

**Eugene Schuster  
Veteran**

**Paul Zucker  
U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary  
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on  
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**PZ:** [Eugene] Schuster at the 27th South drive in Great Neck New York. Eugene was born on the 24th of November of 1918 in New York City and served in World War Two with the US Army Signal Corps. My name is Commander Paul Zucker of the Coast Guard Auxiliary. We will be doing the filming and interviewing. Today is August 20th. Eugene can you just tell me a little bit about your background where you grew up and what you did in your early years?

**ES:** Yeah I was born in New York City, grew up mostly in the Bronx, went to high school in DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx then graduated NYU, went to Harvard law school in 1939 to 1941 so I had two years of law school and then I was drafted September 9th 1941 and at the time I didn't think of trying to get out of the draft because we were only drafted for one year so it just seemed like a little vacation for me and then of course pearl harbor December 7th 41 so that one year changed to almost five years in the army

**PZ:** And the time that you were drafted how old were you?

**ES:** About 21

**PZ:** You were 21 and you were commissioned at that time?

**ES:** No no, I was drafted as a private, went to Fort Monmouth and then with my cause I had two years of law school and knew how to type rather well I was assigned to the pentagon building to the pentagon where I was a cryptographic officer now I was enlisted and then went to back to fort Monmouth to be commissioned then I was sent back to the pentagon I was first when I was , when I graduated I had orders going to Tampa but they soon changed that to back to the pentagon where I became a cryptographic officer

**PZ:** And just what did a cryptographic officer do the during your tenure?

**ES:** Well we learned during our enlisted period to type and use the SIGABA which was a very refined code machine the mechanics of it are that when you type in English at one end in the input but it came out over the radio in code. It was a very effective code

machine and we had to be very adept not only at typing but using the machine of course you need a radio personnel on the other end to send the messages

**PZ:** Sure, okay, so using that this work what you learned from the machine the SIGABA machine you then you were assigned to a ship with the three other officers in?

**ES:** We were assigned to the USS Blue Ridge

**PZ:** Okay I'm going to bring up a picture here of the Blue Ridge you can keep talking.

**ES:** And you can see from the ship it's a liberty hull but it has a lot of radio antennas etc. and that's where the headquarters was setup when we went to the southwest Pacific.

**PZ:** Okay.

**ES:** The other two ships went to other theatres and also named mountains one was called a rocky mount and the other was the Catocin the same theory on all three for amphibious warfare

**PZ:** Okay and these essentially were the headquarter ships that the admiral [Fluckey of the USS] Barb was on and basically all the war effort to -- was conducted basically managed

**ES:** That's right admiral Eugene Bennett Fluckey of the USS] Barb was the admiral of the seventh amphibious force

**PZ:** Okay

**ES:** That's the force that handled the landings at Leyte Gulf. We went overseas in late 43 early 44

**PZ:** And you went to Australia with the Brisbane [inaudible]

**ES:** We went to Brisbane to start the to start the Philippine invasion with the ultimate aim of returning MacArthur to the Philippines

**PZ:** Okay then after you left Australia you went to Leyte Gulf

**ES:** The entire invasion started we had a lot of ships not only at Brisbane but coming in from Calif- from Hawaii and across so there was a coordinated invasion of the Philippines, starting at Leyte gulf we were the southernmost end the seventh amphibious force Halsey was the fifth amphibious force, the north part of Leyte gulf so we had a the nucleus of the navy we were guarding the southern part and directing the Seventh Amphibious Force and Halsey was the northern - northern end - was on the northern end with his battleships coordinating the fifth fleet invasion

