

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
EUGENE THIERMANN
Seaman, Coast Guard, Korean War
2016

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2062

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Thiermann, Eugene (b. 1934). Oral History Interview, 2016.

Approximate length: 2 hours 28 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Eugene Thiermann discusses his service with the Coast Guard from 1952 to 1954, his boot camp in Cape May (New Jersey), his duties onboard the USCG *Forster*, and his life since the Coast Guard. Thiermann discusses growing up in the Town of Milwaukee and doing chores on his grandfather's farm. He then describes his motivation to join the military, and how he ended up in the Coast Guard. Thiermann joined the Coast Guard Reserves in June of 1952 and joined the regulars in September of 1952 when a spot opened up. He discusses the different types of training he underwent during his three months of boot camp. Because Thiermann made it through boot camp without any demerits, he was able to choose his first assignment in Hawaii. In Hawaii, he was assigned to the *Forster* and Thiermann describes the kind of work the crew did on the *Forster* while they were in Hawaii. He discusses what he did while on leisure during this time. He then talks about being sent to the Philippines and the kind of duties he had while they were there. Thiermann describes an incident they had with a Communist ship. He discusses going home on leave and being reassigned for his last few months to a lifeboat station in Eureka (California). He talks about the kind of work he did there and tells a story about saving a family that had capsized their boat in the ocean. He then discusses his civilian life after the Coast Guard: finding a job, getting married and divorced, and getting married again. He finished the interview by describing his trip on the Honor Flight in 2013 and how he feels the Coast Guard is often under-appreciated compared to the other branches of the military.

Biographical Sketch:

Thiermann (b.1934) served with the Coast Guard from 1952 to 1954. After being discharged he worked as a welder for Parker's welding shop and as a salesman for his brother's company.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Helen Gibb, 2016.

Reviewed by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

Abstract written by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

Interview Transcript

Gibb: Today is Monday February 15, 2016. This is an interview with Eugene Thiermann, who served with the Coast Guard from 1952 to 1954, during the Korean War. This interview is being conducted at Mr. Thiermann's home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Helen Gibb and the interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History program. Would you like to tell us where and when you were born?

Thiermann: I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1934 at Deaconess Hospital. I grew up in a rural area on a country road called Mill Road, in the township of Milwaukee. It's called that because later of course on they changed the name to City of Glendale but then it was called Town of Milwaukee. My grandfather lived right next door to me, or I did to him, and that was on my mother's side. My dad and mother lived next door. We had a lot of acreage, not too much but we had about three and a third acres each. I had an awful lot easy time to run around and enjoy myself. It was all country. My father was an artificial florist, prior to that he grew flowers—delphiniums, gladiolas, larkspur—in the field. Granddad had a vegetable farm—they grew tomatoes and beets and carrots and whatever.

We had all organic food to eat. He had a pump house there where we had artesian water. You could go out take a glass from a little nail pounded into a two by four, and could pump yourself a cold glass of water. We had a few cats running around, a dog that would come over by us once in a while and we'd feed him and he wouldn't run away—he'd stay there. Lot of strays would come around. Had some chickens, some geese. My granddad had a horse called him Rex and we used to work the fields with him. I remember an occasion where I had to lead the horse down the row—I was only a little schaefer and he was a big horse—a big plow horse—and grandpa was behind with a cultivator and the old straw hat. When we'd go away from the house, the horse was fine. We'd get down to the end of the row, we'd turn around and get him lined up with the next row and he's coming back towards the house.

At the edge of the house there were two apples trees and he knew they were there and I couldn't control the horse and he would just take off. He would pick me right up and drop me down with his head and sometimes he'd step on my foot and I had tennis shoes—of course the ground was soft, but he didn't break my feet. Grandpa's in the back there trying to hold his cultivator and I tell you what, the first time I learned how to cuss in German because he was just angry as could be. The neighbor across the street was watching all this going on and he was laughing so hard he was lying on the grass. We'd get down to the end of the row and we'd do that a few times and finally my grandpa—we called him *Opa*, that's German for grandpa and of course *Oma* was grandma—so he'd say "Come on." We'd walk in the house and he'd get out the old quart of beer and he'd pour me a little glass and he'd take a little glass. We'd have our beer and get all done and we'd walk out and finish the work outside. This is kind of the way it was.

It was a beautiful time to grow up. We had a lot of shade trees, butterflies all over the place, you could just enjoy. You'd smell the sweetness of the air with all the vegetables.

[00:04:51] But we had to work—grandpa had hot beds and when I'd get up in the morning, before I went to school, I had to walk outside and get up early enough to go out and we'd lift the hotbed covers off and we'd water. When we get all done I would walk to school a mile and a half, then after school when I came back I have to help him cover that up at night so they wouldn't freeze—the little plants underneath there because it would still get pretty cold. Used that, of course, when they got big enough to plant in the fields. Now my dad, being an artificial florist, there was always something to do. He always had me doing something—if it wasn't taking an old wheelbarrow out in the field in spring and picking up all the rocks that the frost had brought up out of the ground and getting rid of the rocks, and wheeling them to the edge of the field, it was working out in the shed.

He'd take a lot of what you might call weeds but was called peppergrass and pansy and a whole bunch of other items that grew wild. We had them all cut and he'd dye them and paint them and make artificial wreaths and bouquets and everything out of them. There was always something to do. In the wintertime, when it got too cold to work out in the garage, he would bring it in the basement and he would have me work in the basement. My free time—if ever I had any—I had a buddy who lived across the street and we'd go hunting in the woods. We had a lot of woods around by us and we'd build ourselves a slingshot and we'd go in the woods. He had a couple of dogs and they were called Daisy and Peggy—they'd chase squirrels up in the tree and we'd shoot squirrels with slingshots bring them home, clean them. His mother would make them and we got a pheasant—that was mine—and I'd take a pheasant home, we'd eat that.

It was a rural area and it was a wonderful time to grow up and I felt, like I said so—

[break in recording][technical problem]

—older I got a bicycle—my older brother's bicycle—and my mother had it all fixed up for me and I'd pedal home and then I'd get my Bible and my catechism book and I'd ride about three miles into town, in what they call North Milwaukee. I'd go to church, in the church basement—I had two years of instruction there. I remember one time I came there and there was a gang of kids sitting on the front porch and one of the kids looked at me. He said, "Hey, where are you from." I said, "I live out in the country. I take my bike." "Well, do you live on a farm?" "Yes. Granddad has a truck [??] gardening farm and my dad's an artificial florist." And he says, "Oh, farmer boy." I just kind of ignored him—I didn't say much. We went into the church basement.

Each time I come there they'd be sitting on the front porch or the steps of the church. "Here comes farmer boy." He kept it up and kept it up and I kept ignoring him. One time I came and there was nobody sitting on the steps there and I

walked downstairs and they were all sitting in the classroom. There was about sixty kids, I think, and he was standing in the middle of the room there, in front of the chairs, and he says, "Farmer boy." I ignored him like I always did and wanted to walk to sit down. He came up and he knocked the Bible and the catechism book out of my hand and it fell on the floor. I don't know what happened to me but I just lost it. And I said, "I tell you what I'm gonna do." I says "I'm gonna walk toward you and when I get close enough I'm gonna hit you." He says, "Come on, farmer boy. Come on." I took a couple of steps and he swung at me, and I threw my left arm up and I blocked his punch. I come straight out and hit him right in the face. I rolled him over a couple rows of chairs and he had blood coming out of his mouth and his nose. He got up and took the handkerchief out of his mouth and I set the chairs up. We just sat down and the minister walked in. He knew something was wrong but he didn't say nothing. After that, he was my best friend. We got along fine. I guess that's the way they work things, the city kids or whatever. That was that incident.

[00:10:42] Let me see what else I got to tell you. I remember an incident I walked in the pump house one time at my grandpa's place and he had a big wash tub. The wash tub was full of corn and I looked and I see a little mouse coming around the corner of the wash tub. I tried to get him, tried to hit him with something. I missed him. Then I got an idea—I always got bright ideas, you know. Sometimes they didn't work though. I got one of our cats and I sat down in a chair next to the washtub and I put the cat on my lap. I'm petting the kitty cat and low and behold here this mouse comes around the corner. That cat sees that mouse—that cat's ears just went up and all of a sudden that cat dug his claws into my legs and took off. Well, the cat missed the mouse and all I got out of it was bloody legs. I'll never do that again. You learn, I guess.

Then we used to build forts. I built a fort behind my grandpa's barn in our yard. We had a beautiful yard—big rock garden, little pond in there where my dad used to put fish in. He built a little island and a bridge going across't. I had a fort back there and pretty soon I had two stories on it. We had a two story fort, my younger brother Ken and I we'd play in there. I had an older brother—he was about seven, almost eight years older than me. My younger brother was two years younger and my sister was three and a half years older so I was the third child of four. We'd play in the fort and everything and then we wind up building another one alongside the road in a tree just east of my grandpas house. That was way up in the tree so we had a fort there besides. We had a lot of fun doing that kind of stuff.

