

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
STERLING W. SCHALLERT
Supply Officer, Navy, World War II.

1999

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Schallert, Sterling W., (1919-). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 90 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 90 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Sterling W. Schallert, a Watertown, Wisconsin native, discusses his service in the Navy on Landing Ship Tank (LST) 465 in the Pacific Theater of World War II. Schallert talks about dropping out of law school in 1941 to enlist in the V-7 training course, boot camp at Notre Dame, three months of study at Abbott Hall in Chicago, and getting married the same day he graduated as an ensign. Sent to the Naval Training Station in San Diego (California), he speaks of finding an apartment with his wife, doing swimming training, playing football, and having gunnery training. Assigned to LST-465, Schallert mentions being stalled for three weeks due to union strikes at the shipbuilding yards. He touches on the commissioning of his ship and describes duty as the stores officer. Schallert comments on “borrowing” supplies from other ships, ordering long-delayed battle helmets, and degaussing the ship. He describes the LST, its beach-landing capabilities, use of the anchor, and transporting equipment and troops in the southwest Pacific. He analyzes the practicality and solid construction of LSTs and states his was short of crew. Schallert mentions his living quarters, medical facilities, food aboard ship such as Australian mutton and canned rations, and meeting Harry Stella, an All-American football player in the Army. Schallert describes travelling with a group of nine LSTs from San Francisco to Australia via Samoa, seeing two ships in his convoy sunk by torpedoes, and his first landings at Woodlark and Kiriwina islands (Papua New Guinea). He explains how his ship was damaged by bombs while unloading gasoline and thus missed the Leyte landing. Schallert portrays the Australian soldiers they worked with. He discusses participating in the 1st Marine Division landing at Cape Gloucester and doing several supply runs there. He compares the different ports at which his ship was based. Schallert describes doing landings at Saidor, Seeadler Harbor (Manus, Admiralty Islands), with the 24th Division at Hollandia (Dutch New Guinea), Wakde, Leyte Gulf (Philippines), and Lingayen. He highlights finding Japanese propaganda aimed at making the Australians angry with Americans. He remembers his communications officer getting shot by a sniper and visiting him in the hospital. Schallert mentions playing basketball with other LST crews on their tank deck. He comments on mail delivery, beer and cigarette rations, and positive morale aboard the ship. Schallert speaks of feeding some Marines dinner on Christmas Day and transporting wounded after landings. Shortly before being sent home, he describes seeing a ship next to his destroyed by a torpedo. Schallert talks about his journey home, assignment to Morro Bay Advanced Amphibious Training Base (California), and duty as first lieutenant in charge of supplies. He details fixing ordnance storage violations at the base magazines a few days before an inspection and thus saving his captain’s career. Schallert describes being put in charge of a section of San Francisco’s Shore Patrol and several incidents he

witnessed. After his separation from service, he mentions using the GI Bill to finish law school.

Biographical Sketch:

Schallert (1919-) served active duty in the Navy from 1941 to 1945. After the war, he became a lawyer and settled in Madison (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999
Transcribed by Noreen Warren, 2011
Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2012
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Transcribed Interview:

Jim: Okay, interviewing Sterling Schallert. The date is 18 October, 1999. You entered the Service in 1941; how did that go about? How did that happen?

St.S: I enlisted December 31, 1941 in the V-7 Navy training course, which after four months you would become an ensign. I was told I would be called in February, so I dropped out of law school at the end of January and went home and worked in my father's store. I wasn't actually called 'til July 6th, 1942; apparently they had some foul-up.

Jim: Where did they send you?

St.S: Then I went to Notre Dame with about twelve hundred others between the age—you had to be between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-seven and single and in good physical condition. We already had passed the Navy physical, but after the exercises and the drilling down at Notre Dame they washed out another hundred, including a law school friend of mine from Watertown. They found something; his hearing wasn't quite right and so they took him out.

Jim: And then what happened to you then?

St.S: Well, from Notre Dame they split the class up after one month and some of us went to Abbott Hall in Chicago, and luckily I was one of that group, about five or six hundred of us. And then the other five or six hundred went to Prairie State in New York where they took their training. Now in that first class at Notre Dame, Richard Ney, the movie actor, was in. And my, oh, kind of a cousin, Elsa Schallert, did some publicity work for the *Los Angeles Times* and she did some work for Richard Ney, and he told me about that. Nice young man.

Jim: Sure. What did they teach you in Chicago?

St.S: At Notre Dame we only had about three things, seamanship and trigonometry and that sort of thing, to see who could pass that, but in Chicago they gave us seventeen books. And we had everything from seamanship and gunnery, code, many things, including going to a firing range and small boat—small boats.

Jim: You had some practical experience, then?

St.S: Yeah, yeah. We rowed a small boat—

Jim: Out in Lake Michigan?

St.S: Oh, let's see. I guess it was in the Chicago River. It was in the Chicago River; they had some kind of a dock there.

Jim: I see. Did you have to pass an exam with that boat?

St.S: No, not with the boat, but we had exams about once a month. And the—let's see, the last exam that I remember was on navigation. I ranked about twenty-fifth in the class out of about six hundred, so I did all right. I didn't have any real problems.

Jim: Sure. You were there how long, in Chicago?

St.S: Three months. Then we graduated October 30th, 1942.

Jim: You became an ensign?

St.S: Became an ensign, yes, became an ensign, walked across the stage and was married that evening. A lot of us were single and we wanted to get married.

One of the ensigns in our class, a real nice fellow, had a big wedding and everything all set in Virginia. And about three days before graduation he was pulled out and sent to the *USS West Point*. That was then called—I guess they called it *America* after that, a big ship they used for troop transport. So he couldn't get married until he came back from the first trip overseas. So he had everything all arranged and we were commiserating with him, you know.

But we got out of there, then we went—from there we went to—I was originally assigned to Norfolk, Virginia, then two weeks before graduation they changed my orders and I was reported to the training station, Naval Training Station in San Diego, California.

Jim: So how did you get there? On your own or did they—

St.S: You were given transportation, but we went on the train, my wife and I went on the train down to San Diego. And there was hardly anything available down there, so we went to the Grand Hotel. But the very first day my wife was out looking for apartments and she rode on the streetcar from the main street, Market Street, up Fifth Street, and found an apartment vacancy. And she went in there and by gosh, if we weren't able to get that apartment.

Jim: You were lucky.

- St.S: Yeah, just lucky. And that same afternoon after my wife had moved in, a four-stripe captain came and inquired if there was a vacancy there and my wife said no, there wasn't any vacancy, everything had been taken. Just beat him by that much. If she hadn't ridden the street car we would never had seen that.
- Jim: Right. And what was your assignment there?
- St.S: There we took more training. We had to pass swimming tests, all the—you had to be able to swim fifty yards with every stroke.
- Well, the only stroke I can do is the crawl, so what I would do was I would start out and do the breast stroke for a few strokes and then I'd do the crawl, and so I passed the breast stroke. Same way with the back stroke and the other strokes; I really only did the crawl all the while. I really shouldn't have done that because I could have got real good swimming training.
- But I wanted to play football, because when we weren't doing something else out at the training station, we were allowed to play football. There was a fellow from Michigan named Ringelberg who had been on the Michigan team, tremendous blocker. I was a runner. Behind Ringelberg anybody could have been a Red Grange. He was just tremendous at touch football.
- So then we had other things there. We had some more gunnery practice out on some range down there. And then—
- Jim: Small arms, you mean?
- St.S: No, oh, we had the small arms too, .45s. We had to learn to take a .45 apart and put it back together again. And invariably somebody lost that powerful spring out the window and away it went. But the other thing, we went to the 20-millimeter range and I can remember that so well because of such high piercing sounds when they fired those 20s. We fired at a slave towed by an airplane. And we were there in San Diego and we got the orders about in January that we were going to be assigned to LSTs [Landing Ship Tank].
- Jim: That was January of '43?
- St.S: January of '43. We were going to be assigned to LSTs, and mine assigned me to LST-465. There weren't any available for us to see, so we didn't see any. And then there was a delay by three weeks, right in the middle of the war, a strike between the shipfitter's union and the electrician's union over—there are great big funnels, nine funnels that led down to the tank

deck. The idea was that before a landing you'd warm up the engines and then this would draw that poisonous exhaust up through these funnels. So there was a delay over who was gonna bolt them on, between the two unions. A delay of three weeks, so that meant that we had three more weeks. They didn't have anything for us to do at the training station, so literally we would go in and register and then we'd leave. We had a good time, traveled all around San Diego, didn't have a car, but good bus service and traveled around.

So then we went up to Portland and the ships were being built by the Kaiser Shipyard up there at Vancouver. They built about twenty-five LSTs. And the first one, I think, was 451 and then up. Well by the time we got there we were 465. So we went down to—we had to wait until the ship was ready for commissioning and meantime the communication officer was sent to communication school and the gunnery officer, gunnery school.

