

**Eugen J. Corsale
Veteran**

**Michael Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on April 5, 2005, 10:00 AM
Saratoga Springs, New York**

EC: Eugen J. Corsale, Veteran

Q: Michael Russert and Wayne Clark, Interviewers

Q: Okay, this is an interview at the New York State Military Museum, Saratoga Springs, New York. It is the 5th of April 2005, approximately 10 a.m. Interviewers are Wayne Clark and Mike Russert.

Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth, please?

EC: Eugene James Corsale. July 25, 1928. I was born at Glens Falls and I've lived in Saratoga Springs for seventy-seven years, all my life. I've been a permanent residence in the city.

Q: Okay, what was your educational background prior to entering service?

EC: Well, I went through eight years of elementary school at the old number one school on the city's west side, Beekman Street. The school is demolished now. And I had four years of high school at Saratoga High, which is the Lake Avenue Elementary building now. Then after that I went to work on the railroad. I come from a railroad family and that was in my genes to be a railroad man. I couldn't wait to get out of school to get on the railroad. So, I got on the railroad, and I became a locomotive fireman, shoveling coal, which didn't create any problem for me because I was a young guy with a strong back and a weak mind, so to speak. But I enjoyed working on the railroad. Like I say, I joined my father and my brothers. They were all railroad people. And I got off the transportation end of it because they wanted to send me to Rouses Point, Canada, which is one step from the Canadian border. And I had to live up there and work on what they call the extra board, which is your work when the regular guy takes a day off. So, you might get three days a week, you might get five days a week, or you might get two days a week. But in any event, when the personnel officer said that he wanted to send me to Rouse's Point to live and work, I says, I've had it. So, after three years, I went into the construction phase of the railroad. And I stood there until I joined the Navy in October 19, 1950.

Q: Okay, so you enlisted?

EC: I enlisted. I volunteered for the Navy a four-year enlistment. Now, the way it worked was there was five of us fellows working on the maintenance, the construction end of the railroad, building a new railroad cutoff in Ballston Spa Village. We all decided the Korean War was on. A lot of the reserves were being called back from World War II. And we decided whoever was classified 1A first, we'd all go and join the Navy, which we did. One of the fellas came up 1A. Unfortunately, when I came up 1A, I was already two years in the military. I was out at sea when my mother sent me the 1A postcard, so I could have maybe beat him out of two years. But in any event, we decided to join the Navy for four years rather than win the Army for two years. So, we went down to Albany, and we all enlisted, and we all went away together. Five fellas had all worked on the railroad together, and we were all from the west side of the city. And we all did our basic training together.

Q: Where did you go for basic?

EC: We went to basic training in Newport, Rhode Island. And from there, they moved us out when we graduated after three months of training. And we went down to Portsmouth, Virginia, and we boarded the battleship, USS Wisconsin. So, I'm very proud to say that I'm a battleship sailor. And that's a distinguishing feature in Navy service because the battleship was the big capital ship of the fleet at that time, even though you had your carriers coming right along and like that. But in any event, it was a very exciting time. I had never seen a ship as big as a battleship. I mean, my God, there it was. And they said, "okay, boys, off the bus and get on the ship." We were going into dry dock the next day. The ship was full of mothballs because the Korean War came on all of a sudden and they just needed a lot of people. So, they called back a lot of the reserves and us fellows that were enlisting. And we went aboard the ship and the next day we moved into dry dock, and we did all of our showering and eating and like that right on the dock because the ship wasn't ready at all. But we worked right along with the civilian yard crew, taking the mothball covers, the cocoons, so to speak, off the gun mounts and all the grease that they had, preservatives and like that. So, we helped get the ship ready for sea. And after dry dock, we made our shakedown cruise.

Q: Now, how long did it take to prepare the ship?

EC: It took quite a few months. Exactly, I can't remember, but it was a lot of months. And then we had a course of a recommissioning ceremony where the governor of Wisconsin came down, brought a whole load of cheese for us and like that because they're pretty famous for products. But in any event, we got re-commissioned and then we went down to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and had our shakedown cruise down there. And then after that we took a trip over into Europe, Scotland and Portugal, and then we were on our way to Korea. So, we got over into Korea about in, oh, I believe it was late '51, 1951, and we replaced the battleship New Jersey. The Missouri had initially been in