Wintertime, we'd go ice skating. We had to walk about three miles to a park called Brown Deer [Park]. Friday night after school mother would let us go so we'd tie the strings of our ice skates together, put them over our shoulder, and I'd walk. A lot of times I'd go by myself—my younger brother never went much, ice skating, but I did. I'd walk three miles to the ice skating rink and go ice skating. At ten o'clock at night it was over and I'd walk home. Well back then you didn't worry too much about somebody getting hurt or picked up by some stranger or

something like that. If that were to happen all we had to do was run into one of the houses along the way that we could find, or across the field, and that would have been it. Mother didn't worry too much about that because we were way out in the country. What else I got to talk about here?

[Break in recording] [00:14:35]

Thiermann: So do I start back over?

Gibb: Mm-hm.

Thiermann: Okay. My father was born in Thiensville, Wisconsin and that's north of Milwaukee a little ways. When he was nine or eleven years old his dad became ill. He lay down on a couch and his mother says to my dad, "Quick, run and get the doctor." So dad ran out to get the doctor and by the time they got back with the horse and wagon, my grandpa was gone—so he passed away. A number of years went by and my grandma married a man by the name of Schwarz. Dad and his step-father used to work out and cut cedar posts which they got about ten cents apiece for. They had to do something to make a living. When World War I came around, he joined the military and he was in the 3rd [Infantry] Division I believe—in the Army—and he went across and fought in the trenches in Europe. I used to ask him, "Tell me about the war. What was it like over there dad?" He'd look at me and shake his head and he said, "You don't want to know."

[00:16:43] I just kept after him and after him and finally, one day, he said, "One minute you're looking at your buddy and as you're going after a machine gun nest. You're talking and hollering at him and the next minute you look back and his head is gone. When the concussion shells would go off, blood would come out of your eyes, nose and ears. It was terrible." At Armistice Day we would stand in the garage or the barn, be working, and when the sirens would blow and everything, he made us hold our hands over our hearts and the tears would come down his face—he was crying. He said he went out with five hundred guys one night—over the top—they came back with twenty. He was one of twenty that came back alive. He said it was very bloody and then he wouldn't tell me any more. That was it—never got another word out of him.

He had all his land and he had his flowers and he was a very good artist as far as making up bouquets and wreaths and everything—he had a God-given talent. He eventually moved down to Florida and he's buried in Ellenton, which is over on the west side of Florida. Mother and him got a divorce when I was fifteen—things didn't work out. We had it pretty rough for a while—he paid a dollar a day for me, to feed me and clothe me, and a dollar a day for my younger brother, at that time. When I was fifteen years old I had to go out and work. I earned enough money making just a few—thirty, thirty-five cents an hour or whatever I could get—and I paid my mother fifteen dollars a week room and board. I had to work on Saturdays and Sundays and after school in order to get enough money together to survive. There was no free lunch but we got through it.

[00:20:15] Finally, we—or I should say I decided I wanted to go into the military. I wanted to go in the [U.S. Navy] Sub[marine] Corps in the worst way—I wanted something exciting because my older brother, Bill, was in the 32nd—no not the 32nd, but the 82nd Airborne [Division]—paratrooper. He wanted to be a flier and my dad would have had to sign for him but my dad said, "No. I'm not gonna sign for you because it's too dangerous." My dad knew what the war was like and he didn't want his son to get killed. My brother says, "If I can't fly, I'm going to jump out of them." That's where he went—he went into the Airborne. I got to go back here and tell you a little story. He used to write home and he used to say to us, "When we get up at our door, everybody when they jump out they yell 'Geronimo' and they jump out of the airplane." And I thought, "Boy, that's pretty neat." So I thought "I'm going to try that."

One day—you talk about some stupid stuff that people do—I went past the hall closet, opened it up, took my ma's umbrella. I walked out the house and walked over to our two and a half story barn—it was high. I went upstairs in the barn, came out the door in the middle and I shimmed across the edge to the edge of the barn, hooked the umbrella to the side of me and climbed up on the edge, holding myself. I got way up to the top and I mean it was high. Walked over to the top of that thing—of course my parents weren't home at the time—opened up that umbrella. Down below is a rock garden but there was a spot in there where there wasn't any rocks. I hung on that umbrella and I jumped off that top of the barn and I didn't go two feet and that umbrella went straight up—the stays just pulled, the wind force straightened that umbrella right up and I down. I hit that ground so hard my legs collapsed and I'm sitting down there with my legs up by my chin, or my knees, and I sat there for about five minutes.

Finally, I started reaching around and found out if I broke any bones. I had to kind of get my senses—it shook me up pretty bad. I didn't find any broken bones but I was more scared of getting my butt kicked from my ma because I ruined her umbrella. Here I am for about an hour trying to straighten that umbrella out the other way as best as I could and I put that umbrella back in the closet. One day we're going someplace and ma walks past the closet, opens it up to grab the umbrella and she says, "What happened to my umbrella?!" Oh my God, "I don't know ma." I never told her until she was ninety years old, then I finally admitted it and she was a strict old woman. I tell you what I would have got the willow switch. That was the end of that. We went through a whole lot of stuff when I was a kid and all kinds of things that came up and if they would have found some of the things we did, it would have been crazy.

My younger brother he had two crows—he got them when they were babies. Oh my God, them crows they grew up and they were pets. They'd fly by our window and they'd peck on the window to get us up in the morning. When we'd walk out they'd fly and sit on our shoulder.

My ma would do weeding down in the field and they'd sit on the cuff of her pants and ride down all the way and ride back on the cuff of her pants the other way. We put the cat's food out in the dish—they'd chase the cats away and take the

food. Pull the clothes pins off the clothes line. My brother in law laid his watch down one time, he never found it. They grabbed that and flew away with it. You had to be careful. They were like watch dogs. Nobody could come in the yard without you not knowing about it.

[00:25:26]

Same with the geese we had. When the milkman would come and deliver milk, the geese would chase him away. I had to go out there and chase the geese away or the milkman wouldn't get out of his truck because they clamp on your leg and beat you with their wings. If you showed any sign of nervousness or being scared of them they'd charge you. There were a lot of incidences. I got to go back one more time here, I remember my dad and mother and younger brother, we went out one time. We went to a show and we came back at night and my older brother he's playing tricks. We got out of the car, walking in the house and all of a sudden we heard, "Hoot, hoot, hoot." "Owl." "Oh, there's an owl." And that was nothing unusual—we had owls around our place. Mother and my younger brother Ken, they went in the house and my dad and I we walked around the corner and dad says, "Oh, there's an owl here. Eugene, you go get the .22." I said, "Okay." I walked in the house, got the .22 and some shells. My dad, he loaded her up and he fired a couple of shots in the ground and my brother was up in the tree with his buddy at night, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! It's me." He never did that again. We just stood there and laughed. There was a whole bunch of different things that he used to always come up like that—we'd pull tricks and everything.

But anyway, let me go back to going in the Coast Guard. First, I wanted to get in the Navy Sub Corps and I talked to my buddy Jerry across the street that I was chums with all my life. I said "What do you think? You got to go down to Chicago to enlist." We're just about ready to go down and enlist and we met one of the gentlemen that I went to school with—grade school. He was my sister's age, a little older and he says, "Hey, you guys, did you ever think about the Coast Guard?" "No." He said, "I tell you what, I belong to the [Coast Guard] Reserves down here in Milwaukee. Why don't you come down there and see what it's like, see what you think? If you don't like it, you can always go down, join the Navy Sub Corps." I thought, "Okay, I'll give it a try." We went down—it was down at Chicago Street, downtown.

One night we went down there and they made us feel very welcome. Their commander let us march with the guys in the armory, and gave us a whole bunch of literature and sat down with us and explained everything about the service—what it does and what it meant. We said, "Okay. We'll take it home and read it up." He says, "You guys come back next meeting such and such a day." "Okay." We went home, we read all the pamphlets. I found it most interesting and so Jerry and I went to the next meeting and we decided to join the Coast Guard. He said "Good. Guys I'm going to give you a test and you got to pass the test in order to get in." It's a volunteer outfit—you just don't sign up, you have to have a certain degree of intelligence. One of my cousins didn't pass it—he took it, didn't pass it. But by luck, Jerry and I both passed the test and he said "Okay, you've passed the

test. Join the Reserves." So, we joined the Reserves. We come down there for a number of months and we joined the Reserves.

[00:30:09]

One evening we were standing at attention, the commander said, "We're looking for two guys for the next so many months—each month, two guys—to join the regulars." I think he got the September or October, I'm not sure. It might have been September. Jerry was standing in front of me and a little to my right—he kind of turned his head and I nodded, "Yeah." We both raised our hands and he said "Okay. Thiermann and Devore [sp??] You're going." "Great. We're going together." We went home and told our folks we were going into the regulars. We had some uniforms already that the reserves had given us. His father one early morning drove us down to the train station—got on the train and we took off. We went to Cleveland, Ohio at a Coast Guard station—life boat station—right on Lake Erie. We were in transit, so we stayed there for a couple of days.

