

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
RUSSELL SULLIVAN
Air Pilot, Navy, World War II.

1999

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Sullivan, Russell H., (1923-2007). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 80 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 80 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 80 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Russell H. Sullivan, a Madison, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as a pilot with the Navy. Sullivan talks about enlisting in the Navy V5 Cadet program, ground school at Maryville (Missouri), basic flight training at Livermore (California), formation flying and instrument training at Corpus Christi (Texas), and fighter pilot training in Sanford (Florida) using F4F Wildcats. He mentions being impressed by the F8F airplanes he saw in Hawaii. Sullivan explains why he disliked flying Corsairs. Assigned to Air Group 95, he talks about boarding the USS Bunker Hill to leave Pearl Harbor on the day the first atomic bomb was dropped, the celebrations in Hawaii, and returning to the States. On his last flight off the carrier, he comments on nearly having an accident when his engine failed and he nearly collided with another airplane. Sullivan touches upon joining the Inactive Reserves and his decision to retire from the Reserves in 1959. He discusses other veterans he knows in Madison. Sullivan comments on issued clothing, nearly getting assigned to the USS Franklin, and once almost deciding to eject from a faulty plane over the Atlantic. He details qualifying for field carrier landing, taking off via catapult, and the stress when landing on the carrier at night. He states that upon graduation from flight school the pilots chose whether to stay Navy or enter the Marine Corps. Sullivan evaluates the capabilities of the Corsair aircraft and characterizes his division leader. He discusses spatial disorientation and three planes that were lost in the Bermuda Triangle. Sullivan talks about training to keep up his instrument proficiency, using a link trainer, and keeping an aviator's flight log book during training. He talks about his civilian career as a locomotive engineer with Chicago Northwestern.

Biographical Sketch:

Russell (1924-2007) entered the Navy in 1942 and was discharged from the Navy Reserves in 1959. After his service, he moved to Madison (Wisconsin), worked for Chicago Northwestern Railroad Company until retirement in 1984, and eventually settled in Waunakee.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999

Transcribed by Elisabeth Bownik, 2011

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Transcribed Interview:

Jim: Where were you born?

Russell: Where?

Jim: Yes.

Russell: Dane County. Right here in Madison.

Jim: Madison. And—in 19—

Russell: '24. February 3rd, '24.

Jim: Oh, you're younger than I am.

Russell: Oh. [laughs]

Jim: I was born in '23.

Russell: Oh.

Jim: In—next month. And you went to the military—

Russell: Oh—when I went in, or when I joined?

Jim: Well, when—when did it all start for you? When was that?

Russell: Well, I signed up for V5 in October of '42.

Jim: And they sent you where?

Russell: And, then, in March 8th of '43, I was sent to Maryville, Missouri to State Teachers College for Piper Cub planes and ground school.

Jim: [Unintelligible] from there?

Russell: From there? Saint Mary's Pre-Flight. Livermore, California.

Jim: And you flew there in—

Russell: Nope. Didn't fly nothing. That was all ground school and—and physical. And from there I went to Livermore, California. And I guess—Livermore.

Jim: So you got basic flying there?

- Russell: Yeah. That's where we flew N3Ns or N2S-5 Stearmans. From there; Corpus Christi, Texas.
- Jim: When did—when did they divide you into what type of plane you were gonna fly?
- Russell: After we graduated. See, from Corpus Christi—we went to Corpus Christi, and we started out with what they call the Vultee Vibrator. It was an old—it was an old wooden-type aircraft. And that was, basically, I think, formation flying, what I remember of it. And from there, we went into SNJs, and that included instrument qualification, under the hood, and also what were those boxes that they used to put us in?
- Jim: Link trainers?
- Russell: Link trainers. And after we graduated from there, then we were—we could—at the time of graduation, or prior to graduation, two weeks or a month—we could sign up for Navy or Marine Corps. The only difference, then, was that you would get 100 dollars extra uniform allowance.
- Jim: For what?
- Russell: Marine Corps uniform. We had our blues. The Marines couldn't use the blues. They were no use to 'em, so they had an extra 100—100 dollars uniform allowance.
- Jim: I see.
- Russell: And at that—at the time of graduation—that was in July 1, '44—then was posted where we were going. And I wound up in Sanford, Florida, flying, well, it'd be F4Fs, but they were FM-1s and FM-2s.
- Jim: That was training [unintelligible]
- Russell: It was a Hellcat—or Wildcat.
- Jim: Yeah, but that's in training?
- Russell: Fighter—fighter pilot training.
- Jim: Yeah. And that was at Livermore?
- Russell: No, no. That was at Sanford, Florida.
- Jim: Sanford, Florida.

- Russell: Just north of Orlando. FM-1s, FM-2. I think the difference between an FM-1 and an FM-2 is an engine. One had the Wright Cyclone twin bank. No, Pratt and Whitney twin bank. The other had the Wright Cyclone single bank. You know, nine cylinders?
- Jim: I've seen all of those up close at the Pensacola Air Museum. Gorgeous museum.
- Russell: I never been there.
- Jim: Beautiful. You absolutely have to go there. They have an F8F there. The last one that they made, the last one made, that didn't go out and fight.
- Russell: Air Group 19 had them. Or Fighter—VF-19. They were at Pu'unene, Maui.
- Jim: Is that right?
- Russell: Yeah. I had one jump me. I was coming back from Pearl one day, two of us, and I looked up in the rear view mirror, up above like this, and I saw a speck in the sky coming up on us. [Jim laughs] And I don't remember if I was a lead or if I was wing, but, one way or the other, we opened up for a defensive formation, do a thatch weave, and that F8F went around us like a bumblebee.
- Jim: That's the biggest—that's the most huge single-engine airplane you've ever seen. The engine is just a great big—
- Russell: Same engine that the Hellcat had—or Wildcat—or Corsair had.
- Jim: It looked bigger. I don't know—
- Russell: The only difference was it weighed 8,500 pounds, and we weighed 13,500. They had a thirty-two foot wing, we had a forty-foot wing—forty-two foot wing.
- Jim: I noticed in the studying.
- Russell: Yeah. And only the tips of the wings folded.
- Jim: It just didn't—it never reached combat status—
- Russell: Nope. It was headed.
- Jim: Sure. Well, they said—they told us down there that that's the fastest single-engine—

- Russell: Oh yeah.
- Jim: --propeller plane that's ever been made.
- Russell: Yeah, it was. It was a four-bladed, paddle blade, Hamilton Standard on there.
- Jim: And it flew over 500 miles an hour.
- Russell: I don't remember the speed, but I—
- Jim: Well, I don't—that's what they told me. I don't really—
- Russell: But I remember when they first came to—when they first came to Maui, I was at Hilo, Hawaii, and two of them came in. And they posted a Marine guard on them. We couldn't even get near them. They were new out of the States. And when they left, they took off in two-plane formation, and they just—soon as they got airborne they plucked their wings, went a short distance, and then went right up to about forty-five degrees out of sight. They could stand those things on a propeller. They were tremendous. They didn't use them in the Korean War, because they were restricted for distance. They didn't have the fuel capacity. That's why they went to the Corsairs.
- Jim: [Unintelligible] Corsairs [unintelligible].
- Russell: Yeah.
- Jim: Saw them when I was in Korea, saw a lot of Corsairs.
- Russell: They didn't use the F8Fs because they didn't have the fuel capacity that they needed.
- Jim: Could've used drop tanks?
- Russell: I don't know whether the drop tanks did them any good or not. I don't remember. I never was mixed up with them, so I don't know.
- Jim: Well, [unintelligible].
- Russell: Oh.
- Jim: (Laughs.) So, from Florida, where—what'd they do with you then?

