

**Blaine Leotis Cottom
Veteran**

**Robert von Hasseln
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

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RVH: Interview of Mr. Blaine L. Cottom, January 24, 200 at Syracuse Armory. The interviewer is Colonel Robert von Hasseln. The videographer is Wayne Clarke. Mr. Cottom, tell me where you were born and where you grew up.

BLC: I was born in a little boondock town called Summer Hill. It is in Cayuga county not too far from Cornell University, which is at the southern end of Cayuga. It is between Cortland and Auburn, more or less. There were four of us children. Three were born there. The oldest was born in Colorado.

RVH: What did your family do there?

BLC: My grandfather ran a cattle ranch. Dairy cows, not beef cows, out in Colorado. Dad got out of the war and wanted to work on the ranch. Dad helped out there. That was Undercliff, Colorado. In the meantime, my mother went out with her sister. Back in those days, if you had a lung condition, you went to high altitude. That was how they met. Dad was still in the Army working on the farm a little bit. He got discharged. They met and went back to Ohio to be married. My oldest brother was born before they decided to come back to New York State to Upper St. Lawrence county. Where they were originally from when they came over from Canada.

I grew up in and around Cortland. Summer Hill was only seven or eight miles away. That is Cayuga county. I grew up in a little town, Blodgett Mills, during the early years of The Depression, the early thirties. My first memory is about 1930. I went to a school there up to the eighth grade. We had moved to Cortland. Now we jump from eighth grade to eleventh, which takes us from 1937 up to the summer before the war started. The war started in 1942, so the summer of 1941. Dad was making PT boats for the Navy at ELCO [Electric Launch Company] Shipyards, Bayonne, New Jersey. My brother Kenneth, later

you'll hear about him. He joined dad as a carpenter. He was killed on a PT [boat]. They lived in Bayonne, New Jersey, making PT boats for the Navy. They made twelve. When that contract was finished, they opened up Annapolis Yacht Yards in Eastport, Maryland, across from the Naval Academy. This is how I got enthused about the Navy, listening to that music every day. They had a contract there for ten.

Well, instead of coming home weekends, dad took the family, except for two children who stayed in Cortland. My brother Ken, myself and my mother. She rented a house down there and rented out rooms to the shipyard workers, which were from all over. So anyway, I fell in love with the Navy. Every morning I heard marching to chow and marching to class. I visited over there. My sister came down. I got her a date with one of the midshipmen. I fell in love with the Navy, and I was there when the Japs dropped the bombs on Pearl Harbor. I had just started my senior year at Annapolis High School. About half a dozen of my friends said they were going to quit [school]. We were all sixteen, some maybe seventeen, but I was sixteen. My birthday wasn't until three months after the war started. But anyway, I felt enthused about it and all that. Always patriotic, [our family had a] military background. I decided to quit school. Well, they had different ideas. I did not go back to school, I was bound and intent. I went up to Baltimore, took my exam, had the paperwork all set so that my birthday, April 9th, I could leave. Well, sometime in February, they finished that last contract, so we moved back to Cortland, New York. I actually left for the Navy from Cortland just shortly after my birthday. It took us a week or so to get settled in and all that.

So instead of leaving on my birthday, I left the twentieth-something. It is in my records there somewhere. I went from Cortland, New York to Syracuse, finished my exam, passed it, went home, got a ticket to Albany, had the final medical there. Went to Newport, Rhode Island, Coddington Point, Company 513, United States Navy Training Center. I was there for a little over a month. Ordinarily the training period is longer, but this was wartime. So they taught you the basics, what you needed, and left the school choice or further training choice until you left boot camp. I had a choice of subs or aviation. In order to get into aviation, first you got to know a little about the Navy. So I went to RCA Radio School in New York City. I was taught by civilian instructors for two months. For the next two months, I was taught by Navy instructors on the big equipment we used on the big ships. That took four months. I am going to say that I was twelfth in my class of five hundred. I have a newspaper clipping somewhere. But this entitled me to my first stripe, Third Class Radioman, Fleet Radioman. Now you notice there are wings on here. That was after you went into aviation. Once you went into aviation, they added

the wings. The regular one is a big spark picture. But anyway, I was a Third Class Radioman.

I went from there to Millington, Tennessee, outside of Memphis. Brand new airbase, all full of mud. On the way down, one of our officers that was in charge of us in transit got sick. They said, does anybody here know how to get these guys to march? I'd been in a drum corps and a band, so [I said] yeah, me. [They said], Good. You're now an acting petty officer. You're in charge of getting these guys to church, to class, to wherever we had to go. I was at Millington for two months, and I learned the difference between the big stuff on the ships and the little dinky ones they put in the aircraft, the aviation radio. I had already learned how to use the Morse code, key, send and receive. Now it was concentrating on earphones and voice. So I learned what I didn't learn in New York City there.

From there, I volunteered for aviation in New York, but the next step in my career was Aerial Ground Gunnery School, Hollywood, Florida. I was there through Christmas of my first year in the service. I was there for two months. We rehearsed shooting at anything that we called a target. We had a plane fly over with a fifty-foot rope and a round canvas bag called a sleeve. Three at a time. We took three colors of paint and painted on the nose of our .30 caliber bullets. So that it would leave a color if we pierced the canvas. We learned how to shoot skeet. We learned how to lead the target. We also learned golf, anything that we could shoot. Also, the beginning of the electronic age. We shot on a screen with electronic signals like some of the first games that you see now that are very popular.

I went in in April. We are up to past Christmas. West Coast, four days. I want to say this. They pulled that old railroad car out of mothballs from World War I because it was falling apart, but it was the only transportation we had. Every railroad car in the country was busy hauling troops. So we got to Alameda. That was one of the West Coast's large Naval Air stations. It was in San Francisco Bay. I checked into Treasure Island, which was where they had the World's Fair just prior to the war. Slept my only two nights in the Navy in a hammock. Then I got transferred across the bay to Alameda, the Naval Air Station. After about two days of lectures of what they're going to expect of us, our squadron was in the making. You'll see that later on. Some of the squadrons that came back from the first combat in the Pacific were being reorganized. In the meantime, rather than sit around, they put us in scouting squadrons. The initials for the scouting squadron was VS. And as it turned out, I was assigned to VS-48. I put in some [of my] knowledge

about aerial gunnery. I used to transmit my messages to William 6 Victor, the Coast Guard station underneath the Golden Gate Bridge.