I remember one afternoon we said "What are we going to do?" We went into town and we went to a show. We got done with the show, we were walking outside, and here's a big parade. I looked up and here's President-elect Eisenhower in a convertible driving by—he was running for president. We saw him going by—that was kind of a thrill. Then we went back to the station. Finally, we got our orders, so we hopped on a train and we were on our way to Cape May, New Jersey which is one of the Coast Guard training camps on the East side—the other one's in Alameda, California. During the train ride we met a bunch of other Coast Guard guys that were going to the boot camp as well. When we got to Cape May area, New Jersey, we had some time and we knew if we went into the camp, we weren't going to get out of there for a long time, so we had some time to spend. We were going to enjoy ourselves.

We went to the board walk and we went by the ocean, and figured we were going to go swimming in the ocean. Well, it was kind of closed there but we thought "What the heck." We had swimming suits. We put on our swimming suits they had a little building there and we went body surfing in the ocean. We'd swim out and we'd catch a wave and come gliding back in. I think it was kind of stupid now 'cause there could have been undertow and everything. You don't know but when you're—you don't think like that when you're younger sometimes but we did—we went swimming. We reported late afternoon at the camp and that was on 9/12/52. We stayed there until 12/12/52. That was our training period at Cape May. We had gone in on 6/6/52 until 9/12/52—6/6/52 was when I went into the Reserves.

At training camp and boot camp I was assigned to Company I—Item. They had all these phonetics names—Item, Charlie, Baker and so on. Item was our name and we had 164 guys in our company. Each week they'd have something different for part of the week and we had sailing, where we got to get out on boats learn how to sail. We had swimming in a big swimming pool—big natatorium—how to save somebody if they're drowning—how to come at them because they're going to be fighting someone that you're drowning, how to take care of yourself and that person, and tow them across the swimming pool. We had to swim underwater for so long and when we come up we had to throw our hands up first and swish our

hands back and forth in a circular motion in case you were in burning oil—so that you could take a breath of air, go back down and swim underneath the water to get into clear water. You had to learn all these different things about swimming.

[00:35:52]

Then they had a real high tower. You had to climb up this tower and this tower that was a diving platform, I mean and it was high. You had a big Mae West life jacket on. Well, the guy up there wasn't just too small, he was one big guy. When you got there, you got to walk to the end of that swimming pool and jump off of it. They told you how to jump off of it so you don't hurt yourself because it was a heck of a way down. Everybody had to jump off of that and hit that water. When that was over then you had to pass every single week because if you missed something, or you didn't pass that week, you had to do it over again and you were set back another company. Then we'd have different things—we had hand-to-hand combat, we had to learn how to take care of our self if somebody's coming at you with a gun and a knife—how to take the knife away and how to throw them down and take charge of the situation. We learned all kinds of stuff and hand-to-hand combat.

We had rope tying. We had to learn all the different knots and how to—there's a lot of them. You had to know it all and everything had to be perfect. Lot of drills, lot of marching. You had to run to chow hall in the morning. Of course, you had calisthenics every morning when you got up. They got you up out of the sack before it was light and that you had to do. We had firefighting—learning how to do handy Billy pumps and put out fires in the ship. You had guard duty—you had to walk around at night for four hours and you had a clock with you and there were different stations all over the Coast Guard base and you had to get to that station at a certain time and put this key that was hanging down at a certain place into that clock and turn the key in order to make an impression on a disk that was inside the clock that would turn and they would know exactly what time you were there.

Then we had ship board training, where we went aboard ship and learned all about that ship and how it works and all the different duties. Then we had a five mile run one time, I remember that. We had all our guys out there and we had 164 guys standing there and instructors. We had to run for five miles. We started running. Some of the guys would take off like a bat out of heck and be way out. I just took my time. I was used to running when I was a kid because I'd run through the gravel pits and through the woods and up and down hills. I used to run all the time. I'd run to school, run back home lot of times. We started running and running and pretty soon I got my second wind and I passed a few guys and I keep on going, pass a few more, finally I got in the front of everybody. I kept going—the instructor's way out in front—so I start gaining on the instructor. He turns around as he's running and he's looking at me and he starts running faster. He's running faster and I start running faster. I thought, "Oh what the heck, give'r." I just put the pedal down and I took off and I burned right by him. I got to the end and I stood there waiting for the whole crew, including the instructor. He just looked at me—he never said a word. That was the end of that.

[00:40:05] Anyway, during our training, we had a break—and I forget how many weeks it was—they let us out for a couple of days liberty. My buddy and a couple of other guys we went to Washington, D.C. We saw a couple of monuments, saw the sights. We came back and we had to finish our training. During your training, if you get something wrong, they give you a demerit—they'd mark that down. Depending on how many demerits you had, you could choose where you wanted to go after graduation. I was a Boy Scout—I never had a single demerit. I never got one demerit and my buddy Bob Kingery [sp??] he just had a couple—maybe one, two, three demerits. He was number two. They had a posting on the board, where you could go, of different assignments. I looked at that and I said, "Hey Bob. They got an opening for two guys that they can go to Hawaii. Let's go to Hawaii." He said, "That sounds good to me." We put our names down for Hawaii—that we had locked in right off the bat. We had the first pick of the whole Company. That's how I got to Hawaii. My buddy Jerry, he didn't fend so well, he went to Argentia, Newfoundland. After that there was a guy named Stony—the barber—he had a couple of cars for rent. You could go home any way you wanted to, so we got four guys together and we gave him some of our money that we had from mustering out and he drove us back to Chicago. From there I took a train and went home after that. We had a nice time. Good to be home for a while.

Gibb: What did your family think about you going—moving from the reserves into full-time?

Thiermann: Mother didn't say too much. She was pretty strict but I was eighteen. I don't know—I just went.

[Break in recording] [00:43:35]

Thiermann: Like I said, I went a short leave home. Then, I believe, I boarded a plane, I flew out to Alameda, California on 1/1/53 to 2/10/53 when I got out that base waiting for transit to leave for Hawaii. Then, finally, the ship left and was on big cargo ship, must have been about five hundred foot long. The first time I was on the ocean and so we got into Hawaii, went to the Coast Guard base there, which, by the way, is not in Pearl Harbor. It's a little bit off of Pearl Harbor—we've got our own separate base. It's across from actually the Aloha tower in Honolulu, across the bay. [coughs] On 2/18/53 to 5/24/54 I was aboard the cutter [USCGC] *Forster*. The *Forster* was a destroyer escort—World War II ship. It was 306 foot long, thirty six foot wide. It had three, three-inch cannons. One quad forty—that's four guns—two twin forty millimeters, two twenty millimeters, two aft depth charge racks, four K guns—they are the guns that shoot depth charges from the side of the ship, four on each side—and bow mounted hedgehogs [Anti-Submarine Projectors], which are shot in front of the ship and go down into the water, and you make a sharp port or starboard turn so they don't hit your ship. When they go down into the water they hit a sub, they explode on contact when they turn over. It was really a sub chaser during World War II—very maneuverable boat. [coughs]

[Break in recording]

[00:46:32] We were in transit there and we were summoned to the office. Bob and I had our bags packed and we walked up to the office and we walked in the lieutenant at the desk says, "Guys I got two openings—two for cutter and two for a buoy tender." Bob says, "Let's not go on a buoy tender. All they do is just stay in the harbor and fix buoys." We took the cutter and that's how I got on the *Forster*. "All right gentlemen. Go out the door and make a left turn and go down the dock. You'll find her down there." We went down there and walked on board, checked in. Change into our work clothes and started working—put you to work right away. There was 140 crew of which twenty were officers and chiefs. We go out to sea and cover 250 square mile area and patrol that.

One of the spots we'd go out to is between the U.S. and Hawaii. Any plane that was coming over and had to ditch, we could pick up the survivors. We had to learn to circle around and make the waters calm, drop flares out that were floating in the water—like a runway—shoot a star shell up in the air to light up the whole area, and lower our small boats down in case some plane had to ditch. We had to practice that—ditch and rescue. It was also weather ship which means we had to send in weather reports wherever we were. These guys would send us into storms to get the weather—what's the storm like? How strong is it—all about the storm. Sometimes we had to carry U.S. weather people on board our ship.

Another duty we had was what they called a LORAN [long range navigation] station. We don't have them anymore—we have satellites in the air, but a LORAN station is a station where the Coast Guard mans. It would send out a signal and if a plane, or a ship, or anybody was lost, they could hone in on that signal, then hone in on another LORAN station someplace else, cross them and they'd know exactly where they were. We'd go out there and bring them stores. One place was French Frigate Shoals was part of the Hawaiian chain, way out—I think it was about four hundred miles out. We'd go out there and bring them stores and we'd take our small boats—you couldn't get up to the island because it was like a big sand bar. We'd load up all their supplies and take it in on a couple of our small boats—we had two of them, one on either side. Had to go over the reefs of course to get through there, because there's the reefs around the little bar.

