

**Grant E. Covill**  
**Narrator**

**Michael Russert and Wayne Clarke**  
**Interviewers**

**Interviewed on November 30th, 2006**  
**at his home**

**Q:** Can we start this?

**GEC:** Yep, go ahead.

**Q:** Alright, this is a home interview in Hammondsport, New York. The 30th of November 2006. Approximately, 11AM. Interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke.. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth, please.

**GEC:** Grant E. Covill, born March 27th, 1927, in Wellsville, New York.

**Q:** OK. What was your educational background prior to entering service?

**GEC:** High school.

**Q:** And um... do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

**GEC:** I was at home laying on the living room floor reading the funnies, the Sunday Funnies. My parents were sitting in their respectful chairs reading the paper and the radio was on. And uh... playing music. I don't remember what it was. And then all of the sudden the announcers said there was a break in for a special news announcement and it was the attack on Pearl Harbor.

**Q:** Do you remember your reaction when you heard about this?

**GEC:** I don't remember my reaction because I was just...

**Q:** Yes, right.

**GEC:** I was just a young kid.

**Q:** Mhm.

**GEC:** But, I remember what my father said. He says "Oh my God, here we go again".

**Q:** OK. Um, did you enlist or were you drafted?

**GEC:** I enlisted

**Q:** Why did you decide to enlist?

**GEC:** Well I didn't want to go into the army.

**Q:** OK.

**GEC:** Cause uh I like the idea of sleeping between clean sheets and having three square meals a day.

**Q:** Alright so that's why you picked the Navy, I guess, right? Uh where did you go for your basic?

**GEC:** Sampson Naval Training Station.

**Q:** Um, how long were you there?

**GEC:** 7 weeks

**Q:** What was it like in Sampson?

**GEC:** I remember the heat.

**Q:** You were there then in summer?

**GEC:** During the summer. Ugh, it was unbearable. Of course, everybody I talked to since then said "Well it was just as cold in the winter as it was in the summer. As it was heat in the summer"!

**Q:** Um, OK, what kind of things did you do during basic?

**GEC:** The regular basic training.

**Q:** OK.

**GEC:** Like everybody else.

**Q:** Alright, did you go anywhere for specialized training after that?

**GEC:** No

**Q:** Where did you go from Sampson then?

**GEC:** Well, from Sampson.. When I got through with Sampson, my basic training, I got shipped home for a two week leave. They called it "boot leave" and uh, I came back from that, I stuck around for about 2-3 weeks at OGU, out-going-unit and doing various jobs like, uh, well going to mess halls, working in the mess halls and various other jobs. And then I got transferred from there to a submarine base in New London, Connecticut.

**Q:** Was there a school down there that you attended in New London?

**GEC:** No. Well there are schools, yes. There was then and there still is. But uh, I did not attend any schools there. I was immediately put aboard the USS Apollo which was a submarine tender.

**Q:** Mhm.

**GEC:** And um, from there, a- at that point, when I was assigned to the Apollo, I was given uh a opportunity, I don't know whether you'd call it an opportunity or not but I was put in the optical department of the repair ship. Now this repair ship had many, many, many different types of machine tools and various capabilities in repairing most anything you want to think of, in regards to the Navy. Uhh, in the optical shop they repaired submarine periscopes, uh, binoculars, telescopes, anything that had optics. We would repair it.

**Q:** Mhm

**GEC:** Even if it got dropped on the- on the- on the floor. It goes right back to the repair shop cause we don't know any damage it got done. So uh, and then after the periscopes were checked out, repaired, checked out and reinstalled on these submarines. Then they- then they would uh, hand pick, uh, various members of the optical shop to go on a shakedown, what is it called, a shakedown cruise. Aboard the ship, and uh, we would go from the point of where we were, our point of origin, uh, which was at the base, we'd go all down the river to long island and make several tests about the periscope itself, see where any of the seals leaked or if the optics are in line and so forth and so on. It was very interesting work.