Russell: Well, we were assigned then to VF-95. And that was formed around January 15th of '45.

Jim: VF—VF-95.

Russell: VF-95. And that was—that was a formation of the air group.

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: That was I—

Jim: Was that your carrier?

Russell: No. No, that was the formation of the air group. That's what they did—the Navy would pull pilots that came back from overseas—combat pilots. They'd split them up. And they'd form new air groups. The new fledglings would come in and fly wing on these new—on these combat pilots.

Jim: That's where they learned.

Russell: That's where they learned. And that—when the air group formed, you had Fighting-95, Bombing-95, Torpedo-95, and I can't—at this time I can't remember—we had a VBF, which was a fighter bomber. And they flew Corsairs. When we got to Hilo, Hawaii, I don't remember whether VF—or Air Group 95 had a fighter bomber unit to it when we formed at Atlantic City, New Jersey, or not. But when we got to Hilo, we had a fighter bomber unit that had Corsairs. And then we were supposed to get assigned to a carrier. The “Bunker Hill” was coming back from the States to be—we were supposed to outfit the “Bunker.” Then they gave us Corsairs.

Jim: That was the first time.

Russell: First time.

Jim: So you were flying the Hellcat.

Russell: Hellcat up until then.

Jim: Now, you had a different kind of airplane, right?

Russell: Oh yeah. Nobody liked them, to begin with.

Jim: Oh really.

- Russell: Because, oh, they were a tricky little thing to fly.
- Jim: Oh, I thought they were hard flying on the deck, because you couldn't straighten them out [unintelligible] half [unintelligible]—
- Russell: No, well, now what they do on the deck is they come back from a long distance out. And even, like, the F/A-18 now, they're computer-controlled on landing. You have to bring the ball in, where all we had was the paddles. When we came in on the deck we were still in a bank, and at the final second when you gotta cut, you'd level off, chop your power, [thumps table] crash.
- Jim: And hope that the deck was ready and there.
- Russell: Yeah, but then you had—I think there was twelve cables across the deck in addition to the barrier. And if they lifted, they saw that you were gonna miss all the cables, they'd lift the barrier, and that was an engine change right there. Sudden stoppage of the—it wrapped that cable right around the propellers.
- Jim: Must ruin the engine.
- Russell: Oh, yeah. Yeah, the engine was ruined, because it was a sudden stoppage of it. But that—no, that—at that time, we were in a constant bank coming around. You couldn't see over the nose of that Corsair. Even the Hellcat, with the altitude you were flying at, just above stalling speed.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Yeah.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: So we didn't have too much of an adjustment between Hellcats and Corsairs. But they were a hot airplane.
- Jim: What's the major difference that you noticed when you went from one to the other? What did you notice?
- Russell: Nothing. I don't—I can't remember them. No.
- Jim: Was just a little bit different—
- Russell: Yeah.
- Jim: Would that be a way of saying it?

Russell: Yeah, they were probably a little different.

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: Yeah.

Jim: So, you finally got to the ship? The Bunker Hill?

Russell: Yeah.

Jim: And when was that? You remember?

Russell: Remember when the first bomb was dropped?

Jim: No, when'd you get on the Bunker Hill?

Russell: That's what I'm getting at [laughs].

Jim: [laughs] Okay.

Russell: When the first bomb was dropped [laughs]—that's when we hit the Bunker Hill. We were ready to go. We were ready to leave Pearl when the first bomb was dropped. Everything was stopped.

Jim: Oh. On the day the war started.

Russell: No, the day—the first atomic bomb—

Jim: Atomic bomb, okay. Got it.

Russell: First atomic bomb was dropped—they held off everything. And the second one was dropped—nothing moved out of Pearl.

Jim: Since August—since August '45.

Russell: And then we came back, and I got out Navy Day at '45. So that was—what—October 23rd, 29th, or something. I was at Pearl when they dropped the first bomb. I was in the Officers' Club. And I dropped—I was up at Ford Island, and we went over to the Officers' Club at Ford Island, and the—I thought it was an air raid. Everything that they had on Pearl Harbor, I think, was being shot up in the air and exploded. That was the celebration they had. And it—

Jim: [Unintelligible].

- Russell: It was just a—everybody was cheering. But, when I came out of the Officers' Club, I thought it was an air raid [laughs]. Because it was just everything you could think of was in the sky, blowing up. They—that's when they shut down everything, and then we went back to the States.
- Jim: So, they know [unintelligible]—back there, or—
- Russell: No, we came back to Walla Walla, Washington. I can't remember the—that's all I can remember of that. It's a—we came in—well, the last flight—it must've been out a ways, because the last flight off of the carrier was a four-hour flight. So, we got shot off the carrier. Four hours later—says “final takeoff from USS Bunker Hill CV-17”—I damn near got killed on the shot and on the landing.
- Jim: On the ship?
- Russell: When I got shot off the catapult, my engine started to sputter out, and that's—at that period of time, you were just about at the mercy of the ship, because if you went underneath the ship, you were done. We didn't have the pop-outs. And then I came in for a landing, and I looked up, and there was a big sixteen-foot prop about that far from my cockpit canopy.
- Jim: Where'd that come from?
- Russell: A guy that didn't see me [laughs].
- Jim: Oh, wow.
- Russell: And when you're on a carrier, you run around with your tail wheel unlocked so you can taxi. On land, you lock your tail wheel so you keep a straight line.
- Jim: Right.
- Russell: Well, I didn't lock my tail wheel prior to landing. I was up on one wing, and the crash truck's following me down the runway, because I couldn't get the other wing down. And when I got out of the aircraft I couldn't walk. I'd used all the power in my legs trying to use the brakes and the rudder and everything else—
- Jim: That was pretty close.
- Russell: And I went—I was going to go looking for the guy—I knew the guy who tried to land on top of me in the air [laughs]. I couldn't go anyplace. My legs wouldn't move. I was—my legs were completely exhausted from landing.

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: Yeah. And then from there I went by train to the Midwest, and that was the end of it.

Jim: The Korean War came on; they didn't ask you to come back?

Russell: No, I went down to the Weekend Warriors. They flew SNJs. I made one—it isn't in my logbook. They made—we made one flight from Glenview to Detroit and back. And that's the only time I went down to Weekend Warriors. At that time, you didn't have automobiles like—you know that. The reliability of an automobile, and all the side roads that you had to travel. And I was married, young, with children. I probably decided I didn't want to go any further. But I didn't get discharged from the Navy until '59.

Jim: Stayed in the Active Reserve?

Russell: Inactive.

Jim: Yeah.

Russell: They automatically put you on Inactive Reserve status.

Jim: I was on [unintelligible] until '57.

Russell: You were? Well, I was in '59. I don't know. But anyway, that's the end of the flying. And I couldn't do any more flying afterwards, because it's like riding a bicycle around, compared to driving a truck. If you're going to fly an airplane, you want to fly an airplane. You don't want to fly a kite. There was—to me, to fly, I'd have to have, like, a service-type airplane at that period of time. Because a Piper Cub was just a toy.

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: And a friend of mine from Madison was flying DC-3s, and I knew he was at Pearl, and I flew from Hilo up to Pearl to visit him, and we took up one of those little observation planes. And we made a couple passes around Pearl and landed a few times, and then he says, "Well, you take over and try it." So I took off, came around for a landing. When we were going to drop in, we just cut the throttle, pull the stick on our guts and dropped in [laughs]. When I did that, I thought I was a kangaroo going down the goddamn runway [laughs]. 'Cause if you bounced, and you still had flying speed.

Jim: Right.

Russell: And you were bumpty-bumpty-bump [laughs]. That was no fun. Did you ever get ahold of Jim Sticka?

Jim: No.