Korea, then after her time in the bomblines, so to speak, up in the war zone area, they were relieved by the New Jersey, and then we relieved the Wisconsin, and the Iowa relieved us. There were four Iowa class battleships, and those were the four. But it was very good duty aboard the battleship, a real big heavy ship. It was about fifty thousand tons. And of course, when they fired those sixteen-inch guns, which is the biggest ships, biggest guns on any ship around in anybody's fleet today, it was really something to see. Especially when they fired a nine-gun salvo, which is what they call a broadside. When they fired a nine-gun salvo, you'd be sitting here and the concussion and the repercussion was so great that it moved you like about five feet backwards in the water from the force of the shells going out. When we were shelling over in Korea, what we did we laid off the coast, and we'd get in pretty close, considering that, they didn't have much of an air force, so there wasn't much chance of them coming out with any kind of an air force situation. But what they would do, they had a lot of the areas calculated and like that and what they would do, they'd have their field artillery pieces in the mountainside and they'd run those field artillery pieces out and they'd fire one shot over and one shot short and the next one had you. They'd straddle you and then they got you and they hit us, surprising enough, field artillery pieces hitting the battleship, out in the water. But in any event, the quartermaster on the bridge, he spied where the flash came from, and what he did, they calculated where the artillery piece was at the mountainside, and the captain pulled off in the water a little bit further, and he ordered a nine-gun salvo. When they had the nine-gun salvo, you could feel the ship just ricochet back. The captain announced over the loudspeaker, I can still remember, he says, "fellas, we did get hit." We had about eight or nine guys hurt by shrapnel. He says, "you'll be happy to know where there was a mountain before, there isn't a mountain there anymore." [Laughter] We took care of that. We devastated that area. A lot of exciting things that happened over there in Korea is that once in a while you corner a railroad train going along the coast. And what they would do, they'd fire ahead of them and stop them, and then they'd fire behind them. They couldn't go anywhere. And then they'd have the anti-aircraft guns, the forty millimeters, going close, and they'd fire at the boxcars or whatever they were loaded with, munitions and like that. So, like I say, they didn't have much of an air force to come out and attack the fleet, and they never did. The whole time the Korean War went on, it was never aerial attack, any of the ships. Mines were a real bad thing. A lot of the lighter ships, the destroyers and like that hit mines and blew their bowels off. It was a lot of mine warfare. So basically, in a way, you have to give the communists a lot of credit. Even though they didn't have the facilities like a Navy or to mount anything, they would cause a lot of problems with their shore batteries and with their mine warfare. They're very good at mine warfare.

Q: What were your specific duties on the ship?

EC: I was damage controlman. Really, my rate was a metalsmith. In World War II, they called it a ship fitter. In my time, they called it a metalsmith. And now currently, it's a

hull technician. The rating is what they called a hull technician. But my job was anything involving metal, I had to take care of it. That's welding, fabricating, and like that. And in case the ship was hit, one section of the ship was assigned to my crew and in case we got hit, took a hit or caused any damage, we had to go fix it. In other words, we kept the ship afloat. They call us damage control men for general quarters duty. But I could distinctly remember the day that we got hit. Of course, where my station was at, I had that much metal over my head, about a foot of armor plating from the main deck area down. And I could hear the shell hit. I said—we were all sitting there—we said that “I think we got hit.” And then it came over the loudspeaker that, call it away to the hospital parties, corpsmen and like that. We had damage control duties and that meant keeping the ship watertight and preserving the integrity of the ship in case you did take a hit any place. Of course, we only had certain sections of the ship. Everybody was assigned a certain area to look after. So basically, I really enjoyed my four years in the Navy. I think I went to twenty-five countries after the war service and like that, I've been across the equator, the International Date Line, and the Arctic Circle. Unfortunately, I got my tattoo, which I'm not too proud about, but I've been living with it here for about fifty years anyhow. I call it an idiot mark, and it is an idiot mark when you come down to it. But in any event today, I guess it's pretty popular with everybody, male as well as female. But I did enjoy going to visit all these countries. During peacetime, it was almost like a pleasure cruise. And we did a lot of training of midshipmen. Annapolis people, we'd take them out on cruises and like that, I've been to a lot of countries. I think the most hospitable country I ever went to was Scotland. The Scottish people were fantastic. And I would have to say the Japanese people rank right up there too as far as hospitality goes. Now we were in Japan four years after the end of World War II, and yet those people didn't hold any animosity or anything. They welcomed us.

Q: Did you go ashore in Japan?

EC: Oh yeah.

Q: Did you see the damage? Was there still a lot of damage?

EC: There still was a lot of damage. Believe it or not, in England and Scotland, of course we were over in both of those places and like that, the people were still on rationing. I know my buddy and myself, we met a couple Scottish girls, and we took them to the movie and they said, “shall we get some candy?” We said, “yeah” and they said, “we're rationed we only can get so much.” I said, “God, I thought we won the war.” Here we are, four years after, they're still on rationing over in Scotland. But no, there was a lot of damage, bomb damage in Glasgow. We went into Glasgow, Scotland. We were anchored off the Firth of Forth. I liked that because it was right underneath the railroad bridge and I'd watch the trains go by because I'm a train lover, you know. But in any event, yes, there was a lot of damage over there, but I will say that the Japanese people really treated the Americans very, very well. In fact, they'd invite—I wasn't a shore-based sailor

but fellows that were stationed on the shore would tell us they were invited over for meals and like that, to the families. They were very polite. I'll never forget...the ship came back from—

we'd like to go up on the bomblines and shoot for maybe about three or four months, then come back to Yokosuka, Japan for resupply and like that, and that's when we got off the ship.

