VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Edward Henry Oldis

Conducted by Ms. Deb Barrett

February 13, 2011

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This interview is being conducted on Sunday, February 13, 2011 with Mr. Ed Oldis at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Mr. Oldis was born on July 5, 1922 in Preston, Iowa. He is a retired court reporter, and he learned of the Veterans History Project through contact with the library of the VFW. Mr. Oldis has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Here is his story.

Life Before Entering Military Service

Ed, just before you went into the service where were you living? What was your life like? Were you in school? Were you working?

I was in high school. I graduated from high school in Iowa City, Iowa and joined the Navy.

What year was that?

1940 – August 13.

Why did you choose the Navy, and why did you choose to enlist?

Because my family did not have the necessary finances at the time, and I didn't think I was college material. I was going to make the Navy a career.

Why did you choose the Navy over the other branches?

Because my father was a World War I veteran, and we talked a little bit about it. He recommended an easier life would be in the Navy.

Had he been in the Navy or the Army?

In the Army.

And he thought the Navy would be a little easier life for you.

Oh, yes. He was in World War I and went overseas. He was in an aerial squadron. His job was to drive a motorcycle close to the front lines, get information on where the bombs would strafe, go back and give that information at the air field.

So he was right up there in the fighting and thought this might be easier for you.

Yes.

So your family was understanding and supportive of your enlisting in the Navy.

Oh, yes. Yes.

Were your friends enlisting at the time?

No. No one from the high school I graduated from. I had a friend in Preston, Iowa who enlisted in the Navy a month before I did. We did meet up a couple of times.

Induction and Basic Training

So it was 1940 when you went into the service, and you were 18. Where were you inducted into the service?

Great Lakes Training Center.

What do you remember of the first couple of days? What was your first impression?

I was ready to go. We got our haircuts, uniforms – the whole bit. You slept in a hammock and learned a little bit of Navy procedures. And discipline.

How did you get to Great Lakes, by the way?

By train. I was inducted in Des Moines, Iowa along with other fellows and took a train to Chicago, and took another train to Great Lakes.

So you were inducted in Des Moines and then traveled to Great Lakes.

Yes.

How long were you at Great Lakes?

We were there for only two months. We were supposed to be there three months, but after the two months of training we were given a ten-day leave to go back home, then come back to Great Lakes and go out and be assigned to a ship or a school. I came home and three days later I got a telegram to come back to Great Lakes because they were going to ship me out to San Diego to be assigned to a ship.

So your training was cut short because they needed men.

Yes, they needed men in the fleet.

So you were home for a short time. Were you able to tell your family that you were shipping out?

Yes. They got the telegram at home, so they knew.

So you cut short your leave, in fact, and went back to Great Lakes. You said you were being shipped out to San Diego. What happened? How did you get to San Diego?

By train.

Was it a troop train or a regular passenger type of train?

A regular passenger train.

Were you traveling in uniform?

Oh, yes.

How did people react to you traveling in uniform?

I don't recall. The train was pretty much all sailors. They were shipping all of us out to San Diego to catch a ship – to get transported to wherever our ship might have been.

So there were a lot of sailors on board, but there were civilians as well?

I think there were some civilians, yes.

Duty Assignments

So you got out to San Diego.

We went down to the dock and got aboard a destroyer called the "Fletcher." I got on there. We were on there about four days – we left right away. I didn't know if it was north, south, east or west, but it went up to Long Beach. Up there we were sailing, and I saw this large ship. They came by and said we were going on that ship. So I got transferred at sea.

What was the name of the ship you got transferred to?

The USS Saratoga – an aircraft carrier, better known as CV3.

What had your training been for? What type of work were you going to have on the ship?

I had no training at all at Great Lakes.

So Great Lakes was basically learning terminology, discipline …

Indoctrination. Yes. Passing the physical, swimming test, shooting a rifle and things like that. I did not go to any school.

So you were transferred aboard the Saratoga. How did you transfer at sea? What did they do?

By a little whale boat. I got my hammock and sea bag, and being about 5' 5" – I was starting to grow, I guess. And from the whale boat I got transferred to the Saratoga. I got aboard there and was greeted by another sailor who took me by the hand, so to speak, and took me up to the place I was going to be assigned – the captain's office, to be a secretary. In the Navy it's called a yeoman. I did not have any desire to be a secretary, but there were not too many men at that time who could type.

