Navy. He mentions radio school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and assignment to the USS Bush (DD-529) as a radioman third class in the emergency radio room. Reeder comments on using Morse code, publishing the ship’s newsletter, *The Daily Twig*, and listening to Tokyo Rose on the radio. He recalls riding through high, stormy waves at Kiska and Attu (Aleutian Islands), bombarding beachheads at New Guinea, and seeing a welcome sign for the Marines signed “Navy Frogmen” at Halmahera (Maluku Islands). Reeder details being attacked by kamikaze airplanes at the Battle of Okinawa: going on deck after the first explosion knocked out power to his radio room, seeing a second plane hit his radio room, hearing the order to abandon ship, and being in danger from exploding ordnance when a third plane hit the forward ammunition room. After abandoning ship by jumping into the water, he talks about getting onto an overcrowded life raft and rigging a flashlight to signal ships. Reeder recalls seeing four American fighter planes circling the sinking ship and knowing help would be sent. He tells of an armed survivor threatening to shoot the others if necessary and disarming him by cutting his rifle strap with a knife. Hours later, Reeder discusses seeing a ship approach, worrying it might be a Japanese ship, and climbing up a fishnet onto a Navy LSM (Landing Ship, Medium). He speaks of riding back to the States aboard a crippled troop ship and assignment to a baggage inspection room, where he tagged souvenir weapons. After the war, Reeder mentions doing carpentry with his father in Sallisaw (Oklahoma) and moving to Madison (Wisconsin) to marry a girl he had met while in radio school. He talks about attending several ship reunions.

Biographical Sketch:

James Reeder (1922-2008) served in the Navy from 1942 to 1945. He settled in Madison (Wisconsin) and worked as a carpenter.

Interviewed by John Weingandt, 2006

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Interview Transcript:

John: We are talking with Jim Reeder, who has been in the U.S. Navy as a Radioman, Third Class, and his principal thing that he wants to share with us today are his experiences on the U.S.S. Bush, which was attacked by kamikaze planes in April of 1945. Before we do that, Jim, I was wondering if you might tell us a little bit about how you became a radioman. And you went to the University here in Madison.

Reeder: Yeah. I took an aptitude test at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station to see if I was—what do you call it?—capable of becoming a radioman.

John: Okay.

Reeder: Learning the codes and all that stuff, you know. So that's how I become a radioman, and they sent me here to the University.

John: The Navy did?

Reeder: Yeah, to go to the radio school. So from there I was assigned to the U.S.S. Bush, DD-529, sometime in '45. I think it was '44 or five. And then I was on that for three years and three days.

John: Can you tell us a little bit about the Bush itself? It was kind of a special ship.

Reeder: Well, yeah. It was our present president's relation that it was named after.

John: Oh.

Reeder: They were all military people.

John: Okay.

Reeder: And so our president had something to do with this thing too.

John: Tell us about the ship itself though. When I think of a destroyer, it's fairly small.

Reeder: Mid-class ship.

John: Yeah. It was a Fletcher class. Can you tell us what that is?

Reeder: Yeah. Well, it's three hundred-some odd feet long, thirty feet wide in the beam, and it will throw up a rooster tail ten feet in the air when both engines are working.

John: Wow!

Reeder: And we could really travel. Well, you're going forty-five miles an hour on a ship that size, you know, why—[laughs]—you're bound to throw up a rooster tail.

John: Yeah. [laughs] Forty-five miles an hour.

Reeder: Yeah. That's about the best we could do with both engines going. So it was a good experience for me.

John: And you were a radioman or the radioman, what?

Reeder: Third Class.

John: Okay.

Reeder: I had my own radio room. It was called "emergency radio," and it had a transmitter/receiver and a typewriter and a chair and a desk. That's all it had in that room. So now I was getting into the attack part.

John: Well, go ahead. Now it's April, 1945. You are off of Okinawa.

Reeder: Yeah, about fifty-one miles north of Okinawa we were attacked by suicide planes, and the first one came roaring in on the right side; I forgot if that's starboard or port.

John: Starboard, yeah.

Reeder: Starboard.

John: Where were you at the time?

Reeder: I was in the radio room.

John: Okay.

