

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
RONALD F. THOMAS
Boilerman, Navy, Korean War.

2000

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Thomas, Ronald F., (1933-). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Ronald F. Thomas, a Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin native, discusses his Korean War service with the Navy working in the engine room and as an anti-aircraft gunner aboard the USS Southerland. After boot camp at San Diego (California), Thomas talks about boarding the Southerland (DD-743) off the coast of Japan, duty operating the boilers as the "oil king," and technical details about his destroyer. He comments on learning to use the 20 millimeter guns and adapting to life at sea. Thomas describes shore bombardment, the support the Southerland provided for Marines at the invasion of Inchon, and naval combat. He discusses creating drinking water, different types of shipboard guns, and capturing a barge full of North Korean troops. Thomas describes activities around Wonsan and the evacuation of Hungnam, including rescuing crews whose mine sweepers were sunk and transferring wounded shipmates to a cruiser for medical treatment. He recalls some close calls from enemy shore batteries and having his hearing damaged. After the truce, he touches upon aircraft carrier escort and training Chinese naval personnel in Formosa. Thomas comments on his use of the GI Bill for home loans and to attend the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and attending reunions of the Southerland.

Biographical Sketch:

Thomas (b.1933), born in Iowa and raised in Wisconsin, enlisted in the Navy in April of 1950. He served in the Korean War and was honorably discharged in December of 1953. He eventually settled in Middleton (Wisconsin) and had a career as an air conditioning specialist.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000

Transcribed by Hannah Goodno, 2011

Edited by Joan Bruggink, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Interview Transcript:

- Jim: We're off and running. Talking to Ron Thomas and it's the 30th of June, year 2000. Tell me where you were born, Ron.
- Ron: I was born in a little town called Greene, Iowa.
- Jim: Green? Just green?
- Ron: Yeah, G-R-E-E-N-E.
- Jim: Oh, with an E.
- Ron: Greene, Iowa.
- Jim: When?
- Ron: I was born February 13th, 1933.
- Jim: Okay, and when did you enter military service, Ron?
- Ron: Ah, about on April 20th—April 25th, 1950.
- Jim: '50?
- Ron: Yes, 1950.
- Jim: Before the war started?
- Ron: Just before the war started.
- Jim: April. And were you a volunteer, or—
- Ron: Yeah, volunteer. I had lived in—I was born in Iowa and I lived in Chippewa Falls as a young man for a while and then moved back to Iowa, and since then I've lived all my life in Wisconsin since I got out of the service.
- Jim: So where did they send you first, Ron?
- Ron: Well, after boot camp, they—
- Jim: Your boot camp was where? Great Lakes?
- Ron: San Diego.

- Jim: Oh, San Diego, okay. Alright, and then where?
- Ron: They sent me to the *Southerland*. They moved me across—the recruit leaves were cancelled due to the Korean War and they sent us and put me on the *Southerland*.
- Jim: You were still in boot camp then, when the war started?
- Ron: Yes.
- Jim: I see, okay. And were you trained to become a boiler man right off the bat?
- Ron: I was—they didn't really know what to do with me, so they put me in the fire room and the engine rooms, and they didn't know what to do with me, so my battle station was on a 20-millimeter gun tub on the after-stack, on the rear stack up high, and then I was—spent most of my time in the fire rooms, I was oil king. Half of the time was out of the boiler room doing different things.
- Jim: Okay, and did they—they taught you how to shoot that gun while you were on board?
- Ron: Yes, they gave about one hour, one hour of teaching.
- Jim: [Laughs] Not an awful lot.
- Ron: No.
- Jim: Was it hard to learn to shoot that thing?
- Ron: No, it was not. It was not. It was a little bulky. It was primarily an anti-aircraft 20-millimeter, and it wouldn't depress low enough for much purpose, but the 40-millimeters—the larger tubs would depress down.
- Jim: Right. Yeah, okay. But that was the—and the boiler—learning how to be a boiler man, what does a boiler man do aboard a destroyer?
- Ron: Well, they generate steam to run turbines to make the ship go forward and also make fresh water and manage the oil. I was oil king for a year and a half, two years, which was a—you manage that type of thing.
- Jim: Well, manage is kind of a vague term. For instance, tell me about the boilers. How did you manage them?

