

Harris, H. E. Jr. Interview 2-19-91

[Speaker 1]

Now, as I said, my first ship was the USS Thurston AP-77. She was an amphibious mothership and carried around 20, maybe 25 boats on her deck. When I was assigned to her, Captain Hurth was captain of the ship and the executive officer was R.B. Van Ness. He was a class of 25 from the Naval Academy. The most despicable man I have ever had the displeasure of knowing. We got along fine when we were training up the Chesapeake.

We made the addition of North Africa and came back to New York. Captain Hurth had requested three of us. We had about eight or ten amphibious officers and something around 100, 115, 120 enlisted men as boat crews.

And Captain Hurth requested three of us. Cornelius Francis McKeel was his name from Providence Island and was, by the way, my roommate at the time. Hitch Carr Maiden was from Texas.

He's an executive officer, probably retired now, from one of the major banks there in Dallas. But the three of us and myself was the third. I was in the engineering department.

They were in deck and they stood deck watches. I stood engineering watches. The Bureau of Naval Personnel allowed the captain to, with the three of us and 40 men.

He allowed us to select the 40 men and, of course, we selected the best men we had. And we became part of ship's company as long as we were operating as support vessel. We went into an amphibious landing.

Then we trained and took part in the amphibious landing, the 40 men and the three officers.

[Speaker 2]

About what time was this? This was 1943?

[Speaker 1]

No, November the 8th, we hit 42. We hit North Africa. And back to the United States.

That's when we got permission to stay aboard. I see. And then the rest of the amphibious force was taken off the ship in Little Creek just outside of Norfolk Naval Base.

And the rest of us went to New York with the ship and went into the dry dock and whatnot for repair. At the end of which, I had four days leave granted by Captain Hurth to get married. And we had a full honeymoon at the Commodore Hotel.

The interesting thing there was the other ship's officers said they were going to give us hell, my wife and myself. And I'm sure they tried because they told me after we got to the ship and we headed back to North Africa, Casablanca, on support stocking. They said, you didn't stay anywhere near Manhattan Island.

I said, I did stay in Manhattan. And they said, well, you stayed in some hotel. And I said, no sir, I stayed in a very fine hotel.

And they said, well, we called every decent hotel on Manhattan. You weren't registered. And I said, did you call the Commodore?

And they said, no, we were staying there. And I said, so did I. And I did.

I stayed. They didn't look for me there. But after I got married, this R.B. Van Ness, Commander Van Ness, treated me worse than dirt under his feet. I've never been. My life was made miserable for about 18 months. He assigned any dirty duty to me.

As I said, I was an engineering watch stander. I was a B Division. I had charge of the boilers and the men operating the boiler tenders.

I was a boat division officer. And he assigned me the duty of ship service officer. Naval regulations requires that that job be rotated in the officers every two months.

I was relieved in 11 months. And it was because for some reason or the other, he held his payday on the fifth of the month. Rather than keep track of each man's laundry, we charged every man 50 cents a month.

And he could send everything he had or he could send nothing, but he still owed us 50 cents. Officers, a dollar. Well, that adds up to about \$300 accounts receivable on the fifth of the month because I had to close my books as of the first of the month.

So on the fifth of the month, I showed, let's say, \$300 accounts receivable. And every time my statement, before it was sent to U-PERS, Abuse Ships, whichever, he would call me his room and raise unmitigated hail. What are you doing about the accounts receivable?

And I explained to him and again and again that I had to close my books on the first and he paid me on the fifth and that wasn't accounts receivable. And some insulted or barged in and about that tone of voice and I couldn't figure out why. What have I done to make him feel the way he did?

Well, eventually, I was transferred to the tanker. They said that was rest duty and on the tankers you have to work only the first 24 hours of every day. And then you can just lay around and do nothing the rest of the time.

But they are, they're all slavers because there's something to do on a tanker all the time. And so I went to the Pacific with it. The day I boarded to the tanker, I went to Captain Palmer.

He was the only officer on board at the time. We were building the ship in Baltimore, Maryland at Sparrows Point. Bethlehem Steel, I think, was the one that built it.

And I told Captain Palmer that at that point he could be aware of the fact that there were no personalities involved. That I was requesting a transfer back to the amphibious force in combatant duty. I was trained for it, I knew how to do it, and I found it interesting.

I enjoyed being where the headlines were being made. So he said, stay with me six months. If you want to stay from then on, fine.

If you want a transfer at that time, I will forward it approved. And I said, that's as fair a shake as that. At the end of six months, I requested the transfer to the amphibious force.