Reeder: And it come—flew right through the side of the ship and the five hundred pound bomb it was carrying went off, and that just blew the heck out of that part of the ship for a little while.

John: What part of the ship did it hit? Now you said the starboard side.

Reeder: It was just forward of the forward smokestack.

John: That's pretty close to where you were.

Reeder: Yeah. I was in between the smokestacks in my radio room. So that knocked out the power that I was using to run the radio and the transmitter/receiver, and so I said there

is no sense in me staying in here because I can't do anything with no power. So I walked out about fifty feet from the emergency radio room where I was, and another plane come down from straight above and took out my radio room while I was out on the deck.

John: You wouldn't be here.

Reeder: Or otherwise I wouldn't be here.

John: Yeah.

Reeder: But somethin' told me to get out of there because I couldn't do anything anyway, you know, it was just one of those things. And so that's—the first plane flew right through the side of the ship and the second plane took out my radio room.

John: You got another five hundred pound blast?

Reeder: Yeah, and it blew that—that buckled the ship. It was, you know, V-shaped. And the captain had already gone in a whale boat, and him and his crew was leaving, and he says, "You abandon ship at leisure."

John: But I'm first? [laughs]

Reeder: So at that time I had my life jacket on, so I just took a running leap and jumped off of the ship into the water. And I thought to myself, well, if I make it, I make it, and if I don't make it, I don't make it. I was over there so long that it didn't make any difference whether I made it or not. So I wasn't—I couldn't say that I was really scared. But anyway, I was apprehensive, you might say. And I swam for about two hundred yards, I'm guessing.

John: Excuse me, Jim. What time of day was this that you hit the water?

Reeder: It was about 3:30 in the afternoon.

John: Okay.

Reeder: And so when I hit the water I had to find someplace to lodge myself, so I started swimming. I see a bunch of men out there about two or three hundred yards out there, and they were in a big whale boat, and the whale boat—or I mean the raft was about the size of this table and it was for eight men, and there was twenty-seven of them hanging onto it, and it had a dropped foothold in it about two feet down, and you could stand on the slats. You know, it was hanging from ropes from the raft.

John: On the outside of the raft?

Reeder: No, inside.

John: Inside, okay.

Reeder: Yeah. So then I just wormed my way and was able to get my feet over the edge of the raft so I could be inside of the circle with the other guys. And we paddled, and we had a paddle, an aluminum paddle. And so they had one lifesaver flashlight that we got off the ship with, and we took some rope pieces from some of the things that was—the footholds was hanging from, and we tied it to this boat paddle and took turns waving it so if there was any ship out there they would be able to see us and come pick us up. So pretty soon I saw a great big shadow, and it was a ship. And we were apprehensive then for sure because we didn't know if it was a Jap ship or an American ship gonna pick us up. So I knew it was death if they picked us up if it was Japanese. But it happened to be the LSM, the Landing Ship Material for the U.S. Navy. And they put a big fishnet over the side and we all clambered aboard, the ones that were left, and we was on that back to Okinawa, fifty-one miles. And from there I caught a ship that was damaged back to the States. And there is a lot of stuff in between here, but the third plane—I'm going to go back there.

John: Yeah, let's go back to that.

Reeder: Yeah, the third plane come in on the port side, flew into the forward engine—or the forward ammunition room, and the ammunition started exploding, and there was 20-millimeter shells flying everywhere, and you've gotta keep your head down.

John: I understand that kind of hampered the firefighting effort at that point, yeah.

Reeder: Yeah. [laughs]

John: Because you were on fire, right?

Reeder: Yeah. It was burning. The ship was burning. But it hadn't started sinking yet, and evidently the third plane was the one that did it and then—no, the captain before that said, "Abandon ship at leisure because the ship is gone."

John: He said that after the second plane?

Reeder: Yeah, uh-huh.

John: Okay.

Reeder: And so, anyway, we was on that raft for at least nine hours, 3:30 in the afternoon until about 12:30 midnight, and they saw that flashlight waving back and forth.

John: Oh, so the flashlight that did that?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Okay.

Reeder: It was tied to the boat paddle, aluminum boat paddle.

John: I get it now. Okay.