Q: What do you mean by the bomblines?

EC: The bomblines were like above the 38th parallel or wherever in Korea. We'd almost go right up to Vladivostok, Russia. We were right in the Russian area and like that. We were pretty close to the Cold War enemy when we were shelling like up in Songjin and like that. So, in any event, we'd come back to Japan and then we'd get off the ship and be able to, go over a shore, where they had ham and eggs and like that, aboard the ship. You wouldn't get that stuff, you know, as everything was powdered. So, we'd go down to the enlisted men's club and have a meal, an American style meal. I'll never forget, I'm walking along the street with a bunch of my buddies and this old Japanese grandfather, here he is with his two grandchildren, the kids have got balloons and I looked at him and I said, these people aren't any different than we are. They didn't want any war or anything like that. Here he is doing what every guy, every grandfather is doing back home on a Saturday afternoon with his grandchildren. I asked him if I could take his picture and I still got his picture today. But they're no different than we are. Like I say, they treated us all very well. Of course, a lot of times you get the ugly American attitude, you know, that would cause a few incidents. But overall, the Japanese were very receptive to us. The Scottish people were—we were there, I think, for—we had the midshipman crews at that time. So, you can imagine bringing thousands of sailors into like Edinburgh, Scotland and Glasgow, Scotland, what it did for the economy. My God, economy would get a terrific shot in the arm. Well, a lot of fellows met Scottish girls, and when they went back to the States, they pulled thirty days leave and went back and got married. In fact, ironic enough, we got a great website, a USS Wisconsin website, and it tells about who passed away and like that. I'm looking at my website the other day, and one of the fellows that married a Scottish girl—His name was Paul Silvia, I can still remember—He passed away. I was telling my wife, I said, Paul flew back and married a Scottish girl, and here he is now, he's expired. But we do have this website about the USS Wisconsin. It's got pictures and everything on it. In fact, I took a lot of pictures out of my photo album, sent them in to the fellow. I think you call it the webmaster or something like that, but he puts them on the website. He's very handy at it. I wrote him one day and I said to him that I was having a little bit of medical problems, I had to go through some treatment, and he put it on the website. I wound up getting thirty-five e-mails. Some of the fellas I knew, some were from World War II guys. They were all saying, well, I went through it and you'll be all right. I saved them all. Would you believe it? Thirty give e-mails in about a day and a half. Some of these fellas I didn't even know.

I wrote back the webmaster, and I said, you know, you got a website here that's almost like a family. And he said, well, he wrote me back. He said, that's what my wife and I try to do. But we have reunions. In fact, I went down to the ship's recommissioning in Pascagoula, Mississippi, just before Desert Storm, and I went aboard the ship. I had my wife and my daughter with us. There were fourteen thousand people at the dockside to recommission the ship. And of course, when you recommission a ship, it's really an event, because they give the order, bring the ship back to life, the whole crew was on the dock and they run up the gangways, the aft gangway and the forward gangway, and they man the ship right up into the superstructure with sailors all around the guardrails. They lower the guns, they toot the horn, they make the smoke come out, they get the flashing lights. All the guns are right over your head. It's quite a ceremony. I really enjoyed that. I mean, I met a lot of fellows that I served with. That's one thing about the Navy; you meet some very good friends. In fact, some of my buddies, one of my buddies was very artistic. When I got married, he flew in from Chicago and sang at my wedding. He was that good a singer.

Q: Now what happened to the Wisconsin? Where is it now?

EC: Well, the Wisconsin is a museum piece now down in Portsmouth, Virginia, Norfolk. But it's in what they call the ready reserve. In other words, you can go down there and walk the main decks in the superstructure, but you can't go below decks because if they need it, they can bring it out. Now the Missouri is a permanent museum piece alongside the Arizona. In other words, the Pearl Harbor, you see where the war began and where the war ended. The Jersey serves as a visiting ship down in Bayonne, I think it is. In fact, people can go aboard, there are Boy Scouts that spend a weekend. So that ship, I don't think, is anything in the ready reserve. The Iowa, of course, had that disaster where the turret blew up and the Iowa was just put aside. That was a bad episode Navy-wise when they had that turret explosion. But in any event, the Wisconsin would be the one to go to war. Wisconsin is the newest one, and it's the biggest one. It's eight inches, I think longer than the other ships. [Laughter] Our captain used to brag about that. One thing about the Wisconsin that I used to get a big kick out of was they'd assigned these officers there that were captains and then just before they made rear admiral they had to be commander of a capital ship. The last two captains that I served on aboard the Wisconsin were submarine men. And boy, they used to like to play with that battleship, you know, going from a submarine to a battleship. We're in a port of Norfolk and usually we had two or three tugboats come and get us out and bring us out into the bay and turn us around and point us out to sea. We got all the lines cast off from the dock and all of a sudden we're moving. He said, where's the tugboats? He didn't use any tugboats. He just pulled it away like a car and took off from the horizon. [Laughter] I said, these people are really something. But that's how we got hurt because the captain was too close. He was too close to the shore. The battleship shouldn't have been that close to shore. But they liked to get in close. I tell you, they got in so close, they had the anti-aircraft guns,

