

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

RAYMOND L. STEVENTON

Aviation Machinist Mate, VPB-150, Navy, World War II
Instructor, Electronics Technician, Navy, Korean War Era
Chief Technician, Naval Air Development Unit, Naval Air Test Center, Cold War

2002

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Steventon, Raymond L., (1926-). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 77 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 77 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 77 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Ray Steventon, a Merrick, New York native, shares his experiences with aviation in the Navy during World War II and the Cold War. Steventon tells of his duties as a volunteer air raid warden on Long Island (New York). He discusses the planes of nearby Grumman Aircraft and Republic Aircraft factories. He talks about working with Dr. Stader and his “Stader Splints” at a zoo. He recalls taking a concentrated calculus class so he could enlist as a navigator, dropping out of high school, and joining the Navy. He mentions basic training in Newport (Rhode Island), mechanics school in Norman (Oklahoma), gunnery school in Purcell (Oklahoma), air-to-air training in Buford (South Carolina), night vision school in San Diego, and squadron assignment to Patrol Bombing Squadron 150 at Moffat Field (California). He tells of a job picking up body parts in Lake City (Florida) after a midair collision and afterwards getting an arm tattoo and ankle bracelets for identification purposes. Steventon speaks about how his brother, a medic in the Marines, earned three Purple Hearts. He describes flying a Vega Ventura PV-1, “the flying gas tank.” He discusses low-flying missions to clear the water of radio-carrying boats between the airbase on Tinian and Japan. Steventon talks about a landing gear collapsing on the runway, being thrown out of the plane, and being sent home for a month due to a broken neck and kidney damage. He talks about briefings on Yokosuka Harbor and being put on a carrier, and then the bomb’s being dropped on Hiroshima. He discusses duty on shore patrol in New York City. He talks about going back to high school, the difficulties veterans had getting along with teachers, and getting expelled. Steventon tells of his assignment to *USS Franklin D. Roosevelt* and having his leg broken by a snapped cable during a rough storm that washed aircraft overboard. He touches upon going to electronic school in Corpus Christi (Texas) and marrying his wife on a base chapel in Memphis. Steventon mentions flying AD-1s for the flight pay and being sent aboard *USS Bon Homme Richard* where, due to a high sed rate [ESR] he spent sixty-five days lying on a bunk and acting as a corpsman by giving people shots. He describes teaching B school [advanced electronics] and acting as flight instructor for radar. He mentions serving with VF-11, the “Red Rippers,” aboard the *USS Coral Sea* in the Mediterranean, and describes flying above Mt. Vesuvius with a photographer and the Italians’ impressive formation flying. Steventon discusses developing radars and installing and testing new navigation systems with the Naval Air Development Unit at South Weymouth (Massachusetts). He talks about how he was commissioned as an ensign to discourage him from transferring to the Air Force. He details his activity with the “Hurricane Hunters” flying a WV-3 Super Constellation into hurricanes for weather research. He notes two occasions of officers crashing planes after not listening to the

pilot or flight engineer. Steventon reports working with the Naval Air Test Center in Patuxent River (Maryland) and testing the P-3 and S2F as navigator, electronics test officer, and ejection seat tester, and as a lieutenant demonstrating Skyhook techniques to Seals. He sketches a time his P-3 almost crashed, and explains his wife influenced him to end his Navy career. He mentions the emotional difficulty of guest lecturing at high schools and being a “non-going” member of various veteran associations.

Biographical Sketch:

Raymond L. Steventon (1926-) served in the Navy from 1943 through 1964. After discharge he worked with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Climate Research, conducting arctic research and flying P2V aircraft. He was also involved in the radiocarbon dating business. Steventon retired in 1989 and currently resides in DeForest, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2002.

Transcribed by Katy Marty, 2008.

Transcription corrected by Channing Welch, 2008.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2009.

Interview Transcript:

- Jim: With Raymond Steventon on the 31st of May 2002. Where were you born sir?
- Ray: Merrick, Long Island, New York.
- Jim: What was the name again?
- Ray: Merrick, M-e-r-r-i-c-k.
- Jim: Okay, and when was that?
- Ray: April 17th, 1926.
- Jim: April, 1926.
- Ray: Yup.
- Jim: And so, you were in school when the war was actually started.
- Ray: Oh yeah.
- Jim: High school, and --
- Ray: I was an air raid warden.
- Jim: Oh, an air raid - I thought you were on the East Coast.
- Ray: Yeah, and --
- Jim: As a high school student?
- Ray: Yeah, and --
- Jim: Did they recruit you or did everybody volunteer?
- Ray: Everybody volunteered. I was in charge of making sure all the neighbors had their shades pulled down.
- Jim: Oh my goodness.
- Ray: And that the headlights were painted half-way across so they could only show down. As it was they landed saboteurs on the beaches near us. They were captured.

Jim: I know about that.

Ray: But they were also torpedoing ships off the coast. They would burn buildings. The flare up of the fires, they could see the silhouettes of ships and they would torpedo ships.

Jim: Who would burn buildings? Saboteurs or (unintelligible)?

Ray: Saboteurs, saboteurs or something, some --

Jim: (unintelligible)

Ray: Yeah, but these buildings all of the sudden ignited all by themselves it seemed like. And they were always condemned empty buildings. There was somebody that was --

Jim: As an air raid warden person did you have a watch, an area, a time?

Ray: Oh yeah. I had a—

Jim: Like what?

Ray: I had almost one square mile. I was a very agile runner and I would run back and forth at twilight and make sure everybody had their shades --

Jim: Your job was to make sure that people had their shades down. Is that correct?

Ray: Right. Any light that could be exposed to the atmosphere automatically shown out --

Jim: Sure. So if you're walking past this house and there's a - what would you do?

Ray: I would go up and knock on the door and tell 'em to pull their shades down. If not I was able to contact somebody and they would --

Jim: Who's somebody? Not the police?

Ray: The local police

Jim: Oh, okay.

Ray: and they would give 'em a a ticket for -- There was also, military jeeps were right there, too because we had an Air Force base not too far. An Army Air corps base not too far away.

Jim: But they, of course, you had no jurisdiction in that city.

Ray: They did.

Jim: They did?

Ray: They were on patrol there constantly because it was an area - -

Jim: I 'spose if an arrest had to be made then they had to (unintelligible) the local police.

Ray: We were only a mile from the ocean.

Jim: A mile. Are you on Long Island?

Ray: On the south shore of Long Island and any light exposed there just --

Jim: Would be detrimental to the --

Ray: To any cargo vessel going by, anything going by the southern shore.

Jim: Did you ever see a submarine surface?

Ray: No, but we used to go look for 'em.

Jim: I'll bet ya did.

Ray: Whenever I had a girlfriend I used to go down and watch the submarines.

Jim: That's a great excuse. (both laugh) Did you? Oh, that's cute. Oh, that's delightful. Oh, I love it.

Ray: We kept an excellent watch.

Jim: I'll bet.

Ray: One night anyway.

Jim: Oh yes. Now, your assignment was for how long? For a term of hours or --

Ray: Oh, I was usually up until midnight.

Jim: That was at your discretion or --

Ray: At my discretion. Once everything was closed up and I knew it was --

Jim: You would hope.

Ray: I could go home.

Jim: And after that there was no patrolling by anyone?

Ray: Oh, yeah. They had road patrols.

Jim: Now say that again. Now was that the Air Corps people or the city police?

Ray: Well, both, the city police and the Army Air Corps.

Jim: This is an opportunity for me to question somebody who I've never questioned about this.

Ray: Uh huh.

Jim: Now, what was the attitude of the people in New York City? Were they scared?

Ray: Very, very, very, very obliging with everything.

Jim: Right, but were they scared?

Ray: No.

Jim: They didn't really. --

Ray: No.

Jim: Fear an assault?

Ray: No.

Jim: Or bombardment?

Ray: No.

Jim: They didn't?

Ray: No.

Jim: So the general tenor was one of resoluteness and so forth?

Ray: Well, everybody there seemed to work in a defense plant.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: Grumman Aircraft, Republic Aircraft.

Jim: Where were they?

Ray: They were --

Jim: On Long Island?

Jim: About twenty miles, yeah.

Jim: Oh, I didn't know that they had factories on Long Island.

Ray: Oh, big factories for Grumman Aircraft. They rolled a plane out about every six minutes.

Jim: Wow.

Ray: And that was --

Jim: Do you recall what city that was in?

Ray: Farmingdale, Bethpage.

Jim: Bethpage is the company?

Ray: Bethpage was a town and Farmingdale was a town and Republic was in Farmingdale and Grumman was in Bethpage.

