

**Eugene Hugh Fellers
Veteran**

**Michael Aikey
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

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MA: We're interviewing Mr. Eugene H. Fellers at the Saratoga Armory. It is October 24, 2001. The interviewer is Michael Aikey. Videographer is Eric Stott. Mr. Fellers, where were you born, sir?

EF: I was born in a small town in Ohio, the name of New Philadelphia, town of about twelve thousand people. Settled by a lot of Swiss people. My people were Swiss. The Swiss cheese factory is there to this day.

MA: Really? That's neat. Did you grow up in New Philadelphia?

EF: Yeah, I spent my first eighteen years there. My family was in business there, and I graduated in 1938 from high school. After going through some very severe years of the Depression, my father lost his business and times were really tough.

MA: Sure, sure. What did you do when you graduated from high school?

EF: Well, I had no intention of going to college because first of all, I didn't have the wherewithal to do it. Only the lawyer's son or the doctor's son went to college, and ordinary people like myself didn't do that. So I majored in largely commercial things. I did take some odd things like German, which would enter into my life later. I didn't know that then. No hopes whatsoever of a job. No hopes. In 1938, I was walking down the street and I met a friend of mine. He was a quarterback on our football team. He asked me if I wanted to go to college. I said, Bill, I didn't prepare to go to college. He said, you can make those up. [I said] What's this all about? He said, our friend Dick Singerman got hurt this summer. He can't go, and you can go in his place. Well, I said, I didn't consider myself a star. I didn't know whether they'd want me. He said, talk to the guy and find out. So the deal was that they would provide simple meals for the first year, and a room. You played football for about pretty close to ten months out of the year. In the wintertime, we

even blocked on pads in the armory. We had spring football as well as fall football. That added up. Then all summer long while we were working for the college____

MA: What school was this?

EF: This was a small Methodist college called Baldwin Wallace, famous because they beat Syracuse University in 1936 with six hundred students. But they did it. Anyhow, I said, I didn't have any clothes, Bill. He said, the old man's got all kinds of clothes down in his dry cleaning shop. Nobody's ever going to come pick them up. These were Depression years. I couldn't find a reason. He found an answer to everything. The next thing I knew, I was in college. So I did that for two years. The beginning of the third year, the summer at the end of the second year, the government foresaw the war coming. They offered a free flying course. I took that course and got my private license. From that moment on, I had lost interest in college; I wanted to fly. I had a night job in a bicycle factory from midnight, no, excuse me, from four o'clock until midnight and then an hour's drive home. This didn't work out with such things as philosophy class and German class and things in English class. So I realized that I had made a mistake. But when I got down to the Army Air Corps, I couldn't pass the test. The blood pressure wasn't right, the eyes were a little bit off. Maybe they just didn't like the looks of me, I don't know. At any rate, I had to make up my mind on what I was going to do with my life. I couldn't do anything practical. I had no skills. *Life Magazine* came out with the entire edition devoted to the US Navy. They had beautiful ports, they had beautiful girls, they had beautiful guns, beautiful ships. I went down there and said, I want to make a career of it. They signed me up for six years. It had always been four, but they foresaw the war, you see, this is December of 1940. Hitler had already invaded France. So I signed up for six. I thought I would stay for twenty. Naively, I was young. [laughs]

MA: Where did you go to basic?

EF: I found myself down in Norfolk, Virginia for basic training with a lot of guys from Cleveland who had never seen very good times. And quite a number of Southerners too were in there. I found myself picking up cigarette butts in the dark at six o'clock in the morning behind a great high fence. It looked like a prison, of course, and I felt like I was in prison. But that eventually went away. I enjoyed the drills and marching to music in these big halls and that sort of thing. I didn't mind it at all. Then I chose radio school and they sent me to Jacksonville, Florida, which was a big building, sixty-thousand men there, and the air was just choked with airplanes. I thought, oh, I wish I was in one of those airplanes. But it wasn't long, after I saw how many of them collided with one another, that I was glad that I didn't go to flight school. Really, I was. It was that bad. They had nine satellite stations around Jacksonville. Eventually I ended up on one of

those at a fighter station at Green Cove Springs. Around April, I think it was, this is 1941, eleven months before the war started, we went to radio school. We were being trained as radio gunners, for dive bombers and that sort of thing. You had to man a machine gun and you had to know the code. I hated the buildings. There was only one set of plans in Washington, I think, for the buildings. They didn't take into account the climate like Florida that we might want a little air. You had thirty or forty men in a room this size, forty by forty. Hours and endless, endless hours on the code. Da da da da da da da. I still know the code to this day. Then they showed us the bottom of a radio. They said, that's a tuning condenser, that's a resistor. We were going to be radiomen and we didn't even know what the parts were. So they showed us. They let us fire a burst on the machine gun. That was about it. Now I had dreams of being in a dive bomber squadron, probably off Pearl Harbor somewhere, I don't know. But how disappointed I was when they assigned seven of us to the main station down there. And we weren't even attached to a squadron. We weren't going to even sit in an airplane. We were going to be ground personnel. This was a huge station. Now we're talking about twenty five to thirty square miles. Down five miles into the swamp, they had a building there for a radio transmitter station. At the tower, they had all the machinery for sending messages, receiving messages, directing traffic and all that business. And we were connected. So there they were, they were sent down there in that swamp. No transmitters in the building, three hundred fifty foot towers, antennas running up in all directions and nothing to do. I thought, this is far from my dream. Here I was in this bloody swamp. Eventually we got one transmitter. It was a big day, a TBF [Transformer Based Filter], they called it. Big tubes that big. [gestures about twelve inches] Gradually over a period of time, they brought in another one and installed that. But we weren't learning anything, maybe a fuse or something like that. But there was no need to tear down anything. It was all new equipment, there was no repairing to be done. We were just standing these eight hour watches, either midnight to eight or eight to twelve, so on. That was pretty boring. And then Pearl Harbor was attacked. I remember one of the chiefs said, just wait until we send our carriers against Tokyo. This was bravado at that time. We weren't ready for that yet.