Russell: He flew 47s. And I don't know whether you could get him to come up or not. He's got—

Jim: Where does he live?

Russell: Here in Madison. He's got stomach cancer.

Jim: Oh.

Russell: And he's down to about 135 pounds, and he was—I had a class reunion over at the Masonic Temple couple Sundays—three Sundays ago.

Jim: Class were you [unintelligible]?

Russell: For '42.

Jim: High school?

Russell: Yeah. But that was—

Jim: Where was that? East High?

Russell: No, Central.

Jim: Central.

Russell: Six women got it together. Our 55th they didn't have. So these women got it together, and they decided they'd have an oddball year, instead of the five-year bunch. And he was there. But you've told me you talked to Bill Carow.

Jim: Yeah. He's the guy who did the [unintelligible].

Russell: And Bill bought him—I think Bill brought him up to the reunion. Whether he could—unless somebody brought him up here, or he went to see him.

Jim: Carow was in your class though.

- Russell: Yeah. Sticka was in my class, too. And there was another guy—course you just want—what—Madison?
- Jim: Wisconsin.
- Russell: There's a—Brown—Harold Brown. He was in the class of '42. He flew 47s, and he lives in Janesville. Sticka and Brown, I don't know—Jim Sticka was a guy here. S-T-I-C-K-A.
- Jim: C-H-A. You know Hen (??) Sticka's brother?
- Russell: I don't remember. I couldn't—I couldn't really tell you.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Harold Brown.
- Jim: Alright. I'll check into those.
- Russell: If you ever get a chance, on the first Wednesday of every month we meet at the—
- Jim: Oasis.
- Russell: Oasis.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Did you ever get talk to Steve Stuczynski? He has a museum in his house. And it's in the basement, and he put an addition on it. Don't ask me how to spell his last name. It's either a 2-4-9-18-19—or I think it was 18-19 or 19-18.
- Jim: What?
- Russell: Telephone number.
- Jim: 2-4-9—
- Russell: I think it's either 19-18 or 18-19. I can't remember the—
- Jim: I'll [unintelligible]—
- Russell: It's 2-4-9 or 2-4-4. I don't call it that much. I generally look it up in my own phone book—my own log at home. Keep track of it.

Jim: This is your logbook?

Russell: Yep.

Jim: Is that something the museum can have?

Russell: I don't know who else would use it.

Jim: Well, we can.

Russell: Uh—

Jim: We don't have many of these.

Russell: This is—when I arrived at Sanford, Florida—this was stamped in Sanford? Hmm—this is when I arrived at Sanford, anyhow. And that was for fighter pilot training. That was right after I got out of—well, it was July of '44. That was July—

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: Now here's August of '44. Oh, this probably was at different periods of time they handed this stuff out. See, here's Sanford here.

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: That was the date that that was issued. But I got the Sanford at—that'd be right after 1, July '44. But that was different dates—that's what they issued. Even had a gun issued, but I don't have a date they had the gun. Six cylinder rotary barrel. Or no, 38, probably.

Jim: 38, probably.

Russell: I imagine that's what it was. They issued winter flight clothing, which we never used. Had the jacket, the helmet, the overall-type—

Jim: They issue you whites too?

Russell: Oh yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah. We had cadet whites.

Jim: Oh.

Russell: See that's when—when we went through cadet training we had the white and the blue. Then—

- Jim: I was in the V-12. We didn't get any whites. We just got the summer tans and the winter blues.
- Russell: Well, then did you ever run into the greens?
- Jim: Didn't—that was an option. Those were [unintelligible]. We could've purchased the greens, but we didn't.
- Russell: Well, the greens were mostly used by pilots. Or air—yeah, I would say pilots.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Oh, that could be. That's what that guy was asking me downstairs. The star as a line officer.
- Jim: Oh, yeah.
- Russell: I couldn't—I could remember staff. But it was line. The designation between the line—the shoulder pad and on your arm straps.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Mm-hmm. And the chaplain had a cross, and the—there were various types.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Yeah, there's various types.
- Jim: Yeah. So the experience of the Navy was mostly on that one carrier.
- Russell: Well, as far—all my flight training. But as far as flying, though, I didn't get into combat.
- Jim: [Unintelligible.]
- Russell: I was supposed to go to combat. I was at—
- Jim: You didn't have to fly [unintelligible] Japan. In Japan—
- Russell: In sometime in March, April—I don't—I could remember back here this way. That is a gap in my flying time. We were—this was—this guy got killed here in Florida, so it had to be after this. He took off, and I know engine cut out right after he took off. All that was left of him was the cockpit and the engine, and everything else was missing, and I—my

roommate and I were the first one to the—to the wreck. We took a jeep. And then someplace in here we—April, May—May, June—May 18th to June 22nd. That must've been the gap between when I went overseas. Sometime in May of '45 my folks came out to visit, because they knew I was going overseas. We were assigned to the Franklin.

Jim: Oh.

Russell: And all—all the gear was ready to go. And a senior air group commander came in and demanded the Franklin, and evidently he got it. He had enough political pull to get it. And he went down, took the—we watched the Franklin sail out of Norfolk. And the next time I saw the Franklin was at Pearl. I was glad I wasn't on it. They gave Abandon Ship twice to that ship.

Jim: After you saw it?

Russell: Well they got to combat. Then they got kamikazed and they gave "Abandon Ship" twice to the—the crew saved it, eventually, and then they got towed back to States.

Jim: What was the [unintelligible] ship?

Russell: I—it never went back out again after it got—because they wouldn't had time to repair it. 'Cause it was badly damaged, and it was—well, I say, they gave "Abandon Ship" twice and they didn't do it. They stayed right with it. But I should've been on that. I don't know what air group went out on it, but it was a mess [laughs].

Jim: Did you ever have to eject or get out of your plane?

Russell: Once.

Jim: Parachute [unintelligible].

Russell: I was out over the Atlantic off of Norfolk, and we had—we could switch gas tanks. When I switched gas tanks the engine stopped. And I was—I was up quite a few thousand feet.

Jim: So you thought you could start it, but then—

Russell: Well, it—I got it started, but it—I was just about—I had one leg over the side, and I was gonna bail out, because I knew the off shore winds would blow me to shore with a chute. But if I rode it down, I'd be in cold water. That was in—that was off of New Jersey. And then your survival rate in cold water goes way down. So just as I thought I was gonna leave it, it

started to sputter back to life, and was alright. That's the only time I had anything that I had to get out of. Or thought about getting out of. So that—overall it was a good experience.

Jim: How long did it take you [unintelligible]?

Russell: Well, what we did—there was a place called Titusville, Florida. And they had a field carrier deck set up. One cable—I think one cable, I'm not sure. I don't remember that far back. But they had a landing signal officer there, and you'd get the pattern. You'd come in, and if you caught the cable, you got the experience of catching the cable. If you didn't catch the cable you just added power, went off, and went around again and came back for another pass. And when you got qualified for field carrier landing, which was FCLP—field carrier landing practice—then when we got to—when the air group formed we had F6Fs. They flew us DC-3s down to Key West, Florida and put us on a jeep carrier out in the ocean there between Florida and Cuba. And there's where we got carrier-qualified. And everybody had to qualify. The whole air group had to qualify.

Jim: Qualified, then, to do what?

Russell: Landing.

Jim: Right.

Russell: Landing and getting shot.

Jim: [Unintelligible] any number that you had to—

Russell: You had to be proficient. Put it that way. Now, the air group—the air group commander—the captain of the ship on any carrier demanded nothing less than twenty seconds between aircraft. Landing.

Jim: Touch down.