- Ron: Well, you operated them, but they were six hundred pounds steam, eight hundred-fifty degrees superheat, and you used bunker oil right from the oil like it came right out of the ground that we would take on from a tanker at sea.
- Jim: But was there a constant flow into these boilers?
- Ron: A constant flow into the boilers. We would use—we had about a half a million gallons on board at all times and we would use—if I remember, we could generate sixty-six thousand horsepower.
- Jim: I see. So when you regulated things, you regulated the flow of oil or the heat of the boiler, or what?
- Ron: Yes, the flow of oil. Yes, we regulated the amount of oil that went in the boilers that kept the steam flow at an adequate rate to feed the turbines at whatever speed the bridge determined.
- Jim: If they wanted to go faster, then you upped the flow of oil?
- Ron: More oil. Right. That's basically—it's a little more complicated, but it's right.
- Jim: I understand. You pour the coal to it, but now it's pour the oil to it?
- Ron: Right, exactly.
- Jim: How fast would your destroyer go?
- Ron: We would do about thirty-three to thirty-five knots.
- Jim: At full tilt?
- Ron: At full—at flank speed, they called it, flank speed. And we used a lot of oil at flank speed.
- Jim: Right. So ordinarily you cruised at what?
- Ron: Oh, standard speed was probably fifteen knots.
- Jim: Not so bad. And how long did it take you to get used to living on a destroyer and everything going up, down, in, and out and all directions?
- Ron: As a young man, it didn't—when you're just a young kid, it doesn't take you very long. And the passageways and the ladders, you could practically jump down the hatches.

- Jim: You didn't notice it after a while? The movement of the ship?
- Ron: No. The destroyers, if we were in a typhoon, then you noticed it, but as a rule, you got used to it.
- Jim: The motion, the standard motion?
- Ron: The motion. You'd get seasick when it was extremely rough or something, but after the first few times, you got over it.
- Jim: I see. Now, the ship was six hundred feet long? Five hundred feet long? Three hundred feet long?
- Ron: Ah, it was three hundred feet—about three hundred and some feet long, and about thirty-five to forty feet wide.
- Jim: How many men did that carry?
- Ron: Well, it carried a crew—supposedly, it was supposed to—of about three hundred, but we never had a full crew, could never get a full crew on. So most of the time there was probably two hundred-fifty people, including the officers and the captain and everybody.
- Jim: And did you have torpedoes to shoot?
- Ron: Initially we had torpedoes; also, we had 20-millimeters, 40-millimeters, torpedoes, depth charges, and also K-gun depth charges and of course six 5-inch .38 calibers.
- Jim: Six, at three on either side? Or fore and aft?
- Ron: The 5-inch guns were two in the aft and two gun mounts forward, twins each. So a total of six 5-inch guns.
- Jim: Alright. But you never were involved with the bigger guns?
- Ron: I never personally became involved. I was knocked down on the deck one time when I walked out of the hatch when I wasn't supposed to when they fired a salvo and it knocked me head over heels, the concussion. But that was my own fault because I shouldn't have went out of the hatch without checking.
- Jim: How close were you then to that 5-inch gun?

- Ron: When it went off, I would say about eight feet, that's all. Five, six feet, eight feet.
- Jim: And that concussion was—
- Ron: Oh, bad. When they both went off at once, they really—
- Jim: Did that make the ship move?
- Ron: It, it appeared to make it, to make it move. The guys, the gunner's mates used to tell me that it'd be pretty loud in there and they wore ear plugs and flash—
- Jim: Okay. So where was your first tour on the *Southerland*? Where'd you go first when you left the United States?
- Ron: We went way—they flew me overseas and the *Southerland* picked me up on the—at sea off Japan. I ran out in a what they call an LCVP [Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel] from Japan _____(??).
- Jim: You went alongside and climbed aboard?
- Ron: Climbed aboard, just me, and they said, “Go down in this hole,” and that's what I did. [Laughs]
- Jim: Were you alone or were there a lot of guys coming aboard at that point?
- Ron: No, I was the only one that came aboard at that time. There was a lot of people came later.
- Jim: I see, and so you got all your indoctrinations in a bunch, didn't you?
- Ron: In a bunch. It was the best experience—a real good experience.
- Jim: Your food was okay?
- Ron: The food was okay if we weren't out too long. If we got out to be real long, it became quite—not good.
- Jim: What's not good? I don't—
- Ron: Oh, we'd have beans for breakfast every day.
- Jim: You mean boring? Just boring?
- Ron: Yeah, boring. We'd have powdered eggs and things like that.