Jim: Say, those are good Navy airplane companies.

Ray: Well, Grumman was, they produced the TBF which I flew in and my mom worked on. She was a riveter.

Jim: And the Corsair.

Ray: No. No, no. It wasn't the Corsair.

Jim: Was that a Republic?

Ray: Hell Cats, Wild Cats.

Jim: (unintelligible)

- Ray: F4F was the first, the Wildcats, and then FGF was the Hellcats and then came the Tigercats. That was a twin engine fighter, and then came the Bearcat. Which is --
- Jim: It never made it to war. I saw one of those at the museum.
- Ray: You say it never made it to war. It made it over in Korea.
- Jim: (unintelligible)
- Ray: In Korea.
- Jim: Not the F8F.
- Ray: Okay, then I'll have to erase --
- Jim: I saw one. There's one down on in Pensacola.
- Ray: You say not but I'll have to erase some planes off the flight deck of our ship because we had 'em on there. (laughs)
- Jim: Well, I don't want to -- I won't okay, -- It's pointless to debate that now.
- Ray: Yeah.
- Jim: But it was really an impressive airplane.
- Ray: Oh yeah, except if you had a big pilot he didn't fit in it. (laughs) Had the smallest cockpit of any plane I ever worked on.
- Jim: Yeah, okay. Anyway so after high school then what?
- Ray: I didn't. I quit school and joined the Navy in 1943.
- Jim: Before you finished high school?
- Ray: Yes. The only requirement was that I could quit school was my math teacher talked to my mother. She was a cook in the cafeteria then, at that time and she, he told her that I should take a special math course that he wanted to teach me. I was very good in mathematics, straight A student and he taught me calculus. In about a two month period I took a concentrated course in calculus and that, my birthday was in April and that took me until October and he said I was ready. That by itself made me enlisted navigator because I knew how to do coordinates and everything else.

Jim: So where did they send you? And then tell me exactly when you joined the Navy.

Ray: October 1943.

Jim: Okay. We have that, and where did they you then for your basic?

Ray: Newport, Rhode Island.

Jim: And you quickly got you into navigation, is that --

Ray: No, I wanted to be a doctor. I worked for a veterinary, a quarantine agent for Frank Buck Zoo. I don't know if "Bring 'em back alive" Frank Buck -- I cleaned teeth for lions and tigers and I clipped their nails and for six months --

Jim: What a job!

Ray: For six months we were the quarantine people.

Jim: How did you tranquilize them?

Ray: Nembutal, chunk of meat with a Nembutal in there according to their weight.

Jim: I bet it took awhile. Nembutal's a slow actor.

Ray: Yeah, and then we would sit on, I would sit on their head, right behind on their neck, if and they even made a move I was gone (laughs). But some of the paws were just huge. We nipped the nails because they couldn't run and they just grew like crazy there.

Jim: I know.

Ray: The other doctor that was there was a Dr. Stader. Do you remember anything about Stader?

Jim: Nope.

Ray: You every seen "Stader Splints" on a man with a broken jaw?

Jim: Oh. Yeah,

Ray: He worked on dogs and we reassembled dogs that were hit --

Jim: I've put splints on broken dogs but I don't remember the name Stader.

Ray: Well, they called 'em external splints later on.

Jim: Oh, sure, yeah.

Ray: Can you imagine during the Civil War how many less amputees there would have been if they had had Stader splints then?

Jim: Perhaps.

Ray: We had a school—

Jim: They couldn't stop the infections.

Ray: Yeah, but we had a school teacher over in Middleton that broke both arms in seven places and they put an external splint on there and lined 'em all up. They couldn't put a cast on it. The only other thing would have been to amputate. So they put the splint on there, lined up all the bones and she could actually write on the blackboard with that ugly thing hanging on there.

Jim: (laughs) Right, but it worked.

Ray: But it worked, and then later on they took that off and put her in a fiberglass thing to finish the healing. But her arm, you can't hardly see, except for a couple little holes. Everything.

Jim: Good result.

Ray: Yeah, but even, I visited guys in the hospital where I looked down the whole ward and everybody on the whole ward was wearing some kind of a Stader Splint that was –

Jim: Which ward was this?

Ray: In the hospital.

Jim: When were you in the hospital? Or, you mean - how did we get to the hospital?

Ray: I was there. I had a broken neck.

Jim: Well, I don't want to - was this before while you were in the Navy?

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: Oh, well, I don't want to get too far ahead here.

Ray: Okay.

Jim: I gotta take it in order.

Ray: Okay.

Jim: So when you first went in, your basic was how long?

Ray: Eight weeks.

Jim: And then where did you go?

Ray: From there to Norman, Oklahoma to mechanics school. I wrote a perfect score on a mechanical aptitude test.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: Even though I wanted to be a doctor. (both laugh) I never should have put it down on my entrance write up.

Jim: For the Navy, yeah.

Ray: Because whenever there was a crash, guess who got to pick up pieces.

Jim: Oh good, then you practiced medicine before you were ready, that's all.

Ray: That's the result of it.

Jim: What's that?

Ray: That's my service number from World War II.

Jim: How did that happen to tattoo on your arm?

Ray: Because there was a midair collision and all's I could find was arms and legs and I didn't know who they belonged to. And –

Jim: But that's on you, you knew where you were.

Ray: Yeah, but I got blasted that weekend and came back with a tattoo on that arm so at least they knew my parts. We just packaged stuff up and sent them to people; we didn't know who they belonged to.

Jim: But your arm was attached to you so --

Ray: Well, I had it tattooed because, I wasn't in the collision –

Jim: Right.

Ray: But I wanted to be able to identify me, if they wanted to send my parts home to my mother.

Jim: Yeah, but maybe that part is not the part that tattoo --

Ray: I had a bracelet made for my ankles, my wrist --

Jim: Boy, that too.

Ray: I started wearing my dog tags -

Jim: You should have gone into life insurance. That seems to be your interest there.

Ray: Well, it just, I wanted something of me to be sent home.

Jim: At least one part.

Ray: At least one part.

Jim: Ha, ha, that's cute (??). I never heard anyone in the –

Ray: Well, I could of quit flying but I just loved to fly.

Jim: Okay. At Oklahoma you're rated as a mechanic.

Ray: Aviation machinist mate. I went from there to Purcell, Oklahoma to gunnery school.

Jim: That was just in addition to your other jobs.

Ray: Right.

Jim: To finish up.

Ray: And I had one week of radar training.

Jim: Now gunnery, was that aerial gunnery?

Ray: Yes. Aerial --

Jim: So you were always into air here.

Ray: Yeah. Then I went from there to Lake City, Florida and the first week I was there they had the midair collision. Okay?

Jim: At your base?

Ray: Yeah, it was both planes from our base and they were both turning in for a landing, and somebody wasn't watching and they midaired and dropped into the swamps. I spent a week in the swamps –

Jim: Did everybody turn to go out and help pick up, was that the deal?

Ray: Everybody that, some of the guys walked out there and got sick to their stomach --

Jim: Sure.

Ray: And because I had helped a mortician and I had worked, wanted to be a doctor.

Jim: And with tigers? (laughs)

Ray: Yeah. But I had worked with a mortician and I had even worked with a coroner. I really wanted to be a doctor and that was in my record and so, boom I was out there.

Jim: Just picking up pieces and –

Ray: Just going around picking up pieces and trying to figure out why the midair. Being a mechanic I wanted to see if I could see any instruments or anything but it was sinkin'.

Jim: So after that where was your next assignment?

Ray: It was to Buford, South Carolina.

Jim: For what purpose?

Ray: Continued training air to air gunnery.

Jim: Well, you were heading for then a TBF. Is that your (unintelligible) --

Ray: No, no.

Jim: To be the rear gunner on a TBF?

Ray: No, we were flying in Vega Venturas, PV-1s.

Jim: I know them.

Ray: Okay. They --

Jim: Not the world's greatest airplane by the way.

Ray: No, it was known as the flying gas tank.

Jim: Right.

Ray: I sat on a 165 gallon tank. My navigation station was a 265 gallon tank. That was my platform for writing.

Jim: Wonderful, wonderful.

Ray: There was a thirty gallon oil tank just across the way so I could keep oil pressure in the engines (laughs).

Jim: If your mother knew that she'd of written the Navy and told 'em to take you off that job. (laughs)

Ray: If my mother had known that or if, my mother didn't even know that I met my brother in the Philippines and my cousin who was raised at our house.

Jim: Oh really.

Ray: He was in the Army. My brother was with the Marines. He was a medic with the Marines.