Russell: Touch down and the next guy come in twenty seconds later. You had to clear the barrier. You had to be clear of the barrier. In other words, you'd land, catch the cable, pluck your hook, start folding your wings, you get picked up by the deck crew, clear the barrier. The next guy was hitting just as you cleared the barrier. And the catapult shots—we had two catapults, and we were required to clear the deck twenty seconds between aircraft. So, actually, you had forty seconds from one catapult until the next catapult on that same one. You had one here—bang. One here—bang. And then you got twenty—you had actually had a forty second interval.

- Jim: On each one.
- Russell: On each cable—on each catapult. But twenty seconds between aircraft on the catapult.
- Jim: I see.
- Russell: And that was a—when you got shot, you made sure your head was against the headrest. And that was a eighty-mile-an-hour shot within a short distance. I don't know how long. That was steam.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Then they went after World War II, for a short period of time they went to hydraulics. And they found out hydraulics wasn't doing the job. They had to go back to steam.
- Jim: Not enough power.
- Russell: Nope, they weren't fast enough.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Oh, yeah. Yeah.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Oh. Talk 160.
- Jim: Off the aircraft carrier?
- Russell: Yeah.
- Jim: That's twice as fast you could go.
- Russell: That means if you had your head that far from the headrest on the old type, you wanted it that far [laughs] from the headrest on the new shot.
- Jim: And that was the sensation in which [unintelligible]—
- Russell: Well, the first thing—when they get you on the catapult, get you locked down, you'd put your hand on the throttle quadrant, which also controlled your RPM and full rich mixture, and you locked your hand over that.
- Jim: Just tense up your grip.

- Russell: The throttle was—everything that controlled was right here. You put your hand over the front end of that quadrant, so you **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** couldn't—and the catapult shot. The—
- Jim: Would force your hand away.
- Russell: Well, it—if you didn't have your hand on it, the throttle could come back.
- Jim: I see.
- Russell: You'd give a salute. The next thing, you'd drop your hand to the stick, put the stick in your guts—bang. It was a—
- Jim: Wouldn't the stick in your guts put the ailerons down?
- Russell: Ailerons—
- Jim: Flaps down?
- Russell: Oh, yeah. The flaps were all down. But as soon as you give the salute, you'd drop your hand to the stick, you pulled it to your guts. You went like this. You'd put your elbow in your guts, and you—
- Jim: Oh. So it didn't—
- Russell: Well, you wanted the control stick vertical. Pretty well vertical. You didn't want it come back and then make it give you a lift off the end of the deck in a stall speed. And then you got shot. But now, the F/A-18—that's all computer-controlled now.
- Jim: Sitting—
- Russell: You just sit there. When you give the salute—(thumps table) bang. So many seconds later, you take control again.
- Jim: Did you ever get a chance to look at those?
- Russell: Oh, no. That's—
- Jim: These are jets.
- Russell: Those are jets. But now they're also experimenting with—and I think they've even perfected on the F/A-18s—night carrier computer landings where you come in and the computer's got control of everything. Right to

the touchdown. But if you want an experience—night carrier landings was it.

Jim: That's what I was going to get to next. Tell me about that. Tell me about your first [unintelligible].

Russell: Just scares the shit out of you.

Jim: I'll bet.

Russell: That first of them I made was on a jeep carrier. You know, little—

Jim: Real short.

Russell: Yeah. 400- and what? 400-, 450-foot flight deck? And between Cuba and the US, or Florida, all you had for a light was a little funnel on the top of the—very top of the highest point of the ship. Like a flat funnel with a light in it. And you—submarines couldn't see that light. That's the only light you had, other than when you came in on the ship, you'd pick up the landing signal officer, and he'd have the—

Jim: Fluorescent bulb?

Russell: Fluorescent—well, they'd aim what they call a black light at them, or whatever it was, and then you'd get your signals to come in. I never—I made them all. Some of the guys, they had to send them to Cuba, or to Florida, or wherever we were closest to.

Jim: Waved them off.

Russell: Waved them off. They couldn't make it.

Jim: How many chances would they give you?

Russell: Till you were qualified.

Jim: How many did you—you got two wave-offs and they'd send you to Cuba?

Russell: Oh, I don't—depending on your fuel status, I suppose.

Jim: [Unintelligible] chance—

Russell: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Jim: But you had to be able to make a night landing before [unintelligible]—

- Russell: Oh, yeah. Quite a few of them, in fact. And all I can remember about that was they'd put us—when he had to sleep at night, they'd put us down in the hold of that ship, and they didn't have air conditioning back then. And that probably was around a hundred, 110 degrees. Well, you've been down in a ship without air. You know how hot it gets.
- Jim: I lived in one—a hospital ship—
- Russell: You know how hot they get.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Yeah. That was—oh, that was an experience that I wouldn't trade for nothing.
- Jim: The learning process—what did you gradually learn and landing and like that? What was the process [unintelligible] somewhat comfortable with?
- Russell: You never were comfortable with a night landing. You were—we didn't have it, but either—I think it was Vietnam with the jets. They put stress pads throughout the body of a pilot—various pilots, not just one—flew them into combat, and all this stuff was registered. The most stressful thing of all of it was night carrier landings, that they figured out, I suppose, blood pressure, heartbeat, or whatever—that that was the most stressful. They could go into combat and get shots at them and get shot at or whatever—
- Jim: [Unintelligible] [Russell laughs] [unintelligible].
- Russell: Yeah.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: But if you—I have a book at home about the training of an F/A-18 pilot. It's 290—2-95 or 2-96. That means that was a second group of ninety-five or the second group of ninety-six that they were training. If the next group came in, that was 3-96. The next group was 4-96. In other words, that was their training period. And then they took them—they were all qualified pilots, of course. And they were all probably at least lieutenants, Marine captains, sometimes lieutenant commanders. And it just took them through the whole syllabus. And that included landing at night with an F/A-18 onboard carrier. But that was an interesting book. And then there was even a couple women pilots in that group.
- Jim: [Unintelligible] [static].

- Russell: Not with us. No, no. Back then—no, they didn't mix the Marines and the Navy as far as the aircraft onboard a carrier went. But I don't remember of any Marines that were actually carrier-based. Now they are.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: On land, yeah. I don't think—
- Jim: When you were training it was essentially the same as yours.
- Russell: Well, when we went—when I went through—from the time I signed up there might have been 1,000 others signing up at the same time. They all went through Navy training. Up until a certain point, maybe one, two, three months before we graduated, then you'd sign up whether you wanted to go Marine Corps or stay Navy. That was the only difference in training. Right up until the very day you got your wings and commission. The next day you could put a Marine uniform—or that—the day of graduation was all Navy, if I remember right. I had a—I don't know if I have the picture or not. It was an eight-by-ten. Think it was all Navy. Then the next day, or that—after graduation, then you could put your Marine uniform on. That was the only difference. The crazy son-of-a-guns were the ones that went to the Marine Corps [laughs].
- Jim: Why would you say that?
- Russell: Well, they were a little more of the reckless type. I think, anyhow, that was my—
- Jim: Well, just landing on a carrier is reckless.
- Russell: Oh no, no. It's what you're trained for.
- Jim: Yeah, but it's something you never get comfortable with, you said.
- Russell: Night flying.
- Jim: Oh.
- Russell: Day flying, that's a different ballgame.
- Jim: Because of vision? Depth perception?
- Russell: Lack of—lack of—depth perception was a great thing at night.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].

