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Oral History Interview
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Washington, North Carolina

I am Warren Lane, born in Boston and the son of a Boston merchant. We lived in the suburbs where I received my early education. I then graduated through a New England boys' preparatory boarding school. The school incidently is the oldest boys' preparatory boarding school in the country, founded in 1763. Then I continued and finally received my degree from the University of Pennsylvania, Morton School. I was a marketing major and got my degree in Business and Economics. I graduated and came on the job market at the very bottom of the depression, where with a little luck and some perspiration and a little bit of ingenuity, you got a job.

I began selling shoes at retail in New York City in 1932. I liked the business and the company and moved along with it into management until later when I carved out a career in the shoe industry and was eventually the national sales manager for a very fine New England shoemaker. Being from New England, I guess that's not unusual. It was one of the founding industries of New England.

About the time that World War II broke out, I was traveling nationally trying to market my product. I had a young family and was married with two young children. Of course, I stood in fear of the draft board and was listed as eligible. I always tell my grandchildren that I went into the Navy out of sheer patriotism and fear of the draft board. I found out from the Navy that I was qualified to accept a commission if they offered it to me. I had certain qualifications at that time, not just being more mature, but also having a record of dealing with personnel and motivating and training. I think my background was attractive to them. Alluding to the draftboard again, I thought that if

I were drafted, I would not have the income necessary to maintain my family in my absence. My wife, being a mother and a housewife rather than a professional lady, I wanted her at home. So I again renewed my interest in the Navy. My employer at that time would not grant me a release for immediate mobilization. He felt that our factory, making shoes for the Navy, was considered an essential industry. But that didn't quite satisfy me. When the real threat came for the final draft, things were really hot and closing in in Europe. I applied again and received my release.

The Navy then gave me a commission. I went through indoctrination with men ten to twelve years younger than I but stayed with it. When it came time for assignments, I was dispatched to the Naval Armed Guard Gunnery School, NOV Norfolk, Camp Shelton, to develop guncrews and develop myself for duty afloat. This frankly, without being heroic, I welcomed. I felt that being in the Navy, the place to serve was aboard ship. So having trained several guncrews, and my name having been up for assignment, I was based out of Brooklyn, New York, and received my first commission as a Naval armed guard commanding officer aboard the S. S. Edwin L. Godkin which was a merchant ship in a convoy. On Pearl Harbor Day, 1944, we shipped out of New York for Europe as a member of an eighty ship convoy which was unusually large at the time. I was the only commissioned officer aboard my ship in charge of what we called an inflated guncrew. We had three inch fifty forward and four, twenty millimeters and a five inch thirty-eight aft. Of course, our sole responsibility was when under enemy attack to provide the fire power for our convoy, which, as we all know, was entirely inadequate. So at least we had a weapon of defense.

We were, as I classified my job description, a father, mother, chaplain and incidently a gunnery officer. Our prime problem when not under fire was morale building and working with our own Navy gunners assigned to us and working

in cooperation with the merchant mariners who were receiving considerable more compensation than our guys whose base was fifty-four dollars a month and then on up. Right here the Merchant Marines were getting wartime union wages and overtime and double pay in explosive waters the minute you went into enemy territory. So it was a personnel problem working with the master of the ship, who was licensed, and his crew, because we dealt with them every day. It called for ingenuity and thinking and most of all providing ways and means of keeping the men occupied. That was my function when I came into the Navy.

We were under attack a couple of times and were alerted for submarines a couple of times. The Nazi Navy then had come pretty close to our shores. This we know now from their records. We were lucky. My convoy took a hit, but my ship did not.

We did have many round trips across the Atlantic. My service was in the European theater. I later served in the Pacific. Having carried cargo in convoy successfully to that point, we became, unbeknownst to us, part of what would have been the invasion of Japan. We got to the Philippines just at the time when they threw the bomb on Japan, and that was the end of the war. We never got to go on that cruise. So we returned to the States. My tour overall took about two years. Most of this was duty afloat.

One of the advantages of our type of duty was when we secured in a port and were tied up and had stood our watches, we had liberty time. I had many opportunities to travel and sightsee, of course within the wartime restrictions, but our facilities for our recreation were excellent. The Red Cross and Salvation Army were tremendous to us. I will speak wholesomely and enthusiatically about what they provided, not only for the commissioned officers but for the enlisted personnel also.

We made many tours that were exciting down through North Africa, down into Egypt and the pyramid country and into Casablanca and all through the North Africa region. We skirted virtually the entire Mediterranean area up into the Adriatic into the Italian ports and around southern France. Our principal port seemed to be Marseilles.

So we were on Gibraltar, and, as I say,went down through the Panama Canal area. We went into the Philippines. We based at Batangas at which point we discharged our deck cargo which was primarily Army mobile equipment and jeeps and weapons carriers. As far as I know, that stuff may be still rusting out there. That was the total of all of my tour duty.

I came back, and my company had held my position for me. It was very tempting to stay in the Naval reserve as we were requested, but I wanted to get back to the commercial life again. My company had made it very attractive for me. They never skipped a paycheck which came home every month. So I felt a little bit obligated and committed to carrying on with them.

(They paid you while you were in service?)

That's right. This wasn't entirely full compensation for the job I vacated. One could say that the company having made money through the war years, what else? But it was a very fine company and a family owned business. It was well indicated that I was considered part of their future plans. So I returned to them. That was in January or February of 1946.