[00:50:35] They told us, "You guys can go swimming, but don't go out past the reefs because there are sharks and jellyfish. Stay inside the reefs." A lot of the guys went out there and caught a sea turtle and they caught fish and everything. They bring them aboard. I didn't do any of that stuff but we went fishing. We caught some sharks—went down the cook and he got a big pile of meat. One of the Hawaiian boys had a great big hook, tied it on to a rope and tied a bore onto that line about two, three feet up and threw it over the side. Didn't take too long and here comes the shark and nailed that thing. We swung a davit out over the side, that's like a little U, like a cane and an eye on the bottom of it and put a line through there, that line we'd hoist up the shark. Throw another lasso round the shark a little lower, heavier line, put that through it, about ten, twelve guys would walk down the side of the deck and hoist that shark all the way up.

We swung him over the side and landed him on the deck. Guys bunch of fire axes they chopped that bugger all up. They washed him over the side with fire hoses. Let me tell all that blood and all that meat and everything going into the water—there was a shark frenzy. Anybody would have fell in that water you wouldn't have lasted two seconds. It was just unbelievable—the attacking of the rest of them sharks. I had some pictures that I took—I got to dig them up some place, I don't know where they are now. So we done all that stuff. Once when we were out off of Hawaii, one of the guys got appendicitis attack. We had to go all ahead flank, and we went to Adak, Alaska, We got him to the hospital in time and he was in good shape after that. He had an operation, he flew back to Hawaii, met us on board ship again—he was fine. I remember taking him out there.

In Hawaii when we would pull liberty I used to walk around a lot. I used to go by myself, I didn't want to get in trouble—some of the guys were pretty wild. Once in a while I'd go out with them but a lot of times I'd go by myself and I had a camera, nice camera, took colored slides. I remember one time I was at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and I'm walking around, outside taking pictures and talking to people and everything. I come walking back in and walk up to the water fountain. All of a sudden I look up, here's one of the guys he's walking toward me, to the water fountain—I look up and it's Joe DiMaggio—the famous Yankee baseball player. I was so overcome by it I didn't want to bug him so he looked at me and he said, "You drink first son. You're doing more for your country than I am." So I drank first, and I thanked him. He just smiled at me, and I left because some famous guy like that—you don't want to impose on him, I just left.

[00:54:53] Another thing we used to go to—I'd go to Fort DeRussy—that was a place where World War II guys used to stay when they would come back on liberty and leave, and come into Hawaii. They had a place there for servicemen where you could get a couple of beers if you wanted or something to eat. I'd go over there and spend some time. Once in a while we'd go into Pearl Harbor—we'd steam into Pearl Harbor and we'd get our fuel there. We'd fuel up for the next trip out to sea. When I started I was on the deck force and I always wanted to become a boatswain's mate. I had two stripes and I studied and passed the test, got three stripes—that's like a sergeant in the Army—and I wanted a stripe for being a boatswain's mate. I took my third class petty officer test—you had to be in so long in order to be qualified to get that rank, or rate, I passed the test and there were no openings. They wouldn't give it to me, they were short. I thought, "Okay." I just kept studying all the time and I studied some more and I passed my second class petty officer test—well if you don't have your third class, you can't get your second class—no openings. That was it, I was third class, I mean a three striper seaman and that was my rate throughout the whole Coast Guard career although I might have stayed in for more than two years had there been rate openings because I did enjoy it.

The next place we were going to go was a trip to the Philippine Islands. We had to get some more shots—injections—for any disease they had over there. We had three or four shots before we went over. I remember going over—the trip was just

absolutely beautiful. The sea was just as calm, it was like glass. At night you could just sit back on the fantail and you just watched the water breaking off the edge of the ship. I can't even describe it; it was warm and just beautiful. I had bought a tenor ukulele—we had some Hawaiian boys onboard and them guys could really play that tenor ukulele. Also I had gotten a wire recorder—one of the guys had one and I bought it off of him—and so we'd go on the fantail and we'd record them playing the tenor ukulele and us guys singing and goofing off like you would not believe. It was just beautiful.

I remember going past the Mariana Islands—that's kind of close to the Philippines—we fought there pretty hard during World War II and this is right after the war. Of course, the Korean War was going on. At night, going through there, you could smell the sweetness of the islands. You could actually smell the islands at night. It was just an experience I'll never forget. I didn't know too much about playing the ukulele but as time went on, I learned how to play. I could play a few songs from the boys, they taught me. When we arrived, it was daytime and we went into Manila Bay—Sangle Point Navy Base was off our starboard quarter and we dropped anchor, and of course we were in the bay. Sangle Point Navy Base was where we would pick up our stores to replenish our food supply and whatever we needed.

[01:00:33] If we went on liberty there was a barge that would come alongside of our ship—this barge was one of these barges that they used during World War II where they would take the troops on the shore then the bow would drop down. They had this thing all set up with seats in it and everything. If you wanted to go on liberty—and you had a pass—you'd walk down the side of the gangplank, get on that barge and it took forty-five minutes to get to Manila. Once in Manila we'd grab a cab and we'd head to some bar. Everybody's sitting there talking smart and drinking San Miguel beer. We had a guy on our ship, we called him Little John, and this guy was a piece of work, let me tell you. \

Guy name of Suchsdorf [sp??] was the third class boatswain's mate, he said to us one time, he came back, "I met Little John in town and he had a bottle of cherry wine, Manila rum and orange brandy and he mixed them all together. He says, 'Hey Sukie take a swig of this.' I grabbed that bottle and took a swig and stopped breathing for a while. I don't know how that guy could drink that stuff." He come back to the ship at night. I remember standing on board ship one time and here comes the paddy wagon. They pull Little John out, made sure he got back on the ship—the SPs had him. He come on board ship, Lieutenant on duty said "John"—he had some bottles underneath his jumper trying to sneak them on the ship—"I know what you got underneath your jumper. I'm going to turn around, I didn't see nothin'. When I turn back I don't want to see you. I want you to be gone." John he was just smiling, the lieutenant turns around, John takes his two shoes off, throws them over the side and hears two splashes and takes off, and he kept the bottles. That was John. I'll never forget it.

We had a number of incidents over there. We'd go on liberty to Manila, of course. We'd also go on liberty to other little towns. We went aboard Corregidor [Island].

Corregidor is where they had their gun emplacements and I got pictures of that—big guns that they had mounted in Corregidor. When they shot off one of these guns you had to go into a cave cause they would have broken your eardrums. You could have crawled down the barrel, just huge guns and huge mortars that they would shoot. I could see [Douglas] MacArthur's headquarters off in the distance. I went through the cave there that they have where they have railroad tracks going into it. This was where MacArthur—when the Japs [Japanese] were bombing pretty heavy, he went in there, and they kept ammo and stuff in there and they kept their hospital people in there that were injured and so on. All their medics and stuff were in that cave. It was really something to see.

[01:05:07] Also, one of the cities was Cavite [City] we went to and Olongapo, were two of the other cities I visited. Some of the houses there were on stilts—water underneath them. People living in grass igloos, made out of grass—very poor people. When you grab the cab at the dock there and went into town in Manila, little kids would be standing on the side of the road, holding a victory sign up with their two fingers because they remembered us coming over there, kicking the Japanese out of the place. They had island of Bataan—that's where they had the death march, I have pictures of that—they didn't want us to go aboard Bataan because there were Huks [Hukbalahap]—what they call Huks—on that island and those people, during the war, were people that did not agree with the government and so they wanted their own people in there. They wanted their president and they didn't get their way so they went into the jungle as guerillas.

I'll get back to them in a minute but I got pictures of that. Most of us had nicknames, like I said Little John was one, Suchsdorf was one of the guys we called him Sukie, and all sorts of other names. My name was Easy Ed Therms. They called me "Easy Ed" because my first two initials are ED so that was Ed and because I was easy to get along with they put the "Easy" in front. Instead of saying Thiermann, they'd say Therms—so I was Easy Ed Therms. The boatswain's mate used to call me Therms all the time, just Therms. "Hey Therms, do this, do that." We also had names for money—a nickel was a jit, a dime was a diemer, a Martha was a half a dollar, and a George was a dollar bill. You didn't say, "Give me a dollar." You'd say, "Give me a George." There are all kinds of stuff like that going on.

I crossed the International Date Line going over there, and of course you have to have initiations. I had to go through an initiation. I don't remember what it was all about but I know it was crazy. Every one of us greenhorns, in order to get through there, we had to go through that initiation. Once we got through, it was called the Realm of the Golden Dragon. On my jumper, you turned the sleeves up, you could sew in a patch and it was a colorful all knitted dragon that you could sew around either side. Then they gave you a little card that said "Realm of the Golden Dragon." We had a boat that was out on the water that had lost an engine and there was a storm coming up. One time we had to go out and get a hold of that boat and pull them in before the storm hit.

