Albie S. Ferrucci
Veteran

Robert von Hasseln
Interviewer

New York State Military Museum
Latham, NY
March 7, 2001

RVH: Interview with Mr. Albie S. Ferrucci on 7 March, 2001 at the Latham headquarters. The interviewer is Lieutenant Colonel Robert von Hasseln and the videographer is Mr. Wayne Clarke. Mr. Ferrucci tell me about where and when you were born.
AF: I was born in Hudson, New York. My folks left there when I was maybe two weeks old and moved to Schenectady, New York. That's where I've been all my life, except for my time in the service. I was born on August 20, 1924. Do you want to know about my education?

RVH: Yes. Where you grew up In Schenectady. What was life like?
AF: Well, Schenectady in those days, of course was in the heart of The Depression, and life wasn't that easy or that great with food lines, people unemployed. This was prior to World War II, of course. But I was only a youngster then, four, five, six years old. I remember things. I got to be about six years old and I guess from there on in, you sort of remember more and more. I went to school in Schenectady from kindergarten right on through. I graduated from Nott Terrace High School, which is now known as Schenectady High School.

RVH: What year was that?
AF: I graduated in January 1943.

RVH: And what did your family do? Your father, your mother?
AF: My father worked at the American Locomotive Company, and my mother was a housekeeper. I had older brothers. I was the youngest of four boys. I had three older brothers. My brother Nick was in the Army for a short while before World War II. My brother Joe, the second boy, was in the United States Navy during World War II. He also

worked at the American Locomotive Company prior to going in [the service]. They were big on diesel engines. Well steam at that time, diesel came later. Then went into building Army tanks. He was doing that for a while during World War II. Then he went into the United States Navy. My brother Frank, who was the third boy, was in the United States Coast Guards. And then I came along. When I graduated high school, January 1943, I joined the United States Navy.

RVH: Let's back up for a second. Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?
AF: If I remember correctly. I know I was in high school at the time. I know that. But I can't remember what happened that day. But I do recall in those days, you hung around by the grocery store on the corner. I recall that particular day. We were congregating and talking about this. Of course, in those days, everybody felt so angry and disturbed to think that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor the way they did. Everyone was just in turmoil. I remember one older fellow said, gee, imagine, you youngsters don't even know what life is all about, and you probably won't even see life that much longer. He scared the dickens out of us. [laughs] That's what I remember about that particular day.

RVH: How did life change in Schenectady after the war started?
AF: Well, let's see. The war started in December of 1941. [counts time] December 1941, 1942, I went and in March of 1943. So I would have been around about a year, two or three months. I was in high school. Suddenly work started to pick up. Making things for the war. Tanks at the American Locomotive Company. I don't know exactly what GE was doing in regard to the war, but maybe they were involved in radar, I don't know. But I know the momentum was picking up. Jobs, of course, the factories were loaded with workers now, and the town started to get very, very busy. It was a small city, Schenectady. They made these tanks at the American Locomotive Company, drove them up Knott street and took them up to a testing field up on Hillside Avenue. They used to put special rubber cleats on, so the tracks wouldn't dig up the macadam of the roadways. But then you always knew when a tank went up because even with the rubber cleats on them, during the summertime it made the indentation into the macadam. If you were riding your bicycle, you were careful not to hit those ruts too heavy or at too fast a speed.

RVH: What about while you were a high school student? Did the war make any difference?
AF: Yes, yes, in this regard, I'll tell you. You mentioned that. I know we had one fellow in our senior class who joined the marines. Mr. Underhill, our economics teacher, thought it would be a good idea for him to come to class with his dress uniform. In those days, if

you saw anybody in a Marine uniform, my God, it was the splashiest uniform going. Beautiful. He brought him in to see us, he talked to the class and said how great it was to be able to join and fight for your country. A really nice talk he gave. And don't forget, he was our age, but he gave up school sooner. He quit school to join the Marines. Coach Clark was our football coach. I didn't play football; I was too skinny. I must have weighed about one hundred twenty eight pounds in those days. I can add another hundred now. [laughs] But anyway, Coach Clark, what he did with us. There was sort of a steep hill up at the field and he had us all doing commando things going up there. Training us in case we had to go into the Army because of the war. Down in the gym itself, he had us climbing ropes up as fast as you could. And of course, in those days, a lot of us weren't that healthy. I told you, skinny kids, you didn't get the meals. Meat was maybe at Christmas time. You were lucky if you got dinner with chicken or something like that. It was tough; it was The Depression time. We all had to work. I even worked after school during those days. I worked in the cleaners. I learned to press clothes. Nothing to be ashamed of. I made maybe six, seven dollars, five dollars a week or something.

RVH: Let me ask you along those lines. While you were in high school, before the war started, what did you think you were going to be when you grew up?
AF: I had an older brother, Nick, the one that was in the Army for a while. He always said to me, think about being a lawyer. That was all he said to me. And of course, [you] just [said] yes, to your elders in those days. But in the back of my mind, of course, how in the world am I going to afford to go to law school? How in the world am I going to afford to go to college? Nobody had any money. The Depression. Even though the work was picking up with the war, still the money wouldn't be there. They had mortgages to pay off, things like that, house upkeep, so it wasn't that plentiful yet.

RVH: So you wanted to be a lawyer, but you really didn't think you___
AF: I didn't think I'd be able to afford to go. Who would pay for it? My family didn't have that kind of money.

RVH: Now, of course, when the war started, you probably figured, I'm going into the service sooner or later.
AF: Exactly.