forty millimeters, firing at those railroad trains that we had stalled on the shore. It'll give you an idea how close he'd be in the shore. But in any event, I used to have to admire the way that they would play around with the battleship like it was their little submarine. Of course, if they were ever operating in an area where there was one of their friends, their submarine was in that area, the submarine would come out of the water and come alongside of us and we'd give them ice cream or whatever goodies they didn't have. It was really, really interesting. Being in the Navy is something that, when I was in, maybe I couldn't wait to get out. The thing is, I would repeat it. It was a great experience, and I think that every young guy should go through it. It was my college. I never went to college. I put four years in there, and that I consider my college education. But it was a great education. You met a lot of people from an American like that, fellow Americans, and you met a lot of people overseas. I did a lot of traveling overseas. If you could prove that you had a relative or something like that and you were in like a port like Leghorn, Italy, well they'd let you go. You'd put in for it and they'd give you five days to go off the ship and you'd travel around to meet these people. When you met those people it was like an American big person coming to a little village to meet him. It was like a major event, I enjoyed that. In fact, I went over and visited an Italian soldier that my brother, who was in the American Army in Germany, had befriended in Germany. During the war, Italy went against Germany. All those Italian soldiers that were stationed in Germany with the German army, they became prisoners of war. After the war, the Americans got there, peace was declared, but you couldn't fraternize with the German people because it was a court-martial offense. The guys took over whatever houses—the American soldiers took over whatever houses they could find that were still standing and they just hung around until they were waiting to be demobilized and go back to America. They wanted to have somebody wash their clothes or take care of their odds and ends. My brother struck upon the idea of asking one of these Italian soldiers to come over and be their janitor. He found an older man and whatever little Italian he could talk, he went over and he said, would you like to come and live with us? And be our go-between between us and the German people to get our clothes done or whatever errands they wanted to do or things they wanted done for them. They took him aboard. Of course, he hadn't heard from his family in Italy, he didn't know whether or not they survived the war. So, my mother, who was a great person with ideas and like that, she could read and write two languages. She said to my brother, have him write a letter, put it in your letter, and send it to Saratoga. Which they did. This guy's name was Marco Bianconi, and he was a fascist, a real fascist. I went to visit him. I wound up visiting the fella when I was in the Navy. In any event, he writes the letter to my mother in Saratoga. My mother puts his letter in a letter to my cousin, her nephew, who was stationed in, of all places, Leghorn, Italy, where I departed from to go see Marco. With instructions, put it in the Italian mail system—because by that time everything was being reorganized, the war was over with—Have his wife, if she's still alive—and he had a daughter and a father—have her write the letter to you, you send it to Saratoga, I'll send it to Germany.

That's the way Marco found out that his family was still alive. My mother more or less had a relationship with his wife. We used to send him care packages from Saratoga, soap and cigarettes. When he found out I was in the Navy and I got aboard another ship, the USS Midway, to make a Mediterranean cruise because the battleship wasn't allowed to go into the Mediterranean, had some kind of naval treaty. I transferred in my last two years of the service. I went aboard the aircraft carrier Midway and I made a Mediterranean cruise. The minute Marco found out through the mails—because my mother would correspond with his wife—He says, have Gene, come and visit me. My mother sends me— I don't know how to get to the guy. The place's name was Massa Martana. It wasn't in any world atlas or anything—So, my mother rips a page out of a book, puts an X near a place called Perugia. She says, he lives near there. I got it. I got it aboard. Said, how am I going to find this? I only had five days to do it because we were going to be in Leghorn in five days. If you didn't get back, you were A.W.L and you had to turn yourself into the American Embassy. We had three or four Italian officers that were working with us, observing our maneuvers. So I said, let me go up and ask these guys, they're Italian or from Italy, they must know where this place is at. I went up and I said to them, in my best Italian, you know, “excuse me, could you tell me where Massa Martana is?” They said, “we don't know.” And I said, what am I going to do? You know, I want to do it and I got to do it, I'll never get another opportunity to do it. So they said, “go, you'll find your way.” I put in for the five days, and they said, go ahead, so I gathered up jack knives, pocket watches, cigarettes, whatever I could carry to bring this fellow. I got on the train, they let me off the ship at eight o'clock in the morning. I got on the train, I only had a limited amount of money, I'm in the Navy, I don't have hundred, two hundred dollars on me. I got on the train, the fellow says to me—the ticket agent—“hurry up, the train's in the station, go on up there and get aboard.” I took off and I got up there and I got in my seat and I'm figuring out the exchange rate, American dollars to Lira, he goofed me out of five dollars. He cheated me out of five bucks. And I'm saying to myself, boy, this is really good, I'm off on this trip on a good foot. Now what am I going to do? If I go down and argue with him, he'll call the cops. There was no shore patrol over American policemen off the ship yet. I says, and I won't even get on the trip. So I had to swallow it. And I says, I just got to be careful or I'm going to go broke. And if you don't have any money, what are you going to do? The first stop I made was Florence, Italy. Now Florence, Italy was bigger than Grand Central Station. Here I am and these trains are backing up and leaving and backing up. I saw a triple A and I went over and I said to them, I want to go to Perugia and I got to get a train out of here to go to Perugia. The lady said, well, they do back in over here, listen to the loudspeaker. Well, I couldn't hear the loudspeaker. You guys talking in Italian, blatant like that, you know. I went over to this fellow that was like a station master. I said to him, “I want to go to Perugia, do I get on any of these trains?” He said, “no.” I said, “well, I have to get a train to Perugia”—I kept on bothering him—He grabbed me right by the collar and sat me right down in the chair and he says in Italian, “I sat.” In other words, seat down. I sat there