So we had the commissioning; it was around February 23rd, 1943. A four-striper named Captain Huntoon was in charge of getting these LSTs launched and everything in order, working with the skippers who were like our skipper, Merchant Marine skippers; they gave him senior lieutenant ranking. Almost all of them were senior lieutenants, but of course on the ship they were the captain of the ship. And Smith had a lot of experience in the Merchant Marine and we were real fortunate to get somebody like that to teach us. So we got—

Jim: What was your assignment there?

St.S: I was made the Stores Officer and it turned out—usually the Navy assigns, you know, if you had known anything about guns you'd be assigned to Bakery and that sort of thing. But here I was assigned Stores Officer, and I grew up in a general store.

Jim: That was right on target!

St.S: Right on target. I grew up in a general store and I knew a lot about buying, selling and all that sort of thing. And then also when I went to school here in 1937 to '41, I worked in Lawrence Restaurants and the Cottage Café Restaurants and sometimes helped with the cooking and the serving. So I knew about food, too, so it was lucky.

And then we got on the ship and went down to Portland, and then at Portland there were great big bins where all our supplies were supposed to be. And most of them were, but if there weren't any supplies, if you didn't have it in your bin—these bins were about, oh, maybe twenty, thirty feet long and about fifteen, twenty feet wide, and board up there, LST-465,

next one 466, and so on, up to 475. Well, if you didn't find it in your bin you went to the next bin and so on. And we found most of the things we needed, and I've often wondered what LST-475 did, the last one, because they had no other bin to borrow—

Jim: There must have been nothing left for them.

St.S: Yeah, I just wonder. We did not have battle helmets. Those are the large helmets that go over the head.

Jim: Extended over the ear.

St.S: Yeah, over the ear with a tuchus[?]. So I ordered ten at the advice of Captain Huntoon's guy that was working with us. I ordered ten battle helmets; they said, "You'll have them before you go overseas." Well as it turned out, we didn't. And when we got—before we went overseas, I ordered ten more. Still didn't get 'em. We got over to Australia, still didn't get 'em, so I ordered ten more. So I had thirty on order. But by the time—

Jim: I know what's gonna happen.

St.S: Yeah, by the time I eventually got them though, we had more guns so we needed twenty. So then we used the twenty and we gave ten to a LST that didn't have any, so it worked out.

So we got the supplies, then we had to go down to San Diego where we did runs to demagnetize the ship. It's called degaussing.

Jim: We did that with the hospital ship.

St.S: Yeah, you do a couple of runs, you know, and then you check your compasses and all. You gotta get your compasses all right after that degaussing. We didn't do a whole lot of things in San Diego. Then back to San Francisco for about a hundred structural changes at Hunters Point at San Francisco. Now we all liked San Francisco, but I made the mistake of saying that they needed an officer aboard while they worked. So I volunteered to stay aboard. Big mistake, because they're cutting a lot and these walls got fiberglass, and that doggone glass got in everything. It got in the mattresses, just everything. And then of course all day when they're cutting and using the riveting guns—I do not know what the changes were; all I know it took a week and this was not a very good week.

And after they got those all set, then we had to wait 'til they were ready to sail. And then about the 23rd of April we sailed.

- Jim: Tell me now, before you sailed, about the ship. The LST was this a standard size?
- St.S: Yes; later on some of them were bigger. But the standard LST was fifty feet wide and three hundred and twenty-five feet long. The original armament was on the bow was one 40, three 20s along each side, or six 20s, and one three inch at the back. The original LSTs, that's what we had.
- Jim: Powered by two screws or one?
- St.S: Two screws. Two screws and a LST flat bottom draw when they're loaded. They had great big tanks so that you could fill them full of water, oil or whatever. Normally when you were at sea you tried to have six feet forward and about fifteen feet aft. But you could pump out enough so that you'd have only three feet forward and about twelve feet aft.
- Jim: Was it important to keep them balanced?
- St.S: Yes, if you don't have enough—if you don't have about enough water and oil in to keep them about six feet down and about fourteen, fifteen feet aft then they roll too much. They roll a lot anyway.
- Jim: Because they're flat bottomed?
- St.S: Yeah, flat bottom. But when you went up on the beach you could ram up on the beach with a full load and then when you got ready to get off—of course, having no load lifts you, but then if you still had problems, you could pump water out of the front and then you come off with the two engines pulling back, and then you picked up the stern anchor that's been dropped out about three-, four hundred feet and that combination—you pull off.
- If you had trouble then what they'd do, you'd run the one motor forward and back, you kinda do like this—you'd kinda—
- Jim: Wiggle away?
- St.S: Wiggle your way out, yeah.
- Jim: In other words, when you came up close to the beach, you'd drop the anchor out before you got to the beach in anticipation of pulling yourself back?
- St.S: Oh, yes. Well yes, that was done for two reasons why you had the anchor. That was to help you pull off, but the big thing, the reason why you had the anchor, was to keep you from broaching. Because the LST, as they got

lighter and the wind come along, it could blow you sideways up on the beach.

Jim: Or into another craft?

St.S: Into another craft or whatever. It really—you figured out when to drop the anchor by the captain's seaman's eye. And they had what you'd call a stadiometer, you'd look at a tree and figure out about the height of the tree, set that on the stadiometer and then you'd know. We lost the stern anchor, one of our landings at Woodlark. We lost it, it went down, but there was a shallow beach, so we just put out a small boat and went down, picked it up and cranked it back on.

Jim: How'd you lose it?

St.S: We dropped it, we dropped the anchor out too far. The captain told us to drop the anchor and it was more than the five hundred feet of cable.

Jim: [unintelligible]

St.S: Well, you know, if we had been told more about the—I could have thrown the brake for that thing at that time. But at that time, you know, it was early in the game and it never occurred to me that we'd run out of cable. But later on that paid off when we had a deep landing later on in the Philippines, I remembered that. When there was six turns, I threw that brake. I didn't know what would happen but I wasn't going to lose another one, particularly there, because off the beach they said that the water was five hundred feet deep off Morotai. I don't know if it was or not, but anyway, we didn't lose the anchor.

Jim: So you travel at what? A slow pace, I know.

St.S: About nine, ten miles an hour, about nine knots, which is about maybe ten miles an hour. And we had nine, nine LSTs.

Jim: What would you call that, a squadron?

St.S: Yeah, or a division or whatever, you know.

Jim: Division. They usually traveled in that size group?

St.S: No, usually six. Six LSTs usually traveled as a group. They call them group numbers. But in this particular deal we were going overseas, so we had nine LSTs and then a Liberty ship. There were—LSTs were in a line, lines of three, and we were right behind the flagship and then the Liberty ship was off to the left.

- Jim: That's bigger.
- St.S: What's that?
- Jim: That's a little bit bigger.
- St.S: Yeah, yeah, they're over five hundred feet long.
- Jim: That's one of those that made my hospital ship. It was a converted Liberty ship. Yeah. So I know all about the insides of that.
- St.S: Well an LST has a tank deck, a little over two hundred and some feet long and about forty wide, because they have to have room for the rooms alongside of the tank deck. And then we had an elevator. The early LSTs had an elevator. And the idea was in case you had to carry something on the top deck. Well in the southwest Pacific, because there wasn't anything else to haul anything, we always filled the top deck as well as the bottom. And you backed everything in so that when anything left an LST they drove out. Usually the last thing in was a bulldozer, because then if you ran into mud, or you ran into—trees had to be knocked down—the bulldozer would go out first and push things back. Sometimes the gravel would be pushed back almost as high as this room because the area wasn't flat enough.
- Jim: Now you get rid of things off the ship, all only by the front end opening up or did you have a crane also?
- St.S: No, no crane. No crane.
- Jim: Everything on top deck had to go down and come over?
- St.S: Everything went down; down on the elevator and then out the bow doors. And it worked very well and we could carry troops. We carried as high as eight hundred and fifty troops. One LST wanted to break a record so they had a thousand and one. They had a thousand and one on there. But we carried various kinds of troops and vehicles, road building equipment. When we got to Hollandia they had to build a road way back to the airstrips, over twenty miles, so they needed all sorts of equipment. We got all the equipment, those sheepsfoot tappers with big rolls and scrapers and all that sort of thing. But the LSTs could do it and put it right up on the beach. Whereas the other ships, it would take 'em a week to get stuff off.
- Jim: Yeah, I know.
- St.S: It really was amazing.