Jim: Right, okay. Well, that wasn't too exciting, was it?

Ron: Ah, no. The food was not the best, but when we went into—when we'd go into the shipyard or something, it'd be very good.

Jim: When you got aboard in Japan, where was the ship bound for?

Ron: For shore bombardment in Korea, yeah.

Jim: On the east or the west side?

Ron: They went on both sides.

Jim: But the first trip?

Ron: On the first—first side, I think it was probably way on the south end; I think on the south end.

Jim: Yeah, I would think that's where the activity was at the beginning of the war.

Ron: Yes.

Jim: And you just bombed offshore installations?

Ron: Ah, we did shore bombardment, mostly. Ground cover fire for the Marines.

Jim: With your 5-inch guns?

Ron: With the 5-inch guns, yes.

Jim: How far would they shoot, Ron?

Ron: Oh, you'd probably have to ask the gunner's mate for that, but I would guess five, six miles, something like that.

Jim: I see. But you'd see the shells explode after you shot 'em?

Ron: Oh, certainly. You bet, and we did a lot of star fire shelling at night.

Jim: To light up areas?

Ron: Yes.

Jim: Well that was different.

Ron: Yes, it was. We did an awful lot of that.

Jim: Did you receive any return fire from the shore?

Ron: Yes, we did. We did; the pictures that I gave you at Inchon, and we did several other—

Jim: Well, this is on the southern part now, first.

Ron: Oh, at the southern part? No, we didn't, we were more careful. Later on we—

Jim: Got into that, huh?

Ron: We got into that when the Chinese communists got into it with pretty big shore batteries.

Jim: Right. From the southern part of Korea then, you swung over to Inchon?

Ron: We went to Inchon, that was—

Jim: At the landing?

Ron: At the landing at Inchon.

Jim: How many other destroyers were there?

Ron: Well, there was actually, we were one—I've always heard they call 'em the three sitting ducks. And we relieved, really, one destroyer the night before the invasion that was supposed to be in our place, but they had their bow blown off by a mine. And so we were just called in to replace it.

Jim: How far offshore were you, then?

Ron: Not very far. The tides were very strong. What were they, twenty-seven feet? No, it was very, it was very bad—we were very close. Very close.

Jim: Yeah. So you received some incoming fire there?

Ron: Yes.

Jim: Do you recall what type of artillery you were getting?

- Ron: Oh, those, at that particular instance, weren't as big as it was later, but I'm guessing it would be equivalent to like three-, four-inch diameter.
- Jim: Did they hit your ship?
- Ron: Yes, they did.
- Jim: That one picture, was it from that time?
- Ron: No, that one picture was from another time, but I do have some other pictures of that.
- Jim: Did they damage your ship much?
- Ron: Yes, it did, it damaged it, blew a whaleboat off and did some other—made some holes, we got—it made one large hole that bounced off, a shell didn't explode.
- Jim: Nothing serious, though?
- Ron: No, nothing serious.
- Jim: Did anyone get wounded?
- Ron: We got—on that occasion, there was just one minor—
- Jim: Shell fragment hit somebody?
- Ron: Something like that, and the other was much more serious; there were seven wounded.
- Jim: Okay, and so long were you—you stayed through the entire invasion?
- Ron: Yes.
- Jim: Okay, and so you had a chance to watch all the landing parties coming in?
- Ron: Yes, and it was really—
- Jim: What a sight!
- Ron: It was really quite a sight with the Marines with—we'd call them cleat-tracks. And the firepower that I remember that I was really impressed with was what they call, as you may remember them, the LSM(R)s—they were an LST [Landing Ship, Tank] with rockets. And I was really

amazed. They would come right close and they would let go with these rockets and—

Jim: Spectacular.