Jim: He had gone in before.

Ray: Oh yeah, he was in, 1937 he went in.

Jim: Oh, a regular, from the old time.

Ray: He spent twenty-six years in.

Jim: Wow.

Ray: I only was a short timer, twenty-one years though.

Jim: That's wonderful.

Ray: I envy the guy no end. He got three Purple Hearts, the Navy Cross, Army-Navy-Marine Medal at Okinawa. He was bayoneted, he was shot, and he –

Jim: They couldn't kill him.

Ray: And he was stabbed by a Japanese sergeant. They were trying to save his life.

Jim: The Japanese sergeant they were trying to save?

Ray: Yeah. And the Japanese sergeant got a hold of an instrument and stabbed my brother and he got a Purple Heart for that and he turned around to go back to work on him and there was three Marine bayonets stickin' in the sergeant then. They didn't want, they didn't want him to - the corpsmen were their most prized possessions. They didn't want anything to happen with their medical people, because that was their life saving. We had over 100 people stop by our house after World War II and want to see my brother and thank him for saving their lives. And one, a couple of people wanted to see "the angel", because they knew they were dead and all of the sudden this guy was smiling down at 'em telling them, "You're gonna live."

Jim: Incredible.

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: Incredible.

Ray: My mom kept this logbook and two of the Marine captains said that he was recommended for the Congressional Medal of Honor -

Jim: Mm hmm.

Ray: One for carrying this Marine down two miles to an aide station minus his left leg and he said the whole time he was carrying him down he had blood spurting from a bayonet wound, and he wouldn't stop to take care of himself. The other one, he walked into no man's land and picked up four Marines, under fire, and carried them back to his aid station, and he went out to get a fifth man and the firing stopped, and he got eight of 'em altogether back to the aid station.

Jim: I'm surprised he didn't get a Congressional Medal of honor. How that didn't get –

Ray: There were no Naval officers -

Jim: Oh.

Ray: Witnessing --

Jim: Witnessing it.

Ray: Marine officers yes, but no Naval officers.

Jim: Oh, that's unfortunate.

Ray: I've been workin' on it for years.

Jim: Well, let's get back to you.

Ray: Okay.

Jim: So, you start training and did you have it into in an airplane now with a crew and all that?

Ray: Oh yeah. The Vega Ventura's a six man crew.

Jim: And where did the Vega Ventura go?

Ray: Well, we went, from there we went to night vision school in San Diego and then to Moffat Field, California, which was a blimp base.

Jim: Were you going these places individually or were you in a group?

Ray: No, no, we were in a group.

Jim: Yeah.

Ray: We went there in a group, and there we got our permanent crews in a squadron called

Jim: Tell me about the ship, now, 'cause I've never interviewed anyone that has been in a Vega Ventura. So, what three men? Four men?

Ray: Six.

Jim: Six, okay.

Ray: Pilot, co-pilot, radio man, upper gunner, belly gunner,

Jim: And tail gunner.

Ray: Navigator.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: No, the belly gunner was the tail gunner.

Jim: I see.

Ray: It had a step up in the back, and you could lay on your belly and see --

Jim: You were listed as the navigator.

Ray: Well, navigator, gunner whatever position. I kept track of everything because I remember our navigation training on the West Coast. It said "Cross all railroad tracks and major highways at right angles. The Air Force is navigating today." (Laughs) But there was no railroad tracks or anything out at sea, but that was the Air Force. Method of navigating, following highways. (laughs)

Jim: Well, it's okay, if the vision was good.

Ray: Yeah, but we --

Jim: So, how long did you train in California?

Ray: Well, we were there - we left California on a ship. They offloaded us, let's see, it was the beginning of '45, yeah. They offloaded us, they put us on a ship, offloaded us at Kaneohe Bay and we --

Jim: How many? Just your crew and not the plane?

Ray: No, twelve planes.

Jim: Oh, they must've lifted your plane aboard ship then.

Ray: Yeah, they put onboard ship. We couldn't fly 'em off the ship --

Jim: No, of course not.

Ray: Because they were too big, and when they offloaded us at Kaneohe and we were able to fly to our --

Jim: Kenhoe is where?

Ray: In Hawaii.

Jim: I know, but where exactly, I don't know.

Ray: It's the opposite side from Honolulu.

Jim: Okay. (unintelligible)

Ray: It's a Marine station was there.

Jim: I'm thinking of Hilo as Marine station, but that was a different island.

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: That was another, different city I mean.

Ray: Kaneohe was on the south part of the island and it was kind of separated. It had an inlet and the PGMs [Patrol Gunboats, Motor] used to take off in the inlet.

Jim: Okay, so you're stationed there and again practicing backing and - -

Ray: No.

Jim: No practicing?

Ray: No, we just fueled the planes and went south to -?

Jim: Johnston?

Ray: No, oh come on

Jim: South.

Ray: My memory, Tinian.

Jim: Oh, to Tinian. That's a long hop.

Ray: Yeah, but it made it.

Jim: Obviously.

Ray: Yeah. We fueled everything—

Jim: Nonstop?

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: I'm surprised. That's a long walk.

Ray: It's not near as far as it was --

Jim: When I flew over to Korea I stopped several places, Hawaii; and took a plane, same plane, started from Hawaii morning went Johnston, Kwajalein, Guam and then Saipan, maybe not Saipan but Okinawa and then --

Ray: Yeah, we went --

Jim: We only flew eight hours at a time. So you must of flown longer.

Ray: We had enough fuel with our belly tank.

Jim: Ah, there you go.

Ray: I hated to have those on because it increased our range but also our time in the air.

Jim: It sure did.

Ray: So anyway.

Jim: So you ended up in Tinian.

Ray: Yeah, and there we flew low level, shoot up the rowboats, fishing boats, anything that could carry a radio, because the B-29's were going.

Jim: I was going to say the B-29's were operating on Tinian at that time, by the time you get there.

Ray: Yeah, and we were clearing the lower --

Jim: Clearing where?

Ray: Anywhere north of there, headed towards Japan we would go out for six hours and --

Jim: Up to Okinawa?

Ray: Shoot everything that was in the water that could carry a radio and then come back again. We lost nine planes in six months doing that.

Jim: Well, what level would you fly at?

Ray: 100 to 200 feet.

Jim: Yeah, well that's a dangerous level to fly at. (unintelligible)

Ray: Well, anybody with a pea shooter could --

Jim: Injure you, right.

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: They could bring your plane down as well.

Ray: Well, I think that's what happened. We never knew what happened to any of the aircraft.

Jim: Oh, guys just didn't come back. You never found 'em or saw 'em or --

Ray: We came back --

Jim: With holes in your planes?

Ray: Oh yeah, but not that bad. We landed and we landed on Marsden Matting, you know what that was.

Jim: No.

Ray: That's the interlocking steel.

Jim: Oh, thought it was the name of your place. All right, interlocking steel, yeah.

Ray: Yeah, runway, and it was wet, rainy and we started to slide and we went off the side of the runway.

Jim: Wonderful.

Ray: And --

Jim: At Tinian.

Ray: Yeah, and the right gear collapsed and that's when --

Jim: I trust this was after you, on your landing when that happened,

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: Not on takeoff.

Ray: No, it was on landing.

Jim: Okay.

Ray: The tank I was sitting on was empty. Had it been full I would have been fine, but it was empty, and it blew up, and I had the emergency hatch open, which was the escape hatch in a crash. It was also where the navigator's dome was.

Jim: Uh huh.

Ray: And we had 'em both locked down for landing and that's where I got ejected from the aircraft. (laughs) Got the first automatic ejection.

Jim: (laughs) Well, there ya go.

Ray: I went 168 feet, landed in a water filled ditch alongside of the runway.

Jim: Conscious?

Ray: Huh?

Jim: Conscious?

Ray: Well, broke my neck, crushed my kidneys.

Jim: But you were conscious.

Ray: Conscious, got up out of the ditch, looked around, ran back toward the aircraft, 'cause they couldn't get into the plane, the crash crew, they didn't know how.

Jim: Because of (unintelligible)?

Ray: Well, they didn't know how. I got the hatch open and --

Jim: Oh.

Ray: Both pilots had their arms broken. The radio man broke his pelvis in seven places, --

Jim: Boy, really hit that thing hard.

Ray: Never, never was able ta, well, it was a short stop, ya know, quick.

Jim: I was gonna say, it must of still had a considerable speed

Ray: Yeah, the –

Jim: You must have just hit that runway and then went off right away.

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: Yeah.