- Jim: It was a very practical craft, it really was.
- St.S: It certainly was, and the people that worked on them really did a good job. Now I—
- Jim: Now that was the next question. Did the construction quality seem okay to you?
- St.S: Yes. Do you know, we were in this bad storm off of New Zealand on the way over for three days south of New Zealand and the LST—as you stood on the bridge—the LST bow would go up like this and you could see the ripple coming along in the deck plates. And then as it got to the rear at the stern, then it would kinda give a jump like that and the screws would come out of the water.
- Jim: And raise like hell?
- St.S: Yeah, and then down again, you know, and then do that again. You can imagine—and you know, every time I saw that bend I thought of the tin cans. What happens with tin cans, you know. But you know, we never—as far as I know we never shot a seam. The welding was done at the Kaiser Shipyards, and as far as I know there was only one LST that ever got a rip in the side and that was up at Williwaw, or up in Alaska, one got a rip and they welded it shut. So they were well built. And the side was only about that thick.
- Jim: Yeah, well, I know about that.
- St.S: Yeah.
- Jim: Tell me now, your complement included—
- St.S: We were supposed to have eleven officers and a hundred and seven men, but when we went overseas we had seven officers and seventy-two men. We always wondered, you know, how come they had us so short. I don't know if they didn't think we were coming back, or what.
- Jim: Was that the same experience as friends on other LSTs, they were short of the complement?
- St.S: I'm sure they were short of the complement when they first went over.
- Jim: They were just short of people.

- St.S: They were short of people, yeah, and then gradually built it up to the eleven. And Louie Smith—everybody stood watch except the engineering officer, the exec and the captain. The rest of us stood watch.
- Jim: Four on, four off?
- St.S: Yeah, four on and four off, and of course you did that—no, four on and eight off.
- Jim: Yeah, I was going to say, you had enough men to do that.
- St.S: Yeah, four on and eight off. The only time—it was called Able-Baker, when you were on four on—that was a state of emergency. So then you were on four hours and off four hours. That got very tiresome when you had that. And of course, General Quarters, everybody was up and had a gun somewhere.
- Jim: And your bunk, you had a stateroom you shared with another officer?
- St.S: Because there were so few of us we each had our own stateroom, but they had four bunks, and when you carried Army, Marines and Australians, well then they'd put three officers in with you. And that worked out very well.
- I don't know how familiar you are with football, but back in 1935, a long time ago, the Army had a guard named Stella that was All American. That Stella at Gloucester when we landed, he came on board with a native and he told us to take good care of that native because he had saved his life, because that guy could smell Japs, because they had been in there a week or so before. Stella came into my room, he gave us that instruction and he fell down on the bunk and was out just like that, he went to sleep. I never forgot that. But I—that may mean a lot, but when I looked to the side and I asked him whether he was the All American, "Yes," he said.
- Jim: Oh, that's interesting. How about the food?
- St.S: When we were in the States we could get pretty good food all the way around and we had United States canned food and fresh food and that sort of thing. But as soon as they got over to Australia we had a little different story. Because the Australians were short, and of course the shipping, to ship stuff to the troops and everything over there, it was pretty hard, so most everything was in cans. But we drew beef and lamb, and sheep. We had to take fifty percent mutton and fifty percent beef. The beef was a little tough and of course we didn't like the mutton. But our—
- Jim: Everybody hates the mutton.

St.S: But our chef, eleven years in the Navy, a fellow named Edmond, would take that doggone mutton and he'd steam it 'til there was absolutely no taste in it at all and then we'd serve it with mint jelly. You knew it was meat, but you couldn't taste a thing. [James laughs] And as soon as the *USS Mizar* started coming, that sheep went over side; about ten cases went over for the sharks. [laughs] And the canned food that we got in Australia they weren't so fussy about. You know, cob in canned corn, you'd find a lot of cob. And pineapple, you'd find they cut up that hard center core along with everything else. But at least they gave us what they had.

Jim: Right, at least you had hot food when—

St.S: Oh, yes, oh yes, we had hot food. We had a real good crew. Edmond was very experienced, and then I had two others that were very good, a fellow named Stoneseifer[?] and another one named Smith. And they were good cooks and good managers. And no matter what we carried, if we carried Australians or whether we carried Americans or whether it was Marines or Army, Edmond and these two guys would coordinate with their officers. If we were gonna feed them, they handled it. If we were just going to give them some hot drinks and they were going to use their rations, they handled it.

I don't think—I think early in the game an officer came on board from one of the divisions and asked me about the food. I said, "Well, we'll talk with Edmond." And just as soon as I sat down with Edmond, I could see Edmond knew what to do right away. He was very good at that. So after that I just routed them in to Edmond and never had any trouble.

Jim: Medical facilities?

St.S: We had a doctor. Our first doctor was a Doctor Knights who was from Stevens Point, and after the war he came down to visit with me when I was down here in law school after the war. And our second doctor was a Doctor Ditkowski[?] from Chicago. One relieved the other. We only had one. The LST-464 was converted into a hospital ship so that they had a team of doctors.

Jim: [unintelligible]

St.S: Yeah, it was just like a hospital ship

Jim: I was going to say if something happened aboard ship that this guy couldn't handle, like something important, what would you do?

St.S: Oh, you'd probably take them over there.

- Jim: They stayed with you in your area then, that other ship?
- St.S: Yes, 464 would be in our—whatever our advance base was. When we first went overseas, we made our first landings before we had a base, we went to islands called Kiriwina and Woodlark to get airfields between New Guinea and the Solomons to prevent the Japanese from—
- Jim: That was your first stop after you left San Francisco?
- St.S: No, San Francisco, first we went to Samoa. We went to Samoa, then we had to go almost straight south to avoid subs between—submarines between Samoa and New Zealand. So we went straight south and then we slanted back up, sort of—oh about, that would be north-northwest, slanted back up to Wellington, New Zealand, that was our second—and we had twenty-two of these alligators aboard and we unloaded those at New Zealand. I don't know what happened to them after we got to New Zealand. Then from New Zealand—up until that time we had to have no escort, there was no escort. And after we got to New Zealand to go to Sydney, Australia, we had two big Australian destroyers. One was called the *Warramunga* and the other *Arunta*. And those—they're a little bigger than our destroyers, about like a light cruiser. They took us across to Sydney.
- Jim: Your fleet of nine?
- St.S: Our group of nine. The Liberty ship dropped off; I think the Liberty ship left us at Samoa. I think they left us. But then the group of nine, we went into the harbor at Sydney, through the gates and all and—
- Jim: Did you have some shore time?
- St.S: Unfortunately, three of us were sent north right away. And we were one of the three.
- Jim: Oh.
- St.S: So we weren't happy about that, you know. And so we—
- Jim: They gave you a load there, to take somewhere?
- St.S: No, they didn't have anything at Sydney. We went to Brisbane, we went to Brisbane—I forget where we loaded the aircraft stuff. I don't think—I think we loaded that up later. I don't even think we loaded at Brisbane; I'm not quite sure. But we went to—we left Sydney, and when we went out we had five escorts, first night—torpedoes. Right under the—one of

'em went either under our bow or just in front of us. And the ship they were trying to get was just abreast of us. There were about twenty-some ships in there, and the one they wanted was this one which had just been fixed up. It was a nice big new freighter and just looked great. And that skipper was way over here and we had the five escorts and he was outside the escort and he fired and he got that baby dead center. It went under, went past us, or under our bow, and then hit that thing dead center and that thing sunk just like that. I was—another incident I—

Jim: That was your introduction to the war?

St.S: We were on the bridge, yes. Up until that time I'd enjoyed the war, but after that I didn't know if it was so much fun or not. Anyway, it sunk that and it hit the LST behind us in the stern.

Jim: Did you pick up survivors?

St.S: What is that?

Jim: Pick up survivors?

St.S: Well, the Merchant crew saw that coming. It wasn't too big a crew because they were just taking it up to New Guinea. And I was told that they were already halfway in the boats because they spotted them coming and they were ready. As far as I know, there wasn't anybody killed on that ship.

However the LST crew—this was at about five o'clock—was eating dinner and that's in the stern and that's where the torpedo hit. The one place that a torpedo can get a LST pretty easy is in the stern, because it's about fifteen feet, and so they got that ship in the stern; twenty-six killed in that LST. And that LST swung around like that and—our convoy was going five and a half knots so—two LSTs were on this side and we just got caught. That was all there was. The destroyer went back, they towed 469 way down to Sydney and it was a solid year before that ship came back in action.

So from there, then we went up to Brisbane and then to Townsville. Somewhere in there we loaded first a group to be taken up to the island Woodlark, that's our first landing. And somewhere along the line we—it might have been the second run—we took in the aircraft *Madding*[?]. The ship was so loaded down that I think the stern must have been about seventeen feet. We didn't roll at all, didn't roll one whip with that *Madding* in it.

So from there do you want the—

Jim: Where did you take that?