**PZ:** So do you recall the battle itself the very famous battle of Leyte Gulf were you there to t-

**ES:** It was a very famous battle because several things happened number one the first hint of any defensive maneuvers by the Japanese started with the invasion of a big Japanese fleet coming down from the north this was well to the north almost to Alaska and they were coming down and Halsey apparently we knew about the invasion of the Japs because we had the messages through the code room and we knew that the Jap fleet was coming down and Halsey was going up to meet it and we didn't have any protection on the eastern end on- the Eastern end of Leyte gulf there were just a couple two or three jeep carriers guarding there but when Halsey went north to meet the Jap fleet we were very concerned about the portion in the north where Halsey was supposed to be guarding the battle of Leyte gulf don't forget we were landing personnel at this time we lost a lot of casualties there just in the landing but it turned out to be a very successful landing however when we had heard that Halsey was meeting the Jap fleet up north we were concerned about the protection of the northern end of Leyte gulf which he was supposed to be protecting so we sent a message from our code room to Halsey's flagship and the message read are you still guarding Surigao Strait and the answer came back negative which was the most horrific message we have ever received we were open to invasion from the north which was exactly what happened there was another interesting thing that caused him to leave the army we had army support. Army air support and they went after the Jap fleet in the north and as far as the intelligence was concerned the army intelligence I guess and Halsey thought that the northern that the Jap fleet coming in from the west which Halsey was guarding they thought that the army air force had knocked out that Jap fleet that was coming in cause they turned around and started to go back however they regrouped and they came steaming in from the north and well when they - we could see them coming and every man on our ship was given a rifle and we were going to land and do what we could and escape these big Jap battleships but a miracle happened

**PZ:** Were you frightened at that time by the way?

**ES:** We were not only frightened we were scared shitless

**PZ:** Yeah

**ES:** All of us even admiral Fluckey so what actually happened was this Jap fleet came in and sank those two jeep carriers and we thought we were really in for it but a miracle happened. As they after they finished off these two carriers, they turned around and they were given apparently they were given about an hour to go in and go back do what they could to harass and they were given an hour and the Japanese mind which was a - seemed not to be too agile and he didn't give any credit to these ships that were in there, they were given an hour and they left in an hour they steamed out they had - we resumed the operation and then meanwhile our southern we had battleships old battleships guarding Leyte gulf at the south and the strait in the south from the west

those ships couldn't make a concerted a drive at us because they would have out-manned us they had to come in single file in our narrow strait

**PZ:** Ah so they left themselves wide open-

**ES:** wide open for crossing the T which is a great maneuver

**PZ:** Uh huh

**ES:** where someone flea comes in single file the other fleet is in a t formation and able to annihilate those ships so it was a great victory there for us and the total result was that the jap fleet was decimated he's badly beaten up hales was both a hero and a goat at the same time

**PZ:** And so during that period you must have been very frantically sending messages back and fourth

**ES:** Oh sure yeah

**PZ:** over and throughout that period as far as you know the Japanese never picked up this code

**ES:** oh no never picked up the code

**PZ:** and when we were sending codes and let's say that the ships were being blown up by the Japanese where you would touch with those with those men on the other ship at the time

**ES:** oh there they were destined they were all killed

**PZ:** Uh huh

**ES:** that was a tragedy if he goes say those were very gallant ships very gallant men and of course a jeep carrier they have they don't have many planes this it's not like a real carrier and they were slaughtered so

**PZ:** Uh huh

**ES:** they were very brave because they sent their planes after the Japs no matter what never to return

**PZ:** and when you look back at that now did you feel that Halsey was a- had made a mistake in going after this decoy

**ES:** well in deference to haul see they had reports from the Army Air Force that that fleet up there was had been defeated and was returning that they had turned they were returning so he made a tactical decision to take his whole fleet up to how he became sort of a hero and a goat at the same time that he was a great hero because he defeated many battleships up there if you read the details he won we all want a great victory

**PZ:** So it was a great risk even though he didn't coordinate it with Admiral Fluckey at the time who left him hanging but

**ES:** yeah it would have been nice if he left a couple of miles it was behind about he took his old fleet up

**PZ:** Alright now at the time at that point in time that you were you after that battle you were getting up you were then preparing for the mainland assault is that

**ES:** no no no that before that when we defeated the fleet and landed our personnel at Leyte Gulf part of the strategy of the landing was to go around Manila go north around manila and attack we had another landing at Lingayen Gulf and we trimmed the Japs there and Lingayen Gulf is on the island of Luzon

**PZ:** Yes

**ES:** And we had by this time MacArthur was on the I think he was on the Birmingham a cruiser now we sent in when the Japs were defeated in Luzon they - the gentleman Arthur joined Admiral Fluckey and they went in with we went in with LCTs to land MacArthur at Lingayen gulf

**PZ:** and this is what I'm going to show right now if you just hang by with me for one second let me see if I can pull this out this is a picture that you just gave me of General MacArthur in the center here