It was approved. My relief came aboard. And I kind of pulled a shenanigan there.

My orders came in. I was on the decoding board. And the signalman, or radioman, woke me up about three o'clock in the morning.

He said, there's a message for the vessel to be decoded. I had the duty at that time, so I dashed up and decoded. I looked at what I was decoding, and there was my name.

That was my orders transferring me to another ship, or to the United States. And I went in, woke Captain Palmer, and told him I had a vessel. We had orders, anything pertaining to our unit, our task force, or anything else, to be awakened.

And I said, message for this vessel. He said, what is it? What is it?

Quick. I said, it's my orders back to the States. He said, Harris, if you were just in, if you were general court martial, I think you would have.

But we went into the decoding board. He said, machine down. I did.

He said, set it up again. I set it up again. He says, now decode.

I decoded. And there it was, and I was not lying to him. So, the executive officer was not too highly experienced there, and he said that on such and such a date I would be transferred to the USS General Sturgis, which was a station ship, a floating hotel, for officers and enlisted men waiting for ships or waiting for transfer.

And I informed him, and I said, you are not transferring an enlisted man. Officers are supposed to know how to get around and sail. So, he said, well, you write the orders this morning.

Obviously, he didn't know how to do it, so I wrote them. In paragraph one, the orders quoted for your information. Paragraph two, you're hereby directed to take first available government transportation, and right there is where I made the shenanigans.

Supposed to be comma, not to include air. And I just left that out. And then paragraph three, orders are delivered, execute.

And I took those over to the ship island command and handed them to the captain there, and I said, can I fly home? And he said, sure, you're lucky. He said, those orders will take you home.

And I said, isn't that nice? And we flew that afternoon. We flew up to Guam.

We were grounded there for about three days. And as we were playing bridge in transit officer's quarters, and this warden, we got to asking him, playing the game, where are you from and who do you know? And he said, I told him, I was from the University of Tennessee.

And he said, well, my major is from the University of Tennessee. He played football there. I said, I probably knew him.

Who was he? It turned out it was Pappy Joe Wallen, a fraternity brother. And he was a major down on the other end of the island.

He came, I called him over these telephone systems that the Army had set up, and he came up to see me, and bless his heart, he had a bottle of Scotch whiskey. And it was just delightful to see somebody from home. It really meant a lot.

But then a few days later, we flew to Kwajalein, and then Johnson Island, and Honolulu, and then San Francisco.

[Speaker 8]

What kind of a plane were you on, do you remember?

[Speaker 1]

I was on a DC-3 from Ulysses to Guam. And then our Navy designation was R-5D. That was, I think, a DC-4, if I'm not mistaken.

It was a big four-engine job. And it was overloaded. Mercy from Honolulu to San Francisco, it was overloaded.

And that boy bent the floorboard, the wheel, by pulling the stick back to get over the mountain, trying to get off the ground. I'll never forget it. And let us come forward.

He flew at about 12,000, 13,000 feet. That didn't have enough oxygen. Everybody went to sleep instead of moving around.

Everybody went to sleep, and that's what the pilot wanted. It would allow us to come up on the flight deck and smoke cigarettes. And if you've ever smoked a cigarette at that altitude, you know exactly where your dental work needs to be done.

It hurts. If you did that, you'd sweat all over the teeth you had. But when I went up, the co-pilot was listening to the book, and the pilot had his leg over the arm of his chair, pilot's seat, talking to the operator.

And he was taking the droop out of the automatic pilot, an extension he'd put on the buttons that turn to take the droop out. And as I walked in, I looked around, and it was as black as the ace of spades. Out every window in the pilot's compartment.

And my first question to him was, who in the hell is watching where we're going? He said, George is flying at me. He knows where he's going.

And when we got in San Francisco, we had to just nose almost straight down at a steep level through a dam that broke out, I don't recall where, somewhere around 1,000 feet, I guess, and landed. And I was never so glad to get my own ground in my life. But when we reported to the, I think that was the 12th district, there to await further orders, we were told to, we were given a telephone number, and told to call that number at 11 o'clock every morning.

Otherwise, don't come near the headquarters, which we were glad by. And I had picked up three friends. When you're at difficulties, as you experience in a flight like that, you make friends rather quickly.

Everybody's subjected to the same colors, and you help each other, and you get to be friends. One boy was off to South Dakota. One boy, he'd been there for about three years, and he was injured.

He'd gotten wounded in some way. And he was on his way back to the States. He was ambulatory.