St.S: Okay, The *Madding* was unloaded at—[**End of Tape 1 Side A**]—
Townsville, a place called Townsville. And then we took on people to go
to Woodlark to the first landing and—

Jim: Those are in New Guinea?

St.S: No, this was just Townsville; Brisbane and Townsville are in Australia.
Townsville is in northeast Australia. It goes Brisbane and then Townsville
and then Cairns. It was a vacation spot.

Jim: [unintelligible]

St.S: I wish we could have got there. That was only about twenty miles away,
but they had us occupied.

And from there then we started the first series of landings. South Pacific
Landed was working at the same time; we were called Southwest. We
landed at Woodlark at the same time they were landing at Rondova over
on the other side. So they had LSTs over there and then we had LSTs on
Southwest.

We had no problems on the initial landing, except we had to go through a
coral reef deal. You can see that in my book, which you've now got. I do a
sketch of how that went. Captain Scruggs took us through those. He didn't
trust any of the skippers to go through that the first time through. Then we
buoyed it after that so that when we went back on subsequent trips we
could follow that alright. Beautiful sand beach, no problem, and the
Seabees built that airstrip there in about, oh, twelve to fourteen days they
put that airstrip in. So with buildings and lights it looked just like
civilization. A real good job. You'd like me to do more?

Jim: Well, keep going.

St.S: All right. Well we landed at Woodlark and then we went back to Milne
Bay at the extreme end of the turkey tail, and that's a long bay about
twenty miles long and a great place for ships and supplies, and that's
where our—

Jim: I was going to say, you'd need new supplies and you need new cargo.

St.S: Yeah, we had cargo people and Army were in there and there was an
airstrip there. And our maintenance ship was *Ricco*, an old big repair ship
and—

Jim: LST?

St.S: No, no this is—it was more like a Liberty ship but it was an older ship than that, but those guys could do anything. They had repair people of all kinds, electricians, welders—whatever it was, they had it—and ship's store and all that sort of thing. Which LSTs don't have any of. So we anchored there and then from there we went to this little island, the Kiriwina. And between Kiriwina, airstrips on Kiriwina and airstrips on Woodlark, that kept the Japanese from Rabaul from reinforcing or putting another base there and attacking both sides. By having the planes there they could help landings in New Guinea and they could help landings over on the other side in the Solomons.

So then not much excitement for a while, but then we took the—

Jim: If you don't have a cargo then, did you just sorta lay to and wait for something to happen?

St.S: That's right. Yes.

Jim: Until you got orders to go pick up something?

St.S: Yes. Usually what happened you'd go back and they'd have something. And the second run we took stuff up to Kiriwina. Then we came back and in August we took hundred octane gasoline because of course the airstrip was ready and they needed more gasoline. And we were there unloading when they got an air raid alert. And that's when we almost got bumped off. There were two LSTs on the beach at about ten o'clock at night and we were ordered not to fire. And we're about, oh, maybe half again from—about twice as far as the end of that room, whatever that is.

Jim: About fifty feet.

St.S: Yeah. LST-171 and us, and the Japanese had three planes, we could see them up there, and we had our bow doors open and everything is dark and they straddled us with fifteen bombs. We could see the bombs landing from the three planes. You could see them bouncing along in the water. They bounced here and then they bounced in the middle and then bounced over—no hits, if they'd hit either one of us it would have killed everybody.

Jim: In an instant.

St.S: We'd have had it. Rather, what it did is it bent our right shaft.

Jim: Oh, really?

St.S: One bent the right shaft.

Jim: Underwater concussion?

St.S: Yeah. It had stopped, you know. That was the beach, you know, under the sand was solid coral, beautiful white coral. And that bent that shaft. And so—

Jim: Just the concussion of that bounce—

St.S: Yeah, bent that doggone shaft in there, about that big around, you know. So that's bent then and we finished unloading the gasoline then, there was no more trouble. And then the next morning we went back and you could hear the thump, thump, thump. Engineers came on board, we were scheduled to go to Leyte in about a week to the Leyte landing and we weren't very happy about that one because our air cover wasn't too good at that time and we were gonna carry the Australian 9th Division. Good bunch of fellows, and we really liked them. And we did a practice landing with them. Oh, the Australians are very delightful people.

Jim: Jolly.

St.S: Yeah. There seem to be a lot of them about five-foot two, red haired, and a lot of 'em that were great big guys about six-foot and very dark visage. And then there was all mixture in between, but I remembered those particularly. And because of that bumping shaft we had to go down to Australia and so we missed the Leyte landing. And the fellow that had my position—I was in charge of the rear gun—got killed. Hit by an aerial torpedo. And two LSTs got hit bad on that landing. And then one had to go into a place called Morobe[?]. Bomb came over and hit the stern and blew the stern up, yeah.

Anyway we missed the Leyte landing with the—

Jim: Did you just get stuff squared away on your ship?

St.S: Well what we had to do was go down to Brisbane. We had to go all the way to Brisbane. Because you see, at that time you didn't have anything like floating docks. So they sent us down to—

Jim: They had to pull that out of the water to fix that shaft.

St.S: That's right. They had to go into a dry dock. And they had an old-fashioned dry dock down there and of course you had to wait your turn.

And so we went down there, down there with a little yard mine sweep and we had a PC that had radar and they went in front, so of course, that was supposed to be our escort. Well, they turned off early and then it was just us and the YMS, and that poor little yard mine sweep—

Jim: It couldn't keep up?

St.S: Why, the worst part was, it was kinda stormy. So we thought they'd sink. So what we did, we went in front and the escort was behind.

Jim: You escorted the escort?

St.S: We escorted the escort. We went down there and it took 'em a while, it took them well over a month before we go in and got that shaft straightened. But in the meantime they had the Leyte landing and that's when the first LSTs got smacked, two on the landing, and then one the day after when they were at Morobe, so that's a good one to miss.

Jim: So there you are, you got a new shaft and ready to go back to—

St.S: Ready to go back. Then you go back and you join up and then from Leyte then we went to a place called Finschhafen, then we got the 1st Marine Division landing at Cape Gloucester, which was a well put together landing, it's an Army Aircraft—

Jim: That was a regular landing?

St.S: Yes.

Jim: That was your first experience?

St.S: Well, the ones at Kiriwina and at Woodlark were minor. We didn't really have an opposition at those.

Jim: At Gloucester there was a regular battle?

St.S: Yeah, and Leyte, you see was one, but we missed that one. Finschhafen we didn't really have a battle. But Gloucester was a pretty good—

Jim: Tell me about that a little.

St.S: Well Gloucester was a pretty good scrap. And certainly I have a tape made by the Army Signal Corps of that entire Gloucester Operation, and I'll be glad to give that to the Museum too. You'll like that. The first part of that landing group landed, oh, maybe about nine, ten in the morning. We

landed about one in the afternoon. There were two waves. And they didn't really have any—

Jim: You stood off and watched all this going on?

St.S: Well, what happened—no, you come along behind. We didn't see that, we didn't see the landing because we were spaced behind with our own escorts and then they land and unload and then we land. Because we landed about a mile away from where they, the Japanese, thought we were coming, and I really think that we landed at an area that was not what they planned, I think. But that was good from our standpoint, because there was no opposition from the beach. None at all.

Jim: So the first troop of LSTs get in there and dumped on the beach and they pulled out and you came in next?

St.S: They were pulled—yeah. They pulled out and they were attacked sometime, oh, around eleven o'clock in the morning, I think it was. They got attacked on the way out, as they were leaving. And of course we were just coming around the bend and we did not get attacked at that time. Then we landed on the beach about, oh I would say, later in the morning, maybe eleven, maybe twelve.

Jim: It went okay?

St.S: Oh yeah, no problems. We had to push up some sand for the ramp. Bulldozer pushed sand back and then everything went out from that. And about two o'clock that afternoon, before we got all the stuff off the top, the Japanese attacked. But only one plane came toward us. Only one plane, and that, of course, combined efforts of about three-four LSTs that—

Jim: You shot him down?

St.S: That plane went over, and that was the last we saw of them, it was a Val too, it was a relatively slow plane.

But when they bombed out further, they hit a new destroyer called the *Brownson*. They dropped a bomb down the stack and broke it in half and that ship sank. That's in that Signal Corps movie showing that destroyer goin' down. I couldn't see the destroyer goin' down, but in this movie it shows that, because it was with the other group.

So, now Gloucester, because Gloucester was up, up, you had to go through a pass by New Guinea and then around to get to Gloucester. The Merchant ships wouldn't go there. So we made seven runs to Gloucester.

Jim: You took stuff off the Merchant ships, put them on your ships?

St.S: Oh no. You'd get them from an Army base. They would get 'em from an Army or a Marine base where they had their supplies, and that would be back at either Finschhafen or Buna. Then we'd load up. There was a giant beach there, a place called Cape Sudest [he spells S-U-D-E-S-T]; twenty-four LSTs could line up together, so no problem loading. A nice beach, get loaded, and then we'd go back up to Gloucester. And we didn't have any more trouble going to and from Gloucester.