**Q:** Now can I- can I ask you what kind of the problem were they have on a periscope.

**GEC:** Well mostly it would be water leakage. Cause your submarines i can tell it now, but back in those days you couldn't talk about it. The submarines could dive as deep as 350 feet. There is a lot of tremendous water pressure at that- at that depth and these periscopes had to withstand that depth. That is- that is a crush value depth, but most of 'em operated between two and 250. There wasn't any bother going any deeper unless you had unless you had depth charges.

**Q:** So you were in an OJT program, basically on the job training.

**GEC:** Uh, more or less, yea- yeah. That didn't last very long cause there was a demand for 'em.

**Q:** Now did you have- how long did it take to take a periscope out to repair it

**GEC:** It depends-

**GEC:** Or did you just do the seals? Or did you have to take the whole thing

**GEC:** Well when you take them apart, you have to replace the seals. Yes. Cause you don't want to put any loose seals back in to 'em. And uh, ahh overall during that time it would probably take about 3 to 4 weeks.

**Q:** Now did you- did you have to replace the lenses ever?

**GEC:** Oh yeah!

**Q:** Or did you- did you automatically re-

**GEC:** You'd automatically replace them, yeah.

**Q:** So you must've had a backlog of lenses, or in a stack in some.

**GEC:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. At one time uh, we would have possibly anywhere from 6-10 submarines tied up alongside. Waiting to be- waiting for work to be done or waiting to have work done on board.

**Q:** Was that a common a- a problem with the leaking periodically.

**GEC:** Oh yeah, yeah severe leaking.

**Q:** Now you were in the Atlantic?

**GEC:** Pacific.

**Q:** Oh you were in the Pacific. OK so where was your- did you have a home base there, or?

No. Home base is always New London, Connecticut

**Q:** OK, alright.

**GEC:** Um, now when we uh, when we went to our assigned designation or our designated port where we were supposed to operate from, uh, of course, we left New London came down around Florida back up went to uh- we left New London stopped at New York picked up a few supplies then continued on down around Florida and they Keys and then -then the ship went up to uh New Orleans to pick up additional supplies that were not available at the previous location. And then we continued on uh- through the Gulf another shift went through the canal through San Diego and in San Diego they picked up munitions and additional food supplies things like that. And then from there they went with an escort of uh- two destroyers. The ship left San Diego and headed straight for Pearl Harbor and uh, trying to think when they- They got about halfway across between San Diego and Pearl- the ship had an alert. One of our destroyers is uh- acting as if our escort said they uh- spotted a blip on their sonar. And they didn't know what it was so they took a chase and come to find out it was an enemy submarine. So they immediately gave the captain of our ship orders to head on a new heading due North that would take us out of the sight of everything so we headed North, never saw a thing. Of in the distance- we could- cause the- these destroyers could travel thirty knots about uh- fifteen knots faster than what we could do and now way off in the distance, I'd say from here to Havens Port of something like that. We could hear the depth charges going off and so we figured they made contact. And when everything was all clear, we were ordered back into our real- real small escort and uh continued on to Pearl Harbor.

We found out later that it was an enemy submarine, but we didn't know anything positive about that. So uh- they figured they'd got it, but nobody knew. And we went and continued on to Pearl Harbor and from Pearl Harbor we replenished our supplies and more fuel and uh- food and everything else we needed. Oh, and we received mail which is a very absolute necessity. And we continued on to our final designation which was Guam, we entered back Pearl Harbor Guam and uh dropped an anchor and stayed there for seven months and that was it, we stayed right there, didn't move. We received all of the submarines that required attention, repairs, and resupply and also rotate crew and uh- they go on their way and we'd just do the same thing day, after day, after day, after day. After awhile it got kind of monotonous, but then uh- after the seven months was all up the end of the war came. So we were told to go home, so- so we packed up our bags and went home. That was it.