I finished my career, having chosen to take an early retirement, because my company changed hands. I left New England, and we sold out. My kids had been educated at that point and were married and on their own. So we came down to Washington, North Carolina. This was ten years ago, and we're making our permanent home here. People ask, "Why Washington, North Carolina?" The answer is simple. Forty-three years ago I married a young lady I met in New

York while I was struggling along. Like a lot of Southern gals, she said, "I'll marry you, and this is great, but we're to be married in my home town." So we were married in St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Washington, as I say, forty-three years ago. Through the years we've visited here. We came down for vacation times. I grew to love the area. Having no strong family ties in New England to hold me there, this seemed like a logical place to come. As I say, this is with no regrets. That's an overview of my background. As I say, I'm a marketing manager.

Today you'll find me what they call retired, but I don't know what that word means. Having been a product of retail, and having spent my years in developing plans and programs from the marketing standpoint, I'm now executive director of the Downtown Washington Association, which is a non-profit promotional vehicle for the sole purpose of selling what I call a great product. That product is the location of people and goods and services which our over seventy members provide for the people who shop in here in the Greater Washington Area. That brings me up to date at this point.

(These convoys that the Edwin L. Godkin was a part of, what was the size of them? What U. S. warships were attached to them for convoy purposes?)

Well, our convoys were made up under the direction of a port director who was in the U. S. Navy. He directed the motions and the movements of the goods and supplies. So we had very little to say about being assigned to a convoy if the ship were selected. The minimum or smaller size merchant ship or what they called the "Liberty Ship" was 7,199 gross tons. These were the ships that were built by shipbuilders like Henry Kaiser, and they moved out very fast. Most of these were built in New Orleans. They ranged from that size"Liberty" up to the C-2 which were the large convoys that served in transporting cargo and personnel and transporting army equipment to the theaters of action. The

convoys were formed up on assignment as directed by the port director. You were instructed to rendezvous in a certain place and be prepared to be under way at a certain hour. But you were under sealed orders. You had a pre-convoy or presailing conference with the port director and the master of the ship and the gunnery officer all assembled. You were told when your hour of departure was and from what point, but you never knew what your destination was. The sealed orders were not to be broken unless you found yourself out of convoy or sailing alone. Then you had alternative orders.

(Even when you were on the high seas, you didn't open them?)

No, not exactly. Of course, you knew the direction,and through experience you knew just about where you would rendezvous. In our case, having had several crossings of the Atlantic, we knew after an experience factor when we were going east that we were going to steam off Gibraltar and break convoy at that point.

(Well, generally speaking, what was the normal size of a convoy?)

Well, normally the size was twenty-four ships.

(This is twenty-four merchant ships?)

Yes. We were escorted by either two destroyers or two destroyer escorts, the DE's. Usually there was a blimp that followed us out. They met us too, say for example, at the Azores.

(Blimps were used?)

Yes. They were Navy blimps. They were for spotting submarines and meeting the convoys as they would come in. Obviously, they weren't up there should there be an enemy air attack. When the enemy occupied North Africa, they used to fly up and over the Iran area because that was a great place to get a target and hit those ships. Normally speaking, I would say that the enemy was not necessarily singling out convoys. Of course, they knew where we were. Unless

it was precious cargo and essential cargo, they weren't going to waste their ammo knocking convoys off. Where they got the convoys, generally speaking, were in and around ports like Bahrain. We have a recorded history of the bombing of Bahrain. I think then even merchant ships tied up and clustered and anchored. They had already discharged their cargo in theory. So the threat of attack was always there, but mostly from submarines. On the Murmansk run for which I was outfitted, I found out later, and thankfully didn't make; when you got off not too far from the Scandinavian coast, of course, the Russians were waiting for you there. Convoys were really sitting ducks there. That was a definite cutoff.

(That was just a very narrow channel.)

So in that sense, convoys were a prime target. We never felt complacent about this, but normally speaking about the escorts, a couple of destroyers and some air protection was adequate. When we were under attack as I alluded to a minute ago, the destroyers apprehended or rather detected the subs that were on the bottom. They began dropping the depth charges.

(What size guns did you have aboard the Godkin?)

The normal complement was a three inch fifty in the forward gun tub. They had eight twenty millimeters spaced in the bridge area. Then they had the five inch thirty-eight in the after gun tub. We were fortunate, I always felt, that none of those five inch thirty-eights which had a 360 degree range were powered. We had a diesel powered five inch thirty-eight which was a later development. Well,now I have to say this. Of course, people do say, "Well, what good were you?" Now the value of your armament on these Liberties was simply to get an umbrella by just firing your twenty millimeters. With that number of ships, of course, you created an umbrella effect.

(Right, you could be used effectively only against aerial attacks? You were not used against submarines at all.)

Primarily. The five inch thirty-eight and three inch fifty are surface guns. Obviously you'd have to get a submarine or a ship that you would come upon helpless before this type of firepower would be useful. Our role was to keep the enemy at a distance. Of course, if he got there then you certainly got a target. Then you were very important for that particular assignment. Of course, you have a convoy from twenty-four to thirty ships all lifting this ammo in the air, then you have an umbrella. Then the enemy is not going to come in too close.

One of our problems was first identification, because it was all visual. We were trained to identify. I've got to say that the average gunner shot first and identified later. There were many instances where our own pilots came in too close without proper identification and the guns would go off because these guys were trigger happy. Some of our own planes were shot down by our own guns.

(Now, in your log book, you indicated at one point that a blimp overhead failed to give the proper response to your request for their identification. Was this just a failure on their part?)

I would say that this was a failure on their part. Our records indicated that we sent out the right message. Either they ignored it, I mean we don't know. We were supposed to get a certain response according to the standard manual. They failed to, so I had to log this.

(You didn't fire upon this blimp?)

No. We didn't fire on them. It was apparent this blimp was American. I did not hear of any tricks going around where the enemy camouflaged themselves to look like Americans. That was an incident, and you had to log those kinds

of things of course for self protection should there have been any question. We had incidents like that. For the most part, our fire power was very limited. The importance was in the mass coverage. Our big problem and concern for our own safety was mostly when we were tied up in a critical port. This port could be under attack by the enemy. When we got to southern France, we followed the enemy in. They had gone. The Nazis had pulled out pretty well. They were still there, but they had been subdued.