And you could type.

I could type. I took typing in school. It was on my record that I could type, so I became a secretary – a yeoman.

What were your quarters like on the ship? Where did you sleep?

Well, originally I slept in a hammock, which is much better than anything else aboard ship. The Saratoga, or any aircraft carrier, goes from side to side. It doesn't go like a destroyer that you go through the water like a submarine. The only thing that's pretty solid is a battleship because it's large and bulky.

So there's some rolling on the ship.

From side to side, yes. Once in a while, in a typhoon, you might get picked up a little bit. But generally, when you came to a doorway – better known as a hatch – you'd have to time yourself to go through that doorway so you wouldn't bump into the sides.

So where did you tie up your hammock?

I tied my hammock, when I first got there, by the galley – the kitchen – where we ate our meals. You'd have to string them up tight so you wouldn't run into them.

How many men slept in that area?

I would imagine maybe 200.

The reason I said it was better to sleep in a hammock, was because with the ship going from side to side, the hammock stays in one position.

Level.

Right. Then I finally got assigned down by the captain's office on a bunk – a four-tier bunk. A bunk doesn't move like a hammock.

You did! What bunk were you on?

I was on the top one. I was an apprentice seaman so I got the high spot.

Did you fall out of bed?

No, I didn't fall out that I recall.

And when you were in these bunks was it in a big room with a lot of people.

No. It was in a hatchway, so at the beginning of the day the bunks were put upward so you'd have more room to bypass one another in the passageway.

You said you had no training for the job. So you basically did what the captain needed done.

Not at that time. My job was to keep the office clean. I and another sailor – he and I were there to spit and polish, keep the desk clean, paint, chip and paint, and do filing. The first thing that Mason – he was in charge of the captain's office; he had enlisted back in 1932 I think it was; Russo was '36 and Herb was maybe '38. But Mason was a first class yeoman in charge of the captain's office, and he gave me the instructions on what to do. And the first thing he said for me to do was to learn shorthand. The other sailor, Ed Sabo, in the office – he had taken shorthand but he didn't want to be a yeoman. He was very intelligent. He wanted to be a fire control man, which, at that time, was the hardest rank you could attain. It had to do with electronics, optics, and had some control of the guns.

So is he the one who taught you shorthand?

Yes. We'd study, because what else could you do at sea!

What was your typical day like?

You reported to the office.

What time did you get up?

I would imagine it was 7:00 – I didn't pay attention.

I also had a little chip that showed I could go to the head of the chow line. You'd get yelled at – "Hey, what are you doing!" – and I'd hold up my little chip.

What was the breakfast like for you?

It was delicious. At that time we had a mess cook and I had a table. That was before we had the cafeteria style. The food was good – delicious – in the office, because the cooks and bakers knew that we sort of had opportunity to approve their requests.

So they wanted to keep you happy.

Yes.

So breakfast would be eggs, some kind of meat …

Yes. We had a variety. Beans every Saturday morning. Good food and we had all the other stuff – pies and cakes, hot chocolate – down in the office.

So you had breakfast, you went to study your shorthand; you did whatever needed to be done to assist in the captain's office.

Yes. And every once-in-a-while the skipper would say the mail was ready, so Mason would say, "Hey, Oldis go up and get the mail." So I'd go into the skipper's lounge, which was quite spacious, bring the mail down and would retype it or depending on what the job was to do.

What type of mail did you retype?

Well, he'd write something out, or there might be a correction he'd want and I'd have to retype the letter. I did type. As I mentioned, I did file. And as I got more experience I did walk with him on inspections.

And the afternoon was pretty much like the morning as far as your responsibilities.

Yes. Whatever one does in an office.

What did you do in your off-hours?

Well, pretty much, if it was a nice day and they weren't having flight maneuvers you could go up and lay out on the deck to get sunshine and tan, or play catch – baseball.

Had you been on ships any time before you went in the Navy?

No.

So this was your first experience.

Well, I had a canoe.

But a large vessel.

No, I was never on a cruise or anything. No.

Was there anything that surprised you about living on board?

No. Being a young kid – 18 and 19 – as I grew older I had the greatest job in the world!

Where was the Saratoga headed?

We had 60 airplanes. Our main job was to launch and retrieve airplanes. They'd go on maneuvers – they'd fly off and have flying exercises before the war. There was an island they used to strafe and bomb. And the torpedo aviators would have ships they would "torpedo," and the torpedo would run underneath them.