RVH: How did you come to be in the Navy?
AF: Well, during our senior year, we were just turning eighteen and it was time for you to sign up for the draft. We all had to go down and sign up. I often thought of the Navy more than the Army or the Marine. So I went down, volunteered and joined the Navy.

That was right after I graduated, January of 1943. Now I can't remember if I went down and joined before I graduated or immediately after. It could have been even before I graduated. They told you to report at such and such a time. I can't remember exactly.

RVH: High school graduation was in January?
AF: January 1943.

RVH: Was that because the war was going on?
AF: I don't know. In those days they had two graduating classes, one in January and one in June. I was in January 1943.

RVH: Anything else you can remember about being a high school student or being in Schenectady? Scrap drives, civil defense. Any other noticeable changes, things that stuck out in your mind, that changed because of the war?
AF: No, just that people were very concerned. We were so concerned about what was happening over in Germany. What you saw on the *Pathe News* and heard on the radio, what Hitler was doing over there. And then when this happened in Pearl Harbor with the Japanese, we were very concerned there too. We were wondering, are these forces going to come and squash us. Everybody had a lot of confidence in President Roosevelt. They had an awful lot of confidence in him. In fact, a lot of confidence when you were overseas too. Then when he died, it was a very, very sad time. You felt like you lost not only a commander in chief, you almost felt like you lost your country. You were so concerned in that regard. People thought so much of him in those days. He was a four term president, I believe.

RVH: Yes. Tell us about your initial experiences in the Navy.
AF: For instance?

RVH: When you got in. Fast forward from there.
AF: Well, all right. I joined the Navy, I believe it was March 18, 1943. We were over in Albany and they swore us in at the post office in a little room. There might have been maybe a half a dozen or a dozen guys going into the Navy at that time. After they swore us in, they sent us over to the armory and I believe we got in line, went through some sort of a physical. From there they sent us to this armory on South Pearl Street, I believe it was. We waited there. By bus, they were going to take us to Sampson Naval Training boot camp and that was it. From there on in, you were up at boot camp. You were there for eight weeks. We were a very good company too. We won the Rooster and got one day in Geneva [NY]. I remember that.

RVH: What's the Rooster?
AF: A Rooster was a special pennant you won for doing good marching and obedience and what have you. We happened to qualify for it and we got a day off in Geneva, New York.

RVH: What did you do in Geneva?
AF: First of all, we went to a theater, saw a movie and then just horsed around town a little bit. Nothing really much to do. Young kids with no money or anything really. I think we were getting about seventy nine [dollars] a month. I think it was something like that. I don't even know if it was that much. I don't think so.

RVH: I don't think so. It was more like fifty two [dollars].
AF: Yeah, you're right. Because I think I got more afterwards. I got third class quartermaster [pay]. That's when I probably got seventy nine dollars.

RVH: So what was your daily life like at Sampson? What did you do?
AF: Of course you had a lot of guys who fooled around quite a bit. Especially boys from Brooklyn and New York City areas. I wouldn't call them clowns, but they were more outgoing than the boys from the hicks up around this area. [laughs] In fact they played games. In those days smoking, I guess, was a big thing. Everybody smoked cigarettes and thank God it was only cigarettes and not like they do today, as we all know. Which is too bad. They came around while you were sleeping and blew smoke in your face and you inhaled the smoke. Then suddenly woke up as if you were on fire or something. Those were the guys from Brooklyn. That was how they became acquainted with you. Marching, taking care of your clothes and your barracks and your bed. Inspections came through. Being a good boy, following orders, [keeping] hygiene, cleanliness was very important. They taught you all these things. We had a very nice chief, I think his name was Chief Marvin. A real, real nice fellow. He really taught us from the beginning how to do things. Especially when they brought you into the area where they taught you how to put on a gas mask and things like. Got you relaxed so you didn't get in there and panic. Because, some people, and I was one of them, couldn't stand anything on your face. To put a mask on for me was horrible. I was scared to death while I was just putting it on, let alone getting into the chamber afterwards. But he was very nice about getting you away from that frighteness. Then, of course, there came a time when you graduated from boot camp. Just when you were about to graduate from boot camp, you were assigned to something. I remember a bunch of us were assigned to this destroyer which was being built up in Bath, Maine, which was the USS Sigourney. Its number was DD643. We were

replacing a destroyer that was sunk, that was in this squadron we were to join. Squadron 22. From boot camp, from Sampson Naval Base, they sent us to Boston. We were in the Fargo building in Boston waiting for the ship to be finished up in Bath, Maine. Then there came a time when we had to go up and pick up the ship. In the meantime, I was going to quartermaster school while in Boston waiting for the ship. We went up to Bath, Maine and picked up the ship. Do you want me to go on from there? What happened?