One of the humorous incidents, thinking of Marseilles, we the Navy took over the same officers' club the Germans had. This was interesting to see. The food was excellent. The help was the same; the music was the same; the building was the same, and the facilities were the same, including the girls that usually were available for a dinner and that type of entertainment. Only the clientele had changed. We followed them, and that was the only role that we could assume. Our point was to deliver the supplies that were essential for occupation. As I pointed out, my ship was the first American merchant ship to carry goods to the liberated French under the Marshall Plan.

(You mentioned that when you went into the Pacific that it was, unbeknownst to you, part of the invasion of Japan plan. What were you doing? Were you just to deliver armament to the invasionary force?)

We had deck cargo which was made up of weapons carriers and jeeps. Incidently, deck cargo was a big problem when it was rough, because it was lashed to the foredeck and the after well deck on the surface. When you carry grain or essential things like that, they were in the hulls. This was a problem because Army mobile equipment was lashed to your deck, and if it would shift, this was a great concern because not only would you lose it, but with the weight shift, this would put the ship in an untenable and unmanageable position especially in these high seas. We were very concerned about that. Our role,

and the reason I felt that we would have been in Japan was, assuming that the Japanese had resisted and had carried on, our forces would have invaded and occupied. Then we would have come along with the essential equipment for occupation like weapons carriers, jeeps, rolling stock, food and supplies. Knowing what my cargo was and realizing what it was, it was very apparent that we were moving toward the Orient. But the bomb was dropped, and we got the word. So they secured us and then later we were tied up in Batangas for about a week. It didn't take too long to communicate. At that time our forces were occupying and the whole thing was over.

(What did you do, just off load the cargo?)

Yes. They ordered us to discharge cargo. So we did. The weapons carriers, I remember seeing them lying there on the beach when we left. Naturally, I'm not indicating that they were left there to be wasted. I suppose that the government made some deal with their people. But, anyway, it was expendable materials.

Then, on the way back, and I think I indicated this in my log, we received orders which I questioned. I had to be thorough to dispose of all explosives. We had quite a supply of explosives and shells. They didn't want them to come back on the ships, so we dumped them. I got that order through our radio communication. We had a radio officer, so I made him verify the order. I didn't want to be the clown to be told that we did not have orders to do this. Of course, later we got them in writing. Then you had to log exactly the exact location latitude and longitude to verify that your ship was clean. So we did. It hurt too. I didn't have any future for those shells, but you hate to see that stuff go over. But looking at this another way, this was the end of that particular phase, and we had done our job. So that was the job to execute orders until completion.

(I noticed that in the log books you reported heavy seas frequently. Was this a period of storms? Or was this a case that Liberty Ships were not that seaworthy?)

Well, Liberty Ships were sensitive, but seaworthy. Of course, the North Atlantic and Middle Atlantic in January and February and March, this was the unusually rough time, especially going from the west to east. That's a very severe time in the Atlantic. Your small navigators, these fellows that go around the world, they never leave the States to go to continental Europe this time of year. Even the fishermen don't. I'm sure of that. So we were exposed to very heavy seas. I wasn't apprehensive, but we were on the Liberties that had a record of cracking or breaking up forward of the bridge housing right at the well deck. My ship had quite a crack there too. I don't think we were ever threatened with a break up. But we were very sensitive to the motion of the sea.

There is one incident where my guncrew secured themselves. I will never forget the gunners mate was named Kelly, a good solid Irishman from Boston. I was checking the watches. It was unusually rough that night. I got word out to the forward gun tub to discover that there was no one up there. So I checked them. They were in the crew's mess. Kelly and I had a little discussion about what was happening. He was the gunners mate in charge of detail. He finally admitted, "We were scared." His gun tub was taking in a little water which made him almost have to lash himself against the boat. I said, "Kelly, get your forward gunner and come with me." Then I was scared. But we walked the whole length of the catwalk and up into the gun tub, and we stayed there. We got dadburn good and wet too. But we were there.

Of course, those type things you could make a big deal out of the Hollywood type if you disobeyed orders and all that. The way we used to do that was

get around it on a mast court. The commanding officer would hold a mast court. You would read the book. Then you would take away their brownie points or something like that.

(Well, were these guns manned at all times even when there wasn't an alert?)

No. They were manned on dawn alert and dusk alert. If I remember right, dawn alert was described as one hour before sun up and so many minutes after sun up. You manned them longer after the sun dropped at night than you did after the sun up time, and it was daylight. But we were always standby for general quarters. That one got you out of the sack in a hurry. Of course, we were compact. You bear in mind that the aft gun crew was in the fantail and there was a forward gun crew in the forecastle. I was midship.

(How many men were we talking about?)

Well, the inflated guncrew was thirty. I had a unique guncrew because I had two signalmen which were put on courtesy of the Navy. I can determine a reason for that because we were what they call commodore ship on one convoy. That's where we were the lead merchant ship, the central ship upon which everyone else secured his bearings. When we were the convoy ship, they put two signalmen on there. They were not gunners, but they were courtesy of the U. S. Navy. They reported to me, but they were not considered armed guard personnel. Your basic armed guard personnel was there to man the guns. So if you have ten weapons then you need ten men with two to each gun tub. No, you need three forward and three or four aft, that's seven. I'm talking about full complement under fire. Then four is eleven. I think the minimum gun crew was somewhere around fourteen hands. But they had an inflated gun crew when I took the ship because we were singled out as commodore ship. Those guys stayed with me until some point along in the case where I just discharged them. I also had a situation which was unique. I think the top rank on a normal complement was

a gunners mate second class. But I had a gunners mate first class, and not only that, but also a boatswain. Normally, the complement did not call for a boatswain. Anyone who knows anything about the Navy realizes that a boatswain is so knowledgeable and trained that he can practically run the ship. This is both above deck and below deck. We were also considered line. That was the right arm rank. I was a line officer, and gunners were line. I felt very fortunate to have these guys. Most of them had had experience under fire which was very comforting to me. Anyway, getting back to the basic, we had what we called inflated guncrews with extra hands. We also had the two signalmen who were there to coordinate the communications throughout the fleet. We used visual communications. This was the wigwag and the blinker.