So this was still off the coast of the U.S. and you were training.

No, we went to Hawaii. As I say, we went to Hawaii when I got transferred off the Fletcher – the destroyer I was on. After I got aboard, it was the same day we headed for Hawaii.

So this was off the coast of Hawaii, then.

Both places. Hawaii is five or six days away from the west coast. They'd have gunnery exercises. Every day was a learning day aboard ship. The guys down in the engineering department – in the boiler rooms – would keep the ship running. And the deck hands would be up there doing loading exercises with their 5" guns, or their .20mm or whatever it was.

How long did you do this type of work?

My whole career in the Navy. Six years.

Were you in the same places off the California coast and Hawaii?

Yes. I never left the Pacific Ocean.

You had the chance to go on the islands of Hawaii.

Oh, yes. I saw Waikiki, Diamond Head and all of that. I got to Pearl Harbor before it was struck on the 7th.

We went into Bremerton in October, November – the latter part of September of 1941; I don't remember the exact dates. October, 1940 – after I enlisted – we got aboard the Saratoga and went to Honolulu, Hawaii. I was out there maybe just two weeks and then came back to Bremerton. We were in Bremerton during January-February, 1941; maybe March. I didn't mark it down because I didn't know I'd be interviewed (chuckles). We went back out to Hawaii again and came back in the latter part of

September, October and November of 1941. We got more new stuff on us. On December 7 we came down and pulled into San Diego about 9:30. We were all getting ready for liberty at 1300 hours, which is 1:00pm. And the skipper gets on the loud speaker and says, "The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor." Pretty soon they announced that all leaves were canceled and all liberty for the day.

We took on about 20,000 sailors, 10,000 marines and left the next day.

What was the mood, the reaction, on the ship when the captain made that announcement?

Some of us said we'd be in Japan by Christmas time. That's what we were saying. Naturally, we didn't know how bad Pearl Harbor was hit, although I knew how bad it was hit, because by that time I had been promoted to decoding typist. So when we got messages I would sit and type the messages with the decoding machine, and they let us know they'd been terribly hit. They let us know what ships had been sunk and all of that.

So you got information that wasn't widely known because of your job.

It was secret. I and Erv and Chief Davis – we were just the three decoding typists at the time. I don't know why I was selected.

What was your thought when you were decoding and typing this? Were you surprised how bad things were?

Not really, because I'm a young kid. Remember, I was 19. I had no knowledge except that I knew typing there it made a little bit of an impression on me of all the battleships that were hit. They described those.

So we got out there. We left on the 8th and got out to Pearl on the 15th. But we couldn't go in because we needed a pilot to take us in. We got there in the evening. The next day we had to go down around Maui, then come up and get the pilot to go in on the 16th.

Was that because of all the debris?

No.

Why did you need a pilot?

He'd know where the channel was. The Saratoga might have had a 34' depth of water we needed. So the pilot knew where the sand bars were where we might have run aground. Also, at that time the battleship Nevada had run aground on hospital point because that blocked the channel. They pulled it around and put it across from where it ran aground at hospital point so we could get in and all the other ships could get in. Otherwise we'd have been in terrible shape. They called that "torpedo junction" where

you came in, because you had to go in straight there and they were worried the Japanese subs were sitting there to throw "fish" at us.

So when you went back you saw Pearl right after; you had seen it before.

Yes. I was there during peace time. In 1940 we were out in the ocean off where Aloha Towers was, and we would take the shore boat in to take liberty. And we were there a couple of times before Pearl Harbor, around Ford Island; and Ford Island was where the planes landed.

When all the men on the ship saw Pearl Harbor, what was …

They couldn't see yet until we got into the Harbor. Then we were all restricted because we all had work to do. We had to get rid of those 20,000 sailors and 10,000 Marines and get everything ready because we were going to leave the next day. We were going to Wake Island. Wake still hadn't been taken over by the Japs, so we left the next day.

This was still December?

Yes, December 7th, and we left the 8th.

On the 8th you left and went to Wake Island.

We tried to get to Wake, but Wake fell. And our skipper, the admiral we had who was head of our flotilla, he got orders from Kimmel or somebody – actually, I don't know that – to turn around. And our skipper didn't turn around because there was a Jap carrier out there that was helping to take Wake.