RVH: Sure. Just a stop for a moment. Tell us a bit about the quartermaster. What was involved in being a quartermaster?
AF: They taught you. The number one, taking care of charts especially when you were going into foreign waters. There were a lot of changes when new [information came in]…you had to correct the charts. Put in any new islands they discovered. Not discovered, but they didn't know of before. Because they probably didn't navigate a lot of these inward islands prior to the war. They really had no reason to. You had to keep the charts up to date. We got all this information from Washington. I don't know how we got the information, but we got it. The quartermaster had to get those charts up to date. Also, being a helmsman, how to steer a ship. They got you on some of these little, not large ships, but a smaller boat. They took you out into the bay there in Boston, like a fishing schooner or something like that. They taught you a little about how to handle the boat, about the waves, the caps of the waves. You can tell by the caps of the waves what the speed of the wind was and things like that. While you were out there, they taught you about the clouds, the different cloud formations, what they are. What clouds [mean]. Is it going to be a nice day, what clouds [mean] a bad day, what clouds may mean a storm coming. Keeping the log which was very important. You had to keep a log on everything that ever happened. If the captain sneezed in his cabin up there on the bridge, you had to put that down. The captain sneezed at 0200 [laughs]. You helped a little with the navigation, with the officer on duty. You had to know some signaling too. Semaphore with the light and all that. Hoisting the flags, what they all meant when you took them out of the bag and hoisted them up. Let's see then. There were other things that we did, like synchronizing when you went into a minefield area or something. We had certain cables. We had to go into the other room on the bridge, the inner room where the sonar system was, and we had to push these buttons and the cables around the ship or something down below, however it was made. I don't know the engineering mechanics of it, but you synchronized it some way so it wouldn't attract any mines if you were in the minefield. When we were in a certain area, we knew exactly where to set those up. What other things that we have to do. [ponders] They taught you a little bit of the other things too, like a little bit on the sonar. The sonar was up in the back room on the bridge. In case something happened there we could maybe help take over. The radio men were down just

one short, not a full deck, below because the destroyer wasn't that big. But there you learned a little of that too, in case something happened there and you had to fill in a little bit that you could. You were a jack of all trades. And then you had to know how to wake up an officer and the captain without touching him. [laughs] Especially at four o' clock in the morning.

RVH: How did you do that?
AF: Difficult. Difficult. We had one fellow, lieutenant Alpert. He was a pain. Got that thing with that. [points at camera] I made a mistake and touched him one time. He wouldn't get up, he wouldn't wake up. It was his time to be on watch and I just happened to touch him. Oh, my God. I was ready for a court martial. Not really, but he wasn't very polite about it. The captain was the same way. He didn't want to be touched. You just had to be there [and keep saying], captain, captain, captain. [Or say] Time to come on watch or bogeys in the area. He didn't have to be on watch, but he wanted to know when certain things were happening, especially if there were enemies in the area. Bogeys as we called the airplanes. He came out. He wanted to be there during the attack. Oh, and another thing we did. We were responsible for putting on the alarm system for general quarters. And there was a faster alarm, which meant immediate battle stations because we were under attack or something like that. All those little things we had to do up there.

RVH: So you joined the ship in Boston?
AF: We were waiting in Boston in the Fargo building and we went up to Bath, Maine to pick her up. Then we went through Casco Bay up there. We brought her back to Boston. They had a bunch of things to do yet. All I remember is a lot of welding going on and this and that and synchronizing guns and what have you. I don't know if all the guns were in place yet and whatever other things had to be done. Then we went for a shakedown cruise through Casco Bay, Maine, through Bermuda, through Cape Hatteras, which was a very treacherous straits, as you well know. I guess they were teaching you to get your sea legs when they brought you up through there. Of course in Bermuda, we never got ashore. We were just always maneuvering and learning. [They were] teaching you how to….an airplane was up there, pulling a sleeve, how to get your five inch guns trained on that sleeve and try and hit it with the five inchers. Then she came in closer and you had the forty millimeters and then came in closer and we had the twenty millimeters. Every now and then the pilot of that plane said, you're getting too close to me, you wise guys down there. [laughs] They used to also practice with remote control planes that we fired at. From there we went to Bermuda, back to Norfolk [VA]. All the time that you stopped, this wasn't for liberty duty or anything like that. You stopped because you needed fuel, food, ammunition. This was all you did. It was wartime. You were not seeing the world

by any means of the imagination. From Norfolk, I forgot the ship, another ship we traveled with. I can't remember if it was a cruiser or what. We went through the Panama Canal, which was a great experience. Well, here you were, you were eighteen years old, probably never been out of the city of Schenectady. And here you were going through the Panama Canal. Something you saw in the *Pathe News* or read about in school, studied it in school in your history classes. That was a remarkable thing. How it worked and how he went through the locks and all that. Very nice to see. I remember there was an aircraft carrier just ahead of us in the lock. That was a sight to see too. Those things, they tell me, were built just so that they barely fit in the locks to get them through. They didn't have many inches to spare on each side. Of course, the destroyer, we had a lot of room.

From there, when we got through the Panama Canal, we stopped in Panama City. I can't remember why, but we stopped there. We were, I think, allowed to go into the city for just a few hours. From there we went up to San Diego and refueled again. Food, fuel, ammunition. All the while that you were traveling, you were not just traveling, you were practicing gunnery, constant practice. Survivorship, like putting down your rafts and lifeboats. We only had two lifeboats, but you practiced that too. And you practice being hit [which caused] fires. You practiced what they were going to do to put out these fires to try and save the ship, things like that. You were constantly doing that. You thought you came off duty at midnight, you were safe and sound and would get four hours of sleep. Forget it, they had something ready for you. It was either a drill or enemy coming or what have you. From San Diego, we fueled up and took off. I think we spent one night in San Diego; I think they let us go ashore. If I remember correctly. Maybe yes, maybe no. But anyway, from there went out to Pearl Harbor. That was our next stop. From there again, I recall pulling in there, you could still see all the ships, the battleship row. They were still sunk in the bay. They hadn't taken them all out yet. That didn't set right as you saw that. Made you forget like, you know, I'm afraid. Yes, yes. I'm afraid to be out here because you didn't know what to expect. But when you saw that, maybe it encouraged you. I don't know, I hate to use the word encourage, but you felt like you wanted to get even or something. I don't know how to put that. But anyway, everybody was just sort of, ah. Young kids, eighteen years old. You were looking like this, [gestures astonishment] you couldn't believe it.