Jim: Did you have a home base where mail came?

St.S: Yes, Milne Bay was the first base that we had. Then after we took Gloucester, then we moved up to Buna as a home base. Actually Milne Bay was a much better base because a bay and a [unintelligible] and everything were there. At Buna we didn't have anything but we just—that's as far back as we went.

Jim: And so mail and stuff would come to that?

St.S: Would come to Buna. Then it moved up to Finschhafen on the end as we went further up the line at Finschhafen. That was a good base and a good place to load. And it was at the Finschhafen area where we later loaded for the big landing at Hollandia. After we landed at Gloucester, then we landed at Saidor to cut the Japanese off who were coming from the south pushed by the Australians.

Jim: You really went around the coast, didn't you?

St.S: Right along the coast, yeah. Saidor was a mudhole. The first time they dropped an A-20 on that airstrip—

Jim: It just didn't get—

St.S: —it went right off the end of the airstrip.

Then the Navy reported that they had blasted the Japanese fleet up at Truk and that the Japanese fleet had moved. They moved west. That gave MacArthur a chance to go to the Admiralties.

So what he did, he sent these—he sent what they call an expeditionary force or whatever of about twelve hundred men. The 1st Cavalry Division, they sent them in on this little island and put 'em in a harbor where the LSTs had to go through a narrow neck and then they had to turn south. And that harbor, Hyane [he spells H-Y-A-N-E] Harbor was very small and the entrance was not very wide and the Japanese of course had guns on

both sides. But we had cruisers and we had destroyers there to knock that stuff out, but the coxswains taking the troops in on the initial landing, I think two or three were killed because it was tight.

But fortunately the main Japanese force stayed up at the northern harbor at Seeadler, the big harbor and they didn't come down. But the—so they got the troops, the 1st Cav in, and then as soon as they got in the LSTs were loaded and waiting, and if they were able to hang on, the LSTs would bring the Seabees and the rest to finish the airstrip.

So another twelve hundred or so troops plus the Seabees plus the equipment is brought in by the LSTs two days later. And the Japanese almost pushed our 1st Cav off; *almost* but not quite. And so they got in there—

Jim: So when was your arrival?

St.S: We arrived about three days later and we went in the big harbor. The island is like a loaf of bread and then over on the side here would be a smaller loaf of bread with a bay to the east of it.

Seeadler, the big harbor, you went around all that and you came in from the north between islands up there; it's a gigantic, beautiful harbor. We were the second ship in. There was still a little activity off to the right, and the first LST fired a few guns and we had our three-inch pointed there, but we didn't even use it.

But there's where I got all the propaganda that I have given to the museum. I got over five hundred sheets of propaganda they dropped on the Australians. They weren't using any more because, of course, by now the Americans are involved. But this was in a blockhouse in Seeadler that got hit and this stuff, this propaganda, was all over the sand.

Jim: Paper, sheets of paper—

St.S: Sheets of paper with this colored—yeah, I gave it to Brewster [curator at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum] there the other day. And you want to see that, because that's probably the only propaganda like that in the city, maybe in the state. Because the—you wouldn't get that anywhere else; it just happened that we were there when that thing got hit, and I gave most of mine away. I had five hundred sheets and I gave it here and there, you know. But I got twenty-five different kinds pasted in that book. It was all designed to put, again, to the Australians. So—

Jim: So after you did your thing there, then what?

- St.S: Well, from there we went back and the—MacArthur had sent General Sutherland to the Joint Chief's of Staff in Washington to talk them into the next landing, where we'd have backing from the fleet. And that was the big landing where we'd drive past the next two strong points. The Japanese had a strong point called Hansa Bay, then they had a strong point called Wewak. Very, very powerful bases and a lot of troops, but the next base—
- Jim: Was at Hollandia?
- St.S: Aitape and Hollandia were kinda supply bases and the Japanese never dreamed we'd go there.
- Jim: That was a leap frog.
- St.S: Yeah, we did a landing where we landed at three places at once: Aitape, Hollandia proper and a place called Tanahmerah Bay. As it turned out Tanahmerah Bay was too swampy, they couldn't do anything there, so they brought most of the stuff back to Hollandia. We—our group went north toward the Admiralty Islands to fool the Japanese into thinking we were going maybe to Peleliu or Yap or something. And so some loaded up there, and we loaded up at this big Cape Sudeskio[?]. And we were around a couple of days and then we all swung down and we landed. We all landed about the same time. We landed at Hollandia, another group landed at Aitape another group landed—
- Jim: What was that like?
- St.S: Very calm, because we surprised 'em.
- Jim: My reading tells me that there was nobody there. They were—
- St.S: The only thing there were service troops and indentured laborers. And they were having breakfast. That's true, because—
- Jim: Then all of a sudden two thousand ships were there.
- St.S: [laughs] Well it wasn't that many; we didn't have anything like that. But we were able to, you know, with their blasting, we were there in time to see the cruisers fire, which is nice: two white and a red, two white and a red; it was very pretty. When we landed we had no opposition at all when we landed. And—
- Jim: What were you carrying then, do you recall?

St.S: We were carrying the 24th Division. Twenty-fourth, we had regular troops this time. We had all the stuff. And they went off, off of the ramp and away and later about one o'clock in the afternoon we started to get some firing from an island off, oh, maybe a mile off that way. And we requested permission to silence it with a three-inch, and they let us do it.

Jim: Oh, finally.

St.S: So we used that three-inch. We fired six rounds with the three-inch and we had no more firing from that island. They didn't want any more of that. And another interesting—there were two other interesting things about Hollandia. Number one was that MacArthur was first at Tanahmerah and then he came to Hollandia about eleven o'clock in the morning and they wade in, you know, like you do. And they're right by our ship and went in to inspect and so on, then they went back out to the Cruiser Nasco[?] where MacArthur was off. That afternoon we're gettin' ready to leave and a Japanese sniper shoots and gets our communication officer in the arm. Now mind you—

Jim: Where was he standing?

St.S: He was up in a tree. He was up in a tree.

Jim: The sniper was?

St.S: Yeah, and he sat there all day—

Jim: All day that he had been there?

St.S: Well, why didn't he pick off MacArthur? You know, he—

Jim: It would have been an easy shot for him?

St.S: Well sure, and he wears that cap, you know.

Jim: It wouldn't be far, it would be easy—

St.S: Oh no, as soon as he shot George, somebody took a machine gun and "arrromp," and they knocked him out of the tree. It wasn't too far away. It wasn't any more than across the street, you know. So why in the heck that—anyway, that bullet went in the bone, George went to Brisbane in the hospital and eventually that took him out of the Service. Because the—they said it embedded in the bone. But anyway, I've always thought why didn't—and why would he sit up there all day?

Jim: Amazing.

St.S: That's an amazing thing, but that's what happened. And George had the bullet with him in the hospital. I happened to get on leave and I went to visit George at the hospital. The funny part about that is, George wanted some liquor and I knew the manager at the Burns Boat Company[?] so I had four cases of liquor sent up to the hospital and they put it under George's bed, in the hospital. I bet George had a great time, drinking with the nurses.

Anyway, that landing at Hollandia was of course tremendously successful and Hollandia then was our big base for a long time, all the rest of '44. From there we went to—within ten days we went to an island called Wakde, because they found the airstrips at Hollandia weren't heavy enough for our big bombers. We thought we were gonna use them. Incidentally, I went back to that airstrip and there's just hundreds of Japanese planes on the ground that Kenney's Air Force had caught on the ground. They fooled them by stopping every time they'd get up to Wewak, they wouldn't go any further, so then they felt very comfortable to bring them into Hollandia, so they went in there and they just cleaned house. So I went in there and I cut some pieces off of one of the Japanese Zeros and I think I left some pieces here with Brewster.

So, at Wakde we had a good strip and hard cover, so at Wakde we were supposed to land in the morning. There were four LSTs sent over there, not a very big island, and they got there and it was still, still—hadn't pushed them back far enough for the LSTs to come in, so we waited out there and about—oh, it must have been about ten-fifteen in the morning, the Air Force was bombing and they must have hit a dump, right in the center of the island, the most tremendous big—color like a tornado, way up high and up at the top, everything is exploding; the best fireworks you ever saw. The most tremendous—

Jim: That must have been a big surprise.