- Russell: And not being able to see everything.
- Jim: Even that fluorescent strip [unintelligible]—
- Russell: I don't remember what they had—that's going back fifty-five years [laughs]. No, I—all I can remember—the daylight carrier landings, they weren't bad. It was the night ones that were a bitch. They were no—it wasn't fun.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Nighttime? No. I have a picture at home taken of a Fighting-95 out in New Jersey. I think there was four or five stair steps of us. My roommate and I were someplace on the—I don't know—maybe the third row? Everybody on that row to either side of us was killed. Nothing on the rest of the lines. We had—theoretically speaking, we were the next two.
- Jim: The war [unintelligible].
- Russell: Yeah. Yeah, so I don't—you know, you're talking in probabilities.
- Jim: Let's get back to flying a Corsair. You can take that how high, how far up?
- Russell: Ah—the highest I ever went was 37,000. On oxygen, of course. But then you were just sitting there at a full stall. You weren't doing anything.
- Jim: Oh.
- Russell: You were done. You didn't get—you probably—25,000 where you could probably still fly effectively. Not all that good, though.
- Jim: What is it—you didn't have power?
- Russell: Well—
- Jim: The wings didn't respond, or--
- Russell: You had the lack of air. Your air pressure was—I don't—depending on the type of if you were in a warm front or a cold front, every so many 1,000 feet—every 1,000 feet you had a drop-off of air pressure. I used to know the formula, but as you went on up—
- Jim: Sure.

- Russell: One cubic foot went out to three cubic foot—or twenty-seven cubic foot. And you didn't have the lift.
- Jim: So if you put that thing in a dive, how fast would you go?
- Russell: I don't know. I put a Hellcat in a dive at 400 and—airspeed indicator stopped at 460, and I had it against the peg at 460. How much faster, I don't know. That was knots. That wasn't miles per hour.
- Jim: [Unintelligible] in the Corsair?
- Russell: No, it was in the Hellcat. Corsair I used to take up at Mauna Kea—Mauna Kea, which was a high mountain on Hawaii. We'd get down inside of the mountain—the crater—and fly around inside the crater. Look down at the boiling lava.
- Jim: Was that allowed? Or you just did it.
- Russell: Nobody saw us [laughs].
- Jim: Ha.
- Russell: Other than the ones that were up there. Then we'd come down the side of the mountain, and you'd have to throttle back, otherwise you'd be going over 400. It was quite steep.
- Jim: So was a Corsair a better airplane than a Hellcat?
- Russell: Oh yeah.
- Jim: Because?
- Russell: More maneuverable, I think. They—course, all depends on the training, too. The American pilot—Navy pilots out there with those old Wildcats were getting a decisive edge over the Zeros, which was a lighter and faster aircraft. But the tactics made the difference. They—
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Yeah. The old Zero, they didn't have any armor to protect the pilot.
- Jim: No parachute?
- Russell: No. No, parachute. Where the US pilots were—the biggest thing was the—guy the name of Commander Thatch—

Jim: Thatch Weave?

Russell: He developed the Thatch Weave. And that was the biggest thing. They—constant protection, back and forth. And this division leader I had—we were the lowest of the division—four-plane divisions in the fighter squadron—he was a Southerner from, I think it was Roanoke, Virginia. Lynchburg, Virginia. He was combat. He came back as Lieutenant JG, and when he got VF-95, and I was assigned his wingman. And then he had another lieutenant JG that was a section leader. And then my roommate, who was from Texas, he was the wingman of the section leader, so that we had two and two.

Jim: You were [unintelligible]?

Russell: Yeah. And right—very shortly after we joined 95, we were in tactics already. And I remember one day I left his wing. Got separated somehow. I don't remember. All I remember is that he told me, "You son-of-a-bitch, if you ever leave my wing again, you're going to be the"—what do they call it? Not a replacement pilot but a—"spare pilot." We had spare pilots. Say we had thirty-two aircraft. Thirty-two pilots. Maybe you had five or six spare pilots. But if he told me if I ever leave you—"If you ever leave my wing again, you're going to be a spare pilot." He says, "I want to look out there and see you. Or I want to look out there and see you. Period." (Laughs.) And he—oh, he used to just wrap us through the sky. He'd take two of us or four of us, and he'd just wrap us all over hell just constantly. I mean, it was—you'd get down, you were dead tired. 'Cause he expected to look out, you're there. He wanted his wingman right on his wing. I mean, not five-, 600 feet over there. 50, 60 feet over there.

Jim: You were flying in formation, then you can look ahead [unintelligible] watching his aircraft.

Russell: You didn't see anything. You flew him. That's when down there, when they lost those three torpedo planes in Florida in that Bermuda Triangle, I still think that the pilot had what they call "spatial disorientation." That was what they call—think Kennedy had.

Jim: What about this? This is interesting.

Russell: Well—these—there was three TBFs that went in. You had—evidently they had a three plane formation. Like a "V." These two guys over here and here were watching the lead man. Nothing else. And the lead man got disorientated, flew himself into the ocean.

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: Yep.

Jim: That's what happened to the Blue Angels [unintelligible].

Russell: I don't know. I didn't hear that.

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: Yeah, I know.

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: Hmm. I don't remember that. But they call this—spatial disorientation is when you don't believe what your instruments—or he—Kennedy didn't know what he was doing to begin with. He never should've been flying. I said—

Jim: He shouldn't have been flying, except for the day time.

Russell: Yeah. Pure, broad daylight. He was going into a evening fog.

Jim: That was a dangerous [unintelligible].

Russell: Yep. And even if he had been partially trained in instruments, and he'd believed in his instruments, he probably never would've—he probably would've flown to the other side of the island and would have ended out in the ocean someplace. 'Cause he probably never would've found his destination.

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: Yep. Yeah, they—that—spatial disorientation is—I tell you, if some day when you're in an automobile, and somebody else is driving, and you're in the passenger seat, close your eyes. Keep them closed. And now visualize the feelings of your body. Is this car going uphill? Is it going downhill? Is it turning left? Is it turning right? Now you're up in an aircraft, and you're not—on an automobile you're on a flat surface. In an aircraft, you've got a sphere you're operating in.

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: Yeah.

Jim: And you're upside-down in [unintelligible].

- Russell: Yep. You can be going just like this.
- Jim: Think you're flying up.
- Russell: Yeah. You know horizon.
- Jim: Well, shouldn't you have your eye on that horizon, and be watching the thing on your panel—
- Russell: That's what spatial disorientation is. You don't believe the instruments.
- Jim: If you believe the instruments it's gonna be okay.
- Russell: Right. Right.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: Because your mind tells you different.
- Jim: [Unintelligible].
- Russell: I don't know—
- Jim: You're taught just to mind your instruments, and they won't go and fail you.
- Russell: Yep. Well, at different times it was like when I was over in Hawaii at Hilo, those mountains would get completely cloud covered. Starting early in the morning. Sometime late in the afternoon, it just like somebody pulled a zipper.
- Jim: Minute you entered a cloud—
- Russell: Minute you entered a cloud, you're on—you had to go on instruments, because you didn't know what the hell you were doing otherwise. Well, here—I'll show you in the book here. There's—anytime you see SNJ in here [flips through pages]—okay, a little further down. There's an instruments place in there, but it's further back in here. There's an—no, that wouldn't be—that's FM-1 and FM-2s. Still have them. Now here's—now—here's an SNJ. Over here is F6F. SNJ meant V was instruments. And then you—anytime you see—
- Jim: [Unintelligible] what is this?
- Russell: This is miles brought—hours brought forward. This is a total from the prior page. This is the total to this page. This is the total of this one—