Reeder: And—

John: Excuse me, Jim, before you go on. Where did the third kamikaze hit on the ship?

Reeder: On the port side.

John: Port side. So you really had gotten it from two sides?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: And the top?

Reeder: Uh-huh.

John: And all about at the smokestacks?

Reeder: Yeah. Well, the second plane was my radio room between the smokestacks, you know, in the mid-ship.

John: So the ship really cracked in half and went down bow up/stern up?

Reeder: Yeah, went down bow up and stern up, and the American flag is still flying down there five hundred-forty feet below the surface of the water.

John: How many casualties were there?

Reeder: There was—

John: You had, what, three hundred men on board?

Reeder: Three hundred-six. Three hundred-six men or something like that. I don't know exactly, but it's close. And fifty-seven of them got killed.

John: Wow! Does that include those that didn't survive being in the water for that long?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Okay.

Reeder: Most of the casualties was aboard ship in the forward and after engine room, which got flooded and they drowned down there like a bunch of rats, you know. They couldn't get out because there were ladders to climb to get out of the water and everything. And then one little guy, he was just a seaman, swam out through the hole where the first plane come in, and he was the only survivor, both engine rooms. So then we got back, naturally got back to the States, and we were aboard a bombed-out troop ship that I rode back to the States. And they had the band concerts and everything for thirty days gettin' back to the States.

John: Thirty days to get back to the States?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: That's a long time. [laughs]

Reeder: Because it was crippled.

John: Okay. The war was over by this time, right? It was '47?

Reeder: No, not yet.

John: Oh, okay. So you're still dodging submarines too then?

Reeder: Yeah, everything.

John: Yeah.

Reeder: So we was aboard that ship all the way onto the beach, and after that they assigned me to baggage inspection room. And having the experience that I had with radio room typing and all that stuff, well, I was able to take the tickets and tie 'em to the—some of the guys had guns, you know, that they had confiscated from the Japanese, and so we put their name on 'em and they could have 'em when they got discharged.

John: I always wondered how they got the swords and guns and stuff back.

Reeder: Yeah. So that's the way our men got their guns.

John: Where did you get the nickname "Okie"?

Reeder: From Oklahoma.

John: You were born there?

Reeder: Huh?

John: Were you born there?

Reeder: Yes.

John: Oh, okay. That explains it.

Reeder: I stayed there until I was seventeen years old and I joined the CCC camp, and that's goin' back to another story, see. So I was in the CCs for six months, got out of there and—

John: What did you do?

Reeder: Oh, I was doing carpenter work with my daddy. He was a self-made carpenter and— for about a year, and then I joined the Navy. That's how I got into it.

John: You enlisted in the Navy?

Reeder: Yeah, because I didn't want the Army for sure because I couldn't see meeting the damn Japanese face to face. [laughs]

John: Well, you certainly met 'em.

Reeder: [laughs] Yeah.

John: [laughs] Cost you an award.

Reeder: But that's another story. There is a lot of stories that I could tell you.

John: Go ahead.

Reeder: I don't have the time or the thought either. So if there is any questions, why, we got picked up and I stayed in San Francisco in the baggage inspection room tagging the men that come in from overseas with their guns and their sea bags and all that stuff with stuff in them, and so that's the job that I had until I was discharged.

John: I'm curious if the people brought a lot.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Did they always get matched up with what they—you know.

Reeder: Well, see, it was tagged with their name and everything.

John: Right.

Reeder: So I was the one—

John: Serial, service number and all that?

Reeder: Uh-huh.

John: It got back to them.

Reeder: That's how they got the same thing back, you know, that they turned in.

John: I'm curious, was there anything that was illegal that they might be bringing back?

Reeder: Not that know of. I didn't tag anything that was illegal. There was some loaded rifles too, Japanese rifles.

John: Loaded?

Reeder: Yeah, because they saved the ammunition and they just left it in the gun. But going back a little bit, when we was out there on the raft there was a guy had a shoulder strap and he had an American rifle, and he made the stupid statement that, "If there is anybody survives from this thing, it's gonna be me," because he was going to shoot everybody else. And so I was close by there, and I just reached up with my Bowie knife and cut the strap and let the damn thing fall. Now he was in the same boat we were.