Ron: Spectacular!

Jim: [Laughs] Right. So, you were—I don't know, I suppose you were still, you were below decks all the time then?

Ron: No, most of my time—about half of my time I was above deck. They had me—for whatever reason, I was in charge of a damage control party, and as oil king, I had the run of the ship, and did pump water and oil and things to keep to ship level and had to report to the captain and—

Jim: Keep the ship level? You'll have to explain that to me.

Ron: If you pump more oil out of one tank than the other, you'd have to mix—

Jim: You got a list?

Ron: Yes. Yes, sir.

Jim: And how do you tell? You just have a gauge you look at?

Ron: They had what they call an inclinometer on the bridge and also one down in the engine room.

Jim: Now you were designated as the oil king, is that right?

Ron: They called it oil king.

Jim: That means that one guy has this responsibility?

Ron: Yeah, and it was a good job. It was a good job but a lot of responsibility. But I enjoyed it very much.

Jim: But you dealt with water too?

Ron: Yeah, with water. I had to get the water tanks, we had evaporators. We made our water.

Jim: As I'm getting at—this water, you're talking about is sea water that's pumped in and changed into drinking water?

Ron: Yes, it was.

Jim: How is that done?

Ron: Well, that sea water is brought in and steam is put in these vessels, and it's made to have the water, the sea water, actually boil and recondense with some cold seawater and after it's condensed then that water—

Jim: It's drinkable?

Ron: Yes.

Jim: Is that an ever-ongoing—

Ron: That's an ongoing process.

Jim: It just never stops?

Ron: Never stops.

Jim: And those machines are run by oil too?

Ron: No, those machines were run by steam.

Jim: But the steam was made by oil?

Ron: By oil. Yes sir, yes sir.

Jim: But you weren't directly involved with that machinery?

Ron: Not too much, no.

Jim: You just made sure that—

Ron: Not too much. Once in a while we had to go down in the engine rooms and help stand watch and get involved, but normally, no.

Jim: Did you stand watch in the boiler room on a regular basis?

Ron: I did later on, I did, and also when I was young in the beginning, and the end. At the end, I was in charge of what they call a forward fire room.

Jim: On the boiler room watch, was that a four on, four off?

Ron: Four on, and four off. That's what we did; as long as I can remember, that's what it was. Sometimes it was longer than that, but it was never better than four on and four off.

- Jim: And when there was trouble, like when you were in the invasion, you were pulled up out of the boiler room and onto the decks to man the gun?
- Ron: Yes, I was at that—I don't think—I was just a kid and they didn't know what the hell to do with me, I think that's what the case was.
- Jim: [Laughs] But somebody's still down in the boiler room, though, at all times, no matter what?
- Ron: Yes, there was always somebody—there was always—sure, the more experienced guys were down there then.
- Jim: I see, okay. But I'm trying to figure out how your duty kept overlapping here.
- Ron: They were just shorthanded.
- Jim: Yeah, I see. In other words, if you'd had a full complement aboard your ship, you probably would not be on the gun?
- Ron: Probably would not have been.
- Jim: Got it. Finally. I finally get it now.
- Ron: Yes.
- Jim: Okay, so when you had the gun, did you have a chance to shoot anything?
- Ron: We did shoot, we did see some aircraft, and we did fire a few short bursts over at things, but whether we hit anything or not—there were mostly tracers and they were mostly—the 20-millimeter was mostly for anti-aircraft. But the 40s and the 5s were the—
- Jim: But you didn't have any plane attacks at Inchon?
- Ron: No. Not that—some of the guys said they'd seen some dogfights. Whether there were or not, I never—
- Jim: But it certainly wasn't involved with your ship?
- Ron: No.
- Jim: Okay, how long were you there? At Inchon?