The next spring in 1942, our commander Eberling in our division called us together and said, the British have something called radar, that's how they pronounced it. We are going to send some of you up to Canada, the Royal Air Force, to study it. They sent two. And then a couple more of us went to New York and did some sightseeing, took a train to Clinton, Ontario, a little town up in Ontario. They had high security, high fences, and machine guns. All of our notebooks had to be locked up in the safe and be accounted for before we could march back to the barracks. I thought, this is really high security stuff until I met some girls over in Clinton. They teased us and said, what are you doing here?

I said, we were studying radio. They said, you mean radar, don't you? I thought, uh oh, somebody's been talking. After I recovered, they said, don't worry, we know what it is, we know what it'll do. It's nothing new to us. [laughs] So all the machine guns out there were just a front, just a big front.

The circuits were extremely complicated. Flip flop oscillators, extremely complicated stuff that was beyond us. We really didn't understand that much. What we needed to do was start at the beginning. We were at the end. Trying to understand the finished product when we didn't even understand the beginning product. So after six weeks of that, I went back down to Florida. Now, this was tough to go back to. Jacksonville was not a big city then. It is now. And you poured sixty thousand men in there. Then those nine satellite stations, we mustn't forget. And then Cape Landing had ninety thousand men. On a weekend, you looked on Main street, down the street, there was just a solid sea of sailors and soldiers, as solid as far as the eye could see. There were signs. Sailors and dogs keep off of the lawn and that's it. I admit a few of us had too many drinks over there. It's true. Not a menace to society, but we were disturbing. [laughs]

MA: A disturbing influence?

EF: Yes. So now my goal was to get out of Florida and never go back to that state. I think I gave up that vow. We've been back about thirty times. We have a daughter who lives down there. I've gotten over it. But there lingers a slight prejudice against the state of Florida. I didn't like the climate. It was horrible with no air conditioning, no fans. We slept at night and woke up in a wet bed, not from urination, but from sweat. It was just downright boring and unpleasant. After one ridiculous fight with fire extinguishers in the barracks for amusement, we were all called up before the division officer and he read the riot act to us. I thought that might be an appropriate time to ask for a transfer out of there and I proposed that. He said, no, we have something coming in for you. And that was all he said. Some months later, I got my orders, packed my sea bag, and said goodbye to Florida. I was going to go twenty eight miles down to Green Cove Springs Fighter Station. There they trained fighter pilots on Corsairs, the gull wing fighter. It was a very dangerous thing to learn. We lost six on one day. Hydraulic brakes, and over they went. [gestures plane flipping over] You wanted to be sure you had padding on your head when you did that. Various things happened. The big nose came up, and if they took a peek, they risked ground looping. They made a big circle like that and ended up with that huge prop. There are six foot blades on that prop, and they just took big chunks of asphalt and threw them about twenty to thirty yards. So there was much anxiety among those students. Again, I thought, this could have been me, I could have been out there if fate hadn't been working on my side. Finally one day the Army came in and built us a radar

station. A big room as long as this one, about fifty feet long. They put in radar equipment with tubes about two, two and a half feet across. Huge things. In Canada, we only saw tubes this big. [gestures about two inches] And now we were seeing them this big. Several different units and then radios. And then there were four huge diesels next door, attached. They had starter engines on them. Then you had a panel with these knife switches that gave power. On the roof you had a tremendous antenna. This is what the British were using against the Germans over their fighter direction. It really saved Britain, didn't it? We were going to practice with that. The Army installed it all. No one ever said to me, here are the fuses, or explained anything to me. With my background in Canada, believe me, I was totally unprepared for that responsibility. And they turned that over to me, this whole thing and gave me a helper, what we called a striker in the Navy. My guy was "Moon" Mullins [?]. He was a second class seaman. He was good at trimming wire. But he didn't have a clue what made a radio work. Not a clue.

MA: So you were in charge of this?

EF: I was in charge of this place. So we went to transportation, got a pickup truck and drove down there. It was in the woods. Eventually a plane flew right through that antenna, after I left. I missed that excitement. [laughs] The first time down there I said, all right, Moon, give me some power. He went out and he started up all these big generators. They were monstrous long things. Stood higher than seemed to me, higher than my head on a mounting. He threw in the knives and I had power. Well, I sat down in a business-like fashion and turned on the switch; smoke came out of there. The picture was not a real picture. It was just a flash when the tube went down and smoke kept pouring out of it. I hollered Moon, shut her down, shut her down. He shut it all down and the smoke stopped coming out and I thought, it's not going to burn. We called the Army and they came in and fixed it. I thought, if I ever got a chance to go to technician school, see, I was rated a second class radioman. If I ever got a chance to go, there was a school in Washington D.C. just for that purpose. Men who graduated from that school were looked upon with great respect. I mean, [gestures elbowing someone to get attention] see that guy over there, he's a graduate from, I forgot the name of the place now. Sure enough, an old Navy message came through. Shortly after the fire, [the message] said any second class radioman or better can apply for radio materiel school and no commanding officer can deny it to him. When I saw that, I said, boys, I am out of this rotten state. I am out of here for good. Boy, I packed my bag and I went up to Chicago in October and it was beautiful weather down in the armory. I'm always in the armory somehow. [laughs] There we studied algebra for six weeks and a little bit of Ohm's law and a little bit of working with tin metal. Because eventually we were going to build our own radio. Eight hours a day we did algebra. We did two years of algebra in six weeks. When we finished that, we

were ready to start primary school. Primary school was downtown Chicago on the fifth floor on State Street in the big, high rise building. We had to march over there; it must have been a mile. We marched in formation over there after breakfast and the police held up the traffic. One, two, three, four, up we went and they had that whole floor for school.

MA: About how many people were in the class?