John: Where, in the water?

Reeder: So he wasn't very well liked, you know.

John: I guess not. [laughs]

Reeder: Anyway, that's part of the story, and I know I'm jumping around a lot.

John: That's fine. We have people that can take care of that.

Reeder: You can put it together.

John: Sure we will. Tell me something. Twenty-eight guys are in this boat. One guy announces that he's going to take over, he has got the rifle, and you took care of that.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: That's a lot of people. This table is about eight feet long at the most.

Reeder: Now, wait a minute. I don't know if I took care of it or the guy next door to me had the Bowie knife.

John: Well, one of you was a hero.

Reeder: Yeah, one of us did, but it's kind of vague what really happened right there, but we know that his rifle got sunk, it went to the bottom.

John: [laughs] He was probably next if he kept it up, huh?

Reeder: Yeah, if he kept it up, boy, he would have probably been next.

John: Now, you're adrift for nine hours, overloaded in this boat. There were people hanging on the outside too?

Reeder: No.

John: Everybody got in?

Reeder: Inside the ring.

John: That's a lot of people inside.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Were there sharks in the area?

Reeder: Oh, yeah.

John: Did you see any?

Reeder: But they were kind of afraid because of so much splashing around, you know, that they'd run. I mean, they're kind of cowards really. But they didn't attack any of our men or anything like that that I know of.

John: Well, I don't think I'd want to be spending nine hours in the water.

Reeder: No, not with sharks. We didn't even think about that, we just thought about saving our hind end and gettin' on something dry.

John: Yeah. So one little flashlight is what saved you guys because it's pitch-black by that time of night?

Reeder: That's right. It was pretty dark at 12:00.

John: Now, something that didn't come out here, but you were fifty-nine miles north of Okinawa.

Reeder: Fifty-one, I think.

John: Fifty-one.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Why so far out?

Reeder: Well, we had patrol—

John: There's nobody else around you; right?

Reeder: We had patrol duty, just our ship alone. That's why we got attacked by three planes because they figured they could get us because there was nobody there to help us.

John: Now part of this raid, something I read, was that there were over five hundred planes involved in that raid. This wasn't just a couple of stray Japanese kamikazes. How many were coming at you?

Reeder: They would peel off from the group, you know, the ones that was gonna be suicide. They'd peel off and come in and crash.

John: How many came at you that day do you think?

Reeder: Three.

John: Just three?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: And they hit you?

Reeder: And they hit us.

John: Did your gunners, do you remember, did they shoot down any planes?

Reeder: No. They didn't have—see, the first plane that come in flew right through the side of the ship, and that wasn't over seven or eight feet off of the water.

John: Wow!

Reeder: So—

John: Did you see him coming, or did anybody see him coming, or he surprised you?

Reeder: Oh, I saw him coming and I went over on the other side of the ship and laid down because I didn't want him to hit me. And so you do the best you can to protect yourself in a case like that. So that was part of the experience.

John: That was the second plane or the first plane?

Reeder: The first plane.

John: Okay.

Reeder: Went right through the side of the ship.

John: You have got the emergency radio room. There is absolutely nothing you can do.

Reeder: No.

John: So the Bush never sent out a distress signal?

Reeder: No. We didn't have time.

John: You didn't have time. You didn't have—and the first plane took out your communications, right?

Reeder: Yeah. But we had four fighter planes. See, in war if somebody doesn't call COMDESPAC, which is Commander Destroyer Pacific Fleet, that everything is well and secure, then they send planes out to see what the matter is. So they sent four fighter planes, F4Fs or whatever they were, and they circled around us and then went back and took the message back, and so then that's how come the pickup ships come out and get us.

John: So that was intentional? The pickup ship was looking for you?

Reeder: Uh-huh.

John: The fighters must have flown over in still daylight?

Reeder: And told them the range and bearing and where we were.

John: Otherwise you guys were helpless out there.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Wow! That's something.

Reeder: Yeah. Well, it's one of those experiences I'll never live down, but I don't talk about it much. But I don't mind. I don't mind people knowing what we went through.

John: Well, we certainly appreciate your coming in here and sharing it with us. What did you do after the war then, Jim?