From Pearl Harbor, we had to join our squadron. And I'm trying to remember if we went to…I think it might have been Enewetak [Atoll] or something like that. I can't remember exactly. But one amazing thing happened on our way to whatever island it was. We were going to the bay. We were going to meet our squadron after we left Pearl Harbor. We were going along. Well, you've got to know, in those days, the Japanese had a cute way

of coming out of the sun so you couldn't see them. The radar in those days was brand new. In fact, it wasn't that good yet. Anyway, we heard this plane up there and all of a sudden this guy was coming down, dive bombing. This is the first time we saw [one]. Didn't know it was an enemy plane yet. I happened to be on the helm that day. Suddenly the captain said, right full rudder. I made a right full rudder. He flanked to headspeed and that guy let go of that bomb. We never even fired a shot. They tried to hit you in the smokestack. Away you go. [meaning ship destroyed] As we made that turn, that damn bomb hit right in our wake. We never even got to fire a shot; he was gone. I heard the gunnery officer say, from here on in, we're going to fire at anything that makes a sound. [laughs] We almost lost our ship from the first bomb drop without firing a shot.

From there we joined our squadron. I recall now we went to Guadalcanal and we had to pick up troop ships. We were going to Bougainville, which was the last invasion of the Solomon Islands. That would tie up everything in the Solomon Islands. We went over for the invasion of Bougainville. In fact, at that time, we weren't sure. We thought that they were already using suicide planes. We weren't sure. We heard about them. And some of these Jap planes, the way they were coming down at us, we thought were suicides. But then we found out that they were taken off. Some crashed into the sea. Whether it was that they were suicide planes, kamikazes, or what. But that was the first experience I think that we really had. They claimed that they really started to use them full blast, I think in the Philippines when they saw that they were really losing. Once we took the Philippines over. I forget which bay it was. There was quite a bit of that with the kamikazes.

After Bougainville, I think I gave you a history of our ship. I think you've got it all there. Of course, I can just sum up by saying we finished off the Solomon Islands. We went all through the Marshall and Gilberts. We went through Saipan,Tinian. We went through all of the Philippines, Leyte, The Battle of Surigayo Strait, which was the battle that really, really won that war when we sunk the Japanese fleet. And we were in the thick of that. In fact, after we landed the troops on Leyte, Admiral Nimitz said, lick it. Halsey said, lick it. You fellas put those soldiers on Leyte. Now you're going to have to stay here and protect them because we understand something big's happening. So my squadron, we joined in with Admiral Kinkaid. Admiral Kinkaid had the old ships there, the 7th Fleet. The 7th Fleet, with all the old battleships, old cruisers, you name it, he had them all. Halsey and Nimitz were someplace else, thinking there were going to be some other battles, wherever it was. The one thing that Admiral Kincaid did that they say is an admiral's dream was when the Japs were coming up the straits, Admiral Kincaid crossed the T. [gestures making a T] While we were shooting broadside, they could only shoot with

their forward guns. There was one ship, one destroyer…I didn't know this until just recently. A very good friend of mine was on it, the USS Grant. The USS Grant was going in for a torpedo run. Suddenly it got hit. I don't know, many times. So many times from our ship. Not my ship, but from our Navy and the Japs. They got hit fourteen times, I think they were hit seven times by US shells and seven times by Japanese shells. Mostly everybody aboard was killed except maybe twenty five, thirty men. Could have been more, I don't know. But those were the things of war. But don't forget, this was night fighting at Surigao Strait. It was all night fighting, night battle. Then all through the Philippines, Leyte, Mindanao, Subic Bay, Luzon, all those different invasions we were involved in. The Marshall and Gilbert [Islands], I told you about that without mentioning Zamboanga.

One very outstanding thing that comes to my mind right now. I forget where we were bringing this troop ship. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, it was hit. A torpedo bomber hit it. The destroyer I was on and another destroyer were asked to stay and try and pick up survivors. There were hundreds of soldiers, Marines in the water. Yelling, you know. We picked up thirty two of them. While we were doing this, the ship was on fire. It was such an illumination that these dive bombers kept on coming down trying to get the two destroyers that were picking up these boys. While they were doing that, we knocked down two. We knocked down two Japanese planes and maybe even more, but two that we could see. We got out of that, thank God. Every time we have a reunion, one fellow from the McCain [?], that's the ship that was sunk, comes to every reunion. He was an Army fellow. He comes to every reunion. He just can't live that down. How he was saved by the ship and all that. Nice guy. Then we picked up six American flyers out of the water. We picked up one Japanese flyer. One American flyer. His name was Lieutenant [Robert M.] Hanson. He was on board with us for a while until we got him back to his place. And every time he saw us out there, he was, of course, a Marine Corsair [pilot]. He came down and banked his wings at us and told us everything's okay up above. He watched out for us. And one day, the poor guy was on the list, missing in action, I guess he was killed. Nice guy. He was an ace hero. He received the highest honors anybody could ever receive. I think I gave you some newspaper articles on him.