EF: Well, there were several classes there at a time. But I would imagine, in marching there must have been about one hundred altogether. Then we came down in the elevator and marched all the way back for dinner and then back again. Even at night we did that. We went to school until, I think, eight or nine o'clock at night. There we were getting more math. I remember telling them I didn't have any algebra in high school. I remember telling one of the instructors that I didn't understand powers of ten. He looked at me and he said, you goddamn fool, of course you know the powers of ten. I said, thank you. But the school had a different atmosphere. A lot of cuss words. It just seemed strange in the school room to hear the language I was hearing there. We learned the slide rule, and we learned some trig and various things like that. Then lots of experiments with capacitors and resistors and making graphs of what we saw. Towards the end of the three months, we built our own. We started with a piece of metal, bent it and cut holes in it for the tubes. Then we designed the whole thing and built it, which was a great satisfaction to us. We had a choice between Bellevue, that's the name in Washington D.C. or a new advanced school in San Francisco on Treasure Island. A friend of mine said, you'd be crazy to go to Bellevue, even then. He worked in California as a radio announcer. He said, that's heaven out there. I believed him and I went, and you know what? He was telling the truth. It was sixty five degrees in the wintertime. It was gorgeous. The girls were very friendly there and it was pleasant to go on liberty in the surrounding area. There we got Navy receivers, Navy transmitters, underwater sound gear, surface search radar, air search radar, identification equipment. All that stuff we got lasted for six months. When it came time to choose, this didn't happen very often in service, that you got a choice of something. To choose what we wanted to do. I said, I think I'd like a troop ship. They called them APAs. [Auxiliary Personnel, Attack] I eventually ended up on one after the war was over for a short while. The first one on the list was APA 70. The next one was APA 165, then 166, 167, 160. They were under construction, you see. So I said to the yeoman, why have they got that old one in there with these others? That's the one they gave me, APA 70. I didn't know. [He said] you got the first choice. I was the company commander, I had the first choice. He wasn't going to change it, so I took it. I went home to Ohio on leave and down to Texas where they were building this thing. I found out; it was a terrible shock. It was not an APA at all. It was an APD. [Destroyer escort transport] As you see. [gestures to something off camera] Doesn't it say APD? I

said, what is an APD? He said, it's a destroyer. It's an auxiliary personnel destroyer. [I asked] What's it used for? [He said] All those little islands out in the Pacific had to be taken back from the Japanese. They needed hordes of these things to land. Four Higgins boats land troops, one five inch gun for bombarding and so forth. And this was basically what it was for. But then they changed their philosophy. Why take back all those islands at a bloody cost? Just bypass them. And that's what they did. Many Japanese soldiers starved on those islands. So when I went to see this thing in Orange, Texas, I was rather depressed. It was just a rusty hull standing up in dry dock. They hadn't even started to build it yet. It took them from [counts off months] September, October, November, and into December. All we did was go over there and watch what they were doing. Many girls were working there. We could talk to them, but if they answered, they were in trouble. They lost their job for talking. Experience had taught the administration that a lot of monkey businesses was going to go on here if we didn't stop it. So these girls were fired if they talked to us. In the radio room with all these wires and they were putting them together. If you stuck your head in there and said, hi girls, how are you doing? They went to the door and looked [gestures looking side to side] and said fine. [laughs] So that there was not much to do in Orange, Texas. I remember a rodeo one time. We were about, I believe, fifty miles from the ocean. The Sabine River divides Texas from Louisiana. We were going to have to go down that. We were commissioned at the tail end of December.

MA: So you're a plank holder?

EF: No, I don't know that term.

MA: You commissioned your____

EF: Oh yeah, yeah. I never heard that term. Yeah. I had never been to sea. I couldn't get out of Florida for all that time. Then I was in schooling for a year. So here it is, 1944 and I haven't been to sea. Believe it or not, I wanted to go to sea. Now looking back, I have to ask myself why did I want to go to sea? Well, there was a war going on and everybody else was going to sea. I felt left out, so I wanted to go. The ship you see was an altered ship and it was really the hull of a DE. [Destroyer escort] They took off several five inch turrets. They left just one five inch turret. That thing is okay for shore bombardment. But as far as shooting down suicide planes, it was really useless. Some destroyers of that time had six five-inch guns and radar controlled fire control. But even they were getting hit. We were really defenseless. We only had three twin 40 millimeter guns for anti aircraft fire that were of any use and you could only bring two of them to bear at any one time. You had one forward on the bridge and you had one port and one aft and one starboard back aft. Now if he was coming from that direction, you used the one forward and the

starboard one. But this one, you couldn't use that one on the other side. So you got two. That was all that was standing between you and perdition were these two twins. We had 20 millimeters but they were absolutely useless. If he was coming at you at four hundred miles an hour in a dive. I mean by the time you connected with him with a 20 millimeter or machine gun, it was too late, he was on top of you. They were absolutely useless. We never fired one. Even had a machine gun on the bridge. We were so ill informed. Never fired it. There was no occasion to fire it. The only thing that was going to work were those twin 40s.

MA: Who was the captain?

EF: Captain Allen. He was a big man, about six foot two inches, weighed about two hundred and forty or something like that. He had girth on him. He and I shared something in common. We both got seasick. He never got over it. I only got over it in a typhoon when I was so scared, too scared to be sick. [laughs] He called the fire room and said, if any more smoke comes out of that stack, I'm coming down there personally. They said he can't get down here with that big belly, get through this hatch. [gestures a large belly] The ship sort of looked like a destroyer. In the back aft, we had depth charges. They came in handy several times in Okinawa. [turns around to look at an image, off camera]

MA: So the five inch gun was forward?

EF: [talks about the image he is looking at] Yeah, that's it you see there. Right behind it is a twin forty. And then back aft of this welling davit, you see there, that's the davit for lowering the boats. There's a tub there and one on each side. This [unclear] 33.11 looking thing was for loading a light tank or a jeep or something of that nature. This ship could do anything a destroyer could do except fight. They were putting us out on... I'm getting ahead of my story, but in Okinawa we had a ring of ships all around the island, a hundred miles out, called the radar picket line. Thirty miles out was an anti-submarine line of ships. I say line, I mean one hundred miles out, they were quite far from each other out there; all alone. The idea was to pick up these signals, information about attacking kamikazes coming down. Called the island and the island sent the fighters to shoot them down. Now apparently from the records they shot down a lot of them, but we never saw them shoot one down. We were a hundred miles out there all alone, without any firepower. We were a rescue ship and we were going to help people. Not all that time, but most of that time we were. You felt quite lonely out there. A hundred miles out, nothing but water. If you were in the wrong place at the right time, you've had it. When we saw these new destroyers with six five-inch guns and they were hit. One of my friends from school was on one of them. He told me that the Japanese came at them from different directions at the same time. You see, that is tough to deal with. So anyhow, to go back to

the commissioning of the ship, we went out into the Gulf of Mexico. To get there you went down the Sabine River and through rice fields, all green. If you weren't up on the bridge, it looked like you were traveling, taking a country drive. This was all green all around you. Well, we got out and now, mind you, the crew was quite green, including yours truly. I had never been to sea before.

