

Edward M. Conley
Narrator

Herkimer Fulton County Historical Society
Interviewer

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EC: Good morning, I'm Edward M Conley I served in the United States Navy. I'm proud to be a veteran and I'll give you a little background on exactly who I am, and where I come from and why I spent so much time in the navy. I'm from a family of thirteen children, commercial fisherman out of Block Island, Rhode Island and we lived on the water all of our lives and most of my brothers and sisters well, most of my brothers were in the service. I had two in the Second World War, one army, one navy I had four in the Korean War three navy, one army and I put in after boot camp in Newport in 1951, January to go with my brother. And, of course everyone knows the story of the Sullivan brothers they stopped all families being together. Well, I put in for it and lo and behold I got it. We were one of the first brothers back together. And as it turned out I served on The USS Cony 508 which is a destroyer. It had 270, 280 men; something like that and there were three sets of brothers, they put us all on one ship. Which is fine. And, a stranger coincidence is of the four, two of the sets of brothers were Conley's. From Rhode Island! They didn't know how to spell their name, they spelled it wrong but, that's ok. So, if you're familiar with the service you know they go to the loud speaker and say "Conley! You're here for the quarter deck!" and of course four heads stick out "Which one do you want!" So, anyway that's a little aside but, it made life very interesting. I traveled all over the world, completely circumnavigated the whole globe with my brother. And if you can picture the joy that was. He was my one year older brother than I. We just had a ball. We went out on Norfolk, down through the Panama Canal, West to San Diego, over to Hawaii, over to Japan ECT. ECT. Served in Korea did my duty there and, like they said the Korean War was a police action but, they were real bullets they were shooting at us- not at me in particular but at my ship- and we used to take the Korean Marines up the river for night sneak attacks or whatever they do who ever knows what marines do anyway but, that's ok. And then we'd go back around four in the morning and pick 'em up and run the river back down again, and all the time we were running the river across they were shootin' at us. Gave us the chance that is. But, anyway that's enough of that action. I enjoyed my life in the navy very much. I think it's the greatest thing anyone can ever do. I uh just to mention quickly (shows drawing of ship) I'll show you, this is the ship I lived for four years o. Three years, ten months and seven days. And, it had a lot of good friends I met and we still keep in contact. And, I went across the equator down below India, Ceylon, it used to be Ceylon now it's Sri Lanka I think but, anyway right there. We went up inside the Arctic Circle chasing submarines. In cold January again cold cold weather. So that's why I made rank to sort of get off of this guard duty and uh stand watch out at the wings of the ship. And uh that's about what we need to know and unless you have something more that's, you have any questions....

Interviewer: What was your most memorable day while you were on active duty?

EC: My most memorable day would have been, well it is memorable too! Was when I first arrived on the ship. And, my brother's name is Skell was his nickname, and I won't go into why that's that but anyway I came... I was coming down the gangway and they must have said look for the skinniest kid you can cause believe it or not I used to be, I just made the weight going in the service, anyway I'm going down the gangway with my sack over my back and I got stopped by these three guys. They says are you Conley? I said "yeah" "you're Bones" I said I'm Bones" He says "have you seen your bother?" I said "Oh? Why? Y'know what's wrong?" and he said "oh no nothing, its ok how big was that turtle you guys caught on Block Island?" and I said I know what my brothers been doing, telling stories, that's what you do in the winter in commercial fishing places so I says "Well I don't know what Skell told you but we used the shell of this turtle for the roof of a gas station" and he says "Oh my God we got another one!" (chuckles) which is fine and when I went across the equator they give you a summons y'know and mine was all trying to be polite for the sake of this but my summons was the only man we know that can put a ton of manure in a half ton truck. And, we had to do battle of course and it was it was fun but that's about it. Unless we need to say much more, no point getting into my family too much it's a big, huge, loving family and we still are. Out of thirteen I've only lost two so, that's not too bad at all.

Interviewer: So you have reunions every year?