Guard duty at night, I remember that. Even though we were anchored out in the middle of Manila Bay, it was still dangerous because the Huks were looking for ammunition and guns. They would sneak aboard ship and try to get into the armory and steal guns out of the armory at night. There was a British ship about a thousand yards from us—they snuck aboard the British ship—our exec came in one night and told us this because he was in Sangley Point Navy Base and he heard about it and he told us. They snuck aboard the ship and of course, you've got a roving patrol that walks around the whole ship at night. The roving patrol didn't come back to the quarterdeck, they went out to look for him because one of the black gang come up from the engine room—that's the engine room boys, you call them the black gang—and the quartermaster said "Hey, so-and-so didn't report back in. Something isn't right, go check on him." He went out looking for him and he didn't come back in. [coughs]

[01:10:58] Boatswain's mate sounded general quarters. They went out and found both of them knifed—both dead. The exec was pretty shook up. He says, "All right, we're issuing you a thirty caliber carbine when you walk around the deck at night." I had the mid[night] to four [a.m.] watch. I had a belt on and a clip hanging off the side—an extra clip. The clip had about sixteen rounds in there so I pulled the clip out and I looked, there ain't no bullets in the clip. I said, "This ain't going to be doing. I'm going to put some bullets in there. I ain't walking around the deck with no bullets." I took that full clip out and I put that inside the carbine and put the empty on in my pouch. I put my right hand on the trigger and held it on my right side because I'm right handed and had my left hand of the bolt on the side, my finger on the trigger. All I would have had to do was just squeeze that trigger and throw that bolt back and let my thumb slip off that and she would have went forward and I would have had a round off.

I walked around there very quietly and very cautiously on the mid to four watch. You just didn't walk out from underneath something without looking up because they'd come onboard from the fantail, they didn't have any shoes on or nothing—they were quiet, you know, to get in onboard ship. Thank God I didn't have to shoot anybody but you think about it. You're walking around; you can't see nothing, just moonlight and that. So anyway, we had that. When we were underway, I had three extra duties. One of them was on the helm, steering the ship, for an hour and twenty minutes. Then messenger duty for an hour and twenty minutes. Then lookout for an hour and twenty minutes—you had a four hour watch. You'd work four hours, depending upon what time of day it was or evening it was, maybe you'd get an extra hour or two sleep in the morning, if you had the mid to four, and then you had to go turn two again work. Then the next time you'd keep on doing that when you're out at sea.

Finally, we got down out of the Philippines and we took a trip to Hong Kong, China. When we pulled into Hong Kong, must have been at least a hundred little boats come flying over to us. They figure, "Here's some fresh money, we're going to sell them some merchandise." They come alongside your ship. "Hey Joe, you buy this." Try to climb onboard ship. We had to break out four fire hoses and

we're washing them off the ship. Another guy and me—there was a couple of guys that had snuck aboard the back end—I grabbed a buddy of mine, I said, "Hey, let's get these guys." We run over, we grab them, throw them overboard. I just picked them up and threw them clear over the side. Another one come up, I threw him over the side. That's what we were doing. Then they were washing them with the hoses, keeping them away with water cannons.

[01:15:10] Finally, the next day, we got a visitor. Here's his small boat coming in—this guy's standing in the small boat—white uniform on and all decked out, had a big fancy hat on with gold on top of his hat, and medals all over the place. He comes to our ship and he comes on board and he has a meeting with the skipper in the ship. He told us who we could buy from and who not—because they didn't want the wrong merchants getting money back to communist China. We could not buy from everybody—they had to have a special card in order to sell us their goods. I had the mid to four watch that night—I got up the next day and I walk out and here the whole back of the ship and the sides were full of merchants. They had their little posts up, the tarp over the top to keep out of the sun, and anything you wanted to buy: chests, jewelry, pens, watches, pencils, silks, anything. No matter what it was—I could not believe it.

You could hardly walk through and there's all these merchants selling this stuff. I bought some jade earrings, some jewelry for my mother that went round her neck. I bought a bunch of chests—one would go inside the other, inside the other and so on. All hand carved. I bought a—and they had a tailor make it for me—a cashmere sport coat for nineteen dollars, all tailor made. I bought a three-piece suit for twenty eight dollars—unbelievable. And all perfectly hand made by Lee tailors in Hong Kong. He'd come, he'd go, he'd take my measurements, he'd go into town, he'd come back he'd measure me again, he'd go back measure me again. Must have measured me about three times back and forth and finally he delivered them. I took them home with me—they were nice clothes. I didn't go into town—I saved my money so I could purchase all the different clothes.

Now, when we went out to sea over there, it can get pretty rough, and I mean really, really rough. I wound up going through two typhoons and two gales. A gale is winds going up to sixty miles an hour—I should say seventy. Anything above seventy is a typhoon. You can have winds go over a hundred miles an hour. Let me tell you, it gets pretty wild. I remember one time Bob Kingery [sp??] came up to the wheelhouse and I was on the helm—he had his camera. He says, "I want to get some pictures of the waves hitting the bow, coming over." We were pulling green water—what that means is that the bow is going under the wave and the wave is rolling over the top of the ship. I said, "About every fourth one. Count every fourth one—the fourth one is a doozer." "Okay."

He loosened the lug poles on the hatches, except the top one that he had loose. All had to do was throw it up and drop it down. He stood there with his camera, going to take a picture, and then when he took a picture going to throw that the porthole back up and drop the hook down so he could tighten it back up. Well, he's counting away and I said "Bob. She's a-coming, it's a good one." We're pulling

green water and he drops that porthole down and snapped his picture and before he could move his hand up to put that porthole back, it came through the porthole, hit him in the face, threw him against the back bulkhead and he was sliding down and on the deck, and water all over the wheelhouse. The quartermaster up there he grabbed that and closed it up right away—we had to swab it up. Bob was all right he was just knocked silly for a little bit. It gets that wild.

[01:20:56] During World War II Admiral Halsey [Jr.] on his flotilla out there, lost four destroyers—they turned over in the South China Sea, in the Philippine Sea. That's where I went through a couple of typhoons. I remember one evening—I remember it like it happened today. I was on the helm—it was dark. You couldn't see anything. I had the gyro compass in front of me watching the gyro compass. The magnetic was just to the right. I had a chief standing behind me holding onto the rails that you could hold on to and back of them, and a quartermaster to my left. We hit a swell, or a wave, so violent it picked the ship up and it threw us off course to the starboard fifty degrees—just lifted us up and moved the ship over fifty degrees—and laid it over sixty degrees. That's like this. We were sliding down and the wave's coming over us. Above my head was a bar that was in a U welded to the overhead and you grabbed a hold of that bar and that's what held you in place—one hand was on that, one hand was on the helm.

My legs were hanging in the air, my feet were off the deck, because you could walk up the bulkhead easier than you could stand on the deck. I spun it to the port as hard as I could. She start coming back and the wave caught us again and threw us off a hundred degrees to the port, come back to fifty to amidships, and then another fifty to port and dropped us down again another sixty degrees on an angle. I thought we were going to roll over. The chief is screaming, "Don't let this get caught in a—Thiermann we're going to roll her." I was a busy man. I come back again but then I had to stop it and come back. I finally got her amidships. I no more go that ship amidships and holding course as best I could, the skipper hollers up from his cabin below. He said, "What the hell's going on up there?" I said, "Sir, I think we hit a rogue wave." Because it's like a couple of oak trees coming at you—it would be so high, you'd look up during the day sometimes and the wave was up there and you're coming up like this and the water is washing over you and going over the top of the wheelhouse. That's how high it was. It was like a submarine.

[01:24:45] I knew we were going to be in for it because I was watching the barometer and the barometer was dropping and dropping and I thought "Uh-oh. We're in for something." And we were. We went through a few of them storms and they don't just shut down right away—they might last for ten days, two weeks, not that violent, they'll start to die down as time goes by but they're still wild for a long time and you're fighting it and fighting it. We had acetylene and oxygen bottles on the side of our ship, held on with three-eighth thick steel bands—it ripped the three-eighth steel right in half. The bottles were flying around back by the depth charge racks, stripped the paint off the side of the ship. You can't imagine the force water has, it's just unbelievable. They don't let you walk out on deck when it

gets violent. You don't dare. There's a fore and aft passageway that you have to take.

I remember going to watch one time and watch was now in the wheelhouse—you couldn't go out on deck. There's expansion joints in the ship or the ship will break in half. On those expansion joints, there's about a half inch thick rubber that is bent into a U, that is around there so when a ship moves, that rubber straightens out a little bit. I'm standing there watching this thing and I can see this whole rubber just straightening out and then coming back because the ship is flexing. When the screws [propellers] come out of the water in the back—we have two of the screws—the whole ship would just vibrate from one end to the other, like somebody was shaking it because you're riding on top of the wave now for a second. Everything is just "brrrrr" all the way through the ship.

We went through those storms—at night you'd have to stand watch way up on top of the wheelhouse, or during the day. You had a pair of binoculars and when you're up there, you look down and there's the flying bridge—the uppermost part of the ship that you can stand on. Then you climb up the ladder—right down there's a little ring up there where a main radar control system is and it's got a bench around it like a steel plate where you can sit on that. Then you got a railing in front of you where you can hold on in case it gets very violent. I would go up there with my rain gear at night and I'd take an extra rain top along and that I would hold in front of me because every once in a while you'd get one of these big waves. You'd see it breaking over the bow and she's rolling up on you and I'd hold that in front of me. Wham, it'd hit you. I had this in front of me and it'd hit that. That's how we stood watch. We got a call one night—during the day I should say, some freighter had come through some place and radioed us, and said that they saw a World War II mine floating in the water. This wasn't far after the war when I was there—the First World War. We had to go over and look for it.