Ray: Fortunately we had a torpedo, internal, that's what made us heavy. Don't ask me why we were carrying a torpedo, but we were.

Jim: You never did drop one?

Ray: Oh yeah we did, but we never –

Jim: This time you didn't.

Ray: We didn't. Didn't have occasion to.

Jim: Well, fortunately that did not explode.

Ray: It didn't explode. (laughs)

Jim: Otherwise we wouldn't be sitting here.

Ray: Oh, I wouldn't, definitely I wouldn't be. And then, but the crew was sent back to the States. Our squadron was dismantled completely. They turned our planes over to another outfit and I can tell because in the book I have at home it shows we had an octopus painted out from the turret and we were the "Devilfish Aviators."

Jim: Oh.

Ray: And that was our VPB-150. And we went back to the States and I peed blood for a little while and –

Jim: You injured your bladder.

Ray: My neck didn't seem to bother me too much.

Jim: They put you in a --

Ray: No, no

Jim: Thing around your neck.

Ray: They just, they just said --

Jim: Did nothing.

Ray: They just said, actually, my record reads that I had kidney stones. I don't know who the doctor was that did the examination --

Jim: What's up with that?

Ray: I don't know. They were reserve doctors, some of 'em were.

Jim: Uh huh.

Ray: I—

Jim: Non- urologist, obviously.

Ray: Yeah. But anyway --

Jim: But you had subsequent x-rays that proved that you didn't have any stones, I trust.

Ray: Yeah. Well, I had x-rays then that didn't show anything.

Jim: Did you have any difficulty urinating afterwards?

Ray: No, no, except that I urinated blood for a while. Now I have problems.

Jim: Pardon me?

Ray: Now I have problems. When I have to go, I have to go now.

Jim: Well, you need your prostate resected. I know all about that. That's the kind of work I did.

Ray: They just went through the whole thing with me and everything is supposedly fine. I'm on a --

Jim: At the Veterans Hospital?

Ray: Huh? No, no. At Meriter?

Jim: Meriter?

Ray: Yeah. They—

Jim: Who worked in there?

Ray: Huh?

Jim: Who looked at your bladder?

Ray: No, it was at St. Mary's.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: Doc -

Jim: Waters?

Ray: But anyway, they didn't go in my bladder.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: They did the prostrate, they did the --

Jim: Nobody's looked in your bladder though.

Ray: No.

Jim: With a scope?

Ray: No, not for a long, long time. But they did, they put me on a medication for my prostate.

Jim: Infection. Well, it will help you urinate.

Ray: Yeah, it's "low" somethin'.

Jim: Did it help?

Ray: No.

Jim: I didn't think so.

Ray: I still got ta go.

Jim: Yeah, my partner – I used to do urology, and so my partner thought I'd try this. I said, "Well, let's try it." But I, after a few months, it didn't help any.

I'm on a resection so I made 'em operate on me and (unintelligible) that thing out.

Ray: Yeah, but anyway, I can live with it. I don't feel - I'm 76. I'll last out. I kind of lucked out. My brother is 81. We're survivors.

Jim: Right, but you still might have to have something done with that prostate.

Ray: Unh.

Jim: How often do you get up at night?

Ray: Three, four times.

Jim: You need it done. It's a nice operation. It stands the test of the time, and It's been wonderful for most people. I did five thousand of those operations.

Ray: When I'm ready to leave will you write down what you did and --

Jim: Sure.

Ray: Let me know so I can show it. I go to Dr. Schmidt over in Sun Prairie Clinic. Paul Schmidt.

Jim: Mmm Hmm. I knew his father. Okay, we're getting' off the track here. I'm sorry about that.

Ray: I'm sorry.

Jim: No, it's, that's my fault.

Ray: My arm --

Jim: Oh, your arm's okay.

Ray: I was able to move and everything else. The ordnance man had two leg casts and the radio man was in a body cast because of his pelvis.

Jim: But you were not on anything.

Ray: I wasn't on anything.

Jim: You had some cuts, bruises --

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: Okay.

Ray: And the pilots were healed up within about eight weeks.

Jim: Did you go, head back to the States and discharged?

Ray: Oh no, no, no.

Jim: For a while? No?

Ray: No, we went right back over to our regular squadron areas and -

Jim: How long were you home?

Ray: We were there [Approx. 1 min. pause in tape] until they loaded us on another carrier and we were ready to go again and this time all my briefings were for Yokosuka Harbor.

Jim: So this is after the war.

Ray: No.

Jim: Still --

Ray: The war was still on --

Jim: Okay.

Ray: We --

Jim: So you were only home about a month then?

Ray: Oh, a little bit more.

Jim: Okay.

Ray: Not too much. But we were on another carrier and --

Jim: Excuse me, the same crew?

Ray: Pretty much, a different radioman, the pilots, one a new pilot, --

Jim: Same airplane?

Ray: Same type. Oh no, this was the Vega Ventura – this was the Harpoon, the PV-2.

Jim: Oh, okay.

Ray: Okay? Same airplane, longer wings, bigger tail, slower. (both laugh)

Jim: Oh, my.

Ray: We took ‘em up on the rocket range and almost shed the wings on a couple of ‘em because we were divin’ ‘em too fast. We put on a carrier and we never got to go to sea because they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. I could of kissed old Harry Truman –

Jim: I’ll bet.

Ray: On both cheeks. Upright or bending over. (laughs)

Jim: Saved your life and millions (??) more.

Ray: Definitely; he saved our life and lots of people.

Jim: So, then your duty changed. Everybody just sort of sat around.

Ray: Well, I –

Jim: Waitin’ to see when it was their turn to go home or –

Ray: I was sent to New York and I went on shore patrol in New York.

Jim: Had you thought about staying in as a regular at this time?

Ray: Pretty much. I was there for three months. I extended for six months.

Jim: Doing shore patrol.

Ray: Shore patrol. Yeah, I enjoyed that.

Jim: What did that involve?

Ray: Well, bein’ like a policeman.

Jim: I mean, where and when?

Ray: In New York City.

- Jim: In New York City. Really?
- Ray: Oh yeah, right in New York City.
- Jim: Pullin' sailors out of bars and puttin' 'em in paddy wagons to take 'em back to base.
- Ray: Back to shore patrol headquarters. We were in a police station at 54th Street and 8th Avenue. And we would take 'em back there and sober 'em up and let 'em go in the morning. Usually no charges.
- Jim: Oh really.
- Ray: We picked up a Marine one night. Have you ever seen a "bamboo body"?
- Jim: No.
- Ray: This is a restraint. It wraps 'em all up in bamboo and that's the only guy I ever seen sit up with a "bamboo body" on. He had been in a prison camp and we didn't know it and he sobered up enough to see that he was in some kind of a cell and he (grunts) and that whole thing just "scrunch, scrunch, (laughs) scrunch." We finally talked him into calming down (both laugh). I never wanta - when I took him in there I had a "pinky hold" on him. Have you ever had somebody do a "pinky hold" on you?
- Jim: Did that work?
- Ray: Yeah, yeah. Just let me –
- Jim: Missed it (??) oh yeah.
- Ray: And he was subdued just with that.
- Jim: Sure.
- Ray: And you can pretty much take care of anybody. If you can get two fingers you're even better, but we would put a, that's what we and, but the police weren't sure about him, so they put him in this "bamboo body". They were gonna take him to Bellevue and we finally got talking to him and he—
- Jim: Settled down.
- Ray: —calmed down a little bit. I've seen some weird things in New York. Some guy we picked up one night had \$1,500 back pay. He's separated but still in uniform. The next night he had about \$1,000, still.

Jim: He was picked up a second time.

Ray: Yeah. One night he spent 500 bucks and –

Jim: Well, at least somebody's relieved him of \$500.

Ray: Yeah, but the next day we found him. They had a big orange information booth down there, Times Square, and we found him leaning against the information booth. "How are you doin' tonight?" No answer, eyes were open, a stare. He was dead.

Jim: Oh my God.

Ray: Some gal –

Jim: Vertical?

Ray: Yeah, some gal was huggin' and kissin' him, put a knife in his back and held him there and hugged him and kissed him until he got stiff. She must have been a beauty. I wouldn't want to meet the girl. (laughs) But he was there, deader than a doornail.

Jim: I'll be damned.

Ray: I guess, she, yeah, she relived him of everything else.

Jim: Oh, I'm sure she helped him with that.

Ray: But it was an interesting tour.

Jim: So then, what was your next move?

Ray: Our next move was, I was separated. I went back to high school, 115 of us were in high school. They expelled 108 of us for rowdiness, they called it. We weren't allowed to talk to a girl in the hallways, we weren't allowed to go to lunch in the lunchroom.