St.S: Yeah, they must have hit a dump. Must have hit a dump and that went up. Anyway, by about oh, one, two in the afternoon, we went in, four LSTs, and the books say that we had a lot of trouble; we didn't have any trouble at all. There wasn't anybody shot walking off of our ship. In fact, some of our sailors got off the ship and went up to the front lines and they pounced on a Japanese officer who had been killed and they took souvenirs, including a Nambu pistol. And this was our Bosun mate, a fellow named Price from Maryland, and he's got that pistol today. When he came back to the ship he showed the effects of it. It still had the blood on it and he said, "Hee-you." I said, "Doggone you Price, you and [unintelligible], you guys ought to be court-martialed, go up to the front lines, you could have been shot." But they weren't, they got back.

So we took Wakde and expanded that and that was a hard strip. It could help with things. Then there were a series of landings along the coast, an island called Noemfoor?, Sansapor, no opposition. No opposition either one of those. Then we were getting ready to land in Lanau in the Philippines when Halsey reported that they weren't getting opposition, so they moved it up to Leyte. And on October twentieth we landed at Leyte. And there we had the Central Pacific and of course the big fleet. And we got by the little islands and then we just waited. We were there overnight before landing, the first time that happened. But we had a good fleet. We had about six hundred ships.

Jim: I bet that was exciting to see all that.

St.S: That was very exciting. And then of course they were firing over us, which was good. We were sitting here, and here were the big battleships like the *Pennsylvania* and *North Carolina*. And they were firing over us and you could feel—

Jim: The concussion?

St.S: First you'd hear the "boom" and you'd see the smoke come from the battleship, then—I don't know which was first, but yes, you could feel that concussion a mile or two away, you could feel that on your face. And then you look up and just for a minute, the three shells from the turret, you don't see 'em come and you don't see 'em go, but just for a minute you see them hangin' in there and then they're gone. It's quite a—it's really sensational thing to see them fire.

And then the various landing craft went in and unfortunately the Japanese, who were on one of the hills on where we took a division in, and that was the 24th I think too, and they started to shell with seventy-fives as we started in. And they started hitting ships on the end of the line. And then we got up on the beach and only the first two LSTs on the left could get on the beach; all the rest of us had to turn around and go back out. And about that time the Japanese started to use knee mortars. And the mortars were coming around and this LSTs went out and we had to wait because only every other one could turn and just as we turned they dropped mortar shells right there where we'd been.

And the guy taking the pictures that are in the book that I left with Brewster, the guy taking the pictures was on the bow and if we'd been just a little bit later with the landing, we wouldn't have those pictures either. And we wouldn't have had John. So then we went back out and then what we had to do was get pontoons from the LSTs at another beach and then

we went in at that night on the pontoons and then we unloaded. Got out that way.

Jim: So you stayed there for a bit or—

St.S: Yes, we were there, we were there, let's see, October 20th was the time of the landing and then the next day we unloaded. And they were—I don't know why they were waiting, 'cause we were unloaded, I think, by the end of the 21st. But then on the 23rd, we were there 'til the 23rd when the convoy was going south. And as we were going south we can hear this, on the radio, we could hear these little carriers squalling for help 'cause that's when the Japanese fleet came through the strait. But we're down along Mindanao heading south at nine miles an hour. [laughs] We'd have gone faster if we could. So we could hear it, but of course we didn't get involved in that in any way.

Jim: So then where'd you go?

St.S: Then we went back to Hollandia and we took supplies several times to Leyte and then, about in—sometime in December we left the Hollandia base and moved up to Leyte to stay. And several exciting things happened when we were there. The Japanese bombed one night and got some B-24s and made a big splash, and then a Japanese plane went over one night and all the ships [laughs] were shooting at this one plane. And I noticed that some of the guys didn't have their helmet on; I said, "Put your helmets on." I said, "What goes up, comes down." I had no sooner said that when "clang" a piece of stuff fell on the deck. Boy, I tell ya—

Jim: Those helmets went on?

St.S: Yeah, 'cause you know, everything shoots, you know. It's a wonder—I wonder sometimes how many casualties—

Jim: Got hit by a piece of artillery shell that some American shot? Just shoot it up there and it came down.

St.S: It came down. When you think of how much goes up—

Jim: It's surprising that more of that—

St.S: Yeah, you wonder how many people could possibly be killed.

So after the Leyte landing, then by that time we had more LSTs brought in and they formed what they called *Flotilla Eight*; we were *Flotilla Seven* our[?] thirty-six. And one of our ships, the LST-171, was assigned temporarily to *Flotilla Eight* so they got in on the landing to Mindoro,

which was a mean one, and two LSTs got destroyed both from *Flotilla Eight*. But 171 saw that, they saw those ships get hit, and we knew the people from 460 real well because we played basketball a lot with 460. And—

Jim: Where did you do that?

St.S: On our tank decks. We—

Jim: Oh, you'd invite them over to your tank deck and—

St.S: And then theirs, too. Yeah.

Jim: I didn't realize there was that much room or flat space.

St.S: Yeah, and we had baskets at the ends of the tank deck that folded up, you know. And then the floor was painted. And when the Army put tanks, any vehicle, they had to put dunnage down, you know, flat boards, you know, they'd bring in. And our ship's carpenter would go down there and pick out all the mahogany. Because they cut—well, they cut everything, they cut, you know, the cheap trees and the mahogany, they'd pick big mahogany trees. So Art Sinclair couldn't stand that; he went down and he'd pick those out and they'd have to bring more in. But that would protect the deck and then we'd play. We tried playing underway, we couldn't do that, but we played 'em. The 460 had a very good team. We never could beat 'em. They were really good. But 460 and 472 got destroyed in that Mindoro landing.

Then the next and last landing that I was on was Lingayen, and we were in the second group; we were not on the D-Day group, we were in the second group. But there was a line of ships going, you know—I forget how long they said that convoy was, but it was some astounding number of miles, because there were about nine hundred in that one. And as we're going up, we're opposite Mindanao once and suicide planes jumped group. They were all shot down but one, one hit a Liberty ship and it didn't do any damage, really, it scraped over the side. But it was interesting to see those suicide planes anyway. Then we went in, we went up and landed at Lingayen. The largest sand, flat area you ever—**[End of Tape One, Side B]**—saw in your life. Off, way off to the left of the mountains was where the Japanese were. But the troops unloaded and went south and east toward Manila. And the first time we unloaded stuff, everything was in trucks and stuff, so as soon as they'd get out they'd go and were gone. We were left all alone. So any pictures of ships on the beach, you won't see anything because, because everything is gone down. 1st Cav and another outfit are racing to try to get down to Manila.

So that was the last of that. And on the—let's see, did we take another run up there?—yeah, I guess we did. I guess the last trip we took, we took a trip up to—from Leyte, we took gun barrels. Three ships, three ships—we didn't happen to have the barrels; they took giant cannons, oh my, about this big around and way long. Three of those could go—three of those cannon could go on one LST deck. And three LSTs were loaded with those cannons, because they were gonna use them, they thought, to shell Corregidor.

Jim: Oh.

St.S: And then on I think it was February 17, 1945, nine o'clock in the morning, they torpedoed the ship just to the left of us, split it in half, the whole back half went off. I was in my room on the left side of the ship. And that ship—I could hear the “boom”; I saw the thing break apart. They hit the whole stern, the front end where the tank deck is you could see that split right in front of the deck house. And I got out of my room and bounded down to the ladder to get up. By the time I got up to my gun station, the flag on that stern was goin' down. Ohhh, and everybody was—only one officer, one officer was in the doorway and he pulled himself up by his hands, but everybody that was in that stern was killed, because they couldn't get out. So they tried to tow that, because the guns were still in there, but they couldn't. They finally had to sink that by gunfire. And that was about February 17, 19—

Jim: '45?

St.S: '45. And I got back to Leyte, I got my orders to go home, they were dated: February 17, 1945.

Jim: Oh my.

St.S: And they hadn't given them to us before we left. So I got them then and then flew out of there in March.

Jim: Did you have any trouble getting mail?

St.S: Only the one time that we had trouble getting mail and I outlined that. As we moved up the coast of New Guinea toward Hollandia, when we made that big jump to Hollandia, somehow or another the mail got left behind at Finsch in a—like a giant—it was like a Quonset—well, it was not really a Quonset because it had a wood top and they left the mail there, it was sitting there. Well, we had had to go down to Milne Bay for repairs, and so we came back we were directed to pick up the mail. So we went in there, where that was, and it was just sittin' there; no troops, nobody around, and those bags, soaked, you know. Even though, you know, moisture, sixty-

nine bags of mail we picked up. And the—some people had sent fruitcake and it had broken open and some of those bags, they smelt like wine, like a distillery. And we brought 'em back, and I forget how many bags we had, but I had something like thirty-some letters from my wife in that bag. So when we got back to Hollandia and we distributed that mail everybody was pretty happy. Well by that time they had moved the post office up to Hollandia. That was about the only time.

Jim: And the other thing is, tell me about officer's club near the bigger bases. Were they open to you, the officer's club on the beach?