**ES:** Correct

**PZ:** Over here the landing at Luzon and somewhere in this background here on the landing ship you are joining both Fluckey and MacArthur in the landing at Luzon and that was in January ninth of 1945

**ES:** Right

**PZ:** and this happened to this is now magazine okay so at that point

**ES:** well we won that battle then we finally and by that time we had dropped a bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and that's it at that juncture at that juncture the plans for the invasion of Japan were set in motion and we all receive the battle plans and there were going to be an enormous amount of American foot fatalities because a frontal attack on a bay of Tokyo was going to be a blood bath and they anticipated about 500,000 or more half a million or more fatalities of our troops so dropping the bomb saved a lot of our lives and we thank President Truman and the and the fellows that drop the bombs they saved our lives and that's why now when a lot of the same people or peaceniks decry dropping the bombs for humanitarian reasons we argue with them because it saved our lives saved many lives

**PZ:** Including your own at that time

**ES:** Absolutely

**PZ:** You arrived back for a harbor then

**ES:** no we went back to don't forget the war wasn't quite over we went back to we went back to Hawaii Fort Shafter and now we're in a in a position of a position of occupying the Philippines General MacArthur was redrawing the Constitution to- in our favor and he was a great political figure in reshaping the Japanese Constitution and at that time the war ended and we went back to we went back home

**PZ:** So you were discharged then and then you what did you do with that with your life at that point

**ES:** then I went back to Harvard Law School finish the year and that was paid for by Uncle Sam

**PZ:** By the GI Bill

**ES:** so yeah GI Bill also contained reference to any law students that were interrupted by the army don't forget that my second year at Harvard was five years before actually was in 42 so first we were we didn't have to take the bar exam we were admitted to the bar and I got my law school degree as of 1942 so then I went back to being a lawyer

**PZ:** Okay and then along came the Korean War-

**ES:** Korean War I had foolishly or not I had kept my lieutenantcy in the reserve but I was told at the time that it didn't have anything to do with me being in the active or inactive reserve they called me up in a Korean War to build a code room at Camp Kilmer so our station at Camp Kilmer for over a year with my family

**PZ:** Camp Kilmer was

**ES:** in Jersey

**PZ:** Jersey?

**ES:** Yeah

**PZ:** And where were you married

**ES:** Oh yeah

**PZ:** Have you married before you went into world war-

**ES:** I got married when I became an officer

**PZ:** Oh

**ES:** At fort Monmouth we got married [inaudible] and I got married

**PZ:** Okay

**ES:** see she wouldn't marry an enlisted man I had to be an officer

**PZ:** I see and so when you went to the Korean War were your children did you have children at that time

**ES:** yeah I had two children at the time we did- we were living in Stuyvesant town and when I was called up we rented although we weren't supposed to but war time was war time and we rented our apartment in Stuyvesant town and that we all live together at Camp Kilmer but I didn't go over it all I was taking care of a code room and then the Korean War ended I'm back to the back to the law

**PZ:** and the code room that you set up in the Korean War he was using the same code machines as we

**ES:** that's right

**PZ:** the SIGABA

**ES:** SIGABA

**PZ:** How long did you stay in Korea?

**ES:** I wasn't in Korea

**PZ:** I mean in the Korean War how long-

**ES:** Korean War a year and a half

**PZ:** a year and a half

**ES:** and back to Stuyvesant town back to the law

**PZ:** okay and then how do you feel that these experiences in both the world war two and Korea affected your life

**ES:** Well it took a big chunk out of it and a big chunk out of my civilian life but I was patriotic and I thought I did a lot in the war effort and it was gratifying

**PZ:** Did you keep in touch with any of the people that there were kind of friendships that you had in during war was there anything in particular that you remember in those friendships that have carried on-

**ES:** Oh not much I knew that Joel [unclear] moved to Florida he was one of our officers and I was in touch with him for a while and there was another John Stroud was another one of our another one of our lieutenants in the code room he be- he was an actor he became an actor and other than that there wasn't much

**PZ:** Uh huh so [inaudible] camaraderie in the relationships that you never joined them to VFW or any veterans of foreign war organizations or anything like that

**ES:** well I'm sort of ex officio in the Jewish War veterans

**PZ:** Jewish war veterans

**ES:** and don't forget I also became a back to civilian life and when I'm we moved to great neck I became I be I became a village justice in great neck estates