In other words, I'll tell you how we protected the West Coast from Mexico to Canada. In pairs, you went out. I'm just going to use the figure of one hundred miles. You took a ninety-degree corner out for thirty miles, and came back on the triangle. The other guy filled in the other half. That's a rectangle, two of us. We did the whole coast from Canada to Mexico. And anything suspicious, we phoned William 6 Victor, the Coast Guard station at Golden Gate Bridge. I can still use that key today. We spotted foreign ships that didn't really understand our language. Part of my duties was, on the first approach to the incoming ship, was I took my blinker and [signaled] da da da da da da da da. [That meant] CQ, which meant identify yourself. In the Navy, we had flags about this size, all different patterns and colors. [gestures about two feet square] They ran up a pole. Part of our duties was to learn what those flags meant. Well, any seaman that had communications could read what the message was that they ran up. They did it with flags. So, on the first passover, I sent them a signal to identify themselves. And some of them just didn't understand, were too lazy or maybe too slow in reacting and they didn't do it. So we made a circle. My pilot had fixed guns. Now, this was the [Vought] OS2U Kingfisher. It was a seaplane. We could land on water when the wheels came out and down, or we could land on the bay like we used to when we were based at Alameda. So anyway, I am trying to get all this in. I'm probably talking too fast. But like I said, the second pass over, if he didn't run up his identification flags, he was in trouble. Because I called William 6 Victor with my Morse key, out came a couple Army bombers from somewhere north of Frisco. Deep 6. Didn't ask questions. We couldn't afford to. The Japs were running miniature subs up on the beach along the California coast at night, infiltrating industry with these people that came ashore in darkness.

And I'm going to mention here, Roosevelt did the smartest thing he did by doing this. He rounded up every Jap, whether born here or not. Because some of them were sent here. I've studied Japanese history. I can take you back to 1932 when Japan first planned Pearl Harbor. I'll tell you a story about that in a minute. Anyway, we rounded up all the Japs to slow this down. These incoming ships, most of them eventually ran up the flags. I read them, interpreted them, and sent the okay message back. What I wanted to know was where are you headed? Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco? What pier? What's your ETA, expected time of arrival? All this. So then we finished our triangular area we were scouting. These hops lasted about four hours. That was about what our gasoline stretched. We went back, and on the way back, we saw the incoming coming out. All hours of daylight, we were scouting the coast. This was good training. I got a chance to use my

Twin 30s. [dual-mounted setup of .30 caliber Browning machine guns] I was manual release back then before we got fancy. I pulled the lever. We dropped a couple. We scared a couple. I think we were responsible for reporting one, which was the Army bombers deep-sixed, or the fighters. But it was good training.

In the meantime, they got the work going. They took Bombing Squadron VB-1, Bombing Squadron VB-2. They were eighteen-plane squadrons, brand new. Our carriers needed more help. So instead of an eighteen-man squadron, we went to thirty six. We utilized the hangar deck more and brought the planes up with an elevator and then got them off. This way we didn't have to get one hundred planes on the flight deck. There was no room. Remember, these carriers were only the length of a football field. The brand new ones, you can set my old [USS] Enterprise and [USS] Intrepid three times compared with the new nuclear Eisenhower or Kennedy. But we did what we could. We organized 1 and 2, and made a new outfit called Bombing 6. We inherited a very famous number. What was that number? I lost some friends in the first one I'd been writing to, and I was anxious to get into Bomber 6. This was part of Air Group 6. Thirty six planes, Torpedo 6, VT-6. Thirty six fighter planes in Fighting Squadron, VF-6. VB-6, thirty six planes. So about one hundred planes made up our air group. That was about all we can handle with that size character at that time in history. I'm going to jump ahead here for a minute. My second ship was the Intrepid, which was larger than the old original four we had to start the war with: the [USS] Hornet, the [USS] Enterprise, the Yorktown, and the Saratoga. I'm concerned mostly with the Hornet and the Enterprise. They were sisters. They were launched together, commissioned together, started the war together out there. In fact, they were our only defense in the Pacific at the beginning of the war. More about that.

So anyway, we spent a little time training there. They assigned us a brand new famous, one of the first aces in the Navy, Lieutenant Commander Edward [Henry] "Butch" O'Hare. His folks were, we'll say, politically involved in Chicago and Washington. After Butch's death later, I'll get to that, they named O'Hare International Airport. He was my skipper. He was skipper of all three squadrons. We went to Hawaii. We trained. Butch had been through the Battle of Midway. He had, I'm going to guess, five to seven. Became one of the Navy's first aces knocking down Japs. Was in all that early action out there. And they sent him back here to encourage the public to buy bonds and support the war effort. He earned the Congressional Medal of Honor and was presented that. By the time he got through selling bonds, we were all trained on the island of Maui in the Hawaiian Islands. I was there for approximately four months. We learned everything we needed to know, except the enemy wasn't shooting at us there. Once in a while, they got in close and we had an emergency hop, take off. I spotted a sub off of Guinea or [unclear]

16.06 Bay or something like that. We got into a little bit of combat. We were in the combat zone, but we weren't getting shot at there.

Anyway, he got there, they unload all his stuff and we were standing there talking. He said, is everybody ready to go down south? That meant head for the Japs. [we said] Yes, we are. Well, let's have a beer party and a ballgame, officers against the men. Well, I hate to tell you, the officers won, but boy, we enjoyed that. It was hot. I sat next to Butch O'Hare on the bench, and he had a little potbelly. He'd taken on a few pounds back here in the States eating all that steak and stuff. But anyway, I sat there and shook hands. Two or three of us there. O'Hare said, I'm new at this. I ain't done a thing for three or four months since the Battle of Midway. How would you guys win this war? You know what we did? We offered advice to a gold [unclear]. **16.59** Asked the enlisted men what the tough situations were, how to get out of it. They were the ones that are in there in the mud facing the enemy and everything else instead of behind a desk. No disrespect to the officers, but contact the enlisted men and you'll shorten the war. You'll find better ways to get the job done. And we had a good long conversation. That night we went out for night flying.

I'm going to tell you a story probably untold. Butch drank. He learned that probably selling bonds. But he drank heavily. So did the officers. So did the men. We were headed for combat. Those bullets were real and that blood was red. Butch got a little emotional that night when he started telling us about his battle during the Battle of Midway. So anyway, we had a good time. And he said, everybody on the flight line, that was one hundred planes, at seven o'clock tonight. If you can't fly drunk with me, you don't fly. In my outfit, we lost two pilots that night. Not the planes, not their lives, but two got transferred because of their propellers. He kept telling us to tighten up. Our best defense was a tight formation, more concentrated gun power in a tight form. Don't get stragglers because that was when you were going to get picked off one by one by these lonesome kamikazes and everything else. By the way, kamikaze means they not only crash into your ship, they crash into your plane. A lot of you people never heard that. My two best friends, I was best man at the wedding before we left California, both got shot down by kamikazes. I don't mean shot with bullets, I mean they crashed into them. A hell of a thing to say, but here he was waving his hand goodbye on the way down. Nothing you can do. The plane was on fire, what do you do? So long.