**Q:** You were never under attack at all when you were there?

**GEC:** No, no, no, no, no, no.

**Q:** Guam was pretty secure and then um- how did they resupply the- did you resupply submarines with food and supplies? Or were there other supply ships that did that?

**GEC:** Oh no, we supplied everything

**Q:** How about torpedoes? You guys carried-

**GEC:** We- we supplied them too. They were down deep down in the hull of the ship. Out of- out of sight out of mind, you know?

**Q:** Yes. What about refueling?

**GEC:** Refueling which?

**Q:** The subs.

**GEC:** The subs, those were done at the uh- at the base where we were. I'd say if you were in Guam, the submarine before you would leave the harbor and go uh- to the main base on- on- on land and get more fuel and then take off.

**Q:** OK. OK. Um. How long would a submarine be next to you usually um- for repairs? Depends on?

**GEC:** Depends on, yeah, you're right, it depends on the kind of repair needed, but it all averaged out to be 3 or 4 weeks.

**Q:** Now, you must've had engine people and everything on board and all these different specialists?

**GEC:** We had five complete machine shops. Everything that you could think of. Back in those days, everything we had was modern, today, it's ancient, it's a collectors item. And

uh- we had everything you could possibly think of. We could even cast our own steel parts which we used if it's needed. Now that takes some work. Like exactly like having your own foundry, but we could do it.

**Q:** Did you get to see any sort of entertainment, USO shows or-

**GEC:** Oh, yes! There is one picture in there - in the albums that shows that Hawaiian hula dance oh yeah we had entertainment come on board. Yeah right. I think that was a uh- that picture there was taken during one of the New Year's Eve celebrations and the captain would say, "Well we got to have some type of entertainment here!" So, they contacted the USO group and, sure they'd come out and entertain us.

**Q:** Now being there that long did you get movies and so long.

**GEC:** Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, yes. We exchanged movies with other ships and also on the base.

**Q:** Now did the submarine crews come aboard your ship at all

**GEC:** Constantly, cause our repairmen would be aboard their boat and their crew except for the watch crew would come aboard our ship I suppose and every once in awhile the members of those submarines and also members of our- our crew on board ship would be- would be granted leave, of course what's there to see in Guam, nothing, except the navy, the enlistments and uh the Dodo birds.

**Q:** Alright, um- did you ever have many injuries on your ship at all?

**GEC:** No. No, we'd have minor stuff, I guess. We had a fully equipped pharmacist there and also a fully equipped medical area that would take care of anybody that has an emergency like appendicitis or tonsillitis or something like that, and our physicians were very, very good.

**Q:** What was daily life like on- on your ship for example?

**GEC:** Well, revelry was generally around 6 o'clock and you'd have chow, come back up, if you'd have work to do in the shop where we'd do it. And when that would get done we'd just lounge around, do nothing, go down to the library or go to an ice cream parlor or wherever.

**Q:** Now when you were at Guam and you did repairs, for example a periscope did you go on a shake down cruise then too?

**GEC:** I never did, personally, but the other guys that were senior over me did.

**Q:** Now, did you yourself—or your crew—do most of your work on your ship, or did you do it on the submarine?

**GEC:** On the ship. We'd physically take the periscope out of the submarine and

somehow get it twisted around so we could bring it up through the hatch—the main hatch to the conning dock—and take the periscope. Then, when we got it up above the conning tower, we'd lay it down horizontally, and then pick it all up at the same time—both top and bottom ends—and bring it up onto the... bring it up onto the pathway alongside it. Well, I could probably show you better if we had the photographs. And then we laid it right into the shop, because our shop—the optical shop—had a double door at one end. You'd open up both doors and bring whatever you had outside right into the shop. And those periscopes were approximately fifty feet long.