One thing that I thought was a little humorous here. [looks through some papers] I was looking at it this morning where they said that the total miles we steamed since commissioning was one hundred fifty two thousand, six hundred twenty six miles. [laughs] Gallons of fuel, seven thousand.. I'm sorry, seven million, one hundred forty thousand, three hundred fifty seven. Total number of five inch .38 caliber rounds fired, twelve thousand one hundred ninety five. Total number of .40 millimeters, nineteen

thousand, three hundred seventy. Total number of .20 millimeters, forty three thousand, five hundred eighty three.. The cost to feed the crew, one hundred fifty five thousand [dollars]. [laughs] And the approximate total payroll of the ship was five hundred twenty five thousand [dollars].

RVH: That was a nice chunk of change back then. Why don't we take a break for a moment? Okay, take two. Interview of Mr. Albie S. Ferrucci on 7th of March, 2001. Let's see, where we left off was, I think we were up to the Philippines. So how did the war end up for you? From there, the ship went on to Okinawa?
AF: [ponders] We Finished up. I believe…there were some other places we went through after the Philippines, but it might have been out that way. But we didn't get involved in Okinawa itself. We got to a point where our ship needed an overhaul so badly. Our guns were practically worn out. Our squadron had already gone back for an overhaul while we were still there joining some other fleet we were with at the time. I don't know if it was the 3rd Fleet. Most of them went back to be overhauled, and went back to the States. We didn't go for some unknown reason. I don't know. But you see, our first captain, Captain Dyer [?] was a real Navy man, you know, Annapolis. He then became full captain. He was commander. While he was our captain, he got a Bronze Star. The second time he got the Gold Star. And then Fletcher Hale took over. I think I mentioned Fletcher Hale to you earlier. What a remarkable, nice person. He also wound up with a Bronze Star and also with the Gold Star for the things that our ship did. We were commended by some of the nicest people, Army personnel, [like] Generals Halsey and Nimitz. But I don't think they ever issued anything to the men of the ship. For a captain, they gave them the Bronze Star and then the Gold Star. I don't know if they should have had some kind of a unit citation for the ship, too, which I think ought to be looked into sometime. I might even do it myself voluntarily and see whether or not a captain gets something like that. How about the crew? Sure, they were highly commendable to the crew. We have quite a few guys still living. We have reunions and we have lists of those who are still alive. I don't know how many are gone now.

One other thing that we were involved in. You would call it a typhoon. Three destroyers went down. It was such a bad storm. I was on that helm. When that ship turned from one side to the other, you never thought it was going to come back again. When it would bounce off of these high waves, I'm talking thirty five, forty, fifty feet, and that thing slaps down. The bow slapped in and the two screws back there came up out of the water. That ship vibrated until the screws hit back into the water. But they couldn't figure out why those three ships went down with three hundred thirty, three hundred fifty men on each ship. The only thing they figured was the ballast. You know you take on water to

ballast the ship. A captain doesn't like to do that. For some reason, they don't like to take on water into their fuel tanks. They try to avoid it at all costs. Maybe they avoided it too much at a high cost that time, I don't know. Because they can't figure out why it went down except for that particular reason.

RVH: What were you thinking? I mean, a young man from Schenectady on the pitching bridge of a ship in a typhoon.
AF: When you say, what were you thinking of not only in the storm, but what were you thinking of during the battles? I often say, picture yourself as being scared to death of a nightmare sometime and multiply that by one thousand. That was how scared you were. And if anybody tells you differently, it's hard to believe. I remember we had a young ensign come aboard. We were out there about a year already, and we were standing looking out on the bridge, and he said to myself and one of the signal men, let me ask you a question. You guys have been out here. When do you stop being scared? We all looked at one another. We said, there's no such thing as stop being scared. You're always scared.

RVH: So how did the war end up for you?
AF: Like what?

RVH: How did you get back to the United States?
AF: Oh, with the ship. Like I said, we stopped in Pearl Harbor on our way back. Loaded up again, food, fuel, you name it, and pulled into Terminal Island, San Pedro, California for overhaul. The war wasn't over yet. We had an idea. We heard, not rumors, but had an idea the way talk was going that something big was happening. That atomic bomb was going to be dropped, but nobody knew it. But we just had that idea, something big. How to stop that war from getting too many…because we were back to get guns put on or barrels, whatever they were going to do to it, overhaul our engines. And we were going to get right out there again. Then suddenly came a time when they said, we don't know if we're going to have to go out again. [we asked] Why? [they said] Don't know right now, but we have orders. We may be going to New York City. Who were we to argue about that? Why go out there again if you don't have to. Shortly after that. I don't know if it was in June, July, maybe August, they might have dropped the atomic bomb.

RVH: Of course.
AF: Just before that we pulled into New York City. I think I gave you some literature on that. [looks through his papers] In fact, if I think it was June. I wasn't on the ship when she went back, when she pulled into New York. That was October 1945 when she pulled into New York. That was after. The war was over. But I didn't go back. First, I wound up

in San Diego Naval Hospital. I lost my hearing with all the gun firing and everything else. I was at forty millimeter [gun] for a little while. I was knocked off of that thing once. We weren't hit or anything. I don't know if it was a combination of…we had a five inch gun that was right [gestures about two feet from his head] And every time it came over it had a stopper and it stopped just about [gestures an arm length in front of him] I'm going to exaggerate a little bit. Just about like that. And here you were on this forty millimeter. Now something happened. I think we were firing at a kamikaze at the time and so was he [the man on the five inch gun]. There was some kind of concussion. I was thrown off of the forty forty millimeter. I was sort of dazed in that semi [conscious state]. But I crawled right back up into the seat. I was a pointer on a forty millimeter [gun]. The fellow on the other side, said to me what happened, hollering to me, of course. They gave you cotton to put in your ears. That helped a hell of a lot. [shrugs] You can see with my hearing aid that I do have a problem. With that I guess I had hearing difficulty and some kind of shock that I went into. It was coming all the while I was out there. But that might have been something to it. I don't know exactly. I'm not going to get into the history of the medical aspect. I'm not here for that. But I did wind up with very severe hearing loss.