and I watched these trains pull in, leave and I'd look up to him. He'd just ignore me. I said, boy, I hope he puts me on the right train or I'm going to be off to a start, and I'll be stuck here in Florence. I don't want to be stuck in Florence; that's a big city. The trains would pull in and then leave. I'd look up to him and he'd go—Never say anything—he'd give me the windshield wiper deal. [waves his arm and index finger back and forth] And another train came in. [waves finger again] Finally, he gets me by the collar good [Mimics being pulled by the shirt collar] and he's like, "*Fattene*"—threw me all up there— "Go on, get going, get on that train over there." So, I get on the train, I walk in the last car and here's benches on each side. I said, I'm not going to sit here. It was just benches. I kept on walking and the next set of cars were a little bit better. Then I got up to the other set of cars and here's these men, businessmen in a compartment, four of them. They're all reading their newspapers. I open up the door, I got in, I got right on the end of the seat like that. They didn't even acknowledge me, didn't even look at me or anything. I'm in a uniform. I mean, you don't see an American serviceman way inland like that, you know. The conductor comes along, he opens up the door, I give him my tickets, he gives me one of these jobs, the windshield wiper effect. [Waves his index finger back and forth] I give him one of these jobs. [Shrugs shoulders and opens arms] What do you want? He says, "your ticket is second class. This is first class." So, a light bulb went on in my head. I said, well, "how much more money you need?" I want to sit here, you know? It's like, in other words, it's [speaks Italian phrase], you need? I was pretty good at Italian. I did bring my translation book, but I never used it. Surprising enough, when you got to do something, you'll do it. You won't have any problem. I paid him and he let me sit there. The whole trip, these fellas never acknowledged me at all. So, I get in this place, Perugia, now it's nighttime. The station is way out in the country, just like the Saratoga station is. Nobody around. I said, now how am I going to get into the city? This guy says to me, "hey, American sailor!" I said, "my God, somebody talks English." He gives up, he-says, I said, "you speak English?" He says, "yeah, I used to live in Newark, New Jersey." [Laughter] I said, "you're just the guy I'm looking for. Take me to a hotel, and tomorrow morning at six o'clock, you've got to get me on the train to Massa Martana." He says, "okay." I went to a hotel, the guy says supper is being served, go up to your room and like that, come on down and you'll be ready for supper and like that. About that time I hadn't talked English to anybody too much in the whole trip and it gets kind of lonesome by myself. I came down to supper and I sat alongside three British couples and they just ignored me too. I'm saying, what's wrong with me? Nobody wants to talk to me. Usually people would say, "oh, you're an American," at least the English, because they know American servicemen. Nobody would talk to me. Ironically enough, the room he gives me is, guess what, the bridal suite. [Laughter] Of all places, the bridal suite, I got a room that looks like a bowling alley. You know what I mean? The next morning the fellow's there, he puts me on the train, and I get on the train. I went up to this place, Massa Montana, and I had to get a bus into the village. I talked to the young fellow, he was a station master, and I used to say to him—I used to like to say to