**Q:** Oh really. How much did they weigh approximately?

**GEC:** Ah, just couldn't tell you.

**Q:** How was this all done? With wenches?

**GEC:** With wenches and chain-falls and everything else. Anything we could get our hands onto and sometimes we'd use those too.

**Q:** Do you want to show some of the photographs now? No! What were your officers like? Were they any like—did you have engineers, or they'd have an engineering background, or...?

**GEC:** Well they'd have to.

**Q:** Yeah, OK.

**GEC:** The officer in charge of our optical shop—he was a full lieutenant. And he was the only officer that we had who was in charge of the shop. The others that were in command, you might say, were chief petty officers, and you'd just go down the ladder. I was at the bottom of the ladder.

**Q:** Did you have any warrant officers still?

**GEC:** No, not in our shop. We weren't big enough to warrant officers. No.

**Q:** OK. Um, when you returned back to the States—well, first of all, before you returned, you were out there in Guam when you heard about the dropping of the atomic bombs?

**GEC:** Yeah, we were—we were in Guam.

**Q:** How- What was the reaction to that.

**GEC:** Well, I don't know. I think it was a mixed— that was a mixed reaction throughout the whole ship. Everybody had just happened to think and get a serious thought: 'Well, maybe it's all over now, we can all go home.' Then, when we found out they didn't take one, they took two, then we definitely knew what was going on.

**Q:** Now when you left Guam, did you head straight back to the States?

**GEC:** Well, we left Guam, went to Pearl, picked up more fuel and supplies, and then retraced our route. We went out all the way back.

**Q:** So, um, what did you do for the last year of service, approximately?

**GEC:** Practically, nothing.

**Q:** Were you still in New London for that time period? In New London, Connecticut until you were discharged?

**GEC:** Yes, yes, yes. The Apollo was placed in reserve after a few months at the end of the war, and most of the crew had been shipped out or discharged. I wasn't one of them because I was still on the bottom of the totem pole, and the whole ship, along with the remaining crew, was put on emergency call because of the Cold War. So, we were automatically classified as being in the group to take on the Cold War if necessary so they were, we were stuck, then we spent the next six or ten months after the war was over uh- under the direction of taking care of the Cold War if it ever happened.

**Q:** When were you discharged?

**GEC:** August of 46, so I was in the Cold War. Didn't mean anything though, didn't mean a thing.

**Q:** Did you ever make use of the GI Bill?

**GEC:** Oh yeah, yeah. I went to college after that. When I got home, I went to college at Alfred University. Stayed around long enough, got my degree.

**Q:** OK. Did you ever use the 5220 Clause?

**GEC:** Oh, yes. No serviceman or ex-serviceman didn't.

**Q:** A couple didn't, unfortunately. Did you max it out?

**GEC:** I maxed it right out, just as much as I could.

**Q:** OK. OK. Did you join any veteran organizations?

**GEC:** Yes, I joined the American Legion in 1946, very shortly after I got out. I've been a member of the American Legion now for—well, ever since I joined in 46... 60 years!

**Q:** OK. Um, did you stay in contact with anyone who was on the ship with you?

**GEC:** I haven't been able to find anybody. They either moved, left no forwarding address, or they're dead. I don't know—more chances of that happening; they're all passed away. It's very good.

**Q:** Now you are active at Sampson?

**GEC:** Oh, yeah. When I can!

**Q:** Um, how do you think your time in your service had an effect on your life?

**GEC:** Well, you could take that question and turn it around and say, would you do it all over again? Of course, my answer to that is, you can't change history. If you wanted to change it and do it differently, you'd be changing history. And if I did that, I wouldn't have this here—nothing. And you people would not be sitting here. And, um, yeah, it has affected my life because I look back on my enlistment in the Navy. I kind of wish I had been smart enough to stay in. Now, I have a grandson who is in the Navy. He is a lieutenant. His photograph is up on the fireplace mantle, and he is a lieutenant now. And, uh, right now he is stationed in Norfolk. He is just waiting for his ship to be built, a brand-new ship. He'll be a plank owner when he goes aboard. 'Plank owner' means you're one of the original crew, and he is guaranteed to be the navigation officer on that ship

**Q:** What ship is it?

**GEC:** The USS *Sampson*. Unbelievable, isn't it? How fate turns things around. Yeah, he is very happy where he is, and he enjoys the life he's chosen. I said, 'Well, I'm glad you chose that, because I was going to knock that *mhmm* out of you if you didn't!' Let's keep up the tradition.