I've got to be honest with you, I do have a lot of, if you want to call them nightmares. In fact, at times I still do. When I first got home from the Navy, my brother Frank and I slept in the same bed. He was in the Coast Guard. And he was out too. He caught me under the bed curled up rather than being in the bed. He picked me up and said, what's wrong with you? I said, oh, nothing, nothing, Frank. [He said] you're hiding from something. You're hiding. [I said] No, no, no, no. [He said] I'm going to tell your mother. We got to get you to a doctor. [I said] No, no, I'd rather not. I'd rather not. Well, you know how you think, I'm all right, I'm going to be all right.

When I was on that ship. I dreaded thinking of drowning. So I always wanted to sleep topside. I slept right under these torpedo tubes. Your helmet for your pillow. And your life preserver. One thing about those, they called them queen something, life preservers. They had such an oily smell to them. I don't know why. They had such a very oily smell, as if they were soaked in oil. Maybe it was from the fumes from the smokestacks. But they had an awful smell. I used to always sleep up there underneath the torpedo tubes. In fact, I took a line of some sort and wrapped it around my waist and tied it on the base of the torpedo tube. So if that ship swayed a little to the right or left, I didn't roll off. Nothing to hold you on.

RVH: You think you were thinking of that when you got home and you were sleeping under the bed?

AF: All combined, you know, maybe there's a neurosis with it. I don't know. Psychosis, I don't know. My wife tells me I still scream at times. She doesn't know why. I don't know why either, but it's one of those things.

RVH: Tell us what happened after you got out of the Navy. You came back to Schenectady?
AF: After I got out, I was discharged from the Philadelphia Naval Hospital and came back to Schenectady. Of course, those days, they gave you twenty dollars a week for fifty two weeks. They called it the 52-20 Club. That was what we were living on until we saw what we were going to do. Were we going to look for work, were we going to go to school. It was difficult to determine what you were going to do. Because what were you really qualified to do? Fresh out of high school, eighteen years old at the time, now you might be twenty, twenty one years old. You were not really qualified for anything. There was a question of whether or not you were going to stay in the service, too. I tried to stay in the service, but I couldn't. The disability I had, I couldn't hear anymore. I was having all these problems. They wouldn't keep me in if I wanted to stay. I even inquired about that. When I heard there was a GI Bill, I went to college on the GI Bill. I could afford to go to college, on a shoestring, of course. But at least your tuition was paid, your books were paid. I went all the way through. I was fortunate in a way. I got a little bit more from the GI Bill. I went under what they called Public Law 16, I believe it is, where if you had a disability, you got a little more, not too much, but a little bit more. It made it a little better for me. While I was in law school, I got a job as an assistant librarian in the law school. They paid me a little bit for that which helped my living expenses. I got along. Then I graduated from law school, took the bar, passed the bar and became a lawyer.

RVH: Been a lawyer ever since?
AF: Yeah, I met my wife in law school and she's a lawyer.

RVH: She was in the service too?
AF: She was in the Coast Guards. Yep.

RVH: What about children and grandchildren?
AF: Yeah. I have two children. My daughter Sheila is a lawyer in Boston, New York State and Washington, D.C. She has a license in all three states. My son Brian, also a lawyer, practices in Schenectady here with us in our office. He's a former assistant district attorney, and has four children, ages seven, six and three. The twins are three.

RVH: So I guess the GI Bill gave you a chance to do what you didn't think you were going to be able to do.
AF: Exactly. It was very nice of the government to do that. Yes, sir. I think that helped out quite a few veterans.

RVH: It made a difference not only in your life, but in the life of your children and grandchildren.
AF: Exactly. Yeah.

RVH: Let me go back and I'd like to ask some questions about a few particular things that we touched on, and then I'll give you a chance if there's anything else you wanted to say or sum up. You had a unique position to see things because you were on the bridge so often. When was the first time you went into combat?
AF: The first time. November 1st when we invaded Bougainville.

RVH: That was shore bombardment duty?
AF: First of all, we brought in the troops. You have to remember one thing about destroyer duty. Destroyers were what they called the infantry of the Navy. The fleet couldn't move without them. I'm talking about aircraft carriers, battleships, cruisers, all of them. Because we had to screen, make sure there were no submarines around. We had to screen if there were any enemy planes around. We were with aircraft carriers, and operated with them for six months. We had to put a smoke screen around them so that they were not sunk. You were out there with sonar and looked for submarines. We had depth charges, which bigger ships didn't have. Where we could chase a sub, the bigger ships couldn't.

RVH: The first time you were actually under fire yourself was an aerial attack?
AF: Aerial and some mortar fire back from the shoreline in Bougainville. Again, a destroyer could get up a lot closer than your bigger ships. I'm trying to recall where it was. In history, it'll show that we did…there was an offense going on, I think, in Leyte where they were trying to get the Army back into the water. They were trying to back them into the bay. They ordered us to go up as close as we could get and bombard a certain area on the island. And with that bombardment, we were fortunate enough to drive the Japanese back, saving our boys on Leyte. I think that was one of the things that the captain got a star for, but I'm not sure.

RVH: What was it like to be under aerial attack?