There was a Marine that was a spy in Japan. I'm sure he had treated his skin with something to turn him that yellow color he had. And his hair was cut very short, and he would never tell us how they got him off the island.

We asked him. He wouldn't tell us, never did tell us. He was from Seattle, Washington.

A boy from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, John A. Vanderslice, was, he was returning to his ship a destroyer from Damage Control School, which he'd been attending in Honolulu, when we encountered him in Guam. The reason he could not proceed to his ship was because, I'm sure you've heard of the awful hurricane that was detected.

And we were supposedly third fleet that morning. And we could take on a battleship and a carrier on our forehand, and two destroyers at a time on our starboard hand. And the destroyers were of the Monaghan class.

They were the Hull, Spence, Monaghan, and Erie. I'll never forget those names because they had pumped their ballast and were just literally sitting right on top of the water. And when that hurricane broke off, three of them turned over, and they got six men off of those three ships.

The Erie rolled to record 72 degrees and righted herself. And they don't know yet how she did it, but she did. But Vanderslice was one of the ships that sunk, and so he was given 30 days, sunk ship, leave, and was on his way home.

He was a junior officer, so we put him in charge of the luggage. And we were met. The two of us were supposed to go to the hospital.

They had found a spot on my lung, which later turned out to be in the form of histoplasmosis, but they said it's a diagnosis undetermined, possible tuberculin. I was to report to the hospital when I got to my next assignment. But that was my next assignment.

I was supposed to go to the hospital there, and we were met by two waves, officers, and a station wagon when we got off the plane in Oakland. And they said, we have to take you to the hospital. We're not going to the hospital.

And where are you going to stay? They said, we're going to stay in a hotel downtown. Now, if the doctors want to see us, glad to meet them there.

Anytime they want to come downtown. They said, well, we'll tell them, but we don't know what will happen. So it turned out that Harry Fitch, the kid off the—he wasn't a kid, pretty good officer—off in the South Dakota, knew the assistant manager of the Sir Francis Drake.

And he wrote down on him in his office, and he said, good Lord, all I have is the bridal suite. And he said, that'll just fine for all four of us. Where we stayed, and we had a party 24 hours a day for eight straight days.

And my part of the bill was something like \$400 when I got lowered. And there were two of us still there. The Marine, it's not for him, called his father and found out his wife was living with somebody else.

And he immediately took his bag and found his automatic, put it in his pocket, and caught a train that night. Just what happened, I don't know. But I can't blame him.

[Speaker 2]

That's something to come home to, isn't it?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, a lot of folks ain't walking home. But that was the last we saw of him. And then eight days later, Mauritius came.

The other two were still there in the suite. And I paid my part of it. Took off.

I was going to Providence, Rhode Island, and so they sent me from San Francisco to Los Angeles, to Phoenix, Arlington, El Paso, Texas, Oklahoma City, Memphis, Washington, New York, and Providence, Rhode Island. I was allowed four travel days, and it takes six days to make the trip. And I had to get two extra days paid, because they said I was over-leaved.

[Speaker 2]

Did you have that long attended to when you were in San Francisco?

[Speaker 1]

I went to the hospital as soon as I reported to Newport, Rhode Island. That was Commodore Magruder's Navy there. Holy Lord, he had a ramrod for a backbone.

And the first thing I was done, I was stopped by another officer wanting to know where my gloves were. And I had the slightest idea where my gloves were. But you don't make yourself around that base without your gloves on, if you're wearing an overcoat.

But I did go to the hospital. I spent days there. And they examined me thoroughly.

And they put the shook test in my arm. And when the tech came back and said, which arm was it in? And I said, it was this.

And they didn't believe it, so she gave me one in each arm. And they disappeared. So I did not have two breakfasts.

And after 30 days, the doctor told me, he said, Harris, we don't know what's the matter with you. If you want the diagnosis of tuberculosis, we can give it to you. And you'll have a medical pension the rest of your life.

Or you can go back to active duty. And I said, well, hell, I volunteered. The war's not over, so I'm going back to active duty.

He said, that's fine. And I did. After the war, I went to, by the way, Dr. Hollanson is his name. I wondered if you were related. He's a doctor, a lung specialist in Vanderbilt, and has his own TB hospital at that time. And he looked me over closely, and he said, your doctors in the Navy were telling you the truth because we did not find this bent form of histoplasmosis until about two months ago.

And they didn't know what was wrong with you. I said, what'd I do, drink milk? Get a lot of sleep?

He says, just lead a normal life. Perfectly all right. And I guess I still haven't.