Anyway, we headed out for combat on the USS Enterprise, the most decorated ship of World War II. We went down in the Gilberts and the Marshalls. You've heard of some of these names. Battles I was associated with in that area, some of them directly involved.

My target was a tower on a Japanese island called Tarawa. The Marines later took it at a big loss of life. We knocked that tower over, and then we went back and strafed the beach ahead of the Marines. I'm going to mention some names. These were all involved in the Gilbert Islands. Eniwetock. Roi Namur. Oh gosh. Kwajalein, I believe, is in the Marshall Islands. But these are some of the familiar names when you study the first early battles of World War II and our island-hopping campaign. These were some of the initial ones because we got a foothold in the Pacific. We didn't have to be scared back in Hawaii because we stopped them there if we established a beach. The Seabees came in, supply ships came in, big cranes, set up a completely equipped mess hall, completely equipped radio shack, communications, electric shop, warehouses, all this stuff. Set them up with a big crane. In forty eight hours, they put down the steel mesh, and we were flying planes off of there.

I want to mention the name of one of my best buddies. His name is John O'Dell. He lives up the road from me in Homer, New York. He was a Marine SBD rear seat gunner like mine. [camera pans to a photo of a plane] I always kid him, I had a beautiful life out there. I got shot at, but at night I went back to the Holiday Inn. I had a milkshake, I had a haircut, I watched a movie, I watched guys boxing. And you, you poor bastard, excuse my language, you had to crawl in your foxhole on that damn island after the Seabees set up a base. But we were in love with each other. We are not queers, no. But we did the same job. These kids that are going to see this don't know is, blood is red. We shed a lot of it. Bombing 6, practically wiped out. I'm talking about the stuff that happened just before I got out there. Torpedo [Squadron] 8 [VT-8], one survivor, Ensign Gay. Fighting 3 off the [USS] Yorktown, practically wiped out. The Japs had a plane made out of wood, no armor to protect the pilots. They left extra space to carry the extra gas and the extra ammunition. So they could outfly us. The plane we were using at the very beginning was the F4F Grumman Wildcat. She folded her wings, which allowed us to get more in a small space. She was replaced later by the Hellcat. We were fortunate enough to be the first outfit to use the new F6F Hellcat fighters, successor to the Wildcat, F4F. More manpower. Rubber protection on the gas tanks. In other words, self-sealing. If a bullet pierced it, the rubber closed up. More armor. Chest plates around the pilot. The Japs never had that.

Now, remember I told you earlier, I'm going to tell you a story. In 1932 to 1934, the Japs took out some equipment and a crane and a digger and shaped an island to look like Pearl Harbor. It looked like a twin to it. If you flew over it, not knowing history too well, you would have sworn to God that it was Pearl Harbor. And they practiced for eight years. Back in the early years of the war, a lot of our nation's high brass, the admirals and the

generals, said, how are we going to defend Hawaii? Why are we going to defend them? Number one, Japan is a rock. No place to grow food. That was why they attacked China. Their warlords took over and started building up their armed forces. They needed oil. That was why Indochina. That was why their world domination of the Far East started way back in the early 1930s while we were suffering from The Depression. This was well planned, well rehearsed. Their best pilots practiced for eight years. You can look this up in any records. Some of this has been told, some ain't. But they were well prepared. It was well planned. Our Washington people knew it could happen. They were warned. So, they devised a plan to protect Pearl Harbor. On this plan, they estimated what the Japs would do. They would approach from the northwest. They would send a diversionary force to the Aleutians. They would do all that. And guess what? The Japs did it just like they had followed the blueprint. Just the way our top brass, our top people said. If we were going to attack, we would do it that way. And the Japs followed it letter for letter. There was nothing we could do. Congress kept cutting our budget. We started the war with crude equipment compared with what the Japs had developed behind our backs. We signed a treaty with Japan called a non-aggression or something like that, which meant you couldn't go down to Indochina and fight and steal their oil. You couldn't do it anymore. So, we started the Flying Tigers. General [Claire Lee] Chennault. Pat Scarano was here yesterday from Corning, New York. Flew the Hump. We were attacking from the rear because Japan had crossed the pond. They were fighting China. They wanted their wheat, grain, everything else. Also down in Indochina, which today is Vietnam, Cambodia, and that area. I made a pretty good study of this, so I hope my words are accurate. An awful lot of kids don't know about this war. This is the only way they're going to. I thank this program again for bringing this to their attention. This has got to be recorded before we all die. The Associated Press said we are dying [at a rate of] seventy five thousand a week.

You kids see this, you live in America, the land of freedom. You hang out on the corner. Why? Because me, Pat Scarano yesterday, that gentleman that was on here before that went from North Africa up through Italy and all that, they gave up their youth, most of them. We had some older [people] thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years old. We had some Seabees, sixty five, seventy years old. [They] put on the uniform again after they'd retired, came back to help build a base so we could take one island one at a time toward Japan. You don't realize how big that ocean is out there. You had to take them one at a time at a hell of a cost. We had to do it because in the meantime they were sneaking up through the Aleutians [Islands]. I was up at Adak, Alaska later on. I was part of a one thousand ship task force which left in 1945 before V-J Day. We amassed, that means got together. There were so many ships up there, if I wanted to go home, just put them in a

line and I could have walked to San Francisco. Twenty six carriers we had up there. We started the war with four, I believe, not counting the old antiques, the Langley and a few others. But anyway. The Japs, when they hit Pearl Harbor, sent a diversionary task force up in the Aleutians. And they took, what was it?

RVH: Attu and Kiska.

BLC: That's right. Okay. Later we took them back. But anyway, that was to pull our attention away. They were trying to sucker us into sending our only two carriers in the Hawaiian waters up there. That would have been bad. They would have had no resistance. But here's another thing I want you kids to know. This story hasn't been told either. You want to hear a story? Ask the enlisted man because he heard the scuttlebutt every day. And he read that stuff that goes in the wastebasket and the true story comes out. What happened was Admiral King was the naval aide for President Roosevelt in Washington. The Hornet and the Enterprise, my later skipper Halsey was captain then, not an admiral, in charge of the Enterprise. And I forgot who was on the Hornet. But they wanted to go in. When they heard the news of Pearl Harbor, they wanted to go in and get back. Washington said, no, if we lose you two, we might as well study Japanese. Go buy a book on how to live with the Japs. Because they could walk into San Francisco unopposed, literally unopposed. They could have walked into the Hawaiian Islands after they sunk all our fleet. I have figures. You all know about the battleship Arizona, nine hundred of my Navy buddies, Deep Six. [points to the ground] They decided to leave them there.