AF: Well, you know, it was not very pleasant, let's put it that way. Like I told you, we got scared about that near miss. And since then, we were sort of maybe over cautious. But I know a few times when we got some [crossed] signals, we were firing at our planes or something like that. And that happened in war. We didn't shoot any of our planes down. But when they started to come out with the kamikazis, that was when it really got bad. When the kamikazes came out, you know, they not only dive bombed down at you, but they also came down and came between the ships, ships on each side. You didn't know if they were going to go to the right to go after you or go to the left to go after the other guy. So everybody was firing like a maniac. I'm talking about bombs bursting all over the place. The sky was full of it. Then when they got down here [between the ships], there was no shooting at them because you were going to shoot your own people. That was when it was really scary, really bad. They were bad though. We tried everything, I forgot to tell you. We used to try big searchlights that we had on the destroyer. Tried putting them up, trying to blind them. Didn't work.

RVH: Did you ever feel like, how do you fight somebody who was just that committed to killing themselves?
AF: This was what you couldn't understand. We understood also that they had some kind of a one man submarine too that they were killing themselves. Came right in with it, loaded with TNT and boom. Not fair. It felt like not a fair way to fight. All's fair and love and war, I guess. [shrugs]

RVH: The drills that you did while you were traveling out to the Pacific, the constant drills. Did that make a difference when you actually got into combat?

AF: Oh, I would say so. Oh yes. Oh yeah. We had some fellows, I mean, I only knew the fellow that had the five inch gun up by the bridge. I forget his name. He was in charge of the gunnery of that five inch gun. These guys, I'll tell you, were all hard, boy. You had the fellow loading inside, the other guy pointing it, another guy with his head stuck out with the earphones on, trying to get directions. It was marvelous the way they did that. It was marvelous how they didn't brag. [They said] we shot that plane down. We all shot it down. We sunk a destroyer and we had five inch guns blasting at them. Nobody said it was my gun that shot him down. The USS Sigourney sank a destroyer. That was the way they were.

RVH: Did it feel like a lot of teamwork on board? Did you feel like you bonded with the guys on the ship?
AF: Oh yes, a lot of teamwork. Yeah.

RVH: Do you remember what engagements you were in in the Marshalls [Island]?
AF: Can I just look at this for a minute? [looks through his papers]. The Marianas was a capture of Saipan and the capture of Tinian. Bismarck, Green Island, Duke of York Island. I told you about the Treasury, Bougainville Operation. [continues looking through his papers]

RVH: Well, that's okay.
AF: I'll probably remember when I get back in the car.

RVH: That's okay.
AF: Let's jump ahead.

RVH: Anything in particular you remember about Saipan?
AF: Well, Saipan and Tinian are really close to each other. In fact, I think we took Saipan first. If I remember correctly. And I think the guns on Saipan were shooting right over onto Tinian. I remember Saipan very vividly because one of my neighbors, who was in the Army, was killed there. He lived two doors away from me. When I got back to Schenectady, before I even went upstairs to my mother, I went over to the neighbor. I said, Mrs. Korowajczyk, I am Albie Ferrucci. I want you to know that I was out there when your son Joseph [W. Korowajczyk Jr.] was killed. She was so appreciative that I went over to see her. [smiles]

RVH: Did you know at the time there were a lot of New Yorkers on Saipan? The 27th Division was there. A battalion of guys out of Schenectady, a battalion guys out of Troy.
AF: That I didn't know. But I knew Joe was there. Joe was in the Army, I think, even before the war broke out. I'm almost sure. I remember going over to see her. That was sad. My mother said to me, what are you doing visiting neighbors before me? I said, mom, I had to go over there and tell her about Joe. I was there where he was killed. [she said] Oh, that was all right. I didn't realize what you were doing.

RVH: What was his name again?
AF: Korowajczyk, Polish name. His name was Joseph. Joseph Korowajczyk.

RVH: Let's jump ahead now to the Battle of Surigayo Strait. Tell me about that. It was a night action, wasn't it?
AF: [looks through his papers] It was a night action, yeah. This was after we landed our troops on Leyte. And don't forget, this was where MacArthur came back to. Like I said,

Admiral Kinkaid was in charge of the 7th Fleet, and we were with Kinkaid at the time. We were assigned to that fleet. We operated with the 5th Fleet, the 3rd Fleet, the 7th Fleet; wherever they needed us. What was so scary about that operation was not only because it was nighttime, but Admiral Nimitz and Admiral Halsey were not there. We felt a little undressed without them around. Because we hardly ever heard anything of who this Admiral Kinkaid was. Never heard too much about him out there before then. But Halsey, everybody knew Bill Halsey and everybody knew Nimitz. They were with the 5th and 3rd Fleet somewhere else, waiting for some other battle to start. But something went wrong there. The calculations were wrong or something. Somebody had bad information, so they said. We felt sort of undressed and alone. But the scary part, when you were on a destroyer, the destroyer was screening, he was up here, the battleship and cruisers were back there. When they were firing their sixteen inch [guns], is that what they called them on those things? [puts arms out wide] Boy, when that stuff flew over you and you were over here screaming, they really whistled. They were going over your heads. Not that close. But enough so that you felt vibration, whistling and noise and you knew that a lot of ammunition was being fired. All you could see was a lot of at night bursting, red from the powder. And of course, the concussion from each blast. Then, of course, when they [the enemy] were firing, they were firing at the big ships. The Japanese were firing. Again, it was coming over us to get to them. So as a destroyer, you were sandwiched in. All you did was pray and hope for the best. Of course you think it was never going to end. You had to just talk to yourself and say, I'm sure it's going to be over soon. I'm sure it's going to be over soon. That night, I recall, all you were doing was praying for daylight. That was all you were praying for. But they claim afterwards, though, they say that the Japanese made a mistake. If they hadn't made that mistake, we would have been the ones that were sunk and not them. When this Japanese admiral turned around and left at a certain point, I forget what point it was, if he kept on coming, they claim he could have had us.