It got to be night and I'm on watch. You're staring to find something—just a little thing floating in the water if you can see it. I can hardly see nothing—I'm looking through binoculars all around the ship as we're going. They said if that thing ever hits the ship, and you're standing up, the concussion of the ship flying up in the air puts your legs into your body—break your legs and just throw them into your body. That's how fast the ship would go. They said they had one of these destroyer escorts during the war and they went down in seventeen seconds, that's the damage it took—everybody was gone. We ran into stuff like that but then were pleasant times too—the sun setting on top the ocean, a big red ball—beautiful, just gliding along. I really enjoyed it.

[01:30:04] Then we had an incident out at sea where a French Frigate—which is a Canadian destroyer—radioed us, and they said they ran into a ship that was aground—ran aground on a sandbar. And another ship was there, wanted to pull them off. French Frigate asked for their call letters—the Canadian war ship—and they gave him some call letters, who they were. They looked in the log book, they couldn't find them. They called us up. They said, "Would you come over here?" That was our area, the watch, so we steamed over there and when we got there the French

Frigate they left. We asked for the call letters from this other ship as well. They gave us some call letters so we looked them up in our log books—couldn't find them. Skipper figured it's got to be a commie [Communist] ship, wanted to drag this ship off of the bar and claim their cargo.

He said to them, "Leave the area." They just sat there, they didn't go. He told them again, "Leave the area, we want you to leave." Wouldn't go. Called them again he said, "You've got twenty minutes to leave the area or we'll blow you out of the water." He sounded general quarters—we trained all our guns on them. They left. That's what we had to do. We waited there until a sea-going tug, out of Japan, comes over to pull this guy out. I'm glad I didn't have to shoot anybody but that's what happened. Everybody was on their station—I had a set of headphones on I was up on the bridge by the twenty millimeter and I was coordinating the gun to the main batteries. When we went back, we were going back to Hawaii and again—I don't know why—but it was at night and I'm on the helm again. They only let certain people go on the helm through storms and through touchy situations—the quartermaster, myself, and another guy, I think there might have been another, that they would let on the helm. Because some guys weren't that good on the helm or adapted that they couldn't control the ship too good—in calm seas yes, but not when it got rough.

I'm on the helm again and we have to go through what they call San Bernardino Straits—two points where you had to go through or to go out of the Philippine area. The skipper yelled, "Nothing to the left." He gave me coordinates, so many degrees. I had to hold the ship right there so that nothing—we wouldn't run aground. The minute we got through the straits we had a storm—it was a gale weather and it beat us to death for I don't know how many days. It wasn't fun. You know, if you can get into a storm and it comes on gradual, your body gets acclimated to the buildup. But if you're hit with it from calm seas to all of a sudden, bam—you're in a storm—you can get pretty sick. I saw guys pretty sick on that trip. I saw them so sick that when we got back in port, they had to call the ambulance to take them to the hospital, never seen them again, they just sit there and stare into space, they were completely out of it.

[01:30:04] I got sick twice but I kept on working. You just do it—that's part of your job. Once I was on the helm it was so violent, and I was on it for I don't know how many days, and finally your body gets worn down and worn down and I hollered "Somebody grab the helm." And I just passed out. I dropped to the floor. Couple of guys grabbed me, dragged me down—threw me in the sack. Next morning I got up I was working. Couldn't hardly stand, swabbing up water in the chief's quarters in the head—that's the bathroom—but you kept on working. No favor for nobody, you had to pull your weight. So anyway, we're going back to Hawaii and we get back to the States—went back to Long Beach. Coast Guard forty-footer came out and met us. "We got anything to declare?" Yeah, we had stuff to declare. "Forget it." We didn't have to declare nothing—that was ours.

We went back into Long Beach, and from there, right there's San Pedro Harbor, we were decommissioning our ship—calling it a day on the ship. If we got done

working we had to walk off of there, get in a little van, they'd drive us over to some big Navy ship and we had to go aboard the Navy ship and spend the night at the Navy ship. We couldn't go ashore then. We had what they called Port and Starboard liberty. The next day we could stay on our ship and they had half the guys on board our ship, half the guys go back—work crew. Then half the guys would go on liberty. I thought, "You know what, I want to do something." I talked to two of my buddies—Tony and Pete, Tony DiSalvo [sp??] and Pete Sergegas [sp??]—little Greek guy—good guys. I said "Hey they bought a pack on an old Packard, let's go into town and rent an accordion." "Okay." Tony, being Italian, that's right up his alley.

They took me into town, went into a music store and I rented an accordion. Brought it back to the ship, and I'd sit there and I'd play at night for the boys. They loved it. Doing that the skipper heard me and we were standing to attention one time and he said, "Thiermann, I heard you play. It sounded pretty good." "Thank you, sir." He said, "Why don't you play every night? You don't have to go back to that ship." I could stay there on board our ship—I could pull liberty every single night. I had it made. I played accordion for the boys. When I was done, if I wanted to, I could go into town—what a deal. Then I had Coast Guard driver's license I had gotten and I'd go into town and I'd get a movie and I'd bring it back, we'd show a movie. Or I'd drive them back to out in the fields some place where they were playing baseball. That was fun.

Finally, I had orders to go home. Pete and Tony had that old Packard and they're looking for guys to go out with them and they lived way out east—Pennsylvania, New Jersey or someplace way out there. A guy—we called him Smiley—Smiley and Pete and Tony and myself, we went together. Jumped in the old Packard one day and I said good-bye to some of my buddies and drove Route 66 all the way back. Went into St. Louis where we dropped off Smiley—he was married and his wife come running out of there, give him a big hug and a kiss. He said, "Come on in." We went in and we were sitting there and his sister-in-law was there too. She wanted us to stay in the worst way. "You guys stay." "No. I want to go home. Been seventeen months, I want to go home." We said goodbye and we left. We drove back.

[01:40:21] They took me into Chicago and then I said good-bye to them guys—again it was at night. I had two sea bags full—grabbed one, threw the other over my shoulder then I walked into the train station, bought a ticket for Milwaukee, and waited there for a while. Finally, I got on the train and they took me home to Milwaukee. I grabbed a cab, drove home and got in the yard—Opa's standing in the yard by the pump house. The cabbie, he drives in, I pay him, and I get out of the cab. He opens up the trunk, getting my sea bags out. Opa's looking at me and looking at me. I says, "Opa. Don't you know me no more?" "Eugene. Oh my god." Then he was happy. We went in the house, they all came out. My sister-in-law was there—the gal that had married my brother. She said "Bill's going to be excited. We got to call him up and give him some excuse. Got to come over and fix ma's plumbing. Something's wrong with the plumbing—we'll call him up."

They call up my older brother—they had a couple of kids at the time. He comes over and I'm standing back in the pantry where he couldn't see me. He's standing in the house "What's wrong with the plumbing." Then I walked out and oh, was that a reunion. I spent some time at home. Then my buddy came over, he was out at the same time from Argentina, Newfoundland. He stopped over and said, "Hello" to my family. I went over and said "Hello" to his family. It was like my second family, his family. They would take me on vacation with them and all kinds of things when I was growing up. We used to chum together all the time. We spent our time there and—let me see, where am I here? My next assignment was had to go up to California. I was at Humboldt Bay Lifeboat Station in Eureka, California. That's the north end of Oregon along the Pacific Ocean.

What a lifeboat station is, is that we're called to go out and rescue people that are stranded out at sea or are capsized or are in trouble. We have to go out and get them. First I went back to Alameda and of course I didn't see Bob no more, I was by myself. Then from 7/8/54 to 9/7/54—I only had a couple of months to go in my service career—I'm not sure if I took a train. I think I took a bus after transit. I took a bus that went there. Again, once I got there, it was a beautiful lifeboat station. They had four guys to a room and our duties were rescue and a tower watch—they had a tower there on top of a big water tower and it was a little hut on top of the water tower, ninety-foot in the air. You had a walkway up there and the little tower on top of the water tower—a little hut—you'd look over the Pacific Ocean and you had your binoculars, you had a big telescope on top. You had two shortwave radios, there was a siren up there in case you had a call coming in and you hit the siren for people in the lifeboat station to take off and jump in the boats and take off.

[01:45:21] Another duty was checking the boats in the harbor and maintaining the station. We took weather reports that came in when we were in the tower and I had to call—they'd call in from a ship out at sea some place, like what we had. I'd have to call that in to the weather station in Eureka. Then they'd write down—it was just numbers and those numbers all meant something. Then they'd take that down. I was up in the tower once and I just got up there and a call came through. We sit the siren, the guys come flying out of the wheelhouse—they're calling us on the shortwave radio we're talking back to them. Then the phone rings, the skipper down in our house, down below in our lifeboat station. He says, "What's going on up there?" I had to tell him what had happened. "Okay." We were busy for a little while, then he left I finished the watch.