St.S: We didn't have any officer's clubs.

Jim: You didn't?

St.S: No.

Jim: There was nothing even in Hollandia after you'd been there for a while?

St.S: Well, there may have been, but—

Jim: They were made for the Army but not the—

St.S: Well, one of the reasons might have been, you see, the airfields at Hollandia were some twenty miles back in. But no, I never, as far as I know, we never went to an officer's club any time we were in New Guinea or the Philippines. I don't remember any officer's club at any time.

Jim: Did you find it hard to get any beer?

St.S: Well, we had a beer ration once a month and every man was supposed to get two cans of beer.

Jim: Did you drink them aboard ship?

St.S: No, they put 'em ashore on an island somewhere or on mainland and they would drink the beer there.

Jim: But they came in regular supplies?

St.S: Yes.

Jim: In cans?

St.S: It was in cans. I suppose it came in cases; I've kinda forgotten how it came. If it came, it came in cases. No, if there was an officer's club

anywhere I never heard of it. I never saw it. And you hear about, you know, MacArthur's fancy place in Hollandia. That wasn't fancy at all. It just was what you'd call a wooden shack there, nicer than some, but certainly no fancy place at all.

Jim: Did the enlisted men get beer too?

St.S: Oh sure, yeah. That was mainly who got the beer, the enlisted men, and my storekeeper always wanted mine; I don't drink beer. So he always wanted mine.

Jim: How about cigarettes, did the cigarettes get rationed out? Or did you have enough?

St.S: Well we had lot of cigarettes. Not ones that the troops liked. They were not Luckys or that sort of thing. We got a lot of—a lot of odd brands.

Jim: Raleighs and Kools?

St.S: That was one, and I forget what the others were. But they were not—they were not—

Jim: Good candidates?

St.S: Apparently they didn't like them very much. I don't remember, you know. Strangely enough, I don't remember much smoking on our ship, cigarettes or anything. And here you've got a hundred men you'd think that—

Jim: There probably was, but you didn't smoke, so you didn't pay any attention.

St.S: Yeah, yeah.

Jim: The morale about ships was generally good, always good, or how would you chalk that up?

St.S: I would say always good. We had a happy ship. I don't recall, you know, any real beefing about anything. I have in my story about how we had the turkey and ham we had. We fed that to the Marines on Christmas Day before they went in the landing the next morning. So we fed them all the turkey and ham we had on the ship and on the way back had canned food. We didn't get any fresh food for quite a while, but I did not receive one complaint, and I'm sure either Ayres or Turner who were the storekeepers didn't.

And we always took—at Gloucester, for example, we took wounded back on the ship. We'd land, and then if anybody got wounded they'd bring them right on the ship. And our one doctor, assisted by—I'll tell ya, all the crew helped, took care of those Marines on the way back. And they did that every time we went up there, we always took the wounded back. And of course, it was only an overnight deal, it worked out pretty well. Load them up and then we'd get them back and by morning we'd be back down to a hospital. The Wisconsin 60th, I think it was, was at Finschhafen, so in fact I saw some gals that were in my sister's nurse's graduating class at Finsch and some of the doctors from the University.

Jim: The 135th, I think, Medical was there.

St.S: Yeah, but anyway, it worked out real well, because get a nice clean bed and bunk, you know, and bring them back. One time the tank deck was dirty so we put 'em up on the top deck and bundled them up; fortunately it didn't rain. I don't know what we would have done, but we got them back.

Jim: Were you in bad weather any other time except that first occasion?

St.S: Yes, we occasionally would get tremendous rainstorms. Normally when ships travel you travel about six hundred feet back, but when you're in a rainstorm you pull to the left and pull up so, you know, maybe you're a hundred feet away. But you're over here, so if anybody got a breakdown that you wouldn't hit them. But then you could see them. But you had to be able to see them. But normally six hundred feet back is the rule.

Jim: And so you got out and went home rather quickly when you got those orders?

St.S: Yes, when I got my orders in March of 1945, my father was dying and I wanted to get home as quick as I could. So I found out that the Navy had a new service back to the United States from an island called Samar right near Leyte. So I went over there and got on the plane and flew back on what would be a four-motored Skymaster, the Navy calls them R5D. We flew to Guam, from Guam went to Kwajalein, then we had to have some work on an engine, and then from Kwajalein to Johnson Island, then to Pearl, and then from Pearl I flew home on a four-motored flying boat, a Navy flying boat.

Jim: I did exactly that in the reverse.

St.S: Ah.

Jim: I took that *Mars* flying boat to Hawaii.

St.S: I just missed the *Mars* going home by very close.

Jim: Two decks affair. But then I went island hopping, the same islands. And from, you know, Johnson, Kwajalein, Guam, then we went to Okinawa. This was in the '50s, so we went to Okinawa and then to Japan.

St.S: Then to Japan; well, isn't that interesting.

When I got to Kwajalein I got a bonus, because they had a, one of the new Bs—what is it?—'52s, the new bombers. And I'd never seen one, and I asked the—they had stopped there for some reason, and I asked if I could go on board. They said, "Sure, go on." So I got in there and slid back that long tunnel back to the rear and looked at the plane. My, I thought, that is really something; it made the *Fortress* and the other stuff we had look like pretty small potatoes, yeah.

Jim: After you got home, then you were discharged right away?

St.S: Oh, no. When I came home, flew into San Francisco Harbor, I went to Alameda Air Base, and you gotta wait until you got orders that come from Washington. Out of all the possible things that I could have got, by luck I got—there was one position open at Morro Bay Advanced Amphibious Training Base and I got that position. And what luck, because it was just perfect. Morro Bay is about halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles and the beach for landing and that sort of thing, and they're not too far from San Luis Obispo, ten miles. And that's where the Timberwolf Division was, and the function of Morro Bay was to train the boat crews that took people into the beach and to train the soldiers. They had ramps just like the side of a ship to climb down. So I was assigned to Morro Bay, California. And at first I was working with the training officer, but I soon found out why they wanted me.

They wanted me to be the first lieutenant on the base. First lieutenant is in charge of all the equipment, supplies, ammunition, that sort of thing. And I tell about that in one of my stories, because when I went as training officer I got a survey of the base and saw everything and worked with things, but I didn't look at the magazines, because that wasn't in the area of my responsibility. But when I got to be first lieutenant I got a hold of a first class gunners mate. I said, "Let's go see the magazines." Well, first of all, they weren't as clean as I wanted them, but they had black powder, dynamite, and petrol [or tetro?] fuses in the magazine. Now by Naval regulations, if you store black powder and dynamite, in the Army too, you know, whoever was in charge would get court-martialed. The captain would have got broken a permanent rank.

Jim: You mean the potential for explosion is so great?

St.S: Yes, it's so great, yeah. You never store black powder and dynamite. And then in addition, they had the petrol fuses, which are in a special container, suspended, so they can't get a jar, you know. Well when I saw those—

Jim: It was like a mine waiting to go off.

St.S: See, the reason why they let 'em use that magazine is because they were blasting off of Morro Rock to extend the breakwater, and this was a private construction company.

Jim: Amazing.

St.S: They didn't care, you know, they didn't—but I don't know, I never did know, and I guess it didn't matter, whether it was Captain Hart or who it was. Somebody gave them permission to put it in the magazine. And the guy that was first lieutenant before was so dumb he didn't even have an ordnance manual. So I asked, I asked—I went to the executive officer and said, “Do you have an ordnance manual?” He said, “No.” “Well,” I said, “you'd better get one in here.” And when he said they didn't have one, then Captain Hart went to his desk and he said, “Oh, I got a letter here.” He had a letter from the commandant of the 12th Naval District that we were in and it said, “We understand there are some irregularities about your magazines and we're going to inspect them within ten days.” And the letter was about three days old. So then I had to tell Captain Hart, I said, “I remember from my midshipman's school that black powder and dynamite can't be in the same magazine, and they got petrol fuses in there too.” He says, “What should I do?” I said, “You have that construction company get that black powder and dynamite and petrol fuses off the base, right now, within twenty-four hours. Because if they inspect and find that,” I said, “I'm in trouble and you're in trouble.” So he gave that order.

Then the magazines, they'd allowed vegetation to grow up around so they had bushes and everything; they were in terrible condition. It's supposed to be something like fifty feet or fifty yards away clear. I said, “We got to have everybody on this base out there within a day or so, and we got to take all that stuff out of there, because that's another violation.” So we had Bessinger[?], the executive boss, to give the order and I tell you, some of those officers were teed off. They had to come in their old clothes, and of course I was too, and they had—we had some of these specialists that run these devices they had that run these machines that shoot at planes for aircraft training. Boy, they were really teed off, but we got them out there and in half a day we had all that stuff away and the magazine that we took the stuff out of we took some of the stuff from other magazines and put it in and put signs on the board so it wouldn't look obvious that we had made some quick changes.