**Q:** OK. There is some photographs to show us?:

**GEC:** Yeah, his grandfather—my father—was in the Navy, I was Navy, and now he's Navy!

**Q:** You don't have to take them out.

**GEC:** Oh, you don't have to.

**Q:** Just like that. That was you?

**GEC:** "Yeah, I'm home on leave in 1945. That was right after I got home. We pulled into New London, and everybody was very relieved to go home. No, not everyone—two-thirds of the crew.

**Q:** What ever happened to that Buick?

**GEC:** I wish I had that Buick! 1942 Buick Roadmaster and I guarantee you it'd go 120 miles per hour!

**Q:** I'm sure! What other photos-any photos of your ship?

**GEC:** Oh, there are photographs of it, yes. There it is right there! That's the USS *Apollo* (AS-25).

**Q:** Now, do you remember where this one was?

**GEC:** That was taken at Afra Harbor.

**Q:** And this is a sister ship?

**GEC:** Let's see. Yes, that's a sister ship. I got a better photograph hanging on the wall in my bedroom. That's a-

**Q:** Now, you sometimes had submarines on both sides of you?

**GEC:** Yeah, sometimes.

**Q:** How many could you service at one time?

**GEC:** Five.

**Q:** Looks like there are about eight in this one. Five, OK.

**GEC:** The others are probably waiting. Those are taken up at New London they just got- they just got mothballed and uh- they-

**Q:** Oh, this is when you returned. These are all mothballed submarines and you wanted to take them from the deck.

**GEC:** Taken from the deck of the Apollo. If I got caught using a camera, taking those photographs, I probably would have ended up in Leavenworth.

**Q:** Now, what kind of camera did you have?

**GEC:** Oh, just a little brownie.

**Q:** Are you in this photograph?

**GEC:** No.

**Q:** This is some of the men in your shop?

**GEC:** Do you re-edit this, do you?

**Q:** No.

**GEC:** You don't? I better watch my language.

**Q:** OK, now, here is two more of your shop- where are you? I see you're in this one up here on top?

**GEC:** Yeah, this is me, over here, and I am right here again. OK. Where all the guys are now? I don't know. I lost contact. That's taken at the New Year's Eve party. Well, that is the captain of our ship, he and his wife.

**Q:** This isn't on the ship, I don't think, is it?

**GEC:** Yes.

**Q:** Is it really? You had it on the ship for when you returned in the vessel? OK.

**GEC:** We got a captain through a New Year's Eve party. Was I in there? Yeah, there I am. I was on mess duty that night,

**Q:** This is 1945. New Year's Eve party is right here. OK. One of the special treats on board.

**GEC:** Yeah, right. That's part of the entertainment show that was on that New Year's Eve party. A Hawaii hula girl.

**Q:** OK. Is this you here?

**GEC:** Yeah, this is me here, drunk.

**Q:** October 1945?

**GEC:** Yeah, two months after V-J Day. That is a pen ink sketch of a German U-boat that was captured off the coast of Africa, intact. Is that the 505?

**Q:** No, it's the 850.

**GEC:** It's the 850, OK.

**Q:** OK. Now who made that drawing?

**GEC:** I did.

**Q:** It was in the harbor?

**GEC:** yeah, it was tied up at the moorings alongside one of the piers. The rest of that are just collectible knick-knacks.

**Q:** OK, alright. Well, thank you very much.