One time I was out in the back of the lifeboat station, way up on the scaffolding—we were painting the station—and a siren goes off. Second class boatswain comes flying out of the station and he says, "Thiermann, come on." He's running down the dock to get to the boat. I swung myself around and I come scooting down the side of the scaffolds a couple of stories up. I'm running down the dock as fast as I could, he's already cranked away from the dock and I just jumped and I made the lifeboat and got in. He says "Get on the radio. Call the station." I got on the shortwave and I called the station, "What's going on?" He told us as we're racing

out to go out the channel out into the ocean and what had happened—there are different places where you can rent boats there. Some family rented a boat from what they call easy-landing dock and they had gone out into the ocean.

It got too rough out there and their boat capsized and they fell in the water. The life expectancy out there, even if you're in good shape, is about twenty minutes—it's so cold. We go out there and by luck a charter fishing boat was out there and saw what happened, raced over and grabbed a hold of them and pulled them out of the water or they would have drowned. We got up alongside this charter fishing boat out in the ocean and there was a man—elderly man—and a young boy and we took them on board and there was a woman and a girl—they were a little bit better shape than the two guys were. They said, "We'll take care of these guys, you can get these two guys back." Our boat was a lot faster than theirs so we took around and we raced them back to the easy-landing dock. I called the tower couple times: "Send an ambulance to the easy-landing dock."

A little while later I said "We better get two of them, they're both in bad shape." We had them inside by the engine room with the door closed, warmer you know. I called them again, we got two ambulances coming and we come flying into the dock and they were waiting down there. There were a bunch of people had blankets and stretchers and they were waiting on us. One ambulance was there and I heard the siren of the second one coming. They just grabbed them and hustled them up into the ambulances to take them to hospital because hypothermia was setting in—they were shaking pretty bad. We left, we went back to the station—get ready for the next thing that happened. Then we'd go out on Sundays—the bosun, him and I, got along real good together—we'd go to church on Sundays.

[01:50:16] We'd go out and I'd take care of the helm on the boat and drop him off on a boat into the fishing and then he'd check for life jackets and the proper gear—fire extinguishers and whatever they had to have in order to be safe out on the water. And if they weren't he'd have to write them out a summons. Coast Guard would go out there and check people—make sure that they're okay. That was our duty out there. Like I said, it came to be that they wanted me to ship over, meaning that, "Come on in for another four years." I said, "No. I can't, there's no openings. You open it up, give me a third class petty officer—I already passed my test—I'll think about shipping over." "There ain't openings, Thiermann." "Well then I'm going home. There's no sense in me staying here." You didn't make much money.

When I got to be seaman I was making a hundred dollars a month and eight dollars extra. It was a hundred and eight dollars for hazardous sea pay—going through storms—they give you the eight bucks. You didn't make any money back then. I went into town, they took me into town, I had to go to a clinic where they checked me out to make sure I was okay. Give me my papers to muster out. I took a bus into San Francisco, and I spent the night. The next morning I went, I think it was the 9th Coast Guard district, down San Francisco I had to go there and mustered out to go home. I did that and then went to—I think I flew home, I'm not sure. I got home—it was late at night. I called up "I'm at the station. I'll be home

in a little while." My mother answered. I went home—it was late, grandma and grandpa were in bed already. I sat in the kitchen and we start talking together for a little bit.

I had a good school chum, name was Bob Jockwer [sp??] and I went to grade school and high school with him. I remember when I had gotten on my first big leave I was driving down one of the roads over there and he was coming the other way. I spotted him and we stopped and chatted for a while—he was on his way to work. I stopped him. I said, "Bob, I got a couple months to go. When I get out we'll get together and we'll do some stuff together." "That sounds, good. Great." We parted. When I come home I'm sitting in the kitchen with my mother and she looked at me and she said, "Bob Jockwer [sp??] died." You could have hit me with a brick—he died of leukemia, didn't know he had it and all of a sudden. Back then they didn't have anything to do, back in '54 that was. What a terrible shock.

Anyway, that was the end of my Coast Guard career and the rest of it is my life after Coast Guard.

[break in recording]

Thiermann: Now we're in to my civilian life. I had a buddy whose father owned a weld shop and steel erecting. Prior to going in I wanted to get into Wisconsin Electric Power Company and I took a test prior to me going into the Coast Guard and they said, "When you're finished your military career, we'll send you a letter when you come home, and can let you know when you can come down here to get in." I passed their test at the company. I said, "Great, okay." When I got out, of course my parents were divorced and my dad lived next door in the house. My mother lived by her folks then. I went and visited some of my friends and of course, my buddy by his dad's weld shop, he was there working and man I walked in there and it was like all home [??] week.

He says to me, "You come work for me. I got a job for you." "Give me a little time here yet. I just got home." I waited a few days and went home. I didn't get no letter yet so I figured—I went to work for him. Finally one day, several weeks later, my dad come, "Eugene, I got a letter here for you." I open it up, it was from the electric company: "Come on down, we want to talk to you." Great, so I called them up right away. He says, "Where were you? We sent you that letter." It's a couple of weeks later or something.

[phone rings] [break in recording]

Thiermann: Okay, we're back. Anyway, I called him up and he said "Where were you?" I said, "My dad had the letter. It came to the wrong address." He said, "We hired everybody. You're out of luck." I thought, "Oh man." That was the end of that. I stayed working for a place called Parker's Welding Shop. They had steel erecting over there where you'd set steel high beams on houses, put columns underneath them—fill them full of concrete and so on.

I learned how to weld—I had learned how to weld prior to that, when I was still in high school, and I'd go over there once in a while my buddy, course his dad's place and I learned how to weld. I worked there for quite a few years. Weld high beams together and load them on the truck—the right length—and have columns full of concrete, different lengths, four inch diameter. In the morning I'd have to warm up a little bit, six foot six columns one of them and I'd grab that thing and press it over my head - it was a hundred and four pounds - just to warm up. Because when you rolled a high beam off the back of the truck on rollers, onto the wall, the high beams weighed anywhere from nine hundred, a thousand, twelve hundred pounds apiece. You'd roll it on a wall, you'd have to grab the other end and let it down.

I got so I could pick up about five, six hundred pounds off the floor. I was extremely strong and I'd set high beams on houses by myself. The whole truck loaded with them and I grabbed the columns and jumped in there and I popped the columns underneath the high beam and made sure the beam had a crown in it and go to the next job and do the same thing. Sometimes two, three, four columns underneath the high beams. Come back to the shop, get some more down, weld them together, and weld all kinds of things. It wasn't just high beams and columns. We had all other things—we had long rollers, we'd make and working on trucks and building low boys and all kinds of stuff. I welded there and worked there for quite a few years. When finally got married, to a gal from up in northern Wisconsin—I thought, "I'm going to marry a girl from the sticks. I don't want a city slicker. I want somebody that knows the value of hard work."

[02:00:39] That's what I did, I married a girl with ten children in the family. She was the oldest girl and she had four brothers. Let me see, one, two, three, four brothers, and six girls. We got married up there and after my first child was born I asked for a raise because I couldn't make it on straight time, sixty hours a week was the normal workweek. I worked sixty hours a week and sometimes longer. It was all straight time—you didn't get time and a half. If I worked I made sixty-nine, seventy, seventy-five bucks a week. You could hardly afford to have a family. I asked for a small raise. Finally he paid me a small raise and time and a half. Then I could make it. I worked there for quite a few years and finally I left and I worked at other places—welding shops and what have you. We wound up with four children, the three boys and one girl.

And later on in life, tragedy happened—we wound up in a divorce. My wife started getting other ideas in her head and so she started running around. Back then, you had four kids you didn't win the custody of your children. It was always given to the wife—well I had to prove that she was an unfit mother in order to win the custody of my children. I even hired a detective agency to check on her but I caught her. That means that she couldn't get no more alimony from me when I went through the divorce because I caught her being an adulteress. Then I had to prove she was an unfit mother. I proved that she ran away from the kids and left them by themselves. In court, we had three days of custody hearings, and at the end of the custody hearings—I won the custody of all four children. In fact when I

got down to the last one the judge says, "It's unheard of for the father to get the custody of an eight year old boy but because of this and this and this, I'm giving him all the children."

She was ordered out of the house in two weeks. He looked at her and said, "You have a job?" She shook her head, "No." And he—

[Break in recording][End of file1]

[Beginning of file2]

Thiermann: He said, "You've got to be out of the house in two weeks and Mr. Thiermann's going to move in with the children." Then I had the four children and myself. Then I had to get a live-in babysitter. I found some woman, bring her to court, and show that I had somebody that was going to take care of the kids. That was a hassle in itself. I had about three or four different babysitters—they'd stay for a little while then they'd leave. It was tough—finally the kids and I looked at each other and that's enough. I said, "Okay we're going to do it on our own." After my divorce I found a nice gal and she had two children—two small children—so we wound up finally getting married and that's who I'm married to now. We raised all six children together in a little house under a thousand square feet but we made a go. It all worked out and no complaints.