That was on Saturday; on the following Tuesday, in come the 12th Naval District, three officers led by a lieutenant commander and two others to inspect the magazines. So I took Shepard, my gunner's mate, and I to open the magazines and then Captain Hart and Bessinger and these three guys, we inspected every magazine, and of course, every one was slick as a whistle and they had a card on the door and of course there was no trace of black powder or anything like that.

When they got all through, the lieutenant commander said to Captain Hart, "I heard there were some irregularities about your magazines, but on the contrary, these are in the finest condition I've ever seen, and I will so state in my letter to you of commendation." And about a week later comes the letter and Hart showed me with big smile. He put his arm around me; after that, everything on the base that I wanted was mine. [laughs]

Jim: Yeah, you saved his career.

St.S: Yeah. So Morro Bay was a fine deal. And it turned out that when I got there, they had just finished training some units from the Timberwolf Division.

Jim: I don't know that Timberwolf Division.

St.S: I think it's 84th.

Jim: Oh.

St.S: I think it is the 84th, but I'm not absolutely—

Jim: Army division?

St.S: Army.

Jim: That's the one that made the landing in France, in southern France.

St.S: Is that right?

Jim: A lot of these Madison guys were in the 84th.

St.S: Is that right? Well, they were—

Jim: They were here a long time before—

St.S: They were stationed at San Louis Obispo.

Jim: Originally, you mean?

St.S: Yeah, originally.

Jim: They were gone by this time.

St.S: Yeah, so they maybe added another division. But anyway, before they had finished and everybody was dog tired because they had those landings, they'd pick those troops up in the night and they'd bring them over and then they'd bring them over to the base about six o'clock in the morning and then they'd climb down the ramps and into the boats and go out in the surf and they'd land. So that, they'd just had that; everybody was tired. But after I got there, they didn't do any active training while I was there. So it was pretty good, I was able to—I had it pretty good.

So the last thing I—after the war, I inventoried the whole base and inventoried the magazines. And then we got instructions from San Francisco to send it all to Mirror Island. Well, I had the ordnance manual long before that. So we took five big trucks and loaded them with all the stuff, covered them with canvas. I assigned Shepard to take 'em up there and everything went to Mirror Island and they did a real good job of that.

And then I sat back to wait for my points, 'cause I knew I would be high on the list of points, because I had been in so long. But what happened was, then I got called to San Francisco to be in the Shore Patrol. Well, I like San Francisco, but I didn't know about that Shore Patrol. Well, I soon found out Shore Patrol was right downtown. I reported in and I was told I would be in charge of about a third of San Francisco, about half of the downtown, from Market Street north. First through Sixth Street, that's the toughest area there, with all the Crimps and everything.

My hours were nineteen hundred or seven o'clock in the evening 'til three o'clock in the morning. And I had an ex-policeman as a driver, and a guard, about two hundred and twenty-five pounds, from Tennessee. I forget what his rank was; I think he was a second class patrol officer or something. Anyway, we would cruise around through those streets and two walking shore patrol on every block and see if there was any difficulties, then we'd step in. Hadn't been there but about two nights when we got a call from the medics; they were going into some bar where somebody had been knifed. So the instructions were, we'd park the car, I stay in the car and radio control because of the gold braid, they don't want an officer anywhere in those places because they afraid you'd get knifed because of the gold braid, somebody had something against an officer and they don't care who they would get at. So the policeman, the driver and the guard went in and I stayed on the radio. And pretty quick they came

back out and they said that—the medics came out with the person on a stretcher and they said he'd been knifed in the stomach.

So then we got back in the car and we went around again. Oh about, maybe less than a week later, went into the office about ten o'clock for some reason or another. There on the floor they got a sailor—well, they thought it was a sailor—a man, naked. Just in his shorts. He was so badly beaten up that his eyes are closed, his face is puffy, his body is all bruises, he can't talk. They didn't know who he was. So what they did, they kept looking in his shorts to see if they couldn't find a laundry mark. Finally they found a laundry mark, then they were able to trace that. It turned out he was one of our walking Shore Patrol. So what had happened is, he went in somewhere for something free, I think, and his buddy stayed outside. Well, he had got something free all right, he got badly beaten up, and of course they soon found the buddy and then both of those guys got severely disciplined. I don't know what all what happened to them, but I never saw anybody beat up like that in my life; he was really beaten up. So that was another incident.

Then another one happened that didn't happen to me. The Sir Francis Drake Hotel was there and a wonderful orchestra, the Del Courtney Orchestra, a beautiful sweet sound something like Wayne King and Guy Lombardo, but a little different. It was playing at the Drake. Well, the other officer got a call to go to the Drake because there was a lieutenant commander in the coffee shop that was causing problems. So our instructions were at that point, just take him home. So he went in and said, "Sir, I'll take you home." This lieutenant commander bounded to his feet and slugged the Shore Patrol officer in the jaw. And then of course the walking Shore Patrol grabbed him and they took him in. I was told that he was broken in rank in twenty-four hours from a lieutenant commander to a lieutenant for striking a Shore Patrol officer. But I was—

Jim: I'm sure they should have put him in jail. I'll bet he got more than that.

St.S: Yeah, there may be more to the story than that, but that's all I heard. I was just glad it was on the south side and not on the north side.

Jim: Exactly.

St.S: Then there was one—two more incidents. One, the officer that had the outlying area was called to investigate the murder of an ensign. Apparently in some rooming house out there, there had been some kind of squabble or something and this ensign was supposed to have been murdered. And that happened near the end of my deal there, and I often wondered what actually happened, you know, if I could get the papers and see what that was.

But then the last thing that happened to me on the Shore Patrol, we were cruising about Fifth or Sixth Street on Market and I suddenly saw some Shore Patrol people apparently battling with a big guy about six-three, about two thirty-five. And he had on a sailor's suit, but with no markings on it. I found out later that he was a discharged sailor. And what this guy had done is, he had gone into this bakery, probably, you know, drunk and trying to get something and she wouldn't serve him with something. And the little woman was about five-two or five-three and he hit her in the eye, then he kicked in her plate glass window. So what these Shore Patrol were trying to do was to keep him out so he wouldn't hit her again. So when I got there I asked quickly what was going on and I got six guys there, quick as I could. I went and called the regular cops because by that time I could see he didn't have any marking; I thought he was a civilian. And so I said, "Keep him out," I said "he's hurting us." "Well," I said, "there's six of you; what to do—you get him down some way and you all sit on him, is the best thing to do." So they did that and then the cops came, they let him up and he's staggering around. And they say, "What's the trouble?" I said, "Grab that man right there. See that bakery there? He hit that little woman in the eye and kicked in her plate glass window. She'll tell you all the charges." I got the Shore Patrol and got out of there, because of course we didn't want to get involved in anything further. So that was the last thing.

Then November 1 came and my points came up and I decided to get out right there. Because I was on the staff there, I could get immediate action. So by November 3rd of '45 I was out. But with my travel time and two months of leave, my official time I don't suppose I was out, separated from the Service until about the 20th of January. By that time I'm back home and can go to law school.

Jim: Did you use the G.I. Bill to go to law school?

St.S: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And you know, I often wondered about that, you know; the university fees were less than the G.I. Bill allowed. But I understand all the universities took the full—they took the full amount, you know. One thing they did do, somewhere along the line I got an additional fifty dollars for books through the University co-op. But by that time, I didn't need any more for law school or anything, so I bought military books with that last fifty bucks, so that was a bonus. So I got separated from the Service.

Jim: Have you kept any contacts with any of your shipmates?

St.S: Oh yes. Of course, I was only separated and I was not discharged until 1954, you see, because they held a string on us in case of need. Some of

my buddies got called back to Korea, but not me, because I had plenty of points.

Jim: Great career. You were busy. I'm impressed that you didn't have a lot of time to sit around. You seemed to be moving most of the time.

St.S: Well, it was something good, but it was really quite a comfortable time to—place to serve. I had clean bunks, you know, clean beds and we had—I'd say the food was pretty good. The cooks were good. After Edmond left *Stoneseifer* was good too, and by that time we were getting frozen food from the *USS Mizar*. Oh, that *Mizar* was a nice ship. I happened to draw a leave and traveled on that ship. Boy, I tell you, that was really something. But you know, being on watch for four hours at a time and then eight hours off really wasn't bad. Of course, you had to do whatever your division work was. But my division was goods, lot of things were just turned over to the storekeeper, you know, and so it worked out real well.

Jim: I think, marvelous. You are organized; I think it's the secret of your success, don't you?

St.S: Well, I've always been organized.

Jim: Right.

St.S: I'm probably less organized now at home than I—

[End of Interview]