So he didn't turn around because that would have put you in a confrontation with them?

He hoped so. That was one of the carriers, I assume, that was in the attack on Pearl. Then went out there and we were to confront them, because they'd be low on maybe oil, they'd be tired – the pilots would – so let's sink that S.O.B.

Did you make it to the carrier?

No. The executive officer – Captain Douglas – had us turn around, because the admiral was confined to his quarters. My duty station was on the bridge on the phone until the exec's office and the captain's office got enough guys so we could take care of the gun spots – the 20mm guns. So that was when we changed our battle station so if the Japs had any airplanes coming at us we could try to shoot them down. But I never had to fire my gun at a Jap.

So you never had any confrontations.

They did, but not where a 20mm would shoot. A confrontation that occurred, a fighter plane took off and knocked down a seaplane. They knocked down a lot of planes at Guadalcanal when we got that far.

So you went from Hawaii and started to go to Wake Island when you were told to turn around.

We turned around and came back.

To Hawaii?

Yes. It's a five, six, seven day trip from Hawaii back to the States.

So from Hawaii you went back to California?

No. From Hawaii we stayed there, and then we came out on the 1st of … [January], … [1942] and went patrolling to see that none of the Japs were around. And at the same time the pilots are testing themselves, landing and taking off. And the gunner mates were having gunnery practice. The engineers down in the boiler rooms are perfecting their skills; everybody had a job. Navigators were planning out where we were at, signalmen – everyone had a job.

Then, on the 11th of January 1942, we got hit by a torpedo.

Where was the ship when it was hit?

Off of Midway, out in the ocean somewhere – they didn't have signposts out there (chuckles). It happened about 7:30 at night, so it was a little bit dark. It put a hole in us about 40' by 20'. The ship started listing. And, as I explained to you before, an aircraft carrier rocks back and forth. So it would come down and it got to a point where water was coming down into the hangar deck. That's where the planes would be repaired; we had elevators to take the planes down.

Where were you when the torpedo hit?

I was typing a letter up in the office. It made a big, big noise!

Every morning about a half-hour before sunrise, and every night a half-hour before sunset everybody would go to their battle stations. The skipper or someone on the staff would time how long it took us to get to our battle stations. We got it down to about six minutes. When the torpedo hit it took us about 26 minutes. Everybody sort of panicked. There were 'up' ladders and 'down' ladders, and people were trying to go up ladders when they were supposed to be going down. So it was a panic situation.

You didn't know what was going to happen with the ship.

No. If it hadn't been for a chief water tender we might have sunk. He took over for the commander down in damage control, because the commander lost it. He was what we called "plank owner" aboard the ship – he was on there in 1926-27 whenever it got commissioned. Up until then he went from a fireman apprentice seaman to chief. He knew every void and what it had in it. So he took over pumping out the voids wherever they had something to be pumped out; empty whatever to be done and got the ship on an even keel.

So how did the ship get repaired – that was a huge hole to have to repair?

Well, we got into Pearl in dry dock. They made temporary repairs. Then we went to Bremerton again for three months. It took that long to heal us. Then we went down to San Diego to pick up new torpedo planes.

On the old torpedo planes, the torpedo was exposed and you couldn't maneuver. So Grumman made the fighters, so they enlarged that and covered the torpedo so you could maneuver more.

We left from San Diego, where we picked up those planes, and headed for Pearl, and then to Midway because we knew the Japs were coming down with the Battle of Midway. We didn't get there in time for that battle. That was in June of 1942.

So we were in and out of Pearl to perfect our work. I had the easiest job in the world – all the yeomen did – to just sit and type, eat good.

While all this was happening, were you able to communicate with people back home?

Oh, no.

Not at all.

They'd right letters, but during the war our letters were censored. They'd cut stuff out of letters. You were instructed many times that you couldn't write where you were at or what was happening.

So you were able to write, you just couldn't tell them much of anything.

Yes.

Were letters censored the other way? You got letters with things cut or blanked out?

No. What would my mother know about the war? No, they didn't censor those letters.

So it was just the letters going out. Were you involved with that at all?

No. They had officers who were censors.

I became a third class yeoman in rank. I got promoted from apprentice seaman to second class seaman, to first class seaman, then third class. Also, I was picked as a volunteer to study for Annapolis to be an officer in the Navy. There were eight of us picked.

How were you picked?