- Jim: This is a stamp that you made on your book?
- Russell: Nope. Lieutenant J. Crane. He was Lieutenant J. G. Crane.
- Jim: He was just attesting that everything you wrote in this book is true?
- Russell: Yeah. I don't know whether I put it in or whether this—that was in—that was assigned to some yeoman or something like that. They'd pull your flight sheets. Anytime you see an SNJ—here's an SNJ—another instrument training, BC. We were constantly being updated. For instruments.
- Jim: Were you [unintelligible]—
- Russell: Nope.
- Jim: Or just [unintelligible].
- Russell: We had to be proficient in instrument flight.
- Jim: In actual flying or in a link trainer?
- Russell: The SNJ is flying. You'd get in the backseat or the—I don't remember what the—if the backseat was covered or if the front seat that was covered. You'd go under the—you'd pull an umbrella hood over your head.
- Jim: Flying [unintelligible] [laughs]—
- Russell: Yeah. Yeah, and you would be—you'd keep your proficiency up every, probably, once a month, maybe.
- Jim: Was the instructor in the front seat?
- Russell: That's what I don't remember, if the instructor was in the front seat or if he was in the back seat. But whatever it was—
- Jim: He was flying the airplane [unintelligible].
- Russell: He'd take you—you'd get airborne—you'd get up to a certain altitude, whatever it was, wherever he decided. And he'd instruct you to put the hood over your head. It was a special J. You know, a special equipped J. And then he'd tell you what to do. "Make a climbing turn, thirty degree bank. So many feet per second climb, or thirty degree bank, so many degree—so many feet per minute loss of altitude, or gain of altitude..."

But then they had a pattern. I don't know if you got a piece of paper. They had a pattern. I don't remember exactly how it was. It was—it was on a square like this. You'd come in here, you'd make a turn, and you'd make a loop. Or you'd come out here, and you'd make a loop and come back. Or you'd come down here and make a loop. This was all—this isn't exactly—I don't remember what it was. One part of it you were climbing at a 360 degree turn, losing—or gaining—maybe 500 feet per minute, whatever it was. Everything was—everything in these turns were changed. You'd either be climbing, you would be losing altitude. This leg would be a climbing leg or a loss of altitude leg. Everything was different. It was pre-programmed on the link trainer.

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: And then when you got all done, this showed what you did on the link. And then we had radio beam. You'd go—you'd get on a radio beam that would—say this was Madison in the center. Out here would be an 'N' and an 'A.' Over here would be an 'A' and an 'N.' "Da dit or dit da" on your ears. And as you're coming in here, if you got too far over, you would get "da dit, da dit, da dit." You came back again, you'd get "daaa." If you went over too far, you get "dit da, dit da, dit da." And if you came back here, you'd get "daaa." And then every so many seconds, you'd get the call number from the station coming in.

Jim: You're flying in on a radio beam.

Russell: On a radio beam. If you went too far, and you went—now instead of on this side you'd get an 'N,' over here you'd get an 'A.'

Jim: [Unintelligible].

Russell: Yeah. And if you came over here, you'd get an 'N.' As you came in, your volume would increase. As you departed, it would decrease, so that was telling you, you were—if you turned your volume down, then as you're departing this station, it goes out to nothing until you touched your volume control and bring it back up. So you know you're departing this station. So you'd have to make a 180 and come back. Then as you're increasing volume, now you know you're back on course again, that you're heading that way. I don't remember how you figured these cross legs out. At that time I did, but I don't remember now.

Jim: This is done with your [unintelligible].

Russell: Yeah. Or in the link trainer. So it was done either way.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: Well, I don't know. Whoever the guy—whoever the instrument pilot was that was in the squadron—or the guy that qualified you—kept you up to qualifications—he'd look at your flight record. And “uh-oh, here's a guy I haven't tested for a while.”

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: Might be a month, might be two weeks, might be six weeks. I don't remember now. But I know we were constantly being upgraded. Not upgraded, but held to a certain standard.

Jim: [Unintelligible.]

Russell: You fly until he likes what you did.

Jim: [Unintelligible] and do the same thing?

Russell: Yep. Same with the link trainer. If you didn't do it—if your pattern didn't come out as to what this pattern told it was—you were told to do—you had to memorize a pattern. You didn't have it in black and white in front of you. When you started out, the operator would say, “Okay, start.” And then the first one would be doing this, then you make a 160 degree—or a 180 degree turn, or you might make a 270 or a 360. You might be climbing. You might be losing altitude.

Jim: And they'd record all that?

Russell: It came out on a sheet.

Jim: So while—

Russell: Not on the aircraft. On the link trainer.

Jim: Okay, so they could look right at it and see what you did—

Russell: See it was—

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: Yeah. And then if you didn't do it right—back into the link trainer maybe the next day. Or tell you to go back and memorize what you were—maybe you've made a mistake on one turn. So now instead of having this pattern, you're over here someplace. That was a pretty thorough training. We got—I got—hmm. I got a finger I chopped off last year, and it doesn't work right when I [unintelligible]—

- Jim: What's this?
- Russell: Oh, there's a Naval aviator card. I can't get on a Naval base with that. That's dead. That's been dead for twenty-some years. Twenty-five, thirty years, maybe. And this here is restricted. Now, you see up here it says "Navy and Marine Corps?"
- Jim: What is this good for? What will that card get you in to?
- Russell: Nothing. This one won't get me into anything, either.
- Jim: Well, it's nice to have them.
- Russell: Yeah.
- Jim: You earned them.
- Russell: This is what I got back—when I graduated from flight training. But this—I tried to get into Glenview Naval Air Station, oh, that had to be back in the early '70s. I'd lost my wings.
- Jim: Oh.
- Russell: I wanted to get down and buy a new set of wings.
- Jim: Must have changed, right?
- Russell: Yeah. And at that time—now they've got, like, a driver's license. Picture, everything. This here, the guy says, "What the hell you showing me?" [laughs] Finally I got a hold of somebody that let me in. This here was just—this was to show that I was in—I think—let's see. This was 1944. That was when I was qualified—see, I graduated in July of '44. So this qualification was done prior to graduation, which was one of the requirements. You had to be instrument qualified to graduate. And then after that, they kept you up. They really kept you up to date.
- Jim: Okay, now, did you keep track of your shipmates? Kept track of many of them or some of them?
- Russell: None. See, with the—
- Jim: That's not much of a story. (Laughs.)
- Russell: No, I got one story, but—the Navy—like, the Army Air Force had reunions of bomber groups, fighter groups—

- Jim: [Unintelligible]
- Russell: Yeah. The Navy never kept a group together.
- Jim: [Unintelligible]
- Russell: No, what they did is if you went over—say you went over with VF-50 or CAG-50, Carrier Air Group 50. You went overseas. You spent your time overseas, you came back to the states. Excuse me. Air Group 50 was completely blown apart.
- Jim: No longer existed.
- Russell: No longer existed. It might exist two weeks from now on a reformation. But now, all of these combat pilots that came out of Air Group 50 would be sent to various parts of the States to form a new air group, bringing in raw boot ensigns like me. Then you'd have a new air group formed. They'd go overseas, and if, whatever their losses were, and if they came back, they'd be blown apart again, form a new air group.
- Jim: This meant that every new air group had experienced pilots.
- Russell: Yeah.
- Jim: I mean, it was obviously—
- Russell: Oh yeah. Yeah, you didn't go out with a brand new group of men. When they—like, with the Air Force—if they lost the top men, they'd promote the bottom men up.
- Jim: That's not a promoting experience.
- Russell: You'd have majors running around in the Air Force, probably, that were out of flight training maybe less than two years.
- Jim: [Unintelligible]
- Russell: The Navy—the only way you got promoted was on a—every, I think, once a month they come out with what they called an “All Nav.” You know what that was.
- Jim: I got promoted on that.
- Russell: Yeah. Every time that—if you knew your number was coming close, you'd look for that promotion sheet. And if your number was there, you

could add an extra half stripe to your uniform. Yeah. But if it wasn't there, you stayed that single stripe or stripe and a half.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: Yeah [laughs].