Reeder: I started doing some carpenter work with my dad. He was a self-made carpenter.

John: Uh-huh.

Reeder: And we'd—in the city we'd—

John: Here in Madison?

Reeder: No, no, in Sallisaw, Oklahoma.

John: Okay.

Reeder: And we would—by the way, that's Pretty Boy Floyd's hometown, and he was—my dad was a first cousin to his mother, as far as I know.

John: Pretty Boy Floyd met his end in Barrington, Illinois, which I lived in for eighteen years, only a few blocks from where we were. Have I got the right guy?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Yeah? Okay.

Reeder: He was an outlaw, but his whole family were Baptists, and he was the lost sheep of the whole bunch. So they told him to give up and throw his arms up, and he had a gun in each hand. So he put his hands up like this and he wouldn't throw 'em down, so they let him have it from the guys that was after him, and so he ended up with seventeen bullet holes in the back.

John: There is even a plaque where he was shot, you know, in front of the library where it was in Barrington. Well, how did you get to Madison?

Reeder: Oh, I went to radio school here.

John: Yeah.

Reeder: And learned how to—

John: But you're in Oklahoma after the war?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: What brought you up here?

Reeder: I met a girl here. That was my first wife, fifty-two—or forty-two years.

John: Okay. So you came to Madison because of her connection here?

Reeder: Uh-huh.

John: Okay. John, have you thought of anything that may have slipped through the cracks here? [Speaking to another man present, also named John (J.)]

J.: Did you get any kind of decorations for the attack, Jim?

Reeder: No. All I got was a war ribbon, and I had three rows of them or two rows.

J.: You told me once how many words a minute you could send as a radioman.

Reeder: Yeah, about thirty-five to forty. That's pretty fast with a hand key.

J.: Morse code, right?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: You were using Morse code. [all talking at once]

J.: I was surprised that during the second World War there was that much Morse code.

Reeder: See, we was using international Morse code. Maybe there is a difference and maybe there isn't, I don't know.

John: I don't either.

Reeder: But, anyway—

John: That's pretty fast.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: About as fast as John can type on a typewriter.

Reeder: We all learned typing here at the University at the radio school. Blackhawk Garage was where most of the action was. It's out on University Avenue.

John: I don't know where that is, Jim. Blackhawk Garage, does it exist today?

Reeder: Oh, yeah.

John: Huh.

J.: You did the ship's newspaper.

John: Oh, yeah. Tell us about the ship's newspaper. I understand you were the—

Reeder: Yeah, I published "The Daily Twig."

John: Yeah, "The Twig." Okay.

Reeder: Yeah. See, I was a pretty good typist.

John: Bush "Twig," huh?

Reeder: I was a typist, and so I typed it, pages of the news that come over the radio, and then passed copies out to the men, the gunners and the torpedomen and all that.

John: Well, you had access because of your job to civilian radio and how the war was going and that sort of thing?

Reeder: Uh-huh. Tokyo Rose, she'd think we was losing it, see. That old girl, you know, she was quite a talker, and she let the Japs know that they were winning the war, see, so they'd keep fighting. But we—

John: And, of course, that we were losing.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: And you might as well go home, yanks.

Reeder: Uh-huh.

John: Well, that's interesting. Anything else, John, you can think of, anything you want to talk about?

Reeder: I just hope you can put a story together with all this.

John: Oh, I'm sure we will.

Reeder: Total up stuff.

John: The first thing that will happen is somebody, one of our volunteers, plays it all back and highlights and kind of organizes it a little more.

Reeder: Well, I was interested in what you said that you could see my picture.

John: The website for the U.S.S. Bush, Yahoo, the Yahoo site, the very first one, is an official biography of the Bush from day one to—What was the date it was sunk? April—

Reeder: I don't know. It's somewhere in there.

John: Yeah. 1945. It was only three—less than three years.

Reeder: Yeah. Well, three years and three days I was in the Navy, but only aboard ship about two years and a half.

John: Yeah, because it was commissioned in 1943.

Reeder: Uh-huh.

John: Well, anyway, I don't know who the source was, but there is a website, and there are a number of categories. One is the complete history of the ship from all the ports it went to and I was kind of digging through that. Well then I saw a section of pictures. And James "Okie" Reeder, there's a big picture of you.