- Ron: Well, we went in there the night of the—on the 14th, and then we were there—
- Jim: Of September?
- Ron: Of September. And then we were there—I believe for a couple of days, ‘cause I remember the tides going in and out—until they were very well established, and then we left and went somewhere else.
- Jim: Where was your next mission that you recall?
- Ron: We moved up and did some more shore bombardment, and we also used to then spend an awful lot of time with the aircraft carriers, ah, escorting aircraft carriers when they fired. Those days, all we seen was propeller-driven Corsairs.
- Jim: Where were these aircraft carriers at that time? Where were they stationed?
- Ron: They were going up and down the coast.
- Jim: But they’re further away?
- Ron: Yeah, they were out, quite a ways out to sea, yes. And there were no jets.
- Jim: You just offered protection to them? I mean to protect against anything that—
- Ron: Yes, yes. Yes, then—
- Jim: Water protection, really?
- Ron: Yes. And there was like, a large aircraft carrier, there might be four destroyers around it, you know.
- Jim: Did you ever see the *Valley Forge*?
- Ron: The name is very familiar, I probably did.
- Jim: I visited aboard the *Valley Forge*.
- Ron: I see.
- Jim: And the *Missouri*, did you see the battleship *Missouri*?

- Ron: I seen the battleship *Missouri*—or *Wisconsin*, and the battleship *Iowa*. And we seen them, we could see ‘em fire once in a while.
- Jim: Out beyond you?
- Ron: Way out beyond, it looked like lightning across the sky. And one time we captured a barge full of North Koreans, and they were escaping, and the thing that they feared the most, they told us—their officer told us—was shelling, shelling by the battleships. They feared that more than anything.
- Jim: Where did you capture them?
- Ron: This was along—we were going along and they pulled out of a—seemed like a little bit of harbor. And we pulled close on ‘em and they were scared to death. And we took ‘em and radioed—
- Jim: Aboard ship?
- Ron: Yeah, and just stood ‘em up along the rail.
- Jim: How many?
- Ron: Oh, there must’ve been thirty or forty, and then we got a hold of some Marines, and they came out in an LCVP and picked ‘em up.
- Jim: Oh, to guard them aboard your ship?
- Ron: Well, no, they came and got ‘em and took ‘em somewhere. Where, I don’t know.
- Jim: Oh, so they weren’t aboard your ship very long then?
- Ron: No, several hours.
- Jim: Oh, that’s all. Okay, so where else did you go?
- Ron: Well, we spent a lot of time up in Wonsan.
- Jim: And the Chinese became a problem?
- Ron: Yes, and we helped provide ground support cover at Hungnam when the Army with the Navy, or the Army and Marines were retreating and evacuated there. It was very, very cold.
- Jim: So the rest of your duty in Korea was on the east coast rather than the west coast? I would imagine that’s where all the action was.

- Ron: Yes.
- Jim: Tell me about evacuating people, did you help on that?
- Ron: We didn't help evacuate any people *per se*, except survivors like from the mine sweeps.
- Jim: Yeah, we'll get to that later, but I don't want to spoil every story here.
- Ron: Oh, I see.
- Jim: One thing at a time. So tell me, did you take some survivors off from Wonsan province?
- Ron: Well, at the Wonsan, the *Pirate* and the *Pledge* were in there trying to sweep the mines, and they were sunk by mines and shellfire, and we were called in and we did a lot of fire support and rescue. And then we took 'em back wherever it was safe.
- Jim: How'd you fish 'em out of the water? Putting a landing net across the side?
- Ron: Oh, any way you could get 'em, but we had two life boats—two whaleboats, we called 'em.
- Jim: They were all in the water?
- Ron: Yeah, they were all in the water, right. And I think there were some that didn't make it. But the mine sweeps were not very big ships.
- Jim: No, they went down pretty fast, I'm sure.
- Ron: Yes, they did.
- Jim: So how many of those folks did you rescue from those two mine sweeps, roughly?
- Ron: Oh God, it's hard to say. I'm guessing maybe thirty or forty of those.
- Jim: That's all?
- Ron: Yeah.
- Jim: And is this the time you received some onshore fire?