Jim: [laughs] Up to the front.

Russell: Pecking order was different.

Jim: I told these guys [**End of tape 1, side 2**] I was eating there before, I said, "Solo, pal. Don't even talk to me." [Unintelligible]

Russell: The only one I ever got in contact with—well, I had two cases. One—the first one—I was out in the garden, oh, that had to be between—in the early '80s—and the telephone evidently rang in the house, and the wife came out. She says, "There's a call for you from a guy out in New Jersey." And I didn't know anybody in New Jersey. So I came back in the house, and I answered the phone, and he was a VBF Corsair pilot, fighter bomber. And he wanted to know if I had a patch for the VF-95. And they were about like so. They'd put them on our leather jackets. I said, "Yes. I got one that's still in the original wax-coated envelope."

Jim: Was an extra one.

Russell: Well, that was the only one I had.

Jim: Oh. Well, I thought you had it on your jacket.

Russell: No, no. No, this was one that I hadn't—it hadn't been stitched on yet. So I said, "Yes." And he says, "What'll you take for it?" Well, at that time I didn't have any Navy wings. And I said, "I'll trade you a Navy wing. You got any Navy wings?" And he says, "Yeah." I says, "I'll trade you even up." So, believing him, I sent the patch out. Two days later, they must've crossed en route. I got the wings. He got the patch. And I wrote him a letter and thanked him for it, and I says, "I'm gonna come out and see you." I had a vacation coming up from work. And I got a letter right back. You could hardly decipher it: "Don't come out. I had a stroke." And I can't—he says he was debilitated completely. So that's the only contact there that I had. Then, another one—my grandson was in the Army Air Corps down in San Antonio. And my daughter, son-in-law, my wife and I decide to go down for his graduation. When we landed it was raining. And before we left the airport, it was snowing. By time we got to the motel, it was eighteen inches of—the biggest snowstorm in the history of San Antonio. And we landed in it. Well, when I got to the airport,

while the son-in-law was out looking for an automobile, for a rental car, I went through several telephone books. And San Angelo is where this guy came from—Dale Chase. And I found a Dale Chase in a—various books. I found three or four. They didn't sound right—didn't have Dale O. Chase. And I says, "Well. Give up on that." I think I went through four books, like Houston, San Angelo, whatever. And we got to the hotel—motel—snow like so on the ground. I says, "Well, I haven't tried San Antonio." So I looked up San Antonio. And here's Dale O. Chase. And I dialed up the number, and a woman answered the phone. I says, "Is your husband—is this Mrs. Chase?" She said, "Yes." I says, "Was your husband a Navy pilot?" "Yes." I says, "I'd like to talk to him." She says, "Who's this?" I says, "Russ Sullivan." She went outside, told him who it was, and he says, "Russ Sullivan. Where in the hell did he come from?" Now, I hadn't seen—this was in—this, now, was in mid-'80s? Something like that. And I hadn't seen him since we departed—

Jim: Forty years ago.

Russell: Back in Navy day, '45. And there we're sitting in a snow—a super snowstorm, and all we can do is talk by telephone. So we were there for three or four days. And San Antonio has a ring around it—belt liner. Completely shut down. Tape across. We got caught up there, it was 300 dollar fine. They didn't have any snow removal equipment down there. So what they used for—to keep the highway conditions halfway decent was gravel. Pea gravel up to a half inch, maybe. After the snow melted, it was worse than driving on the ice [laughs]. But anyway, we—when I went to—we had to leave. We had to go through the city. We still couldn't get up on the belt. And I was at the extreme south end of San Antonio. He was at the north end of San Antonio. So I called him up and told him I'd be at the airport at a certain time, and I came—we got rid of the car. I came walking in the airport, and this guy's standing there, and he says, "Oh, Sully!" [laughs] He hadn't seen me in forty years. I said, "How the hell did you recognize me? You're—" His facial expressions didn't change, other the fact that he was all wrinkled up. And, well, he says, "I knew you were with your wife and your daughter and son-in-law. So, he says, "That's the way it looked to me." [laughs]

Jim: Sure [unintelligible].

Russell: Yeah. But he'd been all over the world with oil companies. And he wound up retiring in Louisiana, and he said to his wife, "We're gonna go to Texas where we were born and raised and live out our lives." He was born and raised in San Angelo. He got there—they were building a house, but he was in an apartment then. And they got to San Antonio just in time to get his name in the telephone book. If he'd arrived a short time later,

his name wouldn't have been in the phone book, and I never would've found him.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: Yeah, we only had a half hour or so together before I had to depart.

Jim: And you haven't seen him since?

Russell: Nope.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: I think he's dead, because I looked him up on the internet, and I can't find any Dale Chase in Houston—San Antonio.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: That's pretty thorough search. You know, you can get on that darn internet, and—I don't know anything about it.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: [static] But my grandson—I've had him look around different people that I was in the Navy with, and it came up blank. The two guys—the division leader, myself. Well, LeMeyer(??) was a section leader, and Chase was his wingman. LeMeyer, I know, stayed in the Navy, and he was killed. And—in the Navy. Flight operations. Chase, I don't know if he's alive or not. And Langford, he had to be—he'd have to be in his eighties now. He was born in Lynchburg. I don't know where in the hell he [unintelligible]—there's something else—

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: No.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: Yeah. The veterans groups—way I worked, I was a locomotive engineer. And I worked seven days a week, you don't know when—what day—you never had any—

Jim: Out of Madison?

Russell: Yeah.

- Jim: Good, Wisconsin [unintelligible]—
- Russell: No, no. This was Chicago Northwestern. But it was still the Chicago Northwestern when I retired in '84. But—
- Jim: [Unintelligible.]
- Russell: Yeah. But that there—your life was entirely different on the railroad than it is on the normal life.
- Jim: [Unintelligible.]
- Russell: Oh yeah. But your life, you—one day—one week you'd be working days. Maybe the next week you'd be working nights. Or you'd be working day and night, or—
- Jim: Were you an engineer?
- Russell: Yeah. Yeah, I went to work in '40—January of '46, and I quit, got bought out in January of '84.
- Jim: Start out with retirement and move over [unintelligible]—
- Russell: I went out in '80—I went to work in '46, and '48 I went to school in Chicago for engineers. And in '52 I was promoted at—
- Jim: Did you have to pay your way to go to that school?
- Russell: Yeah. I can't—back then it was around 300 dollars for three month—hundred dollars a month, and it was three months of school.
- Jim: And they made you a fireman?
- Russell: No, no. No, that was—your contract, when you went to work for the railroad, at the end of—at the end of so many months you had to—at the end of forty-eight months, you had to go through engineer school. Oh, at the end of thirty-six months, I guess it was. Yeah. And then I was set up as an engineer. In other words, you moved—your promotion list went up. And I was set up as an engineer in '52, and I was never set back. I was an engineer from '52 to '84.
- Jim: Where did you run, mostly?
- Russell: Mostly here to Chicago. We could go from here to Milwaukee. Here to Elroy. Here to Winona, Minnesota. Here to Lancaster, Cuba City. But most of my time was spent between Madison and Chicago.