Reeder: Yeah?

John: A good looking guy. [laughs] And the biggest thing it said was that you were the sometimes daily editor of "The—

Reeder: "Daily Twig."

John: —Twig." "The Twig," yeah, which I thought was interesting. And what you really did was take radio excerpts and pass along to the guys what's going on.

Reeder: Yeah, and type them out.

John: What sources did you have? I'm curious. What were you listening to?

Reeder: "United Press" and "American News." We got all of that.

John: You couldn't reach any radio stations?

Reeder: No.

John: State news, something we broadcast or—

Reeder: No.

John: —edited.

Reeder: We just had to type out what we hear on the radio.

John: Okay. Was that an official source? I don't follow it.

Reeder: Yeah, as far as I know.

John: Okay. So you are an editor as well as a radio operator?

Reeder: Yeah, for the "Daily Twig." That was a silly name for it, but that's what we gave it.

John: Well, it comes from Bush, right?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Just an offshoot of bush, right?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Okay.

Reeder: You can make that sound better if you just put it all together. You're a writer.

John: Well, I'm not, so—

Reeder: Put a lot of it together.

John: We'll let somebody else do that.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Jim, anything else you'd want to share with us that halfway home you are going to say, "Gee, I wish I would have?"

Reeder: No. I don't remember anything right now. See, I'm under a little pressure here too right now. Some of that stuff—I don't think I said anything that was untrue.

John: [unintelligible]

Reeder: I know one thing, we'd go into places and bombard beachheads and stuff like that. And the one place, we was in Halmahera, which is an island over there, and we were supposed to bombard it. So we got about three or four hundred yards from the beach and we started shootin', and we had some Marines aboard ship that landed off of our ship on the Higgins boat. So they went over there, and there was a big sign there. They said it was about yea big and it said, "Welcome, U.S. Marines," signed "Navy Frogmen."

John: [laughs] They beat you to it, huh?

Reeder: Yeah. Yeah.

John: I hope they weren't there at the time of the bombardment.

Reeder: Yeah. I was kind of happy the Navy got there first.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Reeder: My first operation was Kiska and Attu.

John: Oh, boy.

Reeder: In the Aleutian chain.

John: Yeah, Aleutians.

Reeder: That's where I went through a whole lot of waves. I mean, our ship would go down in the trough of a wave and you couldn't see it. And I saw pictures, you know, afterwards, there was sixty, seventy foot waves. And the whole thing, the mast and the whole works, would be hidden in the trough of the wave until it come up. So—

John: What time of year were you in the Aleutians?

Reeder: What?

John: What time of year were you there?

Reeder: I think it was—oh, it was in the fall.

John: Okay. So it was cold?

Reeder: It was cold.

John: So there would be a lot of storms then. Okay. And a destroyer is not the greatest place to be in a storm.

Reeder: No. It's like a corncob. [both laugh] But, anyway, we were able to ride it out. Yeah, the Bush is the only ship I was ever on, I mean to battle. And the U.S.S. Henrico is the one I come back to the states in. It was bombed out, and we could only travel about ten to fifteen knots, and that's why it took us so long to get here.

John: You probably took a south route to get away from the submarines. That's a good possibility because that's a long time to get back.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Now, tell me, you are down in the Aleutians. Where did you go then?

Reeder: Down in the Aleutians. Oh, we went to Milne Bay, New Guinea. And we went from heavy seas—and what I mean, in the Aleutians it was heavy, and pretty soon when we was on the way down to Milne Bay, New Guinea, the water just leveled right out almost as level as this table, no wind, no nothing.

John: And that beautiful blue-green color.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: I won't ask you which one you preferred.

Reeder: Yeah, right.

John: Now in New Guinea, were you in combat there?

Reeder: In combat?

John: In New Guinea.

Reeder: No, just bombarding beachheads.

John: Well, I'd call that combat.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Did the Japs fire back?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Well, that's combat.

Reeder: One of those soldiers that we was carrying that was gonna land over there, Marines or whatever they were, I don't remember, and when he come back—we picked him up, and when he come back there was no more Japs over there. So he come back limping, and I says, "Something happened to you?" And he says, "Yeah. I got my ass shot off." [both laughing] He took some shrapnel right in the butt.