RVH: This was down in the Straits. You went up by the [unclear].1.08.56
AF: This was down in the straits where it took you up into Leyte Gulf. But we were scattered all over too. You had so much down here with the firing. You had others that were screening up in this area. [gestures in different locations] Another thing we did, I forget where it was. They had us going in some of these rivers that went behind some of these islands. The destroyer could barely [fit]. A couple of times we got stuck trying to do it. They thought we could get in there and then bombard them from the rear. We could get up some of those deeper rivers. Of course, not as small as the Mohawk River, a lot bigger than that, but they called them a river. There was so much that happened when you were in a combat area like that. If you notice in the history of this ship it says, I think,

that at only one point did we ever get a six day layoff, where we weren't involved and engaged in some sort of an operation. We were all set to go to Sydney, Australia for a ten day rest, which was well deserved. In the middle of the night I got a call, to get the maps out for such and such a place. I said, no, the maps are all up on the bridge. We're going to Sydney, Australia. They're all set. Orders had changed. I said, they are? So we got these other maps and charts out. We were getting underway early. Of course the guys were all, hey, hurrah. They got their shoes all shined and uniforms. I swear when they made that movie, *The Kane Mutiny*, I thought it was our ship. That was what we almost had. These guys were so disappointed. Lieutenant Commander Dyer was looking to be made captain. I hate to say this, but that was what it sounded like. And he was made captain. He never refused to engage in any engagement. He never refused an order, never questioned an order, never said, my crew needs arrest. They needed him, so he went. We never got to Sydney.

RVH: Looking back after all these years, what stands out in your mind the most about the time you were on board at this point?
AF: You know, when I first went on that ship, it was a brand new ship. Jesus, it felt…it had such a nice way about it. It smelled nice and smelled new and everything. The bedding was new. The shakedown cruise was nice. We all got seasick, of course, going through Cape Hatteras and that. I think that was why they did it. But then from the time you went through the Panama Canal and the time you were in the Pacific, I think the fear started when you went through the canal because you knew you were going into enemy territory. What did you think mostly of? Not that anybody's trying to be a hero, you know, I think mostly the fact…are you saying what you think of today?

RVH: Then or both.
AF: Well, like today, you say, was it worth it? The people that don't know anything about it and learn something about it, do they appreciate what these fellows did? Especially the ones that were killed and those that are living too, of course. Do people really appreciate what these boys did in order to make the world that we have today? If they do, great, I'm glad. I don't mind the suffering we did. But if they don't, then you have a different thought in mind. Something like they're doing here is going to be very helpful to teach the generation what these fellows did, the living and the dead. Let them know this country isn't here just by osmosis. It's here because people made it what it is. And you got to praise the veterans. Let's face it, you gotta praise them. My wife's uncle was killed in World War I. We have a picture of him at home. In those days [it was made] with the oval frame. The old fashioned oval frame. We have that hanging in the living room and it's been there ever since my mother in law gave it to us fifty years ago. He's in uniform.

Jim was a very young man. He was twenty two years old when he was killed in France, World War I.

RVH: We are coming down towards the end of the tape, so it's your chance. Any other thoughts, Anything else you'd like to talk about?
AF: [looks through his papers]

WC: Want to get some shots of the photos?
AF: Oh, all right. I have some photographs if you want to look at them. You can take some shots of that.

WC: Just explain what it is.
AF: Okay. [shows a photograph] That's me looking at the picture. On the right. The little skinny guy over there with three of my shipmates. This is on the bridge of the destroyer we served on. I'm a quartermaster and there's two signalmen there and another quartermaster. Where that was, I don't know, but someplace in the Pacific. [shows another photograph] Here's a photograph of our ship, the [USS] Sigourney. Got that? [shows another photograph] And here's another one of the [USS] Sigourney. [shows another photograph] Here's one of myself and four of my shipmates when we got back to the States at the Palladium in Hollywood, California, having a good time. I think that would be like June of 1945. The only thing I'd say in summation is that the [USS] Sigourney which was a destroyer and a Fletcher type. [reads from his papers] Every active theater of the Pacific War except the Aleutian and Japanese homeland. Everyone that served on that ship from its inception, which I did, was entitled to the American Campaign Award, Asiatic Pacific Area Campaign Award with seven battle stars, Philippine Liberation Ribbon with two stars, Presidential Unit Citation, American Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal. We talked about that. And also the Victory Combat Medal.

RVH: Do you think your experiences in World War II changed your life? Did it change your life being aboard that ship?
AF: Oh, yes.

RVH: Just one last thing I'd like to ask you. What happened to the ship?
AF: It was decommissioned and then… [reads from his papers] She was placed out of commission in March of 1946. And then she was placed in full commission again September 7, 1951. At that time, I think she was more or less a training ship, but she used to take tours around the world, I think. Far East tours and around the world cruise.

WC: Thirty seconds.
FA: [reads from his papers] In 1953 she began a goodwill cruise which took her to Hong Kong, Singapore and Naples. In 1960, she was placed in the reserve. In 1974, she was out of service.
RVH: Well, thank you very much.