- Jim: When you were running as an engineer, were you working eight hours?
- Russell: At the time—that time—back then, you could run—they could work you sixteen hours.
- Jim: I see.
- Russell: Then we fought and fought and fought, and we finally got it down to fourteen hours. Then they—after a few more years we fought some more, and we finally got it down to twelve. And I think it's still twelve, max. Eight was considered a day. A hundred miles or eight hours was considered a day.
- Jim: Stop?
- Russell: Pardon?
- Jim: Then you could stop working?
- Russell: No, if—like—
- Jim: Or you were just paid for that day?
- Russell: It's—you'd have to sit down—it's hard to explain the pay rate or the scale or how it all worked, but if a switch engine—you'd work eight hours, that was a day. Or one hundred miles. That's a—other words, you got a hundred miles for eight hours a day. Your pay scale was based on a hundred miles.
- Jim: Oh, I see.
- Russell: If you went 140—150 miles, you got the hundred mile pay scale, plus half of that added to it, because you went 150 miles, and you might do that in four hours.
- Jim: Well, a switch engine didn't rack up many miles, did they?
- Russell: No. A switch engine was at—when I went to work, was six days a week, and then it wasn't too long after that it went down to five days a week. But your mileage—everything was based on mileage. So if you worked a hundred—if you went a hundred miles, whether you worked five hours, four hours, three hours, you still got a eight hour pay. Hundred miles was the equivalent of eight hours. If you went 150 miles, you still maintained the same pay rate, but if you could make that 150 miles in four hours, you

got the hundred mile, or eight hour, pay, plus half of this eight hour pay, because you went over the hundred miles.

Jim: [Unintelligible.]

Russell: Yeah, it is. It's—like I say—

Jim: And is the Northwestern station still—

Russell: Not the way it was when I went to work, at least. Madison Gas has taken that over. They took that—

Jim: [Unintelligible] here. Yeah [unintelligible] to Chicago.

Russell: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: I worked into there quite a little bit over the years.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: Training.

Jim: Apparently [unintelligible].

Russell: Different. Other words—it was in my blood. Put it that way. My grandfather, my dad's father, was an engineer. He was killed in 1902. My dad was born in 1902. He never knew his father. He went to work on the railroad in '26, something like that. And when I got out—and he was a conductor—when I got out of the Navy I went to work on the railroad in January of '46. Was kind of like a—

Jim: Family [unintelligible].

Russell: Yeah. Well, my son didn't. He never went to work for the railroad.

Jim: Wasn't thrilled with [unintelligible].

Russell: No. I wouldn't let him, because I knew it was going downhill by time he got old enough.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: Oh yeah. It was challenging. And not so much on the—going to Chicago was a challenge.

- Jim: [Unintelligible]
- Russell: The amount of traffic. You had to space yourself—on freight trains you had to space yourself in between the passenger trains. It's hard to explain. You'd have to—
- Jim: I don't want to get any details, because I wouldn't understand.
- Russell: No [laughs].
- Jim: Were you told when to go and when to stop?
- Russell: Oh yeah. Yeah.
- Jim: So—
- Russell: But you had to—you had to help yourself, too. Yeah, you had the signals. You had to help yourself, you know—knowledge. Put it that way. You gained knowledge by experience.
- Jim: Right. But I mean, if you saw the green flag come up—
- Russell: Yeah, you had clear—
- Jim: [Unintelligible] for how long? What are those things—how far apart?
- Russell: All depends. It might—like, down in Chicago area, they might only be 2,000, 3,000 feet apart, if they're that far.
- Jim: They're called sections, is that—
- Russell: Blocks.
- Jim: Is it blocks?
- Russell: Blocks. Signal blocks, from one block to the next block. In other words, if this block was red, this one'd have to be yellow, this one here would be green. So if you came out and this one was green, you would expect the next one to be green, but as you came up to it you saw it was yellow.
- Jim: And you were gonna stop.
- Russell: Then you knew that the next block beyond that had a red signal, and you had to come up there prepared to stop. It might clear up. The train in front of them might—you might be following the guy on yellow signals.

- Jim: I see.
- Russell: In other words, as he cleared, you approached.
- Jim: So it's just a matter of speed. You had a big load and a long—large number of cars [unintelligible]—
- Russell: Ohhh yeah.
- Jim: That's a factor of [unintelligible] experience [unintelligible], is that right?
- Russell: Yeah. Yeah, it is. It all—all your knowledge is gained by experience. Put it that way. You aren't going to read it out of a book. They tried to figure that they could tell you how to do it out of a book, but you couldn't.
- Jim: Did you have feel for if this a diesel—you had a feel for [unintelligible] about how much weight you were carrying and for how long—
- Russell: Oh, you always knew what you had when you left the station. You were—
- Jim: But I mean riding along [unintelligible]—
- Russell: Oh no. The biggest experience I had, I think, was I came out of Heartland with a green signal. This was between Harvard and Woodstock, Illinois. And there was a valley. I was on top of a hill, and I was going into a valley into a big lefthand curve, and I had a green signal at Heartland. And I knew I could see down in that valley and see the next signal. That was probably 10,000 feet away, maybe more. But I could see that green dot down in there. I saw red, and I was going sixty miles an hour with, probably, 7,000, 8,000 tons behind me of rock. Mostly rock. And I just went into emergency, 'cause I didn't know what that signal meant down there. I got stopped about, oh, 400 or 500 feet from the signal, and just beyond the signal sat a caboose and a train. I didn't get the prior warning for this red signal. I found out later on what was wrong.
- Jim: [Unintelligible]
- Russell: A double track. There was a shunt between the two tracks somehow or another. You know, I got on the radio. First thing I wanted to know if that guy backed across, you know, from one mainline to the other. First thing—I didn't ask him if he was backing across. I says, "How long you been sitting here?" And he said, "Uh, thirty minutes, forty minutes. Something like that." So I knew there was problem right away. If he's

been sitting there—if his rear end was sitting there thirty or forty minutes, something was wrong.

Jim: Did the signal [unintelligible].

Russell: So here comes a suburban train to Harvard, and the signal just behind me was green for that suburban train. When he went by that signal, it didn't go red. It went yellow. It should've gone red as soon as he hit that signal block. The next thing I saw was a green signal back here. He'd only went to the next block, and he cleared the signal behind him. So I got on the radio and called the train dispatcher and told him what it was taking place, and I says, "You damn near had a major accident out here." So then they—all different things went—questioning here and back and forth. They sent the signal maintainers out right away. That was after I had left, of course. And they found out a shunt between the tracks. If it had been a fog like that valley generally would get foggy—

Jim: You'd have been plowed over.

Russell: I'd a been dead [laughs]. It was just a matter of 500 to 800 feet, I'd been in there. But there, again—

Jim: Could you be prepared to jump?

Russell: Where you gonna jump to if you're going forty, fifty miles an hour?

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: [laughs] You probably wouldn't even see it coming, because if it was in a fog or if it was too late—it was too late. It was dangerous in ways. You could make it dangerous, too, by not using your head.

Jim: Yeah, I could see that.

Russell: God, old Heinemann, he said he could take men off of the streets down there in Chicago and make engineers out of them. He was the president at one time.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Russell: But he—

Jim: Probably said that during union negotiations.

Russell: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think that was during the strike in '62. Yeah, that was a mess. Well, I don't know what I'll be doing with these books.

Jim: Well, we can—we'd surely love particularly this. These are the choice things—

Russell: This could be—this could be glued in somehow or another.

Jim: [Unintelligible.]

Russell: And this here is the training—not the training, but what the various letters mean in—like M. It doesn't show what M is on here. Hmm. V is—V is instrument. Y is night—generally, Y is in here as red. So here's a red. Night carrier landing. Y.C.L. And I don't know whether that was carrier, or—no, that wasn't carrier. That had to be—oh, here's—then I put over here, during this month, “two carrier landings.” I don't know. My kids wouldn't want it.

Jim: We'd love it.

Russell: Yeah.

Jim: Maybe we'll have you sign something. I'll try and get a hold of this guy, trying to see if he's here. We can't accept anything without your approval.

Russell: Mm-hmm.

Jim: So they have to release that—just wait until I get get that [unintelligible]. We'll walk down—

Russell: Okay. But that there—

[End of Interview.]