Jim: This is guys that had been to war?

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: Yeah, see that's not gonna work.

Ray: Yeah. We weren't allowed to talk to girls in the lunchroom. We weren't allowed anywhere in the building five minutes after the bell rung. We

couldn't attend any sporting events. We couldn't do anything that anybody else would do ordinarily.

Jim: They assumed you were trouble?

Ray: Yeah. Well --

Jim: Too old.

Ray: You gotta remember our high school principal was a colonel in the Army Air Corps and he went seven miles to the base and that's where he spent the whole war.

Jim: That was his experience.

Ray: Yeah, and he just said, "You GI." Everything he said was "You GIs." That's all. The only guy that I really was Gus Wersocki (??), he was one of the coaches and Spring Gardner was another one of the coaches, he was in the Navy and the math teacher, Mr. Stunt, he was in the Navy, and Gus Wersocki (??) was a master sergeant in the Army and they were the only ones we could communicate with. We had some homeroom teacher in the morning and he used to come in and say "You flunkies this" and "You flunkies that." Somebody finally told him to watch his language and he told 'em to shut up and the kid popped 'em.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: And he got expelled.

Jim: How about the teacher?

Ray: No, nothin' happened to him. He lost his teeth.

Jim: Well, I was gonna say, I bet he didn't use that expression --

Ray: Oh, he continued.

Jim: Did he?

Ray: I popped him.

Jim: So you hit him too.

Ray: I got expelled too. Six months after I was back in the Navy we got a thing from the board of education that this teacher was gone, the principal was gone, this was gone, welcome back to school. I went to see my

commanding officer and told him I could go back to school. He says, "You got six years?" (laughs) So, I was then put onboard the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was one of the first carriers at sea with a steel flight deck.

Jim: Right. Remember that.

Ray: We got in a storm in the South Atlantic, not too far in the South Atlantic. We washed planes off the flight deck, lost all our life rafts. They piped "All hands to lifejackets." One of the plane's tie down cables snapped and broke my leg. The other end of it hit a guy in the chest. He had sixty-seven stitches in his chest. I could see him breathing. They carried him down and I was still stuck to the deck. So I had to take out my dikes and cut the wires loose and --

Jim: (unintelligible) lucky you weren't killed.

Ray: Yeah. I'm lucky I didn't get washed overboard.

Jim: That's a long drop.

Ray: Yeah. But the, we got two forty-five degree rolls to starboard, three forty-three degrees rolls to port,

Jim: (unintelligible)

Ray: Eighty-eight degrees. Oh sure. Eighty-eight degrees, we had a six foot wave. Some of the centenary curtains got knocked out. We had a six foot wave goin' back and forth on the hangar deck. Planes were sliding around, tractors, fifteen ton --

Jim: Dropped in the water?

Ray: No. Fifteen ton mules were sliding back and forth and --

Jim: How did they keep on going right off the flight deck?

Ray: This was on the hangar deck and they were hitting things and making loud, loud noises --

Jim: (unintelligible)

Ray: But anyway, we finally got there was a battleship alongside of us that was taking water over the mast head plowing.

Jim: Whoa.

- Ray: The destroyers were going over one and under two. We had over 100 destroyer men come aboard after for surgery, because we had surgery onboard. It was really somethin' and they were light on fuels so they had to take on sea water for ballast.
- Jim: When was this exactly now?
- Ray: 1946, in the summer.
- Jim: Summer of '46.
- Ray: I have a feeling it was the aftermath of a hurricane that
- Jim: Probably.
- Ray: 'cause it was big long rollers-
- Jim: Exactly.
- Ray: Just about on the equator, in the Atlantic.
- Jim: Yeah, yeah.
- Ray: So.
- Jim: Tough, tough, tough.
- Ray: But anyway then we got back into port and there sat the USS Midway and I had orders, even though my leg was broken, I had orders to go aboard the Midway 'cause they were goin' out for another two months and I went up to Comm. Erlant (?), Commandant Erlant (?) and asked what happened to my request to go to electronic school because I wrote a perfect ARI/GCT combination and I should have been, I had 100, not a 100, I didn't have 160, I had 141. It was high enough that I could do anything.
- Jim: Sure.
- Ray: Any school I wanted, and I wanted to go to electronics, and they said, "Well, your request was denied; they couldn't afford to loose ya." I said, "Well if they couldn't afford to lose me how come they transferred me to another carrier?" (laughs) He rewrote my orders and sent me to electronic school.
- Jim: Oh, great (?).

Ray: I had everything with me because I'd been transferred so he --

Jim: (unintelligible)

Ray: Again, he saved my life (laughs).

Jim: Probably (??) So where and when was the electronic school?

Ray: It was in Corpus Christi, Texas. I've got it all written down here in front of these things --

Jim: Oh, is that my copy? I thought that was yours.

Ray: Well, I can give it to ya. I --

Jim: I can just copy it too.

Ray: Yeah, if you would.

Jim: Sure. Why don't I just put this through the copier?

Ray: Okay.

Jim: Then it'll save me some writing it and also to make sure have it correct.

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: So electronic school in Corpus. Did you enjoy that?

Ray: Yeah, but --

Jim: A little more? (??)

Ray: Yeah, but then we went from --

Jim: What was your rating then by that time?

Ray: It was Aviation Machinist Mate 2nd.

Jim: 2nd.

Ray: When I graduated from school --

Jim: I would assume you'd be at least first by then.

- Ray: Well, see, when I got out and came back in they busted me one grade. See I was AMM second when I got out. When I came back in the ratings were all filled up so they busted me one grade. I went back to third class and then I just made second class again when I went to electronic school. And after you graduated from there if your grades were high enough they advanced you another grade and I came out of there as a AT 1 and then they made an instructor out of me.
- Jim: In Corpus? Same school?
- Ray: No, no, no we had transferred up to Memphis's.
- Jim: Oh, okay.
- Ray: And when we got up to Memphis I had gone home on leave and we got - I went back to Memphis and my future intended came to Memphis and we were married in the chapel on the base.
- Jim: Oh, that's nice.
- Ray: For the next sixteen years we moved eighteen times. (laughs)
- Jim: And she stayed with ya?
- Ray: She's still with me fifty-four years.
- Jim: She ought a have a medal for patience. (laughs)
- Ray: For livin' with me she should have a dozen of 'em. (laughs)
- Jim: So.
- Ray: I commend her. (both laughs). We have—
[End of tape 1, side A]
- Ray: —never really had a serious argument because we both said that if we started to get irritated we would keep our mouth shut for an hour --
- Jim: That was the rule?
- Ray: And then come back and discuss it calmly and that's the rule and it worked.
- Jim: It served you well.
- Ray: Yeah, very well.

Jim: That's a good idea (??).

Ray: It still goes this way.

Jim: Well, that was boring work after all the history you had.

Ray: Well, then I went from there. I finally said, "I want to get out of here. I'll do anything." So they sent me to Quonset Point, Rhode Island to a squadron --

Jim: Of what?

Ray: ADs.

Jim: Okay. ADs. Yeah, I saw those in Korea.

Ray: Yeah, okay. I flew off the carrier; I was a crewman on the ADs, the NL night operator.

Jim: I'm trying to figure the ADs out as big blue things. I remember those.

Ray: Yeah, a single engine, 3350 engine.

Jim: Yeah.

Ray: A big engine.

Jim: And your position was in the back.

Ray: In the back, just behind the armor plate. (laughs)

Jim: (laughs) You were expendable.

Ray: Well, that - we flew in white hats and dungarees. The pilots had G-Suits and flight suits and everything else.

Jim: (laughs) Didn't you mention that there's a discrepancy here, get somebody's attention?

Ray: I wanted to fly. I needed the flight pay.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: I wanted to send it home.

Jim: Yeah. How much more was flight pay, do you recall?

Ray: Fifty percent more than your salary.

Jim: That's substantial.

Ray: Oh yeah, yeah.

Jim: (unintelligible) What ship did they --

Ray: *USS Bon Homme Richard.*

Jim: My partner, Dick Graf, father of the, his son is in the office now, but we started.

Ray: Ahah.

Jim: Dick Graf was a physician on the *Bon Homme Richard*, after the war, about the same time you were. October.

Ray: I might even have a picture of him. I got pictures of the whole crew and the medical - and that Graf --

Jim: Was a doctor. Yeah, Dick Graf was on the *Bon Homme Richard*.

Ray: That --

Jim: After the war.

Ray: Yeah. Did he make a Korean cruise?