I don't know. I imagine it wasn't because I was good looking (chuckles).

Anyway, eight of us were picked. We studied – ensigns. We'd go to classes in chemistry, mathematics, English and all that sort of jazz. And I was fortunate to get a high enough grade in October …

Oh, we got hit again – torpedoed again.

We came back after the Battle of Midway, which was in June of 1942, and we'd go out and patrol – get the pilots to land and take off. I think it might have been the end of June when we went south and crossed the equator and got down near New Zealand. We then were informed that we were going to go up to Guadalcanal and start our battle back to defeat the Japs. Which we did. So we went into Guadalcanal on August 7.

Being on a carrier, the people who did all the work were those silly, crazy aviators! They were nuts! They had 300' to land on, and 300' to take off on. The "airdales" who took care of the planes, who had to push them forward or aft, they were the ones who did the hustling. And the landing officer bringing the planes in – he'd sit back there and the lives of the pilots were in his hands.

So you were not directly involved, is what you're saying, in what was happening.

I was four decks below, down by the water line – one deck above the water line. I'd be down there – all of us in the captain's office. Across from us was the exec's office; down the passageway was the air office. Once in a while the yeomen were called upon to take reports of the pilots – what they hit. If they hit everything they said they hit, the war would have ended two months earlier (both chuckle).

So we got hit again by Guadalcanal by a torpedo.

These two times that you got hit, was there any confrontation before or did the torpedo just come as a complete surprise?

Well the first one was a surprise because it was nighttime. But the second one, we saw the wakes from the torpedoes coming. They sounded general quarters, but then they rescinded the call. The reason being, we found out later, was that you'd have opened up all the hatches.

The hatches are generally closed – what we call x-ray condition – when you're underway. Then when you have general quarters you go to zebra conditions and everything is hatched down. You're in this room wherever your battle station is. Say this is a boiler room, so you're here and it all depends if you have to go up a ladder to get out of a hatchway, or you have a hatch that gets you to a passageway on the same deck. So those are all hatched down so water can't go from this room to that room.

Kind of contain it. So was this hit as bad as the first one?

No, no. After our first hit they put another four feet of belly on us. So it hit the spot at our coffee locker – we lost all our coffee aboard ship. We didn't lose any lives on that one.

Did you lose any lives on the first one?

The first one we lost six guys.

In either case, was anyone able to respond to attack the sub?

The destroyers did. Nobody onboard the carrier could. We didn't carry depth bombs because we were too big. We're 880' long by 100' wide. But the destroyers would go off and ping them – drop their depth charges, hoping to put one right next to them and blow them apart. We don't know if they did or not.

The other one – the second one at Guadalcanal – was about 8:00 in the morning. It just put a little hole in us.

How was that hole managed? Where did you go from there?

We went to Tongatapu, an island group down there. What they did is they filled the voids on the port side. We were hit the first time on the port side, and the second time on the starboard side. So they'd put it so the hole was up as much as they could get it out of the water. The welders got out and patched the hole temporarily as best they could, and we headed back to Pearl.

We got to Pearl and they put us in dry dock. That's when I got orders – I and another fellow; an electrician – to go to Annapolis. I was fortunate enough to pass it, and I'd have been in Jimmy Carter's class.

Returning to the States

So I got a ride back to San Francisco on the USS Idaho – a battleship. And somewhere I got pleurisy, which is an infection of the lungs, and it put me in the hospital in Oakland. Dear old Dr. Brown was a specialist, he asked if I wanted a discharge. I said, "No! I don't do anything extensive. I run a typewriter – I'm just a secretary." "Well, you go to bed for three months and we'll see what happens." He was a TB specialist.

At the end of three months he said "You're really not fit for duty. Do you want a discharge?" I said, "No. Let's see what happens." He said, okay; they'd send me down to a rest camp in Carona, California to get well enough to go back to duty.

So you were in the hospital for three months, then at this rest camp …

For another three months. I got well enough, I guess.

I went down to the destroyer base in San Diego. I was there for a couple of weeks. Finally there must have been an opening in an operational training command – we trained new ships and ships that had been remodeled.

I was a gunnery officer's yeoman there. He was a captain. His ship had been sunk off the Philippines. I'd go in and take dictation from him about an exercise he wanted to have performed on all these ships. I'd type it up.

That was 1943?

It was 1943.

So you would have been all of 21?

Yes.