- Ron: They did, but we were not hit. We, we provided a lot of shelling and stuff, but we were not hit.
- Jim: When did you get that hole I see in your picture?
- Ron: That was in 1952 when we were, ah, providing ground support for the South Korean Army. And we were in and I remember very close, I was standing at the quarterdeck with the chief engineer, and it looked like there were little lightning flashes along the beach. And I said to the chief engineer, “Mr. Cash(?), I said, “I think those bastards are shootin’ at us.” He says, “Oh no,”—they called me Tommy then—he said, “Oh no, Tommy, we’re too far south.” Well just then, man, [makes shooting noises] blew the potato—we had potatoes in crates and everything—and he said, “Jesus Christ!” He cussed and down the hole he went, and I could hear him calling the bridge up.
- Jim: Do something, yeah.
- Ron: Yeah.
- Jim: So you got movin’? You moved away from that spot?
- Ron: Well, no, we were there, went back and forth for about twenty—about twenty minutes, and as far as I know, we got about—we silenced five of the six batteries or whatever they were.
- Jim: With your 5-inch guns?
- Ron: Yeah, with the 5-inch.
- Jim: Well, that was a surprise then!
- Ron: Yes, that was just a surprise. We weren’t expecting—we had a Korean military officer that used to ride on top of one of the 5-inch mounts in the, on the bow with the knot givers, and every once in a while if he’d see something he would direct fire, but he didn’t see these people at all.
- Jim: Right. This was off Hungnam?
- Ron: No, this was off from—this wasn’t Hungnam. I don’t know, that thing I gave you probably tells you where it was.
- Jim: Alright, and that was the only wound that your ship suffered was that one shell?

- Ron: No, we had several, several, but that one that I took the picture of there, the reason I took that picture is because of—I was in charge of a damage control party and I was just about five feet away when that thing came through there. I haven't heard, had good hearing since, but that's—
- Jim: Oh really? That was so loud that your—
- Ron: It was very, very loud, but you know, when you're young like that, you don't pay any attention to it.
- Jim: Was your hearing impaired right off the bat?
- Ron: Yes it was, but it—you know, you just don't—and of course, they don't pay much attention. The medical man was nothing but a third class corpsman. He knew how to dispense aspirin and that's about it.
- Jim: [Laughs] You didn't have a doctor aboard then?
- Ron: No, no. A couple of the wounded—the seriously wounded were—we, ah, by life line sent 'em to the cruiser.
- Jim: *Helena?*
- Ron: Maybe it was the *Helena*, or the *St. Paul*, or something.
- Jim: *St. Paul* and *Helena*, they were—those were the ones you picked up out of the water from the mine sweepers, is that what you're talking about?
- Ron: No, about the ones that were wounded when the, with the duel with the shore batteries.
- Jim: Oh, I thought that—you were hit more than that one time?
- Ron: Yes, yes.
- Jim: And you had some wounds in some of your fellow sailors?
- Ron: Yes.
- Jim: Any killed?
- Ron: No, none killed. We had two seriously wounded, and they were transferred by life line—
- Jim: To the cruiser. Yeah they had a medical doctor there.

Ron: Yes.

Jim: By life line, you say?

Ron: You know, with the breeches buoy.

Jim: Breeches buoy?

Ron: Yeah. So the one guy that we did transfer, believe it or not, had been in the Army originally, in the Second World War, and he joined the Navy, and he had been wounded in the Second World War.

Jim: So he didn't want to be in the Army? [Laughs]

Ron: He thought he could get by without it, and here he—so he got quite a shock, too.

Jim: Oh my goodness. Did you ever find out what happened to him afterwards?

Ron: No, I never did. I do know that he wasn't killed.

Jim: He survived that?

Ron: Yeah.

Jim: Do you keep in contact with your shipmates?

Ron: We do. We started a ship's reunion about fifteen years ago, and we have it every other year, and we're going to have one this fall in Omaha. But the group gets smaller. The old ship was sank for target practice in the Pacific years ago by a rocket.

Jim: So the *Southerland* doesn't exist?

Ron: No more; it's at the bottom of the sea.

Jim: Oh my goodness.

Ron: But we still get together, some of the old guys—they're all old now; I was the youngest.

Jim: Well that's nice. **[End of Tape One, Side One]** And you were in Korea how long?