Jim: No, I don't think so.

Ray: Oh, okay.

Jim: I think he just went (unintelligible).

Ray: 'Cause I spent sixty-five days --

Jim: Yeah, but I'm not sure exactly when he was on.

Ray: I got some. My sed rate was running somewhere in the neighborhood of forty to forty-seven.

Jim: Oh?

- Ray: And they put me in a bunk and wouldn't let me even raise my head up.
- Jim: They checked your thyroid and -
- Ray: They did everything, they checked everything. We pulled into port and one of the ships at sea, the Boxer had a fire. So right away, we didn't even stay in port. I was supposed to be transferred to the hospital in Japan, I was sixty-five days down there but I didn't think they wanted to leave me there because I was performing as a corpsman.
- Jim: (laughs)
- Ray: I was laying in the bed and anybody that needed a shot. You know when you go in and out of Japan a lot of people need shots. The guys would back into the room where I was and I had the needles laid out and I popped 'em in the butt. (both laugh).
- Jim: Were they short of corpsman? How did you get that job?
- Ray: They were really short of corpsman.
- Jim: I guess so.
- Ray: And anyway --
- Jim: You've got an airplane mechanic doin' --
- Ray: Well, I was a technician now in electronics.
- Jim: Excuse me. Wrong term.
- Ray: Yeah, electronics technician. (Jim laughs) I knew where the stern was. (laughs) But I knew more guys by their ass than I did by their face. (laughs)
- Jim: (laughs) A guy (??) could spend a career doin' that.
- Ray: But anyway, they finally, somebody smuggled a bottle of booze aboard for me, one of the corpsmen. Two days later, after I had a couple of stiff drinks I was fine. My sed rate went back to normal, but even the doctor said, "You're just too long down here." He brought me a couple of shots of medicinal stuff that they had in the ready room.
- Jim: So you didn't get back in an airplane?

- Ray: I didn't fly again until, came back to the States, back to Quonset Point, Rhode Island.
- Jim: You got off the ship and off (unintelligible).
- Ray: Got off the ship. Went back to Memphis.
- Jim: (unintelligible)
- Ray: To teach again and this time I went through B School. The B school was forty-four weeks.
- Jim: I don't - what's that?
- Ray: It's advanced electronics.
- Jim: Oh, I see.
- Ray: But I had already, when I was there before wrote the curriculum and text -
-
- Jim: Oh.
- Ray: For the B School. So I went back there. It was a forty-four week course. I went through it in twenty weeks, but they still kept me on as an instructor. But I got to go as a flight instructor for radar and I used to take four men up with me everyday and teach 'em the fundamentals of radar and what have ya. And then from there I was sent to Jacksonville, Florida. I was supposed to go to shore duty there but instead I went to, got there on Friday, rented a house on Saturday, moved the furniture in. The moving company had the stuff in the truck and they didn't want to put it in the warehouse so they moved it right into the house. I didn't have any money to pay the rent and an officer down the street gave me all the money I needed. He says "You can pay me back", and I didn't know who he was, except that I met him on the ship. (laughs) He was in another squadron and I guess he knew that I was goin' on the ship. I went to the "Red Rippers" VF-11, a fighter squadron and they flew -
- Jim: Where?
- Ray: Banshee - 3's. I was on the *USS Coral Sea*.
- Jim: Oh, where was that stationed?
- Ray: Mayport was the homeport.

Jim: Mayport?

Ray: Florida.

Jim: Oh, Florida. That's where you got aboard?

Ray: Yeah, that's where I went aboard.

Jim: And you flew in A-3s?

Ray: No. No, no. These were F3-Hs. The --

Jim: Oh yeah. I think I saw one of those.

Ray: But I was a deck, electronics. I got a few citations for 100% performance of all the electronics. They never had a plane down for electronics.

Jim: That's good.

Ray: It was always bad engines.

Jim: Your job was aboard ship then, not flying.

Ray: Not flying on that particular one, but I did meet an astronaut.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: Dick Gordon was onboard the ship. I later flew with him.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: When I went over to get some flight time he was over getting flight time so I went flyin' with him there, and I went flyin' with that other officer who wanted some pictures of Mt. Vesuvius. I thought he was just wanting to take some pictures of Mt. Vesuvius. He said "Make sure the camera is tied in and your safety belt is buckled at all times while we're flying." We went down and took --

Jim: What were you flying in?

Ray: A good old I J-Bird, SNJ North American.

Jim: Put-put putting along.

Ray: Texan trainer and we were flying. We took some pictures at Capri and then we were climbed up and we flew toward Vesuvius and I took some

pictures of Vesuvius, and all of the sudden he rolls that plane over and we fly over and I got some pictures of Vesuvius like you wouldn't believe, right down in the crater. (laughs)

Jim: He didn't tell you that part (laughs).

Ray: But we went back and landed and I said, "You've got your pictures." I said, "You almost got a little extra." (laughs)

Jim: (laughs) One less customer.

Ray: I said, "You might check the seat in the plane for bite marks."

Jim: Wow.

Ray: But anyway we went back in and landed. The pilots I said, we had the crew over for night flying and nobody wanted to go night flying anymore.

Jim: No kiddin'.

Ray: Because the Italians were flying and they were flying Vampires. And they were landing four planes at each end of the runway and they had middle of the runway collisions.

Jim: I imagine.

Ray: Well, they declared emergencies, forty-five minutes everybody would stay up 'till the last minute and declare an emergency and "pheeew." (laughs) They got in, threw their helmets in the cockpits and took off.

Jim: There's a (unintelligible) the same way in (unintelligible)

Ray: Just to show ya how well they were formation flying, while we were over there they planted a plane in apartment number 1, apartment number 3, apartment number 5, and apartment number 7 in the same complex. All of 'em died.

Jim: Of course.

Ray: But they were watchin' the main pilot. I guess that was their formation flying was watchin' him --

Jim: It worked good right until the last second.

Ray: I don't know what would happen if they would totally split off in flight. (laughs)

- Jim: Yeah. Italians are daredevils.
- Ray: Yeah. Anyway then we came back to, that was, let's see July '54, *Coral Sea*, Jacksonville. We went numerous places.
- Jim: Did you round Korea?
- Ray: No, in the Mediterranean.
- Jim: You were always in the Mediterranean then?
- Ray: Yeah. Yeah. We went to Gibraltar, Barcelona, Salonika, Athens, Cannes, Lisbon, Valencia, Naples, Marseille, Beirut.
- Jim: Did you miss the flying?
- Ray: Well, I got to do some. We had some A-Js aboard and I flew in the Savages. Just to keep some time in. Genoa back to Gibraltar then to Mayport. Then from Mayport, at Mayport I made chief technician.
- Jim: Good, finally made it.
- Ray: Yeah and then I was sent to the Naval Air Development Unit at South Weymouth, Massachusetts.
- Jim: I never heard of it.
- Ray: Well, I was going to MIT also.
- Jim: Oh, I see.
- Ray: I had courses at MIT.
- Jim: Was this a think tank you were going to or --
- Ray: Somewhat like it. We developed radars. We had blimps there and we did icing testing on blimps. We had one blimp get six inches of ice on it and then it, ice peeled off one side and it almost did a bag over but it made it. While I was there I got to go to Ireland, to London, to Bordeaux, Lisbon, Port Lyautey, Lages in the Azores and then back to South Weymouth. That was to check out a new navigation system that I had put in installed, in. I put twenty-two miles of wire in a Super Connie, installing that. That plus I installed radars in a Connie II. I took it over the North Pole to check out the navigation system. We went up there eleven times. While I was there I talked to my brother who was at the South Pole.

Jim: Oh, how unique.

Ray: He was officer in charge of the aids station and we got a little write up in the Washington Post, “Brothers speak to the ends of the earth.”

Jim: How unusual.

Ray: Yeah, oh, while I was on the *Coral Sea* I was reading a letter from my mother saying your brother is on the *USS Denebola* on a boat and about that time we hear “ding ding, ding ding” the *USS Denebola* arriving. In other words, the skipper high lined onto our carrier.

Jim: Oh my.

Ray: And I got to talk to my brother for a half an hour on a bull horn (laughs). The Philippines, the Mediterranean, I’ve seen him more out of the country than in (laughs). So anyway, I talk to him at least once a month. He lives in Virginia.

Jim: Still today.

Ray: Yeah, his wife, of all the people –

Jim: That is the Marine now?

Ray: No, he was a Navy corpsman.

Jim: Oh, the other one was a Marine, the other brother.