We survived and now I have—my youngest son has three children, two boys and a girl they're all out of college. My oldest boy has three children—one of them started a business of his own—and my daughter and son are not married. They're living in Milwaukee—one of them is living out just a little ways. My wife's two children have both excellent positions in Wisconsin Electric Power Company, called WEPCO. No complaints. We got a nice family. Yeah, we had our ups and downs, everybody does but you all pull together and you make it go. One of my wonderful experiences was just lately I think it was back—2013, I think it was, September, I went on the Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. My former brother in law to be went with me. That picture right there—wonderful man. He went with me—he was in the Air Force. Our daughter is getting married in Cancun—they paid for our whole trip. We're going to Cancun end of March—it's going to be a wonderful experience. My wife has never gone anyplace like that or seen the southern islands of any kind. I've had that wonderful experience but she hasn't.

As far as my working goes back, after my brother started renting equipment—he was working for Wisconsin Electric Company—he manufactured equipment that could be used to set utility poles and pack them on transformers and rear lots where its inaccessible for line trucks to go. I would go out and weld all the stuff first and he built a big factory on my mother's property—my grandparents had passed away. After a while I got to be in sales and went out and set up distributorships throughout the United States, Canada and international. I flew over to Switzerland, I flew over to England, and Puerto Rico and trained people. After that it was bought out by other companies later on and I worked for them. Finally retired, I was about sixty-nine or something. I worked a little bit longer

than most people. Like I said, back at seventy-three I went on the Honor Flight and saw the monuments—it was a wonderful experience. We flew into Washington, D.C. and they're all standing in a line—little tiny kids shaking your hand, thanking you for your service. It made you cry. Signs up all over, made you feel like a really important person—it was a day to be remembered. We come back to Milwaukee there had to be a thousand people if there was one. There had to be a thousand, if not more. You had pipes playing, you had the Navy, the Coast Guard, the Marines, the Army, the Air Force all standing and saluting you as you went past them at attention. It was something else, just treated like a million bucks. I don't know you got any questions for me—that's about all I have.

[00:06:46]

Gibb: About the Honor Flight—what did you do in D.C.? What was involved in the day?

Thiermann: Okay. We had to report real early to the airport in Milwaukee and you come in there and of course I can't walk so good no more but I can walk and get around. They grabbed the wheelchair and said, "Sit down." My chaperone, he pushed me all the way through, going in the airport and had to get our flight tickets and register in and then we sat in the area and they gave you something to eat—little box lunch and that, breakfast—and then we had to go through security and get on our plane. Think there was a little over a hundred guys on that plane. I was the second youngest, would you believe? I think I was seventy-nine at the time or something. We're sitting there and then when we were pulling out they had fire trucks come out and they were shooting water over the top of the plane for a salute. Then they had another little smaller plane there on the side they were going to lead us out to the runway.

We finally took off, and they were feeding us again, I swear they were trying to make us fat. I had so much to eat I couldn't eat no more. Anything you wanted—well you didn't have any mixed drinks but you had soda, pop and whatever. Then we got there, here come the fire trucks again, more water over the top of the planes. Then we walk out and we had all these people meeting us. Hundreds and hundreds of them, wishing us well, "Thank you for your service. God bless you." We were loaded up on buses, I don't know how many, we had great big Greyhound buses. We had a police escort, they took us to one monument after the next one, after the next one, you'd get off and you'd see the monument, you'd take your pictures. I took an awful lot of pictures. They had a photographer taking pictures of you too, all over.

Went to Arlington National Cemetery—I tell you, you see that, man. You get humble. Then the guys, honor guard would come out and I had a camcorder, and I took pictures of the honor guard—too many unknown soldiers that they guard. I got that all down on a video. Then when it was all over we jumped on the buses from one place to the next of course, and went back to the airport and we waited and the pilot wasn't showing up. Finally he got there and everybody clapped, gave him a hard time. We got on the plane and we flew back to Milwaukee. It was dark

when we got back. We saw all these people again and the bands playing and the pipes are going. Everybody's shaking your hand and hugging you and kissing you—it's unbelievable. My wife was there, my daughter was there, my son had a trip—my youngest one—that was supposed to take him to California cause his wife was there on business and he laid over an extra day and he was there for me.

It was just wonderful. If anybody gets the chance to do it, they should do it because you'll never regret it. We took a picture in the parking structure of us and then got in our car and drove home. That was the end of that. They gave me a book about the Korean War, and they called it the police action. Believe me it was no police action—lot of people died over there. There's all this talk about the Coast Guard and I talk to people "You know the Coast Guard seems to be always talked about as playing second fiddle. It was always Army, Marines, Navy, and Air Force and then oh, yeah the Coast Guard." Lot of Coast Guard men died during World War II as medics and as chasing submarines where the Coast Guard was sinking German submarines. They were on the outside edges of the convoys—they'd have to take the first hits. They always played second fiddle and when they were over in the Deltas over there the Navy got them on small boats and they had to go with small boats with guns on getting shot at and guys getting killed.

A lot of Coast Guard men died. I had a fella, he came home, and he was in the Coast Guard, and he had been on some of these missions and so when he went home to his hometown, he knew the sheriff there. The sheriff's son was in the Marines. They got to talking and he said, "Yeah, my son's in the Marines—doing this and that over there." He said, "I was in the Coast Guard." "You were only in the Coast Guard." He says, "That's what we were living with. It's not true." Even now in peacetime you watch that Coast Guard in Alaska on television, what they do, and all the storms they got to go through. I just got done seeing this picture that they just came out with—started in '51 off of the East Coast, where these Coast Guard guys went out and rescued these guys off of that ship that broke in half in the storm, in a little boat. Anybody hasn't seen that yet, they should because it's an unbelievable story. There are a lot of things that you really have to look into before you comment on. I guess I'm very proud. Okay, I guess that's it unless you have some questions?

[00:15:38]

Gibb: I have a few questions, yeah. Did you talk to your family about your service when you came back—to your kids?

Thiermann: Yeah, I talked to them about it. I told them a little bit what it was like. I don't think I went through what my father went through. He went through hell. But everybody goes through a different phase in their life and a different type of situation and it's how you adapt to it. If somebody says, "Were you in harm's way?" Yeah, I think I was. Would I do it again? Yep. I'd do it again. I miss it. I missed the camaraderie aboard ship—all the guys. You remember certain things and certain buddies and certain happenings. It was like a family. If something

happened to somebody, everybody was there for them. One guy went out one night and got mugged. They asked him "Where was it you got mugged?" Bunch of guys went over and tore the place apart. That's what happens. Twenty guys walk in the place there's nothing standing—never happened again. Wanted to get hold of my buddy that time and I found out he'd passed away. Man, oh man. We sit and we'd talk at night—all the memories. Another buddy we went to Mexico a couple of times—he had a car. Then he'd take me on trips to see his folk's way north in California. His aunt and uncle owned an orange orchard—we stopped there first, we were drinking orange juice like crazy. We stayed overnight there. What a wonderful family. Then we'd go on and we'd stop, we'd eaten Mexican food and he'd say "Now that stuff here is pretty hot. You've got to watch out for that." He was used to that, I'm from the Midwest and I didn't know nothing about eating that hot stuff but he steered me around. The great times—the memories that I have. I'm going to be eighty-two, fourteenth of March. I tell you, I'd like to live it all over again. You blink your eye and it's gone. So you hold on to the memories. Anything else?

Gibb: What are you most proud of, of your service—of your time?

Thiermann: What am I most proud of? I guess, getting that ship through the typhoon. That. Because if I wouldn't have handled that ship right I know we would've went over. We were on a hairbreadth of rolling over because it's lying over on its side—shaking—and I just hit her just right and I've come back. We would have lost a hundred and forty guys. That was scary. Anybody says they weren't scared, I'll tell you, even the chief was worried. He said "I've seen some bad storms but this one." It was tough. I think of back then, I wouldn't want to go through it again. I know I got out on the lake up north here with my wife and her boat and I got a deep V hull. It gets a little rough out there and I got to take her in. She's scared. I say "This is nothing. This is like sitting in a bathtub." "Take me back." I got to take her back and I got to go round islands into calmer water to get her back. She don't want to go through rough water, and when it's calm and quiet I'm "That's fine, let's go fishing." "Where you going?" "I'll just stay right here." "Okay, don't go far away now." But she's a good fisherwoman, she does darn good. Biggest hobby is fishing I guess—make my own fishing jigs. I guess if I had to leave a legacy, I'd say be honest, don't lie. Be truthful. Work hard, do everything you can, help your neighbor and when you get married, marriage isn't, "Well you're married to me now I want you to do this and you can't do that." Marriage doesn't mean you are the boss of somebody or you own that somebody. Marriage is sharing, not dominating. I have a very good wife, very pretty wife. She tells me I never tell her she's pretty. But she's a beautiful woman. That's about all I got to say.

Gibb: I don't have any more questions.

Thiermann: We're done, huh.

[End of interview]