MA: Could you hold for just a moment, we are going to change the tapes.

EF: As I say, we went out into the Gulf of Mexico and we had not gone far before we burned out the main bearing. Now, seventy percent of this crew or more had never been to sea before. The engineering officer had been. He came up through the ranks, and I was surprised that he didn't know. But you had these two shafts driven by electric motors that passed through the engine room. They are huge, big round shafts, and they had to be oiled. They rode on bearings. If the oil failed, a siren went off. And apparently it was like an early movie comedy down there, and they never got the oil turned on. So here, the first day at sea, and we burned out the main bearing. That meant [we had] to shut that one down, and with the other one go back to Galveston and go into dry dock. Now, even though our Captain Allen was reserved, he was a very ambitious man, and he was looking forward to those scrambled eggs on his cap. [the golden oak leaf and acorn embellishments on the dress uniform cap] He'd been out there in an old Four Piper from World War I, Tarawa and some of those landings and places like that. So he had plenty of experience and he was doing well for himself. But this was just too embarrassing to report this to higher authorities. It really must have hurt him terribly. [laughs] So after about a week of liberty there at Galveston, we were ready to go. We went down between Florida and Cuba and worked our way out to Bermuda. We did thirty days on what they called shakedown. Now, I found out the water around Bermuda is right in the Gulf Stream, and it is beautiful, but the water is not deep and you have great rolls and waves, great long rolls. A ship traveling twenty knots or so through that is rolling, pitching and rolling. That was my first experience with that. It wasn't long before Captain Allen and I both were sick. I remember eating a decent breakfast and then losing it. Shortly after we got out there, we were chasing an old captured Italian submarine and refueling and things like that. They spilled the oil in my compartment. Oil floating like that. [gestures about six inches] Horrible smell down there. That was enough to make you sick right there. So after thirty days of that rolling around out there, we got our orders to go to Norfolk. Went to Norfolk, practiced with Marines in the Chesapeake. And I was getting acquainted with my equipment. At that point it was pretty sharp. When you were doing your exercises in the fog and when you got two objects on the radar that were going the same speed and the same bearing, you imagined it was a tug pulling a barge. And it was. So it proved itself there for us. From there, we got orders for Panama. We went down, had a day's liberty

and we went through the canal. Had a little hosing down in the lake there with fresh water. Now, mind you, all this time, outside of that squirt there, we never saw fresh water baths. The officers did. But all our baths were salt water.

MA: What was that like?

EF: Sticky. When you came out of there, you felt sticky, not refreshed. That was the way it was. The next stage was to go from Panama, then up to San Diego. There we drilled with Marines again. From there we went to Pearl Harbor. I was surprised to find some rough water between those two points. My surface search radar went out. There just happened to be a radar officer on board, taking transportation with us. He and I worked on that problem together. He gave me credit for having the right idea, although I was terribly sick. Then at Pearl harbor, we did more exercises with Marines, went out to Maui and shot machine guns into the dirt out there.

While we were there, we had an amusing thing happen. One of my jobs was to climb the ninety foot mast and oil the rotary bed spring up there. There was a safety switch up there. You could turn that while you were doing this so that it wouldn't knock you off. I went up there off of Mexico, and the ship was in nice water. It just tipped a little so you could be over the water at times. No problem. It was lovely weather. Now, on this occasion at Pearl Harbor, they called me. The radar was showing...there were two scopes. One of them had a movable line that went around it like that. [gestures like a clock hand] That's called a PPI scope, Planned Position Indicator. If you were following a coastline, it showed the coast or a ship was a blob. But the air search radar was over here. That was something else again. There you had a sweep that came across and any target showed up as what they called a blip, a deviation of that line. And then if it was a friendly plane, there was a coded return because that plane carried a little box called an IFF [Identification Friend or Foe] which identified it with a coded response. You got a long and two shorts or something like that. So you had these two things. This was going to be important later on and the captain didn't quite understand this. So anyhow, I went up, no, I had a striker who went up to oil that antenna, in port. When they called me, I went in and I saw nothing but a series of concentric circles. I never saw that before. I searched through the instruction books and there were no examples of that. It completely threw me, absolutely buffaloed. I was all alone. I had no one to talk this over with. I understand it very well now, but at that point in my life, I did not understand why. So I worked on this and I worked on that and just groped in the dark, trying to find a solution to this thing. We were going to go take some Marines out to Maui and we were going to land them there. I was so embarrassed because I couldn't use that. We could use the air search, okay, but I couldn't use this other scope. I was exhausted after about four hours of trying

this and trying that. I just spread out in the radio shack on the steel deck, so exhausted I fell asleep. I was just doing nicely when my striker shook me. He said, hey, Fellers, if you turned that switch off up there, would that have anything to do with it? [I said] What did you say? He said, if you turned that switch up there, would that have anything to do with it? Good God, man, it has everything to do with it. [said with emphasis] [laughs] That was the reason for it. Oh, I had even taken that motor off. Strapped it to my back and brought it down that ninety foot ladder, which is about that wide [gestures about a foot]. To have the electricians check it out, searched for every problem. That was the answer to that little problem. It was bad for my reputation, however, I was to retrieve it later.