(You said that you were under sealed orders that were never opened. Someone had to have open orders. Did the commodore ship or destroyers or such have these?)

Yes. The destroyers had them. They were the pilots of the convoy, if you will. They knew where we were supposed to go. They knew how to get us there. They were also our protection. They had the means by which they could apprehend the enemy attack. They really were ones that had the intelligence. Naturally, you were no longer under sealed orders at the point when you were directed to go into Iran, as we were a couple of times. But as a convoy broke up and dispersed off of, say, Gibraltar, the job had been done at that point. Then my ship would be ordered to Iran, and someone else would be ordered into Naples. This was consistent with the place that wanted the material that you had. So in that sense we were under sealed orders up to a point. Then we got further orders for destination.

One of the most dramatic incidents along those lines was the time we broke down three days out of New York after a submarine alert. We had to sheer out of convoy. We weren't commodore ship at that time. We

were then one of the middle lines as I remember. We had to sheer out of convoy which was no mean trick. If you were on the center line and you broke down, you were concerned about the ship on your tail. You were also concerned about how to get out of the convoy, and if this guy had apprehended what was happening, and give you the room to get out. You could have a pretty bad collision there. So we sheered out and bounced around while the engine room gang tried to effect repairs. I want to tell you, that was the first night I ever slept with my clothes on.

(Did the convoy wait for you?)

No. You were then all by yourself. The escort, whose prime responsibility was the convoy and not us, says good-bye. It is a weird thing to see these guys steaming off, and you're there just bouncing. You talk about flying. There is nothing noisier than those old diesels.

(Well, what if something could not be repaired?)

I remember our chief engineer was a Scotsman and a good steady guy. Some of these guys are very steady at sea, but when they get to port, watch out. The port is where they get all their frustrations out. This guy was a good, clean, solid guy who knew his engines. They kept plugging right on through. I don't remember now just how long it took. We must have sheered out along about late afternoon because I will never forget the sick feeling that I had watching those guys go over the horizon. I would say at that point the sea wasn't calm, but it was not too unusual.

(Were you able to catch up with them?)

No. Then we went under independent orders. However, I think we went where we were supposed to go eventually . I'm sure we went to Iran. I don't ever remember crossing the Atlantic when we didn't put in at least to Iran, either to tie up for further orders or to get further orders. We usually ran up to Iran to Marseilles and a little place near Marseilles called Port de

Bouc. I can't remember now why we went to Toulon. We were ordered into Toulon which of course is right near Marseilles and the French Riviera. It was there that I was very much impressed with the real power of our Air Force. They bombed this place where the Nazis had a submarine pen in Toulon which was an ideal thing for them. Our guys got them right in the pen. I never saw so many submarines tipped up with their nose down. They cleaned them up.

We independently never knew exactly where we were going. For the most part, we were sent to these ports along the French Riviera. I don't know if our experiences with that were unique, but it just seems that we were sent everywhere. We were sent up the Adriatic to Bari. We must have had supplies they wanted there. We were picking up things too very often that they wanted to move from place to place. When we were sent to Egypt and put into Alexandria, we had sulfur which we had picked up in Galveston. Now I know that that was Texas Gulf Sulfur. The Egyptians obviously wanted sulfur. We must have agreed with Egypt to bring them sulfur for their fertilizer.

(Did you return to the U. S. empty, or did you pick up cargo?)

We always returned to the U. S. empty. In fact you had to put water ballast in there. You had to pump water into your hold to give you some ballast. We always came back empty. That always meant a rough voyage. You were just like a cork then. In spite of the water ballast, that never gave you quite the displacement that the cargo would give you. That was what they called a turnaround. You would start from this port and would deliver to that port. I can't remember what developed to give us such a unique tour of the Med unless they wanted to keep us there for picking up personnel. We had picked up personnel.

Getting back to the Pacific and the Panama Canal, we were part of the group being sent back to the U. S. to terminate. At least, that's what we

thought. Gradually, as we came closer to the States, they began to disperse certain ships. We were one of them. We didn't know whether the reason was because we had such a successful record or what. I'll never forget that there was an Army guy aboard there who had been through the Battle of the Bulge. We had some Army personnel when we left France at, I believe, Casablanca. We left there to come back to New York, and we had picked up some Army personnel and one of those guys had been through the Bulge and everything. He couldn't wait to get home. When we got our orders to divert and go down through the Canal, this guy absolutely was impossible. He was all shaken up. I also had to deal with that. That was an unofficial thing. Then when we got to Batangas, he got so damned stinking drunk that I didn't know what to do with him. He couldn't wait to get to the States. Those natives were smart too. They were selling what they called gin, and it was awful stuff. This guy really . . . it was a matter of frustration. He had had his tour. He was on his way out.

(Was this a passenger?)

Right, they were passengers. To keep them busy, we made them part of our drills and exercises. I said, "Look, under enemy attack, this is part of your station." Well it wasn't done as a joke because you still didn't know. They didn't belong to us, and they weren't under our orders or disciplinary control either.