the people, how was it during the war?— I'd say to the kid, "how was it during the war?" "Oh," he says, "the American bombers are terrible." I says, "why?" "Well," he says, "instead of hitting the railroad yards, they'd always hit the houses." They were always off course or something like that. I got on the bus, and the word must have got up to the village or the little hamlet. There was this guy, the minute the bus pulled in, he's got on these riding britches. He was a tenant farmer. Sport coat, pork pie hat, black armband around him and I knew it was him. That's how I met up with Marco. I stood with him for about three or four days, but you talk about tough living. They did all their cooking over a fireplace. He was the tenant farmer, but the food was good. God, we had everything from lamb to chicken, you name it. Everything was done over the fireplace. On a Sunday there before I left, I met the Patron, they call him, the man who owns the landlord. By that time, I was talking politics and everything with these people. Communism versus democracy, I was really at it, you know. What he did, before he put me on a train, he put me on a train to Assisi. That's where they have a big Catholic shrine, St. Francis of Assisi and my brother's name was Francis. He says, "I want to take you over there and show you the shrine." He had the village priest get in the car. I said, don't spend any money because I'm going to give you a little money I can. "No," he said, "I want to take you to the shrine." There was Marco, the driver, the priest, me and his eleven-year-old daughter. We went around the area to go over to Assisi, and the Catholic priest gave me a whole tour of that shrine. Of course, now a couple of years ago it was hit by an earthquake, but it destroyed a lot of it. I had a whole tour of that courtesy of an English-speaking Italian priest. It was quite a trip and a thing that, like I say, I will never forget. That was one of the great things about being in the Navy. But then, like I say, to go to the Mediterranean, I had to transfer aboard the USS Midway, which was an aircraft carrier, the biggest one at that time. I served aboard the two biggest ships in the fleet up to the 1950s. Now you see the Kennedy and the American like that, the Reagan. They're humongous. They're gigantic. At that time, they were the two biggest ships in the fleet, so basically, I never had a chance to get seasick too much. [Laughter]

Q: You said while you were in the Midway there was a collision?

EC: Yeah. Well, we did. An oiler came alongside of the ship to give us jet fuel and the water was rough. It was a rough season. What happened, the seas brought the tanker right into the side of the ship and they got hung up. When the tanker pulled back, he pulled off pretty early gun mount on the port side of the ship. The barrels were crossed like that. [crosses arms to make an X symbol] It was just a wreck. We had only been over there now for about three months. We were headed for Piraeus, Greece, which was the port of Athens. I said, my God, we're going to go back to the Navy Yard already. I said, this is no good. I come over on the ship to make a year-long Mediterranean cruise, and here it is with all this wreckage we got on the port sides. We'll never be able to operate like that. They'll send us back home. You know what they did? They says, okay, they had

a meeting. They says the ship's crew will repair the ship and that's what we did. I was a real part of that because I was a metalsmith and a ship fitter. But what we did, we salvaged whatever we could in the way of the gun mounts, burned off all the damaged parts, made it watertight, painted it, and covered all that area with white canvas. That's the way we operated for ten months with the whole side of the ship inoperative. If we'd ever had an air raid or a Pearl Harbor deal, there wouldn't have been any defense on that side of the ship. They kept us out there because they didn't have a replacement ready. The 6th Fleet had to have a major carrier there, and we were it. We had relieved the Coral Sea, which was just like the Midway, and they went back to the States. When they says that the crew will do the repair work, we worked around the clock. We worked five days, twenty-four hours, cutting off all the damaged metal, the collision metal, dumping it in the port there. Must have an iron bottom down there now. We patched it all up, made it watertight, and we were ready for sea. That's the way we operated for ten months. Come back to the States with that white canvas on that side of the ship. On the carrier, that was a very exciting duty because, you're always landing these jets and strangely enough, you do have a lot of accidents. You see a lot of fires. When they have a wreck, you'd say to yourself, how are we ever going to put it out? We were what they call ships company, and our area was below the flight deck. The air company, they call them Airdales, their point of responsibility was everything from the hangar bay up. If they had a fire on the flight deck, they didn't call us away. If they needed us, they would call us away. It was usually the air group that fought the fire. Some of those fires, you'd look and you'd say, my God, we're going to blow up. But they'd get it out because they still had planes flying that had to land and they were short on fuel. What they would do, they'd get this big cherry picker, they called it, it was like a big crane. The guy would go right into the center of the fire, just dump it all right overboard. Whatever's burning and whatever isn't burning. That area, you just push it right overboard and before you know it, they'd have the fire out. They were great firefighters, and of course, fire is one of the things that you really fear aboard a ship. Surprising enough, you're on water, but if that metal thing catches on fire, you've got big problems. They were great firefighters, and that right there was attributable to their fire training. I put the four years in and ironically enough, I'm going to say something here that I'm a little embarrassed about. I can't swim and I had forty-five months of sea duty. [Laughter] Would you believe it? If I ever fell overboard, I'm a gone goose. I always made sure I knew where life jackets were at, where life preservers are at. I joined the Navy, I said, I got to go, I know I have to go into service or I'm going to get drafted. But at the same time, I learned how to swim. When we went down in training, they issued us a swimsuit like that. The days that we went to swimming class, it was heaven for the guys that could swim. It was a day off. You didn't have to march or anything like that. For us, it was hell. [Laughter] One day we went into swimming class, and they had maybe about hundred life jackets or a couple hundred piled in the corner. We were all saying amongst ourselves— because we were already broken apart like swimmers and non-swimmers—We were saying amongst