- Ron: Well, I spent all my career in Korea, except when we would come back to go to the shipyards.
- Jim: When was that? When did you come back?
- Ron: We came back usually about once a year, or once every eighteen months, it seemed, and we'd usually go to the—San Diego was our home port, but we would go to the shipyard in San Francisco.
- Jim: Well then, when you went back to Korea the second time, the war was halted?
- Ron: It had went down somewhat, but we spent an awful lot of time—I never want to go back to that—near there—it was a bleak country.
- Jim: Right. So what did you do then, when there was a truce? And what was your duties as a ship?
- Ron: Well, as a truce, we'd just cruise around with the, with the aircraft carriers, but we did go down and do some training for Chiang Kai-shek on Formosa for his Navy. We provided some training; they call it Taiwan now. But we did—we trained his Navy.
- Jim: They came aboard? They sent some sailors aboard?
- Ron: Yes. Yes, they did.
- Jim: How did that go?
- Ron: It went pretty good, pretty good. They were—their best, their very best people.
- Jim: They seemed to learn and understand?
- Ron: They were very intelligent and very sharp, learned very fast.
- Jim: Oh, that's good. Okay, and so then back to—when did you finally finish with your ship? When was your duty over?
- Ron: Well, then when the Korean War finally ended, you could get out a little early, which I did. I got out early and—
- Jim: When?
- Ron: I was discharged on the third of December, 1953, almost 1954. And then I went to college on the G.I. Bill.

Jim: So you had almost four years?

Ron: Yeah, almost four years.

Jim: Aboard ship, yeah. Three years and nine months, really.

Ron: Three years, seven months, nine days.

Jim: Oh, there you go. That's a long time to be on one ship.

Ron: Yes.

Jim: You must've been the oldest seaman aboard ship by the time you—

Ron: Well, and I was a little bit proud, I made first class petty officer in that time as well; that was very rare.

Jim: Right. Well, that's a tribute to your ability.

Ron: Well, I don't know about that. Maybe they were too short of people, didn't have anybody else.

Jim: Oh, I prefer to think the other. [Laughs]

Ron: Then I went to Milwaukee to school.

Jim: You used your G.I. Bill?

Ron: Yes. And got my house—the same—

Jim: With a five percent loan?

Ron: Finally I got another one down here, and where I live now for thirty-five years in Middleton. Five percent—I think it was five and a quarter, time I got done dinkin' around.

Jim: Right. Well that's really nice; that G.I. Bill was just outstanding.

Ron: Oh, it really—it was marvelous.

Jim: It saved a lot of young men.

Ron: Oh, it did. It was marvelous. I could only—

Jim: 'Cause they had nothing to do when they came out.

- Ron: Oh, it was wonderful.
- Jim: What did you take in school?
- Ron: Engineering. The chief engineer told me to go there. I wish that they—I hope that they expand that G.I. Bill for *all* of the people in the—all the other—
- Jim: Conflicts, right.
- Ron: Yes.
- Jim: Okay. And then what did you do, now that you've got all that engineering?
- Ron: Well, I was a—I spent almost forty years affiliated with the Carrier Air Conditioning Division of United Technologies. Most of the buildings around here are air conditioned by [unintelligible]. And now I have a private consulting firm part-time when I retired.
- Jim: I see. So you became an air conditioner specialist, then?
- Ron: Yes.
- Jim: That's good. And then you got married? Had a family and all that?
- Ron: Got married years ago, got family, they're all grown up now, we have grandchildren.
- Jim: Of course, of course.
- Ron: Typical. There's a zillion guys like me. [Laugh].
- Jim: [Laughs] Right, right. Well, I can't think of anything more to ask you.
- Ron: Well thank you very, very much!
- Jim: Can you think of any other war stories that you didn't tell me?
- Ron: I can't right now. I'm a little taken aback because you're the first guy that ever asked me anything, really. You forget, and I'm sure I've got stuff buried at home, but—
- Jim: But you've hit the highlights, anyway.

Ron: And I do appreciate it very, very much for you calling me.

Jim: Well, it's our pleasure. Thank you very much for sitting in with me.

Ron: No, thank you.

[End of Interview]