(Looking at your personnel, you said that you had to be minister, doctor, and mother and father, and incidently a gunnery officer. How did you go about diagnosing various illnesses? Going through the log, I see that they came to you or came to sick bay for everything from social diseases to backaches to possible appendicitis. How did you go about diagnosing these?)

Well, I've got to say first that we weren't trained in medicine but were trained in the normal check points for first aid. On social diseases the Navy is well indoctrinated on that to look for signs. First I would have to back off and say that you're charged with and took this with various degrees of seriousness. Any morale problem or sickness problem, the Navy charges the command with being totally responsible for it. This went to the point of almost being ridiculous. Saying that if you have one case of VD among your crew, you're responsible for it. It shouldn't have happened anyway. If a guy was well prepared, it wouldn't happen. It's also your problem because it is one of your men. In the matter of the headaches, we were always available to our guys. This was a trick of letting them know that you were always available. You had to sort out between the guys that were just homesick or wanted to have some assurance that they were loved. This seems to be the basic ingredient of all human drives. You had to sort out between who has a cold this morning because they would rather be in the sack to what is the real thing. We would respond consistent with what our own convictions were with how serious it was. The cure was not our responsibility. It was just being smart enough to know what to do. I never had any crisis develop. I quoted on one ship that a guy had a blockage, I guess, and they thoughthe was going to die. Through communications they got him aboard a Navy ship where there was a doctor by means of a breeches bouy for transporting him. But I never had that kind of a crisis to solve.

When we had an indication of VD, you knew what to do on initial treatment. But the responsibility was to get that guy to sick bay the minute that you got ashore under orders to be checked. Well, I never had a case of VD, which is a nasty subject. There were questions because a guy would worry after he left port, but they didn't result in the diagnosis of the actual thing. One case I

did have to discharge, but this guy had had exposure before he reported to me. So if there was any salving your own conscience and keeping your hands clean, I never had anything like that.

Of course, you had the normal infections and colds. We had a full kit of tablets and things that you would be able to take for relief. I never had a real case of serious illness. What our first aid preparation was for was battle casualties from a shell hit or something. In this case I'm not going to say that I would have been adequate. Any basic first aid course teaches you how to at least make initial treatment. So that was the extent of our medical knowledge. It wasn't so much knowledge as it was simple responsibility.

(How many merchant seamen were there usually on those ships?)

Well, they far out numbered the Navy. Yet it is amazing how few hands they did require. They worked normal eight hour days, but they had their dog watches. I'll give you a ballpark figure of twenty-four to thirty hands. So the whole total personnel aboard wasn't that many. Your master and your helmsmen were very important, but then you say that your engine room gang would be four. Four on the verge of being a master would be nine. Of course, when you discharged or loaded, you had the dock hands which would be doing that. They didn't sail with you though. I guess I'm right in telling you there were fourteen to sixteen tops, exclusive of the master. You didn't need over three helmsmen anyway. Your skipper did the navigating. As I say, I think in convoying, the navigating was done more or less for you. It was more a case of seamanship. We took our star sights, but you didn't need that in these modern days anyway. You had your radar.

Getting back to being the medical officer, that was the extent of my knowledge. I would think that you would have to have an inner sense of being a spiritual advisor and a chaplain. Yet you had to anticipate. You got to know

these men pretty well, and they got to know you well. In the Navy they say, "Don't let them know you too well." They did though. They knew you and knew what to expect. We worked on the Navy principle that a taut ship is a happy ship. We had our juvenile things. We had our calisthenics. We did everything we could to keep them busy. I have to say that for every rotten day that you had at sea, you had the nice ones too. This is not to say that we were on any joy ride. You could take advantage of the nice days in the sun. You didn't think at least that the enemy was around. You never let yourself think of that, but as the enemy pulled out of the Mediterranean and France and North Africa, you had a pretty good assurance you were safe. Their air force then had been broken. This gave you a chance at least to enjoy, if you can use the word, some aspects of the duty. If there weren't some joy in there, then it surely would be a heck of a mental strain. So we used to think up fun and games.

Then too, we would be on the alert for infractions, goofing off. I know that I must have logged it because this was really one of the most severe disciplinary things I faced. We had beer aboard for the PX's and BX's. Our guys knew this of course. They couldn't help it. It was under very good security too, but they broke the lock. Someone did and got the beer. This was not a generous amount, but enough to keep them going. That was bad. We finally got to the bottom of the problem and dealt with it. We discovered that it wasn't quite as bad as you could have made it up to be. This never happened again on that pull. This is not to be credited altogether with luck but the way you handled the situation. We had to meet disciplinary problems. We didn't have too much of a weapon for discipline. We didn't have a brig of course. You could confine a guy to quarters, but you were only defeating yourself. That was one hand you didn't have. Normally speaking, the average sailor in that catagory will give up a whole lot, but he doesn't want to give up his shore

leave. So that was always a pretty good control. If you confine them to quarters when you were tied up, he wouldn't want that; so they normally wouldn't give you any bad times. We would run our mast court and pronounce our sentence right there and log it. It would say to confine to quarters in the next port for two or three hours.

(This was a rather nominal punishment.)

You were reminded that they had a pretty good hold on you as with my gunnersmate of whom I was very fond. I think the respect was mutual. That's another thing that you had to watch was the intimacy. You couldn't get overly fond of them so they would have a hold on you and know it. I was reminded by this gunnersmate that there had been instances where commanding officers in my position didn't make it. I'm sure in the lines of mutiny that they could have disposed of the only single, isolated commissioned officer aboard. That threat never worried me, but you knew it existed. It didn't change your methods any, but it made you realize more and more that if you did get tough, you'd better be right. We had occasions of being tough. The beer incident was one.

(Being the only commissioned officer on board, and not feeling that you could fraternize with your men on too close a social plain, whom did you socialize with?)