An awful lot you kids got to learn. They stopped teaching you in school. They taught you how Washington threw a silver dollar across the Potomac. Okay. And a little bit about everything, but the real history of this country is the survival of World War II. My mother saved grease, tin foil, even wood, brass, copper. Anything. We had Nazi subs off the East Coast, Jap subs off the West Coast. We got very little new material in. We had to make do. This was the beginning of recycling. Make do with what you got. And yet we supplied England, Italy later on when they came over to our side. We supplied all our Allies as well as our own multimillion-dollar armed forces that we built up. How the hell did we do it? We did it by recycling, using it over. America is famous for throwing stuff away, but now they see we are running out of natural resources. We are putting it to work.

Okay, let's jump from that. [refers to his notes] From Pearl Harbor, where did I leave you? West Coast. Okay, I went over there. We finally left, did our first battle action in the fall of 1943 in the Gilbert Islands. This was followed by a couple of trips back to Pearl to

replace our personnel, bury our dead, get newer equipment, make modifications to our old equipment, get a little rest, R&R, as you call it. Back out again, back into Pearl again. I was in Pearl for Christmas 1943. Okay, somewhere along here, previous to that, we lost Butch O'Hare.

I'll tell you a story about him. The Japanese Betty bomber [Mitsubishi G4M], we called them Betty for short, came over at night in the darkness. The Navy couldn't fly at night. We weren't equipped. Besides, you could see even a light off a paper match from miles up. That let the Jap people find you. Just a speck of light, you could see it. Back then there was no question. If you lit a cigarette topside, that meant way up, visible to the skies and the clouds. They shot you. They didn't ask questions. You couldn't afford to jeopardize all the lives of them guys and the ship itself. [directs question at interviewer] Anyway, you couldn't shut that for just one second, could you?

[video returns] I will take these glasses off. I had them on so I could look at this logbook. Something came to mind that I had sort of forgotten. That was a little time in the Navy hospital at Pearl Harbor. I have a leather holster that kept me busy while I was recuperating. I could take my kneecap off and hand it to you. They sewed it back on. Also, I had a lot of trouble back then. Everybody did. I don't know if it was the air conditioning on the ship or the weather, the humidity, or what, but everybody had tonsil trouble. And I was taking Sulfa, which was popular back then. for my tonsils. But I got to look back at this again. [picks up log book] Okay. I was in the hospital in Pearl Harbor looking out the window. Some of you that saw the movie *Midway* where the admiral had a skin condition. He was stuck in the hospital and missed some action. He looked out the window and there was a tree in the way. He said, have them cut that tree so I can see my old ship. He was mad. He was hospital-bound and couldn't leave. Well, I looked out the window and my old ship, the Enterprise, was going out the channel. Later on, I found out why she was going out the channel. She wasn't really leaving me. She was going out to sea to refuel. We learned a good lesson at Pearl Harbor; we stopped refueling our ships in the harbor from the tanks that were around the various locations there. All the ships were refueled at sea. Well, anyway, I looked out that window from the hospital. There was my ship. I raised hell with a lieutenant commander nurse in charge of my floor, and she called the chaplain. The chaplain came over and he said, what's the matter, bub? And I said, my ship. I got to get the hell out of here. My ship is going out to harbor. He said, calm down, motioning the nurse to give me a needle to put me out. But he got on the phone and then he talked with the nurse. He found out that I could recuperate aboard [my ship that was] headed back for combat while laying there and I'd be with my group. So anyway, with the help of a couple shore patrol in a Jeep, they got me down to the docks

and I went aboard the USS Lackawanna, which was an oil transport. Remember now, I've just mentioned that we refueled at sea, not in the harbor, because boy, it'd be a good time for them [the enemy] to hit you. And we never knew from day to day if they were coming back.

But anyway, we had pushed them to a point in the Pacific where we didn't think Pearl Harbor was a target anymore. By this time we were getting new ships out, new ones commissioned. We were getting more carriers. Everything, production was rolling. I looked out and, like I said, I got aboard the Lackawanna, a tanker, and we went out through the channel. At sea, about forty, fifty, sixty miles out, a storm came up. We had orders to get the hell back to combat because the Japs were doing something. We had to refuel regardless of the weather, ordinarily, it's dangerous. What you had to do was take a harpoon-like [line] with a gun charge, shoot a small line over the bow of the other ship, and then with that small line, pull a bigger and a bigger and bigger [line], and finally the hose. And that was how you refueled at sea. Well, when they stretched the line across, they also transferred mail, ice cream, bananas, whatever. I rowed that boatswain's chair. In this damn storm, the two bows came together. Well, as long as they were parallel, that [line] stayed fairly tight. But the two bows came in real quick and that rope slacked and they dragged me for, I don't know, one hundred feet in the water. I got back aboard my ship anyway. And here's the high point of it all. A couple of guys helped me into the ready room, which was one deck below where the planes took off from. Enlisted men had a ready room where they got their last instructions and all that, and the officers and the pilots had their own. They dragged me down there and in came Lieutenant Peters [?], the communications officer. And he said hey, Cottom, is that you? I had you down AWOL. Anyway, we got back to combat.

I think previous to this, I got you up in November when we hit the Marshalls. We didn't take them then. We took them after the first of the year, early in 1944. And one island, Kwajalein, in the Marshall Islands, comes to mind. Well, each one of these took its toll. We were losing men, planes, and everything else. Remember, we were getting better equipment. Finally, with these new fighters, we outflew the Zero. We learned how to fight the kamikaze. We learned how to increase our firepower. Tight formations, massive firepower cover. But anyway, we went back to Pearl every so often. New men, new planes, and boy, the new stuff that was coming out. And the guys were better trained. We got rid of our wounded and so on and so forth. But we went back to Pearl. I was back there for Christmas at Kaneohe Bay, which is on the other side of Oahu, opposite of Pearl Harbor. We went out again and this time, I think we hit a couple on the way. We stopped at Majuro. Majuro is an island, I am going to say halfway between Hawaii and

Truk/Chuuk. It got into Jap hands once. We took it back. We used this as a staging point. We left material there. We dropped off men there to be transferred somewhere else. We had gasoline storage there, everything. We also had a cemetery there. Anyway, I will get back to that cemetery in a minute.