ourselves, boy, today we're going to get life jackets on and we'll be able to go in the water and have some fun down to the big pool. We were in the shallow pool. The Order came out, he says, "OK, fellas." He says, "those of you that can swim, grab a life jacket. Those that can't swim, climb the tower." Boy, you ought to hear the hoots and the hollers and the [Inaudible]. I had five guys from my city. They tell everybody he can't swim worth a lick, you know what I mean. They're whistling and hollering, you know, who's going to chicken out. Well, the worst thing you can do is chicken out and not do it. So, [I] went up on the ladder, it simulates the side of a ship. It's better than two and half stories. When you get up there, the two officers on each side of the thing, they'd say, "now son, you know, when you jump off, go off like a projectile with your hands at your side." I'm up there, and of course, I never jumped in the pool that high, and I'm afraid of heights too. I'd go off and, on the way, down I could hear him whistling and hollering and "watch this, watch when he comes up." I'd come up. I couldn't see anything because of the chlorine. Well finally I'd go down, up and down. I nearly swallowed half the pool, you know. They'd get poles. I couldn't find a life reserve. They pushed me in the shore. When they got me out of the pool, the officer said to me, he says, "hey kid, they want you up on the tower again"—I just jumped off, you know— I says, "Me?" He says, "Yeah, you go on up by the tower." As I'm climbing up— all the other guys had already jumped off— As I'm climbing up, there's a fella, I'll never forget his name, Homesey, and Homesey was so deathly afraid of the water that in training camp, we used to have to give him a shower. He's one of those guys, you know what I mean? You give him a shower with a scrub brush. As I'm coming up, I can hear the two officers saying, "Homesey, now son, you're gonna have to jump if we stay here all night." As I'm coming up, I say, "Homesey, are you going to jump?" Because I knew if I got up there and he's up in front of me hesitating, I won't do it either. So, I said, "Homesey, are you going to jump?" He says, "no." I said, "well, then get out of the way because I am." As I got over there, the officer said, "now wait a minute, how did we tell you to jump off here?" I said, "you told me to keep my hands at my side and go down like a projectile." He said, "well, when you went off the last time, it looked like you were trying to grab something on the way down." [Laughter] Off I went again and boy I had a cheer section like you won't believe. They finally fished me out and the officer said to me...he says, "you know kid you can't swim worth a damn, but you got nerve." The thing is if you didn't do it and you went back to the barracks the guys would never let you forget it, so you almost had to do it.... But in any event, yes, one time was you ever scared? Yeah, you were scared and everybody got pretty close to religion when you saw that they were shooting back at us, you know what I mean? It is kind of scary. I know like where we were at down below, you never knew what was going on up topside. One fella had the phones. The day that we heard the forty millimeters going off, we thought that we were being attacked by airplanes. The fort-millimeter gun was World War II vintage and at that time they had jets. The forty millimeter was no comparison to fight a jet attack. We were down below in our area, locked in and like that, the whole ship was locked in, all the doors were all shut. We

thought we were under air attack and everybody's saying to the guy on the phone, "what are they doing up there? What are they doing up there?" Well, he said "they're firing at a train." We were happy about that. We didn't want any air attack. We said, my God. Even though we had a lot of guns, we had about ten quad forties, there were four barrels to a gun mount. There wouldn't be any comparison for a jet attack or anything like that.

Q: Did you ever have any close encounters with the Russian Navy at all?

EC: Yes, we were in, not the Navy, but the Merchant Navy, the Russian Merchant Navy. We were anchored in Gibraltar, and somebody says hey—you didn't see any Russian ships at that time. That wasn't really at the height of the Russian Navy in the Cold War. The Russians were building up their Navy at that time. So, what happened, you never see a Russian man of war, but as we were anchored in the port of Gibraltar, in comes this Russian merchant ship. Of course, the word went all over the ship, it was a Sunday afternoon, "Hey, there's a Russian ship going to cross our bow." We all went up and there's the hammer and sickle on the bow. Well, the wise guys in the gun mounts, they were lowering their mounts training them right on the Russian ship. He probably said these Americans are really something else. Every guy in the gun mount is training his guns right on the ship. That's the only Russian Navy appearance I saw in the whole Mediterranean, of course maybe they had submarines in there following us, who knew, you know what I mean? But that's the only Russian ship, it was a merchant ship.

Q: No one off the coast of Korea or anything?

EC: No, they stood right up there. We got awful close to them in a way, you're almost daring them. When you're almost up to Vladivostok, which is one of their big ports up in the northern part of that area, you're getting pretty close to them. They were very careful when they went up that way, so they knew where they were at. No accidental deals where you might shell a Russian property or anything like that. It was very, very cold over there. We were over there in the wintertime, and you'd get a lot of snowstorms. It was very, very cold and the water very, very rough.