Ray: Yeah, he was. Well, my dad was a Marine and so was my other brother but he didn’t get drafted until the day the war was over.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: He was a test pilot for Grumman Aircraft. They declared him essential but the day the war was over they drafted him. (Laughs) He spent two years as a Marine.

Jim: It’s nice to know the service hasn’t changed.

Ray: That’s dirty pool. But anyway after that I made ensign at the Naval Air Development, Unit.

Jim: By declamation? You’re the second one I’ve heard like this.

- Ray: Well, the Air Force came there. They had bought this navigation system. It's the one, that's in; they had it in the B-36. It's in the B-52. It was in the B-1 and parts of it are in the B-2. They wanted to make a captain out of me in the Air Force. This was -
- Jim: They wanted you to transfer over to the Air Force?
- Ray: Oh, yeah and I went to see my skipper to see if I could do it and he said yeah. Boy, that was a couple of generals and some colonels and -
- Jim: I suppose if you've got power you can do practically anything.
- Ray: Yeah. But anyway I went to see him; he says "How long did they give ya?" "About a week." So --
- Jim: Did you think about it?
- Ray: Oh yeah.
- Jim: Sure.
- Ray: That Friday comes an Admiral, two captains and a lieutenant commander and the Lieutenant Commander gave me a battery of tests on Friday. The following Monday I got commissioned in the Navy. (laughs)
- Jim: That's how they counteracted the Air Force?
- Ray: Yeah, an ensign in the Navy, and I went from there to Brunswick, Georgia to airborne CIC School. I was an airborne officer. Well, I had all kinds of time in there.
- Jim: Mmm Hmm.
- Ray: Okay, from there I went to the "Hurricane Hunters". I spent four years with the "Hurricane Hunters". [Approx. 20 sec. pause in tape]
- Jim: Jesus Christ, were you sick all the time?
- Ray: No, no. We flew in hurricanes at 400 to 800 feet, nothing above because if we did the turbulence would of ripped the wings off.
- Jim: Oh, that's how you stayed --
- Ray: We reported storm center every four hours day and night. We had one of our Super Connies in the storm all day long.

Jim: How long was your duty? I mean what was your usual?

Ray: Sixteen hour flights. Sometimes carried it through at twenty-six.

Jim: So you were at it sixteen hours?

Ray: At least.

Jim: With no sleep?

Ray: No. I was --

Jim: Right?

Ray: Part-time navigator, electronics officer, CIC. I, once you were within 200 miles of storm center you were in command of the aircraft, the CIC officer.

Jim: I'll be damned. But these are sixteen hours straight without -

Ray: Oh yeah.

Jim: So you had to just catnap or something like that?

Ray: Yeah, we -

Jim: Nodded off?

Ray: Call me back in fifteen minutes and I'll -

Jim: Oh.

Ray: Tell ya where to go next. (laughs)

Jim: Was that hard work? It sounds terrible.

Ray: At times, at times.

Jim: You had to trust your pilot flying at that low.

Ray: There was four pilots, they had bunks. We --

Jim: What was the aircraft? I missed that.

Ray: "Willy Victor, - 3", RC-121.

Jim: Oh, the famous spy ship.

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: The kind that the Chinese started out with.

Ray: No, that's a P-3.

Jim: Oh, but this 121 is similar though.

Ray: It is, well you know what the R7V was, a Constellation?

Jim: Yeah.

Ray: Three tails, had a big dome on the top and a big belly --

Jim: Right. Big radar on top, yeah.

Ray: It had a height finder on the top so we could get the cloud tops.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: A big belly radar on the bottom so we could check the rain.

Jim: That was called a what?

Ray: Well, in the Navy the ones we had were "Willy Victor - 3s" and the 3s were beefed up.

Jim: Right, but they're really Constellations that --

Ray: Yeah, we had some 2s but they didn't go into the storms. The 3s were the storm runners.

Jim: How did the planes tolerate those storms?

Ray: No sweat, no strain. We only had one --

Jim: knocked down?

Ray: No, well that was a P2V, a Neptune --

Jim: Uh huh. I know what that looks like.

Ray: Well, the flight engineer was put in the brig in Guantanamo Bay because he wanted to change the spark plugs before the plane flew and the pilot said he was going to take the plane and he said, "I won't fly in it."

Jim: So he gets in the brig?

Ray: Yeah. For cowardice.

Jim: Cowardice?

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: For intelligence would be a better --

Ray: Well, I would have given him a lifesaving medal because he saved his own life. The crew went in. They ran into a line squall and --

Jim: The engine quit and --

Ray: Engines quit and went down. So they had to release him. There was nobody to press charges.

Jim: Did somebody realize that this guy was right?

Ray: Oh sure.

Jim: That they needed some spark plugs.

Ray: Oh, sure, sure. He knew what it needed. He was the flight engineer. He was the one they're throwin' (??) the mague to --

Jim: Why would a pilot do you think did that?

Ray: Stupidity.

Jim: You think.

Ray: Yeah, we had some pretty --

Jim: I mean, at that level though, you would think with that much youth in command he would rely on guys that knew more about it than he did.

Ray: Some of those guys don't believe. I've given a pilot down on a flight check on a carrier and he gave me an up check because it was a fly off to go back to home port --

Jim: And he wanted to back to home port.

Ray: Yeah, he would be there a day or two ahead of the rest of the crew and I gave it a down check and he gave it an up check. I still gave it a down. He pointed at his shoulder to say, "I am an officer." He gave it an up check. He went right on into the drink (laughs).

Jim: He did?

Ray: Yup.

Jim: Never got a hold of him?

Ray: Huh?

Jim: Did they ever get him out?

Ray: Oh, yeah they found him.

Jim: What did he have to say to you then?

Ray: He complained about losing all his souvenirs. (laughs)

Jim: He never apologized to you?

Ray: No, why would he apologize to me?

Jim: You were tryin' to save him.

Ray: Yeah, but why would he apologize? After that I had to listen to every plane that went off. (both laugh) I was ticked off. That was just plain - he knew better. That's plain stupidity. We had a commanding officer- after I left the squadron the Commanding Officer that took over had signed some of his own paperwork off. He also signed the hurricane doctrine that was made up a bunch of meteorologists and radar people and engineers and pilots. We made up this doctrine about penetrating a storm between 400 and 800 feet and this commanding officer signed off on everything plus he signed off on being a pilot, that he was qualified, and he got out in a storm and went in at 1400 feet and they kept tellin' him to go down. He says, "Hurricane doctrine says, sir, you will fly in at 800." "Doctrine be damned." And he just, "Sir, I am in command." "The hell you are. I am the pilot; I'm the Commanding Officer of this squadron. Remember that." All of a sudden from 1400 feet to 6500 feet.

Jim: Scooped right up there?

Ray: Was just scooped right up in an updraft, ripped the wingtips off, the number three engine, kicked him back down again in another downdraft, came out at about 300 feet and they got level, and they brought it in. Scrapped the plane.

Jim: He survived that?

Ray: Yeah. They brought it in and landed it. He lost 1200 gallons of gasoline. It's a wonder they had enough to make it back, --

Jim: -- how he survived that --

Ray: But he landed it. Huh?

Jim: I said, did he survive that?

Ray: Well, his co-pilot knew enough how to trim things up to get 'em goin' (laughs). Anyway, they got back into the base and the admiral knew about it, sent for him and --

Jim: Sent him home I bet.

Ray: Well, he was in Roosevelt Roads and he sent him, Admiral wanted to see him in San Juan. Took his wings and took his commanding officer pin, everything away from him. Transferred him.

Jim: That's rough. Whattaya got left? They took his wings.

Ray: I don't know where they transferred him.

Jim: Probably he went home after that.

Ray: Yeah, but he had a short time to wait 'til he had his twenty in and I guess they felt sorry for him.

Jim: They let him have that. (unintelligible) That's awful.

Ray: From there, from the "Hurricane Hunters" I went to the Naval Air Test Center, and there I tested --

Jim: Where was that?

Ray: Patuxent River, Maryland.

Jim: Okay.

Ray: That's where I met more astronauts, because they go to training there.

Jim: Sure.

Ray: I had, I tested the P-3. The E-2s, which is the AWACS --

Jim: Oh yes.

Ray: Plane that flies off the carrier and the E-6, the Intruder.

Jim: Okay.

Ray: And the S-2F Skyhawk.

Jim: When you check 'em, you check the navigator system, the radar system and all that.

Ray: Yeah, I was electronics test officer there.

Jim: Oh, okay.

Ray: Plus a navigator. I also did the S-2F Skyhawk.

Jim: Hmm

Ray: That's the twin engine S-2F that could pick people up from the ground.