John: What did you have for medics onboard? A ship that size, you got to have something.

Reeder: We had a doctor and he was nervous, this guy. He'd stand out and a plane coming in and he'd crank that camera, you know, and take pictures. And I suppose some of those pictures that he took was—

John: On the website?

Reeder: On the Internet, website, or whatever you call it.

John: Website. I don't recall combat pictures. I wonder if the camera survived that dunking.

Reeder: I don't know. I jumped off of the dad-gum thing and I was two hundred yards away from it when it went down.

John: Are there reunions afterwards that you have been able to go to?

Reeder: Yeah. I went to one in Colorado and one in North Dakota and a couple in Oklahoma in Sallisaw and Oklahoma City, and I went to several reunions because I sold my house and I had a little money. So I spent it all going to reunions, except five thousand and I still got that in the bank. I thought, "Well, I've got to see some of this United States anyway." [laughs]

John: Well, you got to see some of your buddies—**[End of Tape 1, Side 1]**—Okay. We're on side two now with Jim Reeder.

Reeder: Oh, do you want more? Is this on?

John: I have it on, Jim. Are there any concluding thoughts you have? We can start slowing down if something else occurs, so—I want to make sure you don't leave and have some final thoughts. I asked you about getting together, reunions, and hopefully we can get you to that website because there are people there you are going to recognize.

Reeder: Yes. Well, when we was in Halmahera where they had that big plaque that said, "Welcome, U.S. Marines, Navy Frogmen." We were bombarding beachheads there, you know, and going around, and there was nobody over there. We was just shooting at the wind. [laughs]

John: Target practice, huh?

Reeder: Yeah. They had already left.

J.: Jim, what's the one thing you remember the most about the day the Bush went down? What do you remember? What's the most important thing you remember?

Reeder: Me or somebody else got rid of that guy's gun.

J.: Okay. All right.

Reeder: They cut the strap and let it fall in the ocean.

John: Okay.

John: What did he have to say about that, or was he pretty quiet then?

Reeder: He was awful quiet after that.

John: He didn't know but what he could [unintelligible]

Reeder: He might have been because we had some pretty meaty boys on there.

John: Twenty-seven guys on the size of this table, which is eight feet long, conference table.

Reeder: Well, they all had their legs inside the ring and was standing on this board bottom, the slats. It hung from ropes about two feet down.

John: If I hear you right, the boat itself is kind of a dropped floor into the water.

Reeder: Yeah.

John: You're wet up to your chest.

Reeder: Oh, up to under the arms, yeah. We went for about nine hours. My fingers were all crippled up, I mean, crinkled up, you know, from being in the salt water so long.

J.: Was there any oil in the water, Jim?

Reeder: No. It was just salt water.

John: Salt water but debris from the boat or the ship rather.

Reeder: From my ship?

John: Yeah.

Reeder: No.

John: It pretty much went down intact?

Reeder: Yeah. It went down intact, but it was that shape.

John: Yeah, V-shaped.

Reeder: With water in between two parts, forward and—

John: It broke in two, in other words; right?

Reeder: Yeah.

John: Between the stacks?

Reeder: The keel was all that was holding it together.

John: Wow! I'm curious. You were out of the Navy then in 1947, is that right?

Reeder: Oh, yeah.

John: You were in this—

Reeder: I was working at the University of Wisconsin.

John: Okay.

Reeder: Building fences for holding cattle.

John: What, out at the old Hill Farm?

Reeder: Yeah, out at Hill Farm.

John: Okay. Well, anything else you'd like to add here?

Reeder: Oh, I'll think of plenty when I go to bed tonight.

John: Yeah, you will, huh? We may have to do this again. We can certainly do that.

Reeder: Anything that's important, I'll remember that for the next time.

John: Well, John knows how to get a hold of me.

J.: Yeah.

John: We can pick up on that. Okay. Well, thank you very much for being here today, Jim, and you too, John, for bringing Jim down here.

John: Okay.

John: Appreciate it very much.

Reeder: You get some literature man to rewrite that and then you make it sound better.

[End of Interview]