We then got orders to go to Ulithi. This is an atoll just slightly above the equator, south of the Philippines. It had an immense and beautiful anchorage for ships. Sometimes there would be four hundred American ships anchored there. Quite a sight to see. Every man got two cans of beer. We had a compartment full of beer and they welded the door shut. We had two cans of beer and we went over there. It looked like something I'd seen in a geography book. A house on stilts and a straw type of a roof. No natives there, and the ground was somewhat soggy. There must have been forty-thousand sailors over there. They each had two cans of beer. So figure it out. After a while, there was a false air raid there, and then we escorted ships north to Ulithi. Toward the end of April we arrived up there. We had some suspected submarine activity on the way up and gave me some experience with tuning my radar magnetron. When we arrived at Okinawa, the battleship [USS] New Mexico was anchored not too far from shore and lots of ships in the bay. New Mexico was firing sixteen inch shells at the Japanese over on the island. I didn't realize that when a battleship was pointing all its guns to one side, and fired them all at the same time, the whole ship rolled back [leans way back in his chair] like that, when it was standing at anchor. So that was quite interesting to see. We hardly got the anchor wet until we got our orders to go out to pick up survivors one hundred miles out in the East China Sea. I went up to the bridge and the quartermaster had his maps spread out. I said, where are we? He said, we're right there. [points his finger on the table] I said, it says, heavenly mined, do not cross. He said, that's right. I said, I think I'll go back aft. When I got back aft, the whole fantail was loaded up with men who also got the message [about] what we were going to do. If there were any there, we dodged them. We went out and our first experience was picking up survivors. These were all dead. There were floating desks and chairs. Anything that floated, papers and all that [stuff was] around. The ship, of course, was gone. So we picked up the dead and took them back in. That was in early May. We did that for much of the time that we were in Okinawa.

There were a couple of funny things that happened I'd like to tell you about. [refers to his notebook] First of all, before I tell you [about] those incidents, here's something from Admiral [Samuel Eliot] Morrison. The famous naval historian wrote, [reads a passage] "Although your historian himself has been under kamikaze attack and witnessed the hideous forms of death and torture inflicted by that weapon, words fail him to do justice to the sailors who met it so courageously. Men on radar picket stations, to survive, not only had to strike down the flaming terror of the kamikazes, they were under constant strain and intense discomfort. For days and even nights on end, the crew had to stand general quarters [battle stations]. Men had to keep in readiness for the instant reaction and split timing to riddle a plane bent on sacrificial death. The capture of Okinawa cost the U.S. navy four thousand nine hundred killed and over four thousand eight hundred wounded from thirty four vessels sunk and three hundred sixty eight damaged, many beyond repair." And this quote from Winston Churchill, [reads a sentence] "This battle is among the most intense and famous of military history."

So one of the things that brought to mind some amusing things that happened there was the problem of transferring dead and wounded to our rescue ship. Frequently they just put a plank between the two [ships]. The men were in baskets and were slid across the plank. On one occasion...most of the time I had no battle station. Being a technician. I might be called here or there, wherever, so they assigned me nothing. But I couldn't resist some of these things that were going on, which was very exciting at times. And nobody ever said that I had to stay in the radio room or the CIC [combat information central] room. I was out there when I shouldn't have been. And we had a very rough, seasoned twenty year veteran, the name of Chief [Karel] Klapalek. [?] He was of Polish descent, from Wisconsin, and referred to his young crew out there as no good Americans. [laughs] I don't know what he thought he was, but they were no good Americans because they didn't know anything. He was out there directing the transfer of these seventeen bodies to bring over. At sea with the ships rising and falling against each other, they had to provide huge rope wound fenders. What they called fenders, to keep the ships from rubbing together. While they were struggling with this problem, he turned around to me and said, get down there. He wanted me to go down between the ships on this fender and help pass these baskets over. I could have told him where he could go. But I don't know why, I wanted to help, I was involved, I wanted to be in on things. So I hopped over there and let myself down. When I got down there I thought, what have I done? These huge ships going up and down like this. [gestures one hand moving up and the other down] Occasionally we guided one of these bodies over. In the midst of it all, somebody hollered kamikaze. They all ran and left me down there. [laughs] Here I was, down there.

How was I going to get up out of here? But with a little help, it was manageable. One of the amusing things that happened.

There's one more. The men could not take these long hours in general quarters. They had to provide some relief for them somehow or other. So they went around the ship looking for people that didn't seem to have anything to do, such as me. They said, you're going to be a first loader on a 40 millimeter. He said, we're going to put you on from midnight till four in the morning. Nothing ever happened. I said to my wife on the way over here, I said, why bother then if nothing's going to happen? Obviously it might have been for psychological effect. So the crew could say the guns are manned, perhaps for that reason. But it was unbelievable. They did not let us fire a shot. [leans forward and says with emphasis] We were on the front lines and we had not fired our piece. We could not manage it. Now are you aware that we had a trainer who made the gun go this way [gestures left and right] and we had a pointer who made it go that way. [gestures up and down] Those two guys had to coordinate to get on the target. Then you needed two first loaders, I being one, up there to put this clip of five shells. These shells are that long, they're that big around. [gestures about a foot long and four or five inches in diameter]. You put this clip down into the breech on each side. Then you had a big handle to throw forward and a small one for stop fire, automatic fire, single fire. [I asked] now explain that all to us. Didn't let us fire, as I said, and left us there. Most of those nights it was dark, no problem. We didn't see any activity. On one particular night, I even remembered the date. I think it was May 4th. I thought it was going to be my last day. There was one that appeared in the bright moonlight. He was about five miles behind us and radar had picked him up. He kept getting closer and closer. They reported him mile by mile by mile. Then we could hear him, that high whine of the Japanese engine. We turned the piece around to face him and elevated it because he was up there. He started his dive and we heard the difference, the high whine. They said, open fire. We had only drilled with this gun in a level position. Now it was down here. I got a hold of that big handle, it seemed like it was so loose I could have thrown it over the side. But to find the other one in the dark was impossible, to find those three little holes there. The propeller was whining, the engine was wound right up and making a terrible noise. I felt that propeller on my neck. We didn't fire, and because we didn't fire, he pulled out.