Jim: I might have seen pictures of that. I haven't seen the aircraft, but I know --

Ray: Okay. They took the radar out of the belly. I jumped out of there in a parachute which headed --

Jim: Parachute?

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: Who taught you that?

Ray: Huh?

Jim: Where did they teach you about jumping out in parachutes?

Ray: The Naval Air Test Center. They teach you everything. (laughs)

Jim: Today, I don't see you jumping out at 5,000 feet.

- Ray: You gotta remember I was 175 pounds, 5 foot 10, same exact size as the test dummies and I had to do all the testing before they put the dummies in. (both laugh)
- Jim: (laughs) You were testing the dummies.
- Ray: I did ejection seat testing.
- Jim: Jesus Christ, that'd rattle your cage.
- Ray: Yeah. We had a railroad track that went up 200 feet and I used to sit there, pull a thing and "peew" and we finally took a Martin Baker for the phantom --
- Jim: The Martin Baker is another machine.
- Ray: Standard seat that they use.
- Jim: Okay.
- Ray: And I got ejected from a jet later on when the after burner exploded instead of firing.
- Jim: Where was this?
- Ray: Patuxent River. Fortunately it was a test flight and they had fire trucks at every 1,000 feet so they put the fire out when I landed (laughs).
- Jim: They've been tryin' to kill you for a long time. Did that ever occur to you that somebody's out to getcha (laughs)?
- Ray: I went in VW-4 I went from ensign to JG to lieutenant. I did that in four years, a little bit ahead of schedule, and I arrived at service test as a lieutenant. I was in test and evaluation. I did the P-3, the E-6, the E-2 and the Skyhook. I jumped out to show the Seals how you could go down to the ground, set a charge, blow somethin' up, launch a balloon then they'd pick you back up again. I did that eight times in one week to show 'em that it could be done.
- Jim: They picked you up?
- Ray: Yeah.
- Jim: In the Skyhook?
- Ray: Yeah.

Jim: I wouldn't like that.

Ray: You face it, you put your arms out, it grabs you from behind, you go up about 100 feet and then you start to go.

Jim: Didn't that bother you at all?

Ray: I don't know.

Jim: It didn't seem it at the time.

Ray: That didn't bother me near as much - my wife found out about it. That's when -

Jim: That's another story right?

Ray: Well, the thing was I was selected for lieutenant commander and she says no, because I would have had to do ten more years.

Jim: That's where it came to an end?

Ray: That's where my naval career came to an end.

Jim: Because she found out what you were doing? (laughs)

Ray: Well, that, the ejection from the Phantom and on the P-3 we did a service ceiling at 38-9000 installed, not left right nose, tail it went and they didn't want to fall on their back so they chopped the throttles and we started tail first.

Jim: Wonderful --

Ray: Yeah. Turbo props flameout, down we went tail first,

Jim: Like a stone.

Ray: No control, to all hydraulic. We lost everything. Little by little she come around. At 10,000 feet it was falling flat. At six we had enough air to get the engine started again. Three we leveled off and went in and taxied into the - pilot wanted to taxi into the hangar. Now, I was maintenance officer there. I said the line, the crew captain wants it out on the line. He says, "We're going in the hangar." I said "Remember the tail." He says, "I'm not goin' all the way in. I just want to get close to the dressing room." Oh. He gets out of the seat. His flight suit is all wet. The co-pilot's flight suit is all wet. The flight engineers, the radio man, the observer and mine

are all wet. He said "Did anybody do anything else?" I said "Nope, but if you go back and check the seat. It's got bite marks." (laughs)

Jim: What is this aircraft again?

Ray: The P-3, the Orion.

Jim: The Orion.

Ray: Yeah. ASW.

Jim: That's probably the closest you came to dyin'.

Ray: That is, that's the only time that I –

Jim: You were convinced you were --

Ray: Yeah, I did say a few prayers.

Jim: Right, and end with "So long"? (laughs)

Ray: No, I just said I went the way that

Jim: Sure.

Ray: somewhat what I wanted and -

Jim: Yeah.

Ray: And --

Jim: It was after that your career ended --

Ray: Yeah, my wife, somebody got drunk and had to tell her about it. No matter, I lost everything at squadron parties. (laughs)

Jim: Money?

Ray: No, the thing was, it was just the fact that somebody always talked to my wife. "How did you feel about this?" or "How did your husband feel when he came home?" "What do you mean?" (laughs)

Jim: "I didn't hear about this. Tell me."

Ray: So anyway, that's when I came to work for the University. We were doing arctic research in a P-2 Neptune and we were flying out of Fort Churchill

Winnipeg, Yellowknife, which is in northern Canada, flyin' up checkin' open lakes. We were lookin' for a seaplane route to, east coast to west coast. We were checkin' temperatures, also doing some ground truth work. We had infrared aboard. We were doing some ground truth work trying to find out surface temperatures for later satellites.

Jim: I see.

Ray: And the University had the contract to do some of this work on the Great Lakes and up in Canada so when I retired I made some instruments that would go in the plane and I continued to fly in the same plane that I flew in before I retired. Going up there and doing more research in the arctic for the University. Then later on I got into the radio carbon dating business, and I also went to India for that dust study.

Jim: That was your career?

Ray: Yeah, in '89 I retired from the University. I'm probably the only one in the back of the book, University telephone, I have emeritus status.

Jim: Oh.

Ray: From the University, but I'm the only certified high school drop out.
(laughs)

Jim: What a career you've had. It's outstanding.

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: It really is.

Ray: And I've flown around the world twice, once in a Super Connie and once in a P-3.

Jim: You've done it all.

Ray: Yeah.

Jim: (unintelligible)

Ray: I've been on every continent but Antarctica. My brother spent a year there.
(laughs)

Jim: So the family's covered. That's wonderful.

- Ray: Well, there's not only that but there's an island named Steveenton Island down there that's not named after my brother. He's got a mountain named after him.
- Jim: Oh, that's pretty good. That's better.
- Ray: Yeah, but there's an island down there which means one of my ancestors is also a Steventon in the Bermudas, and there's a Steventon in England. It's a town.
- Jim: Oh.
- Ray: I think the family originated there.
- Jim: Probably. Did you join any veterans' organizations after?
- Ray: Oh, I've been to the --
- Jim: (unintelligible)
- Ray: American Legion and every time I went there everybody was drunk. I went to the VFW and every time I'd go there everybody was drunk.
- Jim: Yeah.
- Ray: I was a Mason for forty somethin' years. I gave that up. I joined the Shrine, was there for two years. Ran out of money because my kids needed it.
- Jim: Oh.
- Ray: So I gave that up. I just, if it hadn't been that a schoolteacher got a hold of me and said I've been in depression for twelve years, fourteen years -- hadn't been for a schoolteacher asking me to please come over and talk to the kids.
- Jim: When was that?
- Ray: About eight months ago.
- Jim: Eight months?
- Ray: I went over and talked to them. First time I got about, oh maybe five minutes before the tears came. Second time, I was able to get through it, but the second time, just a couple of sniffles. The third time, I was there - now they, the ROTC wants me to be a guest lecturer.

Jim: Oh, that's nice.

Ray: The school, the high school, wants me to come and talk to the kids there.

Jim: Oh, that's be fine. (??) Wonderful.

Ray: But every time I talk about it, you know, and you loose so many friends.

Jim: Right.

Ray: I'm very difficult to make friends. Very hard for me to make friends.

Jim: 'Cause you think you'll loose 'em.

Ray: Yup.

Jim: Yeah. Automatically.

Ray: My brother --

Jim: Who do you keep track of in your, all your, career in the Navy, anybody?

Ray: Marvin S. Broomhead, and he just died.

Jim: Otherwise that's the only one from any of the ships and the planes and all that. There's no reunions to go to and see people?

Ray: Oh yeah, I could go to the Hurricane --

Jim: I know you could, but I mean, you haven't.

Ray: Nope, I haven't been to any of them. I guess I should.

Jim: There must be thousands of organizations , they send you letters -

Ray: Oh yeah, yeah.

Jim: You could go to so many.

Ray: Well, I belong to the Tailhook Association.

Jim: (unintelligible)

Ray: I belong to the ROTC, no TROA, The Reserve Officers, no -- the Retired Officers Association.

Jim: Okay.

Ray: I belong to the Hurricane Hunters Association but I'm not a going member. I get correspondence from 'em. But it's just one of those things that --

Jim: Thank you sir.

Ray: You're welcome.

Jim: Beautiful interview. I will make a copy of this.

[End of interview]