EC: The ship has reunions. I haven't made one, my brother who's down in Florida, that's where most of the reunions happen to end up, he goes and I have the newsletter from the Cony. The Cony newsletter but, I haven't been able to get free to go. It's just timing, just didn't work out properly. I would have, I keep in contact with several of my buddies, we write. In fact, I just received, strangely enough a card, from one of my best buddies' wife who says just to let you know we've got a new address. They're from Michigan so.... Never seen him since but, every Christmas we correspond and send cards and write little notes about what's going on so, it's nice.

Interviewer: Now what was your job on a large ship?

EC: Ok, My rank ended up being FT3, third class petty officer and that was fire control, we not fire fires but, fire ammunition, armament. Our job was to direct the guns in a proper direction, give the depth and all that and we had about I think fourteen people from the chief down through me, low man on the totem pole then but, then I became second officer after a while but, that was good. And, our job was to maintain the radar, the firing radars to make sure they were always running. As long as they ran properly we had open gangway. There's another great advantage to that rank, that way as long as one person was always visible who could handle it if they needed to. I can't imagine Norfolk needing to run your armament radars but, they had to keep them in more.

Interviewer: Now did you have to fire while you were in Korea? Did you....

EC: ... Oh yeah, oh sure we did, running the river. We used to. And, indeed you moved there was 'cause it was all enemy territory so anything that moved was the enemy to us. I didn't know it, I'm just doing what they tell me to do but, they yeah know oh yeah they had two five inch twin- we had twin 40s and we also had twin three inch McClusky ,hundreds of twenty millimeters they're all over the place y'know. Oh yes, we received our Korean citation in two

battle sites so we earned 'em I guess. *We* didn't get shot up but those guys, the Korean marines got shot up very badly. And we'd bring 'em back aboard and then take them to the nearest ship, health ship. It's a good home for them and that's what they call most of them.

Interviewer: Hospital ships.

EC: Hospital ships yeah.

Interviewer: Did anyone on the ship get hurt or wounded?

EC: My memory doesn't serve me that well but, I would say no. We did go ashore a few times to extract someone but, we were here I guess whenever. Nobody bothered to send, we just went, came back not me particularly but, we meaning us. Whoever does an army ship is we.

Interviewer: What would you consider your scariest day?

EC: Probably boot camp (Laughs). No, well I would say that running the river. Sure I mean eh, what can I say they're real shells that they're shooting at you; you know that'll get your attention. But, you're so busy doing your job you don't really dwell on it. It wasn't like a guy was standing in front of you with a rifle in order to shoot you. I can picture that being very scary but, not me.

Interviewer: How wide a river are we 'talkin about?

EC: Couple a three miles. Maybe yeah pretty wide defiantly, well it's hard to say yeah and it meandered right if you know anything about Jungle Rivers and things they meander and they go up and they go up and down and have oxbows and everything but we tried to stick to the wide and drop 'em as straight as possible obviously so you could zip back out. And, we would come back up full speed, we went in full speed and come back out at full speed, whatever that is. I don't know how they classify it, I don't know anything. So, it was fast, a destroyer does move so...

Interviewer: How fast do they go?

EC: Oh... I'd... I don't know what are they? Thirty knots maybe, I can't. A knot is a mile and an eighth but I would say I really can't say but, if I had to guess that's what I would say.

Interviewer: Anything else you'd like to add?

EC: No, other than I think this is a very nice opportunity for people to get together and talk about their experiences. I know when they invite me to the school they, the kids, love it and these, my grandson actually he's still in it "you'll do that won't you poppy?" I said of course! How do you say no? You don't in Troy. So, I went for a good three quarters of an hour or so and just talked to them, showed them maps and things, cause I carry a map of the world where I completely went around it and its very interesting to a lot of people and that that's about it. I enjoy it very much and I'm glad they're doing this and it's nice to be part of history because we have a USO uh show here at the center and it was simply amazing. In many cases those fellas there and girls, there's a lot of women veterans around and people don't realize how many, we have a lot of women in our veterans association but, at the USO there were people there that spoke for the first

time in fifty years. Tears went right down my cheeks and that's to veterans, that's what a veterans all about and you wanna do somebody a favor someday, you see somebody lonely you'll probably find out he's a veteran, go talk to him and that's, yup that's about it thank you very much.

Interviewer: Thank you.

EC: Thank you very much.