Q: What about your personal equipment? Did you have?

EC: All full weather gear. Now one time we took aboard a North Korean prisoner of war. He was wounded and we had great medical facilities aboard the battleship. They brought him aboard the ship and they tried to save his life, but they couldn't save his life. What they did, they decided to bury him at sea with honors. That right there is an event that you don't forget either when you bury somebody at sea. They gave him all the honors, pallbearers, firing squad, and everything, rendered him to full military honors as a fellow serviceman. We had the president of South Korea come aboard the ship. We were anchored off Pusan, Korea, and Sigmund Rhee and his wife came aboard because we were carrying the admiral of the Seventh Fleet, and they came aboard and exchanged

medals. It was a funny day because...we were anchored there for a couple of days waiting for President Reed to come aboard. We all had to dress up like we were going home on leave in dress uniform. Peak code, all our main blue uniform. We had to line the rails, and they hoisted the United Nations flag alongside the American flag. He came aboard and of course; him and the admiral were going to exchange medals and have dinner. They said for the benefit of the crew, the Korean Symphony Orchestra is going to come aboard. They were bringing them—We were anchored out in the harbor—so they were bringing them aboard by launches, motor launches and like that. We were all curious because they had a lot of girls in the orchestra, like they're watching them come aboard. All of a sudden, this guy comes aboard, he's about six foot three, he's a Korean fellow carrying a clarinet. We're saying, hey, we're here defending your country and you've got a clarinet. [Laughter] That went over big, this guy comes aboard with a clarinet. Now, there was a lot of fun times in the service, though. And like I say, you met a lot of nice people that you still keep in contact with today, fifty years later.

Q: So, you still have contact with quite a few?

EC: Yeah, I have contacts. One strange thing happened to me. I worked at City Hall right up the street up here. I worked in the assessment office, and this fellow comes in one day, real distinguished looking gentleman. He says he wanted to find a Hand Melon Farm over in Schuylerville. I says, "oh, that's no problem. You stay right on this road; you're going to get there." I had a picture of the USS Saratoga on the wall. He says, "were you on that ship?" I says, "no." I says, "I'm a battleship sailor." I says, I was on the—"which one were you on?" He says. I says, "on the Wisconsin." I looked at him and like that, he says, "I was a commanding officer." He was my skipper, walked right in off the street. Would you believe it? I said, "what are you doing up here?" He said, "my son is stationed out to West Milton. He's a nuclear submarine man and me and my wife come up and visit him every once in a while." So, every time he would come and visit, he'd come into City Hall. The fellow I worked with was a retired lieutenant commander submarine man from West Milton. He retired in Saratoga. We'd sit there and we'd have a grand old chat, you know. He comes up once; we used to have to work half a day Saturday. I'm out at the mailbox and there he is going in the City Hall door with a a burlap bag under his arm. We used to call him admiral. I said, "Hey admiral, where are you going?" He said, "Well, I've got something for you." I went in the office and he says, "I won't be coming back. My son is getting transferred, so this is my last visit here. I wanted you to have this picture." He gave me a framed picture with a brass plate on it of the USS Wisconsin anchored in Japan with his name signed on the back. When we went to Mississippi for the recommissioning, I thought I'd run into him, but he was in a nursing home, and I never did see the man. But what a gentleman. Wasn't that something came right in off the street. The more we talked, well, I was so excited. I like to fall through the floor. I had to take him and introduce him to Mayor Jones and all the people. He got a big kick out of it. We talk about the Navy, ahh the Navy's falling apart.

It isn't like when we were in the Navy. See, what we used to say, like, years ago you had wooden ships and iron men, now you've got iron ships and wooden men. [Laughter] Comparing like that, you know. We really enjoyed his company and I think he enjoyed ours. That was really ironic that this person walks in off the street and he winds up to be my commanding officer.

Q: Did you join any veteran's organizations?

EC: I'm vice commander of the Korean War Veterans. We have our own group. I belong to the Legion and the Italian American War Veterans. I'm involved in a lot of veteran's things. We do this Honor of Deceased Veteran of the Month, and it's very popular for the families. It's like a sort of a closure. We do that down the county, the third Tuesday of every month. To date, we've done about over hundred and fifth-teen veterans. A lot of preparation to it.

Q: Could you hold this like this, and Wayne will focus on it. Tell us where and when that was taken.

EC: [holds up black and white photograph of younger self in Naval uniform] This was taken when I first got down to Norfolk, Virginia. I was a seaman apprentice, as you can see, the two stripes on the left arm. That was one of the first pictures I took in uniform to send home to my mother and my father, my brothers and sisters. I can still remember the arcade where everybody used to go and get their pictures taken. Of course, the first thing you did when you were out of boot camp and aboard a ship, you got your picture taken. That's the number one picture taken that I had in the Navy and it's two stripes, Seaman Apprentice.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, thank you very much for your interview.

EC: Okay, thank you very much.