Now, this brings me to Captain Allen's philosophy. After being there for some time and finding out how helpless we really were, a ship like that should never have been put in a position like that. He said he wanted no smoke, no wake behind the ship. He wanted no lights, of course and [he said] don't fire at them. Now, some of the men grumbled that that was cowardly, that we weren't fighting back. But we saw time and time again how

they would follow those tracers down and they went right down to where the target was, just followed the tracers. We were with a formation on one occasion, a diamond shaped formation. We were the tail end ship moving along. The first one up front got hit and we were racing up there to help them. On the way up, we saw one on the starboard side was burning from stem to stern. I was talking to the chief electrician's mate. Duffy. I said, look at that. Those poor buggers over there. He said, that's nothing. Look at the one behind us. So I turned around and looked back. And that one was burning from stem to stern. All three of those got it and we did not. It was this philosophy that saved our lives. If he'd have had some idea that we were going to lick those guys with no firepower. I don't know. Some people would label that cowardice, and some say it was wisdom. One night the admiral came on board, and we saw on the radar that there was one coming. He was heading right to the same point we were. We saw that. He didn't know about the captain's philosophy. We heard the roar of the engine, I think the guy said they could even see the exhaust. When they saw that and nobody fired a shot, the admiral said, what are you waiting for? They opened up and hit him with thirty two rounds. He banked like that and crashed behind us. Now, that was the only plane that I can boast about. That was the only one we ever shot down. We had torpedo runs made on us. One of those torpedoes went right under my compartment where I was sleeping on two different occasions. One of them, a green officer, claimed he was showing a friendly on the radar. I didn't believe that, because they would have to have the equipment, they had to know the code. There were about seven different codes there. And I just didn't believe that it was. Perhaps he was trying to defend himself, but he didn't do a thing about it. A friendly plane would not, at night, come down around the ship at Okinawa and circle. No way. I think you would have to assume that they are all unfriendly. Because they didn't fire at him, he held off dropping the torpedo. He dropped it too late. The construction of the ship was shallow back aft, and it went right under there. The guys up topside closed their eyes, held on and waited for the explosion, which never came. When I came up, they told me how close I was...

So there were a number of funny things that happened. [refers to his notes] But my big glory night, on radar repair. Other problems came up with underwater sound gear and routine things that I repaired. On one occasion on the A scope, what I told you was a straight line with targets like that on top of that line. In this particular case, the line, even though there were three ranges, one of them up to four hundred miles, three different ranges, that line just kept getting shorter and shorter and shorter until all the targets were all piling up all over there. You couldn't separate one from the other. So the captain who, as I said, had been out there before and was experienced. Sometimes we were not communicating. This was the case in this story. He and I talked it over. Sometimes he

just went over the communications officer's head, who didn't understand anything about radar anyhow, and he talked to me. He asked me for my opinion. I told him, now, Bo, sometimes he wasn't listening. I was talking, but he wasn't listening. He said, we have the PPI [Plan Position Indicator] scope. You couldn't identify the planes on the PPI scope, only on the A scope. That went right over his head. That night I asked permission to shut it down. He said, no, we are expecting heavy raids tonight. You can't do it. So when they started coming, they had the big bullhorns up on the deck, and blasted out Fellers, radio technician first class, report to the flying bridge. That's way up on top. The captain was off on the left wing and he had his kapok life jacket, his whistle and a flashlight pinned on. He was all ready to go. He made the first lieutenant ask me why we couldn't identify these planes. I was astonished that he asked that question. I had explained that, I thought, in very clear terms what we could do and what we couldn't do. I heard the captain give a sigh, sounded somewhat like air escaping from the bag. I retired down below. I was not the most popular technician on board, except everywhere I went, [I heard] why can't we identify them? The next morning I asked for permission at eight o'clock to shut her down. I had plenty of time to think this over. I had my drawings and I went through them. To me, I knew there was a circuit that provided this sweep. And basically it had to be in that circuit because it was a sweep that was too short. So I went into that circuit and tested the tube and the condensers and there was a coil called a choke. I put my unsoldered one in, put the ohmmeter to it and it was broken. It was wide open. I went to the steel boxes with the parts in it, and found that part. There was only one, took it up and soldered it in place and boy she worked just like that. I put it back together. At nine o'clock, I had that thing going. The captain told me, I want you to come here and report to me personally. He was pretty uptight about it. I went up there, very proud of myself, and said, it was in order again. [He asked] what was it, a tube? I said, no sir, it was an open choke. Oh, he said. He had no idea. [laughs] He knew the Model T had a choke, but he didn't know that radar sets had a choke. So that sort of restored my reputation around there.

After that I was appointed to this. [points to something on the table] and I had a year and a half to go. As things tapered off through the month of August, and these were hot, hot months down there. We had fans, however; there was some ventilation. But it was not a pleasant place to be. We had a huge typhoon that put ships right up on the island.

MA: What was that like?

EF: Well, I remember we had to get out for safety. In other words, you could have been blown on shore. I don't remember the speed of the winds. They were hurricane winds. I remember these mountains of water. The ocean was up and down. [like] tremendous

mountains. You saw a ship up on top of the mountain with the propellers spinning out of the water. Then as you watched it, he slowly went down, down, down, down and then disappeared. If you wanted to see him, you had to go over to the edge of the ship. And there he was down in the valley down there. Now we did a fifty four degree roll. I thought it would be my last roll in this world. You see, with all that heavy weight, those Higgins boats were so high on the ship. Now that would be a forty five degree roll. Now you go nine more degrees, you were right about there. [gestures the angle with his arm] With these mountainous seas, I thought, amen, we were going, but she held together. I thought of those lady welders down in Orange, Texas. They did a good job. I did not get seasick. I was so scared, I did not.

We also once took USS Relief, a hospital ship and escorted it out. That was a pretty rough time too. But anyhow, as all these activities tapered off, the atom bomb was dropped. The war ended. The guys over on the beach opened up with all their guns, everything. They just sprayed the sky with hot lead. Beautiful sight. After all we'd been through, we just couldn't believe it was true. It couldn't possibly be true. Then we were given orders to take on New Zealand and British troops from a couple of cruisers. There were two British cruisers there. We took them on board and headed up to land in Japan. But there was a period of delay there. We didn't go in right away, so we got to know those guys pretty well. It was interesting to have them on board. We went in and occupied some forts and little islands in the bay. So we sent over these troops. They brought back some well washed, well worn, peasant looking troops and lined up on our fantail. We stood and looked at them. Their clothes were clean but threadbare. They were never issued new uniforms, the country was so poor. They looked at us and we looked at them and finally one of the American boys broke the ice. He took a dollar bill and a pen over and handed it to one of the prisoners and he knew immediately what he was supposed to do. He wrote his name on the bill as a souvenir. They had a bamboo pole with a white flag on it. [They were] looking very scared. After getting them squared away we went back out and occupied an air base. In a little shrine I found this picture of these kamikaze pilots. These were the guys that we were facing out there.[shows photograph] After that we went ashore occasionally. I started a little language group.