You had to be careful with socializing with the merchant crew too. There was an interchange like for like. Remember those merchant seamen were there contributing to the war effort, but money was a factor with them. Perhaps they might have said, "Why couldn't I have been commissioned in the U. S. Navy if it was any honor attached to them?" It put you with a background and the equipment that you had to have or the Navy wouldn't have selected you. It did mean that there was a little vacuum there. The way I handled this was you are friendly and cordial to the point of being an officer with a command.

This is up to a point, but this is never intimate. You knew that you should never drink with them.

When we were ashore, the skipper, the master, and I were very friendly. I'm sure he was very fond of me because he always put me on good report. He had to report on me, and I had to report on the master and the discipline of the ship. This is a sneaky way of cross checking. I was very friendly with the master, and when we would hit port, I'd take him to the officers' clubs and we'd eat together. He was a moderate guy up to a point. I singled out activities that could be measured. For instance, the purser of the ship was a very brilliant guy. His parents were of Polish extraction. He was a very brilliant, intellectual guy. We would play chess a great deal. This reflected to any observer on my ship that we were doing something wholesome. And over the chess board they didn't figure we were such buddy-buddies. We played cards quite a bit on our off duty hours. This was not gambling.

Of course, I never had any off duty hours. I was on duty all the time theoretically. I had no set time. I was always on the bridge on dawn and dusk alerts. That was required. We were fully manned then at every station. You still have some guys that were sleeping on dog watch.

You asked me how you handled yourself and how you kept from going out of your mind. You were alone, but you were a person. Our reports and day to day book work took time. Of course, if you had time, you took that much more time. Also, the Navy encouraged this kind of activity. We could take correspondence courses of our choosing. The way that worked was you would pick up a course like maneuvering board, something which wasn't an integral part of your duty. If it appealed to you, you would pick up a course in port which of course was offered in sections. You would take a section, complete it, and answer the questions. You would then mail the questions in for corrections

and comment. Then you'd get the next installment. This is one of the many facets of the construction in the U. S. Navy that down through the years from a personnel standpoint and from a morale boosting standpoint, the Navy is very wise in these offerings. This is something that makes me very proud of the way the Navy puts their men together.

I think at this point I would like to get back to the keeping busy thing. I would like to give you one of the requirements of the standard regulations of the United States Navy. It is that a commanding officer shall create or cause divine worship service each Sunday or see that it is done. Having spent most of my life as a product of a Christian home, I took this charge quite seriously, as I think one should. It became a problem of how do you take these so-to-speak rough necks, that wouldn't want you to find out they're any different, and make an offering to them that this service would be conducted and then follow through without any embarrassment on any sidewalk evangelism. We stood our weekly captain's inspection, call it a muster if you will. This was another way of having a taut ship, if you ran your captain's inspections of not only the guns but the quarters every Saturday. So we'd muster the crew and the gun tubs and outline the work projects and the problems and their responsibilities once a week.

One Saturday after some prayerful thought I suggested the services. I thought that in view of the fact that this was endorsed by the Navy and that it was something I would be very happy to do to provide a short period of worship and meditation, I told them I would appear on Sunday morning at ten o'clock and offer a service of divine worship. I'll say off the record, I didn't know what to do. I invited them all to be there, and I would then look for them. So Sunday morning came and I had put a little preparation in a Bible lesson and thought for the day. I appeared, and not so much to my surprise, there was

no one there. I waited a little while, and I saw no one. Of course, the gunners on watch were standing by, and I'm sure they were watching me more closely than I was watching them. So after a little while when no one came, I withdrew. I thought, "I don't want to put a period to this effort. I really believe it is necessary."

So the following Saturday I invited them again to my Sunday morning worship service. This was still strictly voluntary. I told them that I would hope that some of these men who had families at home would like to let them know that while at sea, they attended a divine worship service. I said, "I'm not only going to invite you that way, but I'm going to ask if there is anyone present who would be interested in attending service." We waited a few minutes and finally a hand came up from one of the gunners. This was the guy I least expected to respond. He was a rough neck. He liked to let you know that he was. With that hand a couple of more came up. I said, "Fine, now we're going to have a service."

So the following Sunday morning I appeared, and so did the guys that raised their hands plus a couple more. Following that, each Sunday we had our worship service, and then the merchant seamen started to come. So we had to move to a larger quarters. Then we had a merchant seaman tell me that he was interested in the church, and he wanted to be a minister. I said, "Fine, next Sunday you're going to do the meditation." So he took part.

As long as we were duty afloat, we had our service each Sunday morning. It was very gratifying. I think it was certainly an ingredient that made our ship a little bit better or our relationships with the crew a little bit better. They understood better. It was a little easier to talk about God and the Bible. Guys would come up later and tell me that they had been reading the Bible. I don't want to indicate that all of a sudden we had a private little church going.

When we reached the shore, they were on their own to go to the churches of their own choice. It was interesting to me that this was a nondenominational, ecumenical type of relationship and service. I'm a member of the Protestant Episcopal Church, so it was very easy to streamline and abbreviate a service from the Book of Common Prayer. This the Navy understands very well. It was interesting that the Catholic boys began to attend this service. One of them brought his priest when we tied up in a port. He brought the Catholic chaplain aboard just to say that we'd met. So we had a great experience over there. Getting back to the loneliness and the feeling of frustration on your contribution of the whole effort, and where are we going from here, that was an important part of the experience and one of my best remembered experiences.

(I was wondering if you ever had any interrelations with the merchant seamen?)

This brought it up to a marked degree. They didn't all come. You're being observed on what was going on there anyway. We had a Chinese individual there, an American Chinaman, a member of the galley crew. He was a Christian by acceptance. He was very interested in this and attended the services.