**PZ:** Okay

**ES:** so as a as a matter of fact after 30 years of being a village justice I got the a retired as the village justice but they made me what they call acting though as justice as sort of a sort of as a an honor an honorable appointment

**PZ:** now you just brought up the Jewish war veteran organization I imagine that during world war two and the Korean war there were great few Jews among the among the fighting men is that correct or

**ES:** yes but of our of all four lieutenants in our code room three were Jewish

**PZ:** Is that right ending how about what about your experience during Korean was that similar there setting up the code-

**ES:** No it there were very few people there that-

**PZ:** okay so given all your experience in your life during wartime were you ever worried at any point in time that we might lose the war and what would happen to both you and your family background

**ES:** well I had a feeling we'd never lose the war I was very always very optimistic about it

**PZ:** Mm hmm now being in a code room how was it how did you manage to send communications back and forth how were you able to keep up with what was happening in let's say Europe with the war

**ES:** oh we had a newspaper aboard the ship and they got it from the radio

**PZ:** From what radio how did you get a radio signal down in South Pacific?

**ES:** I really don't know I think I think we got it from Hawaii

**PZ:** Uh huh

**ES:** I think we got news from Hawaii and they published it oh they made of they had you know when we sent the message from the SIGABA through the radio in code we were also able to send messages without code

**PZ:** all right

**ES:** and they could send those messages uh there's a machine we still use it that way you were type into an into the radio and that comes out in English

**PZ:** okay so you're basically getting information about

**ES:** oh yeah

**PZ:** What was happening in America?

**ES:** oh yes

**PZ:** What was happening-?

**ES:** oh yes we even got the scores the games yeah sure

**PZ:** So the camaraderie- you are on a headquarters ship of course and so you really that you weren't really amongst the troops you had kind of a different level of people around you was there much camaraderie or concern about-

**ES:** oh yeah

**PZ:** Mhm

**ES:** well camaraderie and not something yeah camaraderie concern

**PZ:** and

**ES:** Once we were on a

**PZ:** What was the day[s] you work there typically on your shift at least when you were-

**ES:** we had full shifts

**PZ:** You had oh so you were on like an eight hour it was like a regular eight hour shift

**ES:** Yeah

**PZ:** and it was seven days a week

**ES:** oh yeah

**PZ:** Uh huh

**ES:** we didn't have any vacations you

**PZ:** No it's a good thing we have unions in those days

**ES:** Right well there were some humorous things happened on board for example we had an ice cream an ice cream machine on board and that was a big a big thing ice cream on the ship and they put out a memorandum I see we had three tiers of three tiers of

personnel enlisted men junior officers and senior officers and they put out a memorandum that the enlisted man could have one ball of ice cream a day the junior officers could have two ball and the senior officers three balls of ice-cream group and I was put out in a memorandum and we sent we were so amused by that that we sent that back by radio oh no in a letter which was letters were censored

**PZ:** Uh huh

**ES:** but we sent back the that memorandum to The New Yorker and The New Yorker print used to print war is hell department

**PZ:** Uh huh

**ES:** and they printed this memorandum two balls of ice cream this three balls of ice- it was printed in the blue in the [inaudible] of USS Blue Ridge memorandum and you can understand the consternation in the Navy

**PZ:** Sure

**ES:** Now see the army sent but nobody knew that you know because it wasn't censored so there was a big investigation they caught lowly officers they wanted to know who sent that and you know everybody played dumb so

**PZ:** Of all your war experiences what was the most memorable

**ES:** my what

**PZ:** your most memorable war experience the one has

**ES:** oh that message should negative that was the most memorable

**PZ:** [inaudible]

**ES:** That was the most amazing

**PZ:** okay all right I've given that this film now will be for posterity for future historians to look upon and your grandchildren you have grandchildren

**ES:** oh yeah seven

**PZ:** you have seven grandchildren wonderful

**ES:** And a and a beautiful wife

**PZ:** And, very good, given all that is there some message that you'd like to leave for posterity given your experience in life and how the war affected you

**ES:** yes we should all be very patriotic love the country and thank God for the atomic bomb that saved our lives but now should be banned forever

**PZ:** with that gene our country thanks you for your patriotism that you've shown us over the years this is a Eugene Schuster signing off

**ES:** thank you very much