But we went and took part in Task Force 58.1, 58.2, 58.3. We had enough ships, men, equipment, and planes. We split our group into three attacking forces. Attacked from three angles, three sides. Our target was Truk. Truk was the largest Japanese Navy base nearest to Japan. Three one-million-gallon storage tanks of aviation gasoline, possibly diesel, I don't know. Great barracks, a lot of warehouses full of guns. All sorts. This was their big supply point. Instead of going back to Japan, their ships pulled in there and restocked everything. This was the fly in the ointment. If we could stop them there, then we almost had easy access to the mainland. Now remember, a lot of big battles happened over this, but we were trying to stop them from supplying their fleet. Because after we took an island, they came back again later after we got established, snuck back in and tried to take it back, or at least do damage. So if we cut off everything at Truk, we were going to slow down their efforts to resupply their fleet, and it was going to get us that much closer. Remember, this was island hopping, one island at a time. A lot of Marines lost. You got to give credit to the Seabees. They were the guys that made the bases. Marines went up the beach with the Army, took the beach. As soon as we established something, the Seabees came in, set up an operating airbase, radio tower, communications, toilet facilities, desalination plants, you know, take salt water and make fresh water. Forty eight hours after the Seabees put down steel mesh, we were flying planes. My Marine buddy that did the same job on an SBD [Douglass Dauntless], only as a Marine, same training, same plane, came in and took over. He flew off of this to protect the island or stage attacks until he got transferred to another island recently taken.

But this is the way we went across the Pacific. It's a big ocean out there, people that are watching this. We had to diversify our forces so badly, split them up where we didn't even have enough sometimes in a task force to do the job. But we had to stop them or slow them down. But finally, America, with their production, the number of men that volunteered and signed up and trained, new planes, guns, everything, everything being improved. You were issued something one day and three weeks later they issued what looked like the same, only improved. We gained as we went through this war. We got better. They got weaker. Our losses started going down. Theirs started going up. And we got to the island of Truk. Like I said, that was their main...if we chopped that off, took that away from them, or at least wreck it, which we did. Three days in February, the 14th, 15th, 16th, the Army established bases on some of these islands so their [B]17s and their

[B]29s could fly long range, do a lot of damage during the night. The Navy didn't fly at night.

I'm going to tell you a quick story about Butch O'Hare. I'm going to go back to the Gilberts. My first skipper, Butch O'Hare, went up after a couple of kamikazes at night. The Japs came over, dropped flares with parachutes, lit up the whole ocean. We couldn't stand this. Kamikazes came in. Butch and another Hellcat fighter and a torpedo plane full of the latest radar went up at night. Unheard of. Butch got a couple of them, got shot down. I got a new skipper, well, I had two of them, [unclear] 40.10 Ike Hampton (?) and D.B. Ingersoll (?). But remember, that was back on the Enterprise. Now we're on the Intrepid at Truk. Sorry to jump around. We hit them three days in a row at Truk. The Army hit them three nights in a row. We destroyed just about every visible target there was. On the 3rd night, February 16th, 17th, just after midnight on the 17th, one of their planes came in, got us. We took a torpedo. We suffered heavy damage, no steering. Finally, with help and some old guys rigging up a sail and two destroyers pushing us, we got back to Majuro. Eventually, after they patched her up, made her seaworthy, we got back to Pearl Harbor. Took four days to issue us new clothing, pay records, and get us squared away. Transportation in the United States on the USS White Plains, a jeep carrier. The top was cut off a cruiser, a flight deck added, transported men and equipment. Also, you could just barely take off and land on one of them. Back to the States, end of combat. Back in Frisco in April, home on leave. I became an instructor after that.

I joined the fleet again up in the Aleutians. One thousand ships just weeks before they dropped the A-bomb. So I did not see any further combat after February 16th. We left combat waters. And by the time we got back to Pearl Harbor, it was secure enough in that part of the war, that we did not call that a combat zone anymore. It was just a staging zone. And so that is about it.

RVH: Okay, hold on there for a minute. We are going to have to switch tapes. Tape two, interview of Mr. Blaine Cottom on 24 January 2001. So Blaine, after you got back to the United States, you were assigned to gunnery instructor duty?

BLC: Gunnery, radio, operation of the radio in a much smaller radio transmitter and receiver. All stages of my job, how to clear your chambers of live ammunition before you land, all sorts of things that helped him do his job. We had a long title. We were listed on the books as an aviation radioman, either 3rd class, 2nd class, or 1st class. The last jump in the enlisted was Chief Petty Officer. But we were also known as aerial gunners. We had a separate patch right here, aerial gunner patch, [points to patch on left arm of his

uniform]. It was a combination of a lot of things. Operate the radio, operate the communications. We sat backwards with a pair of twin .30 machine guns, later .150, but when I was there it was twin .30s. We protected the rear, the kamikazes that snuck up on you.

I'll tell you a little story here. We used to break off into little three-man formations like a V, and believe it or not, instead of looking back, you looked across at your buddy. He was looking across at you. That was how we communicated. [question directed at cameraman] Is that thing aimed at my hand? [taps Morse code on his leg] This is C. Da di da da on the side of the plane. You held your hand out. No radio. Couldn't use them. Radio silence. They [enemy] could pick up your signal. That was how we communicated, the pilots also. So we did it with dots and dashes, by flat and knuckles, and no communication. We looked across, protected the other guy. He was looking. A new way to protect each other. We saw everything around you.

I enjoyed the Navy so well, I became an instructor and I tried to teach guys how to do my job. I'd been out there, I learned it thoroughly. I believed in it one hundred percent. I went from Modesto, California to a cow pasture. We invaded a cow pasture and set up a base as training. We went down to Twentynine Palms. They issued us Marine greens. I was transferred to a CASU, Carrier Aircraft Service Unit. These people went in after the Marines. And with the Seabees, got a base in operating order. Took over the electric, the radio communications, chow, and everything else. There was also an outfit called ACORN [Aviation, Construction, Ordnance, Repair, Navy]. I am not sure what the A-C-O-R-N stood for, but it was occupation of an island, getting a base a little closer to Japan that we could operate off of and further the war effort. As an instructor, I traveled most to California. Point Mugu is now a big missile center. Back then, it was just a hole in the wall. Ojai, California is like a country club up in the mountains above LA and Santa Paula, Ventura area. This was a rest center for submarine and aviation men. I also got sent up there for a rest. I hate to admit this on tape. But, I will. I told the officer in charge I wasn't going to mention it. I studied not to be a priest, because I'm a Baptist, but I studied to be a minister before the war. They taught me how to kill, not save. When I got back, I was so torn up, I went to see a psychiatrist. It was a three-day deal. Then he kicked me out. I left voluntarily though. Believe it or not, his first question asked If I wanted to go back to combat? I said, you need a psychiatrist. It's real out there. I'm not prepared. I'm a young teenager. So my whole life changed. I went into plumbing and heating. I did not become a minister. But I spent the rest of my days teaching new guys. Then I got sick of floating around doing that. It got pretty monotonous. I was taking on a few pounds. Other guys were going to combat. My sister was a hospital corpsman at the

Navy Hospital in Oak Knoll, California. She was the first blood relative I saw. She was taking care of the wounded when they unloaded them, brought them in. First guys back from combat, she took care of. She wrote letters home for them and all that. My brother Maynard was on a destroyer in the North Atlantic, convoy duty. They were picking them off left and right. He was topside during a storm and some guy from the boondocks dogged down the hatch, which meant he closed the entrance to the stairway to get below during the storm. He [Maynard] got battered around during the storm, ended up at St. Albans Naval Hospital, Long Island. Eventually, later, after recuperating and a return to the hospital, he got an honorable discharge instead of a medical. He wouldn't take the medical discharge.