(Speaking of galley crew, did you have your own mess for the gunner crew, or did you eat from the ship's mess?)

No. There was a gun crew mess separate from the rest.

(So you used your own cooks and everything?)

Yes. I ate in the officers' wardroom with the officers from the merchant personnel.

(I'm surprised that they didn't just have one mess and one group of cooks cooking for all.)

No. Well, excuse me. I'm talking about the actual dining quarters. There was just one common galley. There was an obligation of the ship and the master to make sure that there was no discrimination at the time.

That brings up an interesting point too in my line of duty. A man in my position, an armed guard commanding officer, could with no choice over it draw a master of a ship who was not compatible. Their relationships could be bad. Or, as the Navy recognizes, we were running a good cup of coffee and good chow. You could draw a bad chef and a bad cook or rather not a satisfactory guy for a cook. I had both. I had a great master whom I respected and a very fine galley. We had good cooks. So our chow was good. There was one point when an officer who had made several turnarounds can request replacement. But at the time we had molded this crew together, and we were working in a unit really good and seemed to be good for each other. The master of the ship was my type of guy. I felt at home with him. The food was good. I didn't want to leave that ship. You knew that you were going to get another assignment. It wasn't a case of termination of your duty. It was a gamble to leave something with a known and fixed experience to take a chance. There wasn't any reason anyway to pull out because you knew that you were going right back to sea again. This was my only ship. I finished my tour on there by choice, I mean in so far as I had an opportunity to make a choice.

There were a couple of humorous incidents so that we won't think that we were all angels. I spoke of my skipper whom I admire greatly as a mature man. He was a Norwegian by birth. He had followed the sea. In fact I think he had been before the mast on some of the old sailing ships. This is not to say that he was that old, but you know they go to sea at a very young age. He was an intelligent, compassionate man in spite of his brusqueness. He had a thorough knowledge of seamanship. For example, I saw him take that ship into a dock under very trying conditions with a high wind blowing when he couldn't get any dock hands to take his lines. He brought that ship in beautifully and just

touched the side of the dock just nicely and held it there until they could get some lines on. He was an accomplished skipper and a man you looked up to.

The humorous aspect was that he was a good disciplinarian and very well self-disciplined. But when he got to the beach and he could leave the ship, which he was authorized to do when the ship was finally tied up, and his job theoretically for the moment was discharged, he indulged himself. He liked alcohol very much. One time he went ashore with me. We were both off duty and recruited a vehicle and took off to an officer's club in Marseilles. Unbeknownst to me, he had his portfolio papers because he also had to report to the war shipping office. He had his brief case with the papers. We got along on the highway pretty well between Toulon and Marseilles, heading for Marseilles. He said, "I need some shooting practice." I asked, "What are you going to shoot with?" So he said, "This." He hauled out a thirty-eight caliber pistol out of his brief case. I said, "Well, this is great." We stopped by the side of the road and picked out some targets like a rock in a field. There wasn't anybody in sight. We began to fire the gun at the risk that the French authorities might come along. They didn't. Then I discovered that he had a pair of binoculars. I presumed the reason for all of this was, number one, he didn't want to leave a weapon and binoculars in his cabin while he was off ship, and secondly, I believe he felt a measure of self protection in having the weapon there. As far as being authorized to carry this, I'm sure he also had the authority to carry a weapon. We did not. I did not wear a weapon ashore.

Anyway, we ~~preceded~~ proceeded on our way. As a matter of fact, we stopped off at C Sicie which is a lovely little fishing village which is the center of the C Sicie wine country. We had stopped, and it was a lovely day. We had had a couple of aperitifs on the patio overlooking the harbor. We continued on our way. We got to the officers' club and began to socialize and had our dinner.

The skipper disappeared then. I didn't think too much of that because we had had our meal, and I was staying on with the fellow officers in the club. I had no desire to go anywhere else. I got a call from the bartender of the club. He said, "Lieutenant Lane, you're wanted down at the local brig by the shore patrol." So I got directions and went down there. Here was my skipper behind bars. The chief of the shore patrol wanted to know what was going on. I said, "What's going on here?"

He said, "Well, we picked this character up, and he says he's master of your ship. He's got this accent and a pair of binoculars and this pistol, and he is drunk. We think he is a spy."

So I said, "Now look, let's start from the beginning. He is not a spy. He is the master of my ship."

By that time they had scared the daylights out of old Captain Jonsen. He was pacing behind the bars saying, "You get me out of here,Lieutenant. You get me out fast."

I told him to keep quiet for a little bit, and I would get him out of there. I explained the whole thing to them about our ship. They checked me out too. I told them that I would take custody of him. He was completely sober by that time. We went on our way, and nothing was ever said. The humorous side of this thing was that he did have this thick Norwegian accent which our guys couldn't take as being anything but foreign. Then he had a pistol and binoculars and a brief case, and I'm sure they had him listed as number one Nazi spy left over from the evacuation. This gave you some insight on a man who was very well disciplined and who I had never known to take any alcohol while we were under way. He was always on the job. But when we got to the beach, I guess he felt that that was his out.

Another time in Egypt, he had told me he had some friends with the Bedouins. I guess with any little bit of interest, I could have gone with him. I'm afraid to say that I was not too interested in going into a Bedouin camp. But that was the only insight I had as to what he was going to do on that particular leave. He didn't show up for three days. When I finally found him, he was in the cabin. I don't know how long he had been there. He was really under the weather. He didn't know what was going on. So I got him to. I found out that he was in good shape and hadn't been bodily injured and apparently hadn't even been robbed. He was back in his cabin. I have no idea when he came aboard. I got him around to telling me of his experience. Yes, he had gone out with the Bedouins and had been their guest for a couple of nights. He began to explain how they had fed him absinth which I understand is quite a powerful liqueur. I guess he had overindulged in absinth. He had gotten back to the ship, or someone had gotten him there unharmed, but he was a couple of days coming around.