MA: We're going to go to another tape.

EF: If you want to bother. We went ashore at Yokosuka, that's a naval base. There was a burnout battleship there. The whole base was in bad shape and the civilians were quite afraid of us even though we had no arms. We went over, looked around. I remember one big street way down, two blocks down, somebody dashed across and out of sight. They were afraid of us. We looked up and on top of a building there were about twenty people

up there looking down on us. Very quiet. It was kind of spooky in a way. We didn't know whether they were fanatics or not. They had been told that we'd rape all the women and kill people and that sort of thing. We went to a public bath. The Japanese are clean people. They took baths in public places. We were walking along and one of the guys opened a door and said, hey, this is a public bath. All those men and boys in there just froze. They didn't move a muscle, they just stared at us. One of them [GI] said, well, look over here on this side. That side was all women and girls. They were like statues. A couple days later when we went over, there was a sign that said, please do not peek in. [laughs] We got to know the kids. They got a phrase book, and I had a few candies in my pocket. At that time, they were wearing kimonos and wooden shoes. They called them geta. They had vitamin deficiencies. They had paste on the sores from vitamin deficiencies. I was surrounded by these kids. I found out the first thing was very easy because it was just like my home state. It was Ohio. That means good morning. If you wanted to be polite about it, you said gozaimasu. [I said in Japanese] Ohayo gozaimasu and they all bowed to me. The next one was, how are you, [speaks Japanese] Genki desu ka? And they would said, genki desu. [bows] I went through all these things. [speaks Japanese] Where do you live? They pointed here and there and so forth. It was great fun. I became a language teacher, by the way, after the war. Seemed to always be interested in that sort of thing. We saw some interesting sites. Like the Great Buddha at Kamakura which was made in the 12th century. It stands as high as this window here, made out of bronze, and I think three different pieces. Very impressive. Tokyo was just burned to the ground. You just saw chimneys here and there. A few steel or concrete buildings off to the side, but most of it was just burned. You talk about the atom bomb and what it could do, but I'll tell you, those B52 bombers did a job on them. They killed more than Hiroshima in those places. I remember the Japanese were showing us to a movie theater that was standing. We came to a gigantic hole in the street where one of our bombs dropped. He pointed out and said, [unclear] binijiku. That meant B29. Then he laughed. They laughed where we wouldn't laugh, to cover their embarrassment, a giggle kind of thing. We were up there in the balcony watching the newsreel of our landing and found that to be a peculiar situation. One time I was walking down the street and two pretty Japanese girls came along in their beautiful kimonos. I said, ohayo, gozaimasu. They were surprised I said that, so they answered, ohayo and they invited me to their house. Now, oddly enough, sometimes the flames would leave a single house standing somewhere. They invited me in, of course in the Japanese room. Have you been to Japan? No carpets, there are mats. No furniture in sight. The mattresses are stored in closets, and they put them down when they go to sleep. So this room was practically barren. There was a little table and chairs. You crossed your legs and sat down on the mat. The mother brought tea out. The girls sat back on their haunches and were very polite. We couldn't

communicate. I ran out of my six or eight sentences and I thanked them and went on. But they were trying to make contact with us. Met some interesting people, a doctor in his country clinic and told us about his war experiences. He wanted to hear about Okinawa. As the winter came on, we went less frequently, but things were really totally disrupted. We actually went out and flagged down freight trains. They stopped and waited until we climbed on board and then went on to Ofuna. We gave him a pack of cigarettes. He grinned from ear to ear. That was like gold, a pack of cigarettes. Getting pretty bored with all of that. The suffering was terrible, it really was. As far as the ordinary people of Japan, I could not hate them. I never did. Because I realized how the military got control of that country and forced the ordinary people into that war. They certainly did not seem warlike to me. I could have been fooled, but I'm talking about mothers, grandmothers, and uncles. One elderly gentleman, highly educated, asked me if I wanted English lessons. It was too far from my ship to do it. But he said that General MacArthur saw to it that they got some food. He said he saw that they were starving to death. They were. You were filled with pity for people, innocent people. Now, [Hideki] Tojo or somebody like that, I'd gladly watch him suffer. I saw a guy at the city dump with a whip, and he was driving these very ordinary workers of peasants and cursing them. I'm sure he never did much philosophizing about it, but I thought if he only had Tojo and the military cast out there, I would have enjoyed that. But these people had nothing to do with starting this war, no more than I did. They were very common, ordinary people, powerless people. It taught you about the tragedy of war. One day I was sitting down in the chief's room on board ship and an officer came down and said, there's a guy up here, he wants to trade places with you. He wants to stay in Japan and take a job, and he wants to trade. Are you interested? I said, you don't have to say that twice. I had my things all put together and up on deck within an hour. The yeoman made out my orders for the USS Missoula, which is an APA [Auxiliary Personnel, Attack] that I had wanted long before. We took it back to California and started putting it into mothballs.

MA: Did you ever become a shellback?

EF: No, I missed it by a couple miles. Ulithi is right down there. But I never enjoyed that process.

MA: What was general living like on board?

EF: Well, it was crowded. You see, the ship was some short of three hundred feet long and you had a couple hundred men on there. So it was quite crowded. As I told you earlier in the cruise, my compartment at Bermuda was flooded with oil and it never lost that smell. Maybe it contributed to my seasickness. But we used to unscrew the bulbs back there, and when we dropped depth charges, those bulbs made contact and you got

this light and this reddish glow. You swore we just got hit. It was our own depth charges that caused it. Then when I was made chief, I was transferred up to the bow. The bow had its own pleasures, with the up and down pitching. You had three bunks, tied together with chains. You learn to sleep holding on, like riding a bucking bronco. Above us was the five inch turret. I can't really say that, looking back, we suffered very much. That was the way it was in the Navy. You had a clean bed and decent food. But when you went, you were apt to go in large numbers and very suddenly. So it was really not bad.