I'll tell you another little story. I refused my Air Medal. Then later it was given to me, the ribbon only, because the medal wasn't available. They were making shells and ammunition and Jeeps and everything else out of it. Later on they caught up with me and I thought I was going to get it. I want this on the record. Somewhere down in Washington is the authorization. I have a copy of it in my scrapbook authorized by my skipper that I got the Air Medal for many battle stars. I have seven battle stars. The intensity of the battle determined whether you got a star on your Asiatic Pacific ribbon. I have seven from my aircrew wings. These are special wings made for us, the enlisted men. [points to the ribbons on his uniform] They're different. They're not gold like the Navy pilots are. But there are holes in there, and you added a star for a major battle or a major accomplishment. I have seven of those. Which equaled the seven battle stars, the seven major campaigns I was in. You got to get in there and get shot at and get a lot of guys killed and everything else before they designate it a major battle. This looks like a lot of color and decorations up here, but we earned them.

We started the war with crude weapons. They got better and better, and finally our stuff was better than the enemies. After the war, I went into heating. I got out in San Diego. Remember I told you they dropped the bomb in the fall? Well, it took six months to get us out. If they dumped us all out as civilians, the market would have been flooded. Nobody would have had a job. So anyway, I stayed in California until the snow melted in New York. That was in the middle of April. I phoned my mother and came back to New York. Got a job at Sinclair Refining Company distributing heating oil, gasoline, grease, so on and so forth. I was with them for four years. Uncle Sam paid for my training. He paid half my salary for two years. The boss paid the other half. At the end of three years, Uncle Sam lessened the amount they paid by twenty five percent. The boss increased his. At the end of four years, the boss was paying it all. That was how I got into heating. I made a whole career, almost, well, roughly fifty years.

Right now I consider myself an engineer. I have diplomas on the board which are in return for studying my manufacturer's product and passing a course, question and answer, drawings, everything to do with plumbing and heating. I went a step further, got into engineering, designing. Now I am in a business after retiring from the Plumbers Union. I have a thirty-some year pin coming up this year. Eight years in my own business, residential plumbing. What I'm doing right now is digging into the science of getting energy back from nature. We started out this world with no Niagara Mohawk, New York State Gas and Electric, no electric phone, no telephones. You built a fire to keep warm, cook your food. You didn't plug in an electric burner or a coffee pot or something like that. We can get this energy from nature. That is what I'm into now in my retirement. I have snow melting in my own house. I don't want to advertise on this thing, but I melt my snow while you're out there freezing and shoveling it. You leave the snow and ice, and I melt it so it's safe to walk on. I'm going to do this for my town of Homer as a gift for living there for forty years. Wonderful friends. My Marine gunner buddy lives up the road. He's a retired salesman who was on the road for many years. He's going to come in. I have some young guys coming up that want to learn. I'm teaching a class at BOCES on plumbing application, how to do it yourself, how to get into this free energy. It's free after you get the equipment to do it with. But the source of the energy is free twenty four hours a day, even in darkness. So, enough about that. I love the Navy. My dad was an Army one. I'll tell you a quick story. Have I got time?

RVH: Yeah.

BLC: Quick story about my dad. He was in the ammunition corps. He drove a truck took men, ammunition, food, and everything to the front lines. He got up there somewhere. I'd have to look at the notes. The whole front line was dead. Somebody handed him a rifle. He went to the front lines. The second day, he got shot in the mastoid. Eleven years later, because of the gassing, he had to have a kidney removed. Back in the 1930s, they took a hacksaw and cut you in half. They didn't have modern medicine. Dad had two kidney specialists. One of them wanted to operate immediately. The other guy said, no, you better fatten him up, he'll never survive. But it took dad two years. He was a carpenter by trade, as way back in other generations. He recuperated for two years. Finally, that body waste got less and less and that open wound closed up. Went back to work building boats. Built PT boats for the Navy. My brother Ken helped build them and got killed in the boat he helped build. I'm a little mad right now. The training was not enough. We sent green men into war. We sent Marines into war. Some kids hadn't even started to shave. We sent Navy men into war. Not because the Navy didn't want to train them, but because they didn't have time. The Japs planned this thing for many years in a row. They were

prepared. They were well stocked with aviation gasoline to keep their planes in the air. We started with a low budget for the military from Washington. And I believe the people in Washington knew it was coming. It was just a question of time. But they did nothing. We were in a depression trying to get out. I was poor. I mean poor, P-O-O-R. When dad was laid down on his back, neighbors fed us. We didn't have relief. We didn't have a free check. The only thing I got free from New York State was what we called the 52-20 Club. I forgot who was governor. For fifty two weeks, a veteran who returned home could sign a paper and get a twenty dollar check. It kept me alive. Started a family.

A lot of things you kids have today, automatic freedom, we paid for that for you. Next time you pass a vet, thank him. Or at least go to the damn parade on Memorial Day or Armistice Day or Flag Day. We don't celebrate VJ Day anymore. We used to have a parade. We don't celebrate VE Day after the war in Europe ended. You kids have got it made. You're hanging out on the corners. You're shooting up for thrills. Our biggest thrill was to get the hell out of combat and get home. You don't know how lucky you are. Go right back to Washington at Delaware. They were the first ones that fought for the freedom that you enjoy. Take it not lightly. Take it seriously. Somebody gave you all this free time and freedom, the right to hang out, the right to speak your voice, the right to write without getting sued or getting hurt. You're protected. What we did, we got for you. Me, this fellow taking the picture, the officer in charge of this program from Governor Pataki. I want to thank all of them. I think it's the only way we can teach our kids how to appreciate our freedoms. And if there are any other questions, I don't know, I think I've covered about all I want to say.

RVH: Yeah, let's take a break for a minute.

WC: We're rolling.