(What are the Bedouins?)

They are the nomads, the tribes that inhabit these areas in the desert in Africa. They're gypsies. They move from encampment to encampment. I guess their history under the sky and the moon and the stars is as ancient as Egypt. They are nomadic. I guess they're productive. They probably trade. They had their livestock, and it's out of that that comes your tourist guide. Anyway, this is perhaps not speaking well of the man himself, but I think it does. He had a lot of character. He had a wife and a home in Manhattan. I didn't see anything of him after the war. We exchanged Christmas cards for a while, and then I lost sight of him. I presume now that he has passed along. I suppose I could trace it back if I really wanted to.

You know these merchant ships are all under a house flag. The <u>Godkin</u> was under the Luckenbach Lines. I don't know much about them as a steamship line

now. They were a vital force down through the years. I guess they were of German origin, but they are an American corporation. They had a fleet of ships. Originally, before the Liberties were built, they used the then existing steamers and ships that were available. The government took them over for the initial hauling of manpower. Many of our armed forces went over on the Queen Elizabeth or one of the luxury liners of the time. As these Liberties were built probably on a cost plus, they were assigned or acquired by the different steamship lines. So our house flag was Lukenbach. Captain Jonsen the skipper would have been, I presume, in the employ of Lukenbach.

These are incidents that carry a little bit of humor and depart a little bit from our spiritual influence. These were human guys. They were filling their time in under difficult wartime conditions. My gunners or the Naval Armed Guard gunners were generally more mature. In all fairness they were not perhaps the best educated from a formal standpoint, but one of the requirements was maturity, either in age or experience, for the many reasons that I have outlined. They had to have the ability to work together with people. Certainly there was no place in the Armed Guard Service for oddballs. They might have come up with some. If one couldn't live with his fellow man on a day to day basis, understanding one another and getting along, that was not good duty.

Perhaps it's true, getting back to qualifications again. I was not certainly unusual in any respect, but the proven record of dealing with people and taking plans and programs and implementing them with perhaps a little imagination and authorized latitude and taking the ingredients and making them into a working team is what we had to do. We had to be a working team in order to function. Nobody could hate anybody. You could dislike, but you had to pull together. You were very closely confined and on top of each other. As I said before, you had to know how to deal friendly, spiritually, decently, but at

arms length. There was no place for buddy-buddy stuff at all. I didn't see that too much in the segments of the gun crew. One guy would like another guy a little bit better, but because they came from such diverse backgrounds and different walks of life and different parts of the country, they knew there wouldn't be any lasting friendships. This could work for a force of evil. As for ganging up on anybody, I do suppose they could gang up and make it really terrible. Perhaps unlike a peace time complement or any of our fraternal organizations, there was always a threat that if you didn't pull together, you might not make it. That's a big influence on any man's life.

We had our fun and games and recreation. As I said before, the authorized facilities were great. We would get into a port and look up the Red Cross which was always ready to arrange trips if the guys had leave. Therefore, if I hadn't indicated this earlier, we had quite a bit of latitude for sightseeing. This business of "Join the Navy and see the world," our type of duty did allow you a good bit of that. For someone who had traveled abroad prior to this, and then having a great drive for seeing the world, that satisfied me. This is not so much today because we've been so many places. Life is a little different in foreign countries today for the tourists. It gave me a great satisfaction to see new places and people.

There again speaking of people, I don't want to speak entirely of our own. We were very well received through North Africa and Italy, particularly in the south and through southern France. It's true we were carrying the colors of the victor. I think then at that time and perhaps at no other time in history, our attempt to be ambassadors of goodwill was accepted. In southern France I ran into a little feeling that our members of the Armed Forces had abused privileges. Generally speaking then, there was a great deal of goodwill particularly in southern France. Of course, that was the seat of the Vichy French

too,which was not friendly to Parisian French as it turned out. I'm sorry to say that on subsequent trips I have not found that goodwill feeling there, particularly in Paris. The "Ugly American" is there now.

This isn't part of my presentation, but it concerns me that we are the "Ugly American." They have taken our goods and services and attempts to give them a lot in compassion and twisted it around. So now we're the rich uncle doling out, and they're very happy to get that, but they hate us. That is frustrating and certainly disillusioning for everything we've been through. I don't think I have anything else to add to that.

You know, you can go on and on, but there really is not much. You had a package. You knew what you were going to get. What you did not know, you tried to make an effort to find out. We tried to knit this group into a compatible fighting unit. We never lost sight of the fact that we were in a war. We had a job to do, and we wanted to get back. We submitted ourselves to the very best of our ability. We took that, not only as a charge and an obligation, but also as a necessity. I'd say that personally, I can't say it was a great experience. I think any medals or ribbons or campaign buttons belong to, in my case, my wife and two young children. The people at home are the ones that should have all the acknowledgment. To repeat myself, I went out of sheer patriotism and fear of the draft board. The day I took my oath at 150 Cosway Street in Boston, was the day it came out in the papers that General Hershey had said, "No married man with children shall be drafted." My wife wanted to call me so badly and tell me, but she couldn't reach me to tell me not to take the oath. We were necessary and wanted and needed, and I wouldn't have backed down at that point for anything.

(You have no regrets at this point?)

No. I was thinking. You can look back and say, "Well, my contemporaries stayed at home." I don't feel bitter about this, but I know several of my contemporaries who had the threat of the draft board. They went into the draft board people with pictures of their stomach because they had ulcers and made every effort to stay out. That was their business of course. Through the profitable years of capitalizing on the law, several of them had gotten a very fine start.