MA: So you ended up decommissioning the [USS] Missoula?

EF: Yes. I just got well into the job when another one of those All Navy messages came through. They wanted instructors urgently at Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Illinois. So I took that and I went there and they asked me to teach physics, which I had never taught before. They were really short of personnel, so you might say I kept one page ahead of the class. Dines [?] and ergs and things today play no role at all, but that sort of thing. One of my mates and I decided we were going to need some money when we got out. We had about six or eight months to go. I only saved six hundred [dollars] in six years. There was a wire mill up the road in Waukegan, Illinois. We took jobs up there as sweepers. They ran the wire through dies to make them smaller. There was a fine cake that peeled off and it had to be swept up. We did that from four o'clock until midnight. We were able to set aside a few dollars for freedom. This time I went home to Ohio and looked up my old roommate in college who was a doctor. His wife was a sister of my wife and that was how I met her. [camera pans to his wife] So she came to Chicago a couple times and I went to Ohio a couple times. I was released a little bit early. I think it must have been in December. I had my free ticket, six years. I could have been an ensign, but I couldn't see such an unnatural life. It seemed more appealing to have a family and children and a good wife than it did have a good pension.

MA: So after you got out of the service, what did you do?

EF: Well, I remember very well at Yokosuka Air Base, I was talking to one of my shipmates. We were looking out over the water and I said, I don't really know what I want to do with my life. I don't think I want to open up a TV shop and then put up antennas on people's roofs for the rest of my life. He said, why don't you study languages? You're into Japanese and you're always belting out something in German. I said, well, I always did kind of like that. So I decided that was what I'd do. I wrote to the college and asked for their beginning Spanish book. I bought records, a portable thing this wide, that long. [gestures winding] [gestures about twelve inch square] In my spare time I listened and repeated for good pronunciation, listened and repeated. I went through that whole textbook. I was pretty sure that I had that down pat. I took the examination

when I got back and I got credit for [the] Spanish I [course]. Then I went into Spanish II and III. Then I went to Mexico. Five of us went to Mexico and studied down there at the National University. I was taking French, German and Spanish all at the same time. I had had a couple years of high school German and two years of college German, but I had forgotten almost everything. Then one of the guys that went to Mexico with us was Dr. Penlow [?]. He insisted I take French. He said, you're a language teacher, you have to know French. So I was taking all three at the same time. I don't know how I did it. Right now I still study German and Spanish. I still do, don't I? [asks his wife] I'm teaching a class of seniors right now, teaching German. That had to all be done in a two year period. Actually less than two years. Toward the end of my senior year, Dr. Ficken [?], the head of the German department, wanted to get away to go visit his sons in Seattle. He had an evening class for older students who came from Cleveland out near Cleveland airport. Went out there and many of them were voice majors studying at the conservatory and they needed German. So he asked me if I would teach that class. I had never taught in college. In the Navy I taught a little bit of physics, but I never taught a foreign language. I said, I'd give it a try. He gave me a trial one day and said I did all right. I hadn't even graduated yet, so I had some experience there. That coming summer, 1948, we got married in 1948. That summer, the Spanish professor was going to Chile and needed someone to do the Spanish II course, so I did that, that summer. In the fall of 1948, I was full time German. It ended up being three years altogether. More exactly two and a half because I went off, did graduate work at the University of Wisconsin and they called me back. I only did a half a year and they called me back. So I went back. But that was a private school. The pay was very poor. Some of those PhDs with thirty or more years earned three thousand five hundred dollars. My pay was two thousand two hundred dollars that first year. I worked my way up to two thousand eight hundred. We had two children. We really couldn't make it. So I decided that I had to get into the public school. But that meant on the GI Bill, studying for a full year. All those teaching courses and then switching fields to school administration. I became an elementary principal and was in that field for seven years. The last job in that role was in Chittenden, Vermont, a private school. It was a public school funded with private money. We had a big interest in raising our own food and we liked raising animals. We looked for a good place to bring our children up out of the temptations of the city. We came over here in this area looking for a farm. In Schuylerville we found a realtor who showed us a farm. In those days, 1959, you won't believe these prices. I only had fifteen hundred dollars down. This realtor showed us a farm for nine thousand dollars. It was in bad shape, grown up in weeds. It was a colonial looking house. She said, [gestures to his wife] it was so far removed, there was not a house or anything in sight. So we went back up to Chittenden and we got a letter at Christmas time from this realtor. He described a brick house, one

hundred seventeen acres, hill farm, and an old barn for twelve thousand five hundred. I said, I can't believe this price. We came over in January. The snow was about yay deep, in the piles along the roads. [gestures about five feet] He took us out there and he wasn't even sure which fields belonged, but it was one hundred seventeen acres. Beautiful brick house built in 1810, slate roof, an L on there, and big maple trees in the front yard. In a valley, the road went downhill past the house, the stream behind the house. I said, this looks like it. So we took it. It was a scramble to find financing. We had so little money down, but I got a GI Bill loan. It was only about three percent, I believe. We eventually raised Black Angus and sheep. We had about forty head of sheep. One year we had sixty seven lambs. This was just a hobby farm, but there was a lot of work. But it was healthy. I'm eighty-two next month, and I think that that probably contributed.

MA: I'd say so. Well, we'd like to thank you very much, Mr. Fellers. That was very good. I appreciate you. Eric, I want to get a picture. And this is the Pavlic?

EF: USS Pavlic, APD 70. [shows framed painting]

MA: You painted this?

EF: Yeah.

MA: Very nice. And this is a picture of the kamikazes you found at an air base?

EF: Yes. [shows photograph]

MA: And here we have. The rank at this point?

EF: [shows photograph] Chief electronics technicians.

MA: So this would be 1940....?

EF: That was probably taken in 1947.

MA: Very nice. Thank you very much.