Well, October 1942 is when I went into the hospital, so February of 1943 or thereabout. Being I was a typist, I was the head nurses' secretary down in Carona. Being in bed for that three months at Oakland I couldn't have a typewriter in bed with me (chuckles).

That's when all sailors or servicemen could write letters – just put free up there. So I wrote to everyone in the world when I worked in the nurse's office.

So your family knew about you being hospitalized.

Yes, I'm sure. In fact, I wrote to my cousin – she was from Iowa and went to Chicago to work at the stock yards. She worked with this girl named Jane. I wrote and asked her what she was doing working in Chicago where Al Capone and all that crime was. Janie put a little note on one of Thelma's letters she wrote back to me, that if I ever got to Chicago she'd show me around.

So I got discharged from the hospital and maneuvered a 30-day leave. At that time everybody was gone. But then I remembered this girl named Janie in Chicago. So I took the train in, and from the train station I called her house. Her mother answered the phone. I said I was in town for Jane to show me the town. She'd not known I was going to come. They told me how to get to the south side of Chicago. I was there Friday, Saturday and Sunday. And that started it all!

And you married her.

I married her.

How long did you know each other?

Two years.

So she showed you around a little bit?

Oh, yes. And my cousin was there.

This was 30 days you had?

Yes, but I stayed there only Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Because she had a date on Sunday. Which was all right.

The rest of the time you were with your parents?

Yes. Or I'd go out and see my uncles at the farm. They were all farmers.

When your 30-day leave was up …

I went back to San Diego. That's when I was assigned to this admiral's staff as a gunnery officer. I stayed there 18 months, maybe. All the time I was a gunnery officer's yeoman – and still writing letters.

Janie saved all the letters – 4,400 pages! I wish I could have saved her letters – some of them were 20 – 30 pages long! What could you write in 20-30 pages, for just being there three days! Best thing that ever happened.

So you went back to San Diego, you said, and you were …

Then we had "what was a destroyer like" – that was our letterhead. The new ships would come in, and the remodeled ships, and get their exercises from us. Gunnery, engineering – they had an engineering officer – communications officer; there must have been 10 or 12 commanders who were there and gave exercises to everybody.

Then I got orders to go to steno school to get better at shorthand.

Where was that?

That was in San Diego, too.

I was getting ready to get orders to go overseas, and heard they were going to expand the school. There was only one class every four months. They were going to expand to a second class. Something told me if I'd teach school I'd stay there in San Diego. Right?

Right.

I couldn't teach school aboard ship. We had about 30 in a class. So I started studying harder and tried to be nice with the school teacher – he was also a sailor. And he recommended me to be the teacher. The head of the school there came in and asked me if I wanted to be a teacher. I think I beat him by five seconds to say I would (chuckles). I said I would, although I'd never had any teaching experience. Anything to stay in the States.

So I got the orders and called Janie when the orders came in on Tuesday. I said, "Let's get married." We were engaged.

When was this?

It was March of 1945.

She said, "No, remember we told our parents we couldn't get married – wouldn't get married – until after the war was over." So I blackmailed her. I said, "I might as well go overseas and make more money so we'd have a little more money when we get married. I'll call my mother and call you back in a half-hour."

So I called my mother. She said, "You can't get married!" I said I was going to be there a while and wanted Janie close by. She said, "You can't get married. You're Lutheran. You can't get married during Lent." But we did. She arranged a wedding in five days.

You were married where?

In Chicago.

And you went back to San Diego.

Yes.

Did she go with you?

Oh, yes! We didn't know where we were going to go. I knew one of my shipmates had shore duty there. He had an apartment and we went there. We arrived in San Diego on Friday. I had a place to go …

Yeah (chuckles). But she needed a place, too!

She slept on a couch.

She went down to the USO where they had housing. They only had one room on Saturday and the person in front of her took that. She wanted a room with cooking privileges. Monday she went down and she was second then. The girl was offered a room with cooking privileges or a trailer at $15 a week. She took the room, so Janie took the trailer. I was making $94 a month, and four times $15 was $60. We had $34! Then she got a job. One Saturday night we were broke except for a bus pass. We had 20¢. We took 10¢ a piece and rode the ferry back and forth from San Diego to Coronado.

So when the two of you came back to San Diego, you didn't stay together at first because there was no place for you to stay.

Right. But we got the trailer on Monday, and stayed there Tuesday. Then she got a job at a bank and we stayed there until the war ended.