BLC: Okay. [shows photo of PT boat and medals] First, I'd like to pay a little respect here to a well-loved brother. He was what I called my protector when I was a kid. He used to keep my older brother from beating me up. This is a picture of a PT boat. Very fast, high-powered, better than average speedboat which used to carry torpedoes. The earlier ones used to get going real fast and roll those off the side. The boat made a U-turn and got out of the area. The torpedo went at whatever target you had it aimed at. And meanwhile, the PT boat turned one hundred eighty degrees and tried to get out of there. This was one of their typical boats made in ELCO Shipyards, Bayonne, New Jersey, and also Annapolis Yacht Yards. My brother got killed on one of the boats he helped build prior to his enlistment. So this is not his. His number was 194 Squadron 12. I'm not sure about this [the boat in the photo. These are his medals from my hand up. We have the American Campaign, American Defense, Asiatic Pacific, Bronze Star, Victory World War II, and

the Purple Heart. Down below here are Dad's medal, World War I. This is not a true medal. This you get at a VFW convention, but this is the only medal that I know of that they gave the soldiers in World War I. That's that brother.

Quick word about Maynard. I have nothing. He forgot the war. He was the destroyer man in the Atlantic. I gave his uniforms and what my mother had saved to the local museum in Homer, New York. Ken Eaton, owner, Clinton Street, Homer, New York 13077. He's in the phone book. He has a wonderful museum if anybody ever goes through Homer. When I was in the hospital in Pearl Harbor, I was in there for a couple of reasons, but really nothing serious. I got out of there. [shows a leather pistol holder] But this I made. This is a holster for my .38. The enlisted men had .38s to protect themselves in case we got forced down on an island or had to use it. Pilots had .45s. So anyway, this was something to do, and I made that in Pearl Harbor at the hospital. [shows his logbook] This is my logbook. This was underwater after we were torpedoed in February 1944, February 16th. I dried it out and lost some pages, but the pages with the stars are the major battles I was in. Over here near the end somewhere. I'll stop moving it. [shows pages] There we go. Where the stars are, those were the major campaigns I was in. That's all I have left of my logbook. We had these stamped and signed by the officers, so this is a true copy of my time in the Navy. Just wanted to give you a total. I had forty three hours when I had control of my airplane because they taught the enlisted men how to fly to get the pilot and officer back. I had a total of two hundred seventy one hours in the air in the Navy. And that was over a period from May 1942 until the end of the war. My total flight time was stamped by the commander of our squadron.

Going back to my father again, I don't have much of him left from World War I, but this is a picture of him. [shows photobook] Every soldier that fought AEF, American Expeditionary Forces, got a letter from the King of England thanking them for their service. This is Dad's religious medal he had around his neck and his dog tag. This is a history of his outfit, the 115th Ammunition Train. He drove supplies, men, food, and everything up to the front lines. He was wounded up there and suffered for many years from it. That's all basically I have left of Dad. The whole family was military way back. I have a great-grandfather in Gettysburg. This is a sad one here. [shows newspaper clipping] I'm reading from the top. "The following is a list of three hundred seventy three men killed while serving aboard the USS Enterprise." And they designated that ship by a number. CV6 was the Enterprise. And this is Butch O'Hare. O'Hare Airport was named after him. And here is another list. This is more or less the pilots. Air Group 6, it said up here where I highlighted it. [shows image of three grave stones]

These are our three admirals that won the war in the Pacific. I will read them. There are more than this, but these are the main ones. Chester Nimitz. He had a desk in Honolulu. He ran the operation from there. Admiral Turner, Spruance. There's also Halsey, Fletcher, and many more. [shows scarf] This is my original scarf. There are my initials on there, and here's the U.S. Navy leftover. My mother kept just about everything. Thank God she did.

This is my son, David. [shows military portrait] David was an officer in Vietnam. He went through regular basic training as an enlisted man, went to Fort Benning Flight School, became an officer, went to Fort Ruckus, learned helicopters and did two tours in Vietnam. Total of twenty years in the Army as a pilot and afterwards, and retired a major. Was going to be a colonel, but he went back to civilian life and married a girl from Texas. He worked ten years with the Texas Air National Guard and taught young pilots how to handle those Huey helicopters that he flew in Vietnam. [shows khaki helmet with goggles] This is my old helmet. We had two helmets. We had a leather one because remember, in a dive bomb you went up to twenty three thousand feet. It was frigid up there. You had a choice. Wear your khaki. Well, maybe you were stationed in Alaska, then you wore the leather one all the time. It was identical to this except it was leather and fur-lined. Goggles, earphones. Those are the original. The patch on the nose was because down in the South Pacific and we got sunburned, so that sort of protected your nose a little bit.

This is my youngest son, Darryl. [shows portrait] I had two boys. This guy would have been in the after days of Vietnam, possibly in Desert Storm or something or other, but he ended up in the plumbers union like me. He had a gallstone condition, bad kidneys, and couldn't make the service. But he's one of the best plumbers in Central New York. [shows hat] This is my Old Navy white hat, dress uniform. We also had a black one for winter. In the tropical areas, we wore whites. In the colder areas, we wore blues like I'm wearing now. The other hat was sort of flat on top and had the name of your ship or outfit on it. [shows two modern baseball hats] These are a couple of caps I picked up here. This one says, I served in the Navy with pride. My old ship, the 2nd carrier, the Intrepid, is at West 46th Street on the Hudson; it is a museum. If you ever go there, there's a submarine there. There's all sorts of stuff there. There's a destroyer there. It would be worth your while to visit. I go down once in a while and help sweep the floor.

By the way, we have an organization, Men of Intrepid. It is an alumni organization. Now, right here on camera, I want to thank New York State, Governor Pataki, and whoever else was involved. [shows diploma] This is my high school diploma. I quit school in the

senior year, just after the war started in December. My senior year started in September. I got this diploma. I do not know what the date is. [looks at date on diploma] November 28th. When the State of New York, and possibly thanks to Governor Pataki, those of us that could not finish high school and chose not to go back after the war, were given our diploma if we were within a reasonable distance of graduating. But anyway, this was presented to me this past November by the Cortland Board of Education, with a little ceremony up there. I thank everybody involved in getting this. The only way I could join the Navy was to promise my mother I'd go back and get my diploma after the war.

RVH: You did it.