During that time you were doing the teaching.

Yes.

Did you teach the rest of your time there?

Yes.

Did you enjoy the teaching?

Oh, yes.

I know you liked not having to go overseas. But you enjoyed the teaching.

Oh, yes. It was fun.

How many men would be in one of your classes?

Twenty-five to thirty.

What did you enjoy about the teaching?

Well, the enjoyment was being married!

The enjoyment was being married and going home every night.

But also the joy was teaching the guys who'd come in not knowing shorthand, and they'd leave knowing shorthand.

How long were the classes?

Four months. I had four classes.

Discharge and Returning to Civilian Life

When you finished – when were you discharged?

In August, 1946. They kept me eight days longer than they were supposed to, the rascals! (Both chuckle) My in-laws had come out with the 37 Ford to pick us up. He worked for the gas company and he had to call them up to say he'd be a week late.

So they came out to pick you up. And you were discharged in San Diego.

Yes.

And you drove back with your in-laws.

Yes. Six of us in a Ford! (Both chuckle.) But it was worth it.

And where did you settle down after that?

In Chicago. I taught shorthand at Gregg College when I came back. I went to court reporter school for a year.

Then they were going to expand the school and asked me if I wanted to be a teacher. But then a lady came in after I was there a year and asked if I'd gone to college to become a teacher. I said I hadn't gone to college. So she said, "Then you're not certified." I told her I wasn't. So she went to see the head of Gregg College. He came and said, with all the GI's coming back under the GI Bill they had to let me go.

So did you go to school on the GI Bill?

One year.

Where did you go?

Gregg College.

So he said they had to let you go from the teaching you were doing. Where did you go after that?

I went to court reporting.

You said you did that free lance?

Yes. I started my own business, and eventually retired.

When you look back – although you've said a couple of times all you did was typing and things like that – you were involved in a part of the world where there was a lot going on, especially for our country. Pearl Harbor was a big deal, and you went back and forth. How did those experiences affect your view of the world, life? How did those experiences you had affect your thinking?

Well, as I say, I had the best job. Sitting in an office. There was really no hardship except when we were struck by torpedoes. Even then, there was really no hardship for me as long as we didn't sink. If I hadn't met Janie, I think I would have made the Navy my career.

But marrying her, you decided to do something else.

Yes. I didn't want to go over to Japan or the Philippines and have her back in Chicago. Yes.

Do you think your time in the service had a positive impact on your life? Neutral impact? How did it impact the most? What was the impact it had on your life?

Well, I learned my profession. I wanted to be a torpedo man or electrician in the Navy. I had no desire to be a 'girl;' be a secretary.

But you ended up sticking with it after you came out – staying with that type of work.

Yes.

Lasting Impressions

What are your best memories of your time in the service?

I imagine it's selfish of me to say, but I came out alive. I got off the 'Sara.' I wasn't aboard when we had a Kamikaze attack. We lost 123 guys. I learned that by going to the Saratoga reunion. There was another Saratoga later on that took the name because the 'Sara' I was on in 1946 was sunk out in Bikini by the atom bomb test.

By me being in the VFW and listening to some guys and taking their taped videos – some of these were horrendous; how they lived through it. One fellow was in Vietnam 15 days and got his face half-way blown off. He was in the hospital for 15 months. Another guy, a pilot in Europe, had to fly through the Alps with only one engine. I listened to some of the stories that they don't tell us. One fellow got frostbitten legs, and both of them got amputated. War is hell!

So you obviously have a very strong commitment to veterans. You belong to the VFW, and are doing some interviewing yourself.

Yes.

Is there something you would like people to know about veterans and their expectations when they come home?

Oh, I think the reception of veterans might be a little better. But I don't know how to do that. We just had Dr. Provenzano come. He's a member of our Post. He's a doctor. He has a story to tell that shows why we have so many amputees and survivors. He set up a hospital – a surgical thing – and in 15 minutes they're ready to go. There's been a lot of advances.

A lot has changed on ships. Is there anything you'd like to add?

No. I think I might have talked too long!

No, you didn't talk too long.

I'd like each of the guys at the Post to give me a tape. I'm sure you'd like that, too. Because we all have a story. That's what I keep telling them.

They do! And we appreciate you sharing your story with us.

Thank you kindly, and I'll be taking some more tapes.