BLC: They gave it to me. [shows book *United States Fleet Carriers of WW2*] These are two books and scrapbooks. The carriers won the war in World War II. The battleships did their part, gave us protection. The destroyers protected the battleships and the cruisers, all sorts of supply ships and everything else. The only way we could get from here to Japan was island hopping, and it was the carriers. We started out the war with a couple of scrap pieces, some good ones, the Hornet, the Enterprise. Langley was the old one. Saratoga, some others. But we ended the war with twenty six modern aircraft carriers. And now most of them are in mothballs or have been scrapped. Of course, these are the old style. The new ones, you can take one of these [carriers] and put three of them on the deck of the new ones. And of course, the new ones are nuclear-powered with probably twice the complement of men we used to carry. Twice the area. I don't know about the [number of] planes. But of course, your planes are all modern and jet and everything else. An entirely different world. As we look back, it looks sort of crude compared to today's modern fighting equipment. And this is filled with all sorts of stuff. [shows book has lots of momentos inside]

I want to show you a picture I'm very proud of. [shows photo of son with Vice President George Bush] My son David, the one that I told you who was in the Vietnam conflict as a helicopter pilot. After he started working with the Guard, he was in close touch with the governor of Texas. And when some official came down, such as the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of Texas independence from Mexico celebration at San Jacinto, I believe it is. Bush was vice president. This is the father of our President today. He was Vice President at that time, and my son had charge of his security from the time he flew into Texas until he got out of Texas. The housing, the meals, the protection, the snacks, the safety, and everything else. This is my son here, the helicopter pilot from Vietnam. That is Bush and his wife in the background. This is a copy of it.

[shows photo of Regan, Nixon, Bush, Ford] Here are four great men, four great presidents. I'm not going to let politics enter into this, but I believe the Republicans are concerned with the future of the small guy. This country is made up of small men. We were the ones that fought their wars. And now they sort of help themselves.

These other two books, I'm just going to lay this aside for a minute. [shows scrapbook] This is the history of my life in the United States Navy. Serial number 6002714. Entry April 29th, 1942. Exited the Navy January 18th, 1946 at San Diego. And there's all sorts of stuff in here. [shows pages in the book] Here are battle maps of the *Intrepid's* route in the Pacific. Here are fires. These are all authentic Navy. Some of them from our publication of our Alumni Association, *Men of Intrepid*. Our headquarters is up in Boston. We go down on a bus. This is the Marine detachment. The entire circumference of the ship was manned by Marine gunners. An ex-Marine started this organization. These are all battle pictures, all sorts of subjects. Here is the China Incident starting the war. Japan's dreams of expansion to feed their people, to give them oil for the war machine they were building up, started out in Indochina, which is now Vietnam and Cambodia and Laos. So we went over with General Chennault. tried to hit them from the rear up through India. That was the gentleman you did yesterday here, Pat Scarano, was a pilot flying the Hump. One of our first enemy actions was Rabaul. We were hitting back defensively. We got nothing to fight them offensively. Keep them off our back till we can get built up back at home. My education here goes up to and including the Battle of Midway, which was our first big blowback. We got four Jap carriers, their first-line carriers. They had a lot of them. These were their four best. We got them. We let them know we meant business. They turned around and went home. At that time, they didn't get too far away from their homeland. But we had a fleet there to stop them. By then, we had the forces built up to do it. We had the men trained to do it. So, this is my memorabilia. A lot of this will end up in the New York State Museum. I've made up my mind right here and now.

The son that went to Vietnam. Different war, different style. This is another book on my brother Ken, the one that lost his life. [shows brother's scrapbook] In here, is his Purple Heart commendation, the Bronze Star, letters from every known figure in Washington that wrote sympathetic letters to the parents. Mayor of New York City. Mayor of Bayonne, New Jersey. Mayor of Cortland, New York. Different groups. James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy. [shows photo of Ken] This is a picture of him with a short haircut. Graduation. Barber made a mistake. Boy, was he mad. Hunting license and everything else. There he is. One of the greatest looking guys, guitar player, my protector. The state of New York will have this. Oh, there's his Purple Heart thing right there. [shows letter]

This is a copy, not the real thing. [It says] you have to lose blood or lose your life and you get it. That's about the end of it. My book and his book.

Okay. [shows painting] I want to introduce my wife, Jean Helen Aitken, United States Navy WAVES, 1942 to 1944. Jean was brought up in Homer, New York, as I was, in that same area. I met her in 1937 at a band concert on the Village Green. Neither one of us had war in mind, but it brought us together later. I didn't see her again until 1946, after I was back as a civilian. I met her at a dance. She tapped me on the shoulder and said, do you remember me? And I said, no. She said, you stood me up in 1937, we met at a concert, you made a date and never showed up. Well, anyway, I couldn't take her home because she went to the dance with another guy, but I did have chicken dinner the next day. This painting was made from a little snapshot. The painter's name is a wonderful lady, lives down in my area. Her name is Arlen Withey. I'll give you a phone number, 607-898-5234. She also did another painting of my mother and father, together from separate photos. This was from a photo. My wife is a retired banker, ten years jeweler, twenty three years assistant trust officer, First National Bank, Cortland. Wonderful wife, wonderful mother.

RVH: Blaine, what were her duties in the WAVES?

BLC: In the WAVES, she was an employee of General Electric. She was like a stenographer, bookkeeper, and pencil pusher. When she went in, after her boot camp at Hunter's College, New York City, WAVES Training Center, she had three or four things open to her. But she heard about communications, naval intelligence, coded messages and all that. She was a good typist. So she applied for that and got it. In Washington, on the corner of Nebraska and Pennsylvania Avenue, they had a Quonset hut where they used to decode messages sent back from the Pacific and the Atlantic. These messages were in five-letter code groups. It might be APZQF. It didn't mean anything. But until they were deciphered, each one of those went through different stages. Twelve girls started out with these five-letter code groups and deciphered a little bit. My wife was number twelve. She read the finished message, handed it to an aide who took it to Admiral King, who was the right-hand naval aide of President Roosevelt. And she stayed there a good year. In the late 1940s, I believe it was, they started discharging women out of the service. She was one of the first to be discharged. We had not conquered the war, but we had the war in the Pacific at a point where we knew we were going to win. It was a question of time, money, men, lives, and they no longer needed this service. We had free access to the airwaves. We could talk in English over the air without somebody getting our message and using it against us. So, they got rid of the girls in the service

awfully quickly. The WACs and the WAVES and the SPARS were the other branches of the service that the women served. They did a terrific job.

I want to tell you a real quick story. I'm still looking for the woman that took my desk job I had and sent me to sea. [smiles] I don't know what else.

RVH: I think we covered just about everything.

BLC: Could I again thank the people that initiated this program, made this information and true stories of World War II and why you kids are able to enjoy the freedoms that you have today. I didn't mind giving up my youth. Get off of them drugs and all that other stuff that's killing you. You gotta take over this country. We're gonna be gone. It's a great country worth fighting for. Take care of it.

RVH: Thank you.