[Speaker 2]

It must have been good to hear.

[Speaker 1]

Delighting. There's no idea. But while we were there in San Francisco, the officers club was at the Fairmount Hotel.

And naturally, we went up there. One reason I loved going up there was to ride that cable car. Because as long as you can grab something and hold on, that's all that's necessary.

People just literally riding everywhere but on the roof. But we'd go up to the officers club every night. And one night, I ran into three or four officers from the old USS Thurston.

The war was over in Europe, and she had come back to the States through the canal and was riding between buoys in the San Francisco Bay. And I said, well, I'll go down tomorrow. The next day, my orders arrived, and I didn't get to go see the ship.

Now then, let's skip from World War II to the Korean situation. I got called back. My name must have been laying right on top.

Because I had put three or four ships in commission, and they were pulling at that time during the Korean situation, pulling ships out of the mothballs. And I was assigned one in Orange, Texas. At that time, I was living in Houston.

And we pulled that one out of mothballs. I won't go into much detail about that ship. She was an LSD.

She was built for the British, and the mistake that was made was they didn't give it to her. They gave her to the British. She was, for instance, we had generators for a 230-volt two-wire system.

And I had an awful time even buying light loads. I was chief engineer of that ship. And you had to go to Westinghouse or General Electric, export production.

And if I ordered through the normal channels, it would come back. I would order cases of light bulbs. And it would come back marked out in red, and the 230-volt was marked out in red.

115 was put there. Well, that's American, and this was not an American ship. But I don't want to go into that too much.

Because one afternoon, we were in Norfolk. We finally got her into Norfolk. And incidentally, when we got there, we were using 15,000 gallons of make-up feed water an hour.

And I had told the captain, we may make it and we may not. You better arrange for a tug. And he did.

But we did make it. And when the boilers cooled off and we crawled in, what was the matter? I found tubes with holes in them that I could literally drop a pencil through.

It was, in other words, the mothballs looked good on paper, but not on the ship. They didn't preserve anything. But that's the end of it.

One Sunday afternoon, I was over at the Officer's Club. And the big room at the Officer's Club linged in theater style. And a large screen television was on the football game.

And an officer came in and sat down by me. And in something of an Irish brogue said he was rye and ginger ale. And I made the remark at the time that there was not a son of a bitch in the Navy that would order a drink like that but Cliff Morey.

And it was Cliff Morey. I recognized his voice. And he was a friend and an officer, Officer Thurston.

But he had been called back in the Navy, too, during Korea. So we immediately left the football game and went in and started drinking beer and finding out what had happened to all of us. He said, did anybody tell you what happened to the Red Beard?

Now, this Red Beard is a negative officer that hated my soul. And when Captain Hurth was injured, he was shot in the Battle of Sicily. The Red Beard took over as captain and was later given the fourth stripe and he remained as captain.

And so Cliff Morey asked me if I knew what had happened to the Red Beard. I said, no. Somebody kill him?

He said, oh, you're going to enjoy this. And then he said, do you remember Hayclerk Green? I said, yes, I remember.

He said, you and Hayclerk Green were the two that the Red Beard despised. I said, oh, I'm aware of that. He said, I'm going to let him tell you.

He is now a lieutenant over at Portsmouth Station, in Portsmouth, Virginia. I'm going to let him tell you. Well, I had to go over and get the boiler tubes the next day.

And they had only two sets of tubes. And I had to re-tube tubes, and they didn't want to give me both sets because they didn't have any more. Which raised the question in my mind is, what did they have in there for me in the first place?

And I finally got them, loaded them on our truck, but we were there during lunch. And while we were eating our lunch, here came Lieutenant Green through the cafeteria line. He had it round and around, right there on the floor.

Because I was delighted to see him. He said, did you hear what happened to the Red Beard? I said, Cliff Morey told me that you helped me.

He said, you're going to love this. He said, we were between buoys in San Francisco Bay. He said, at 8 o'clock?

Well, do you remember a Dr. McReynolds that came aboard shortly before you left? He was there a couple, three months before I left the ship. He said, well, he kept a diary on that fellow.

He said, there's something wrong with him. Because of the way he treated people. And the most holier-than-thou attitude I've ever encountered.

And he said, he kept a diary on him. One night, and by the way, it was that night that I had run into the other officers that were at the officer's club. He said, he had the duty.

McReynolds had the duty. He asked Dr. Crist. Now, Dr. Crist was a specialist, a four-strike captain in the medical corps. And he asked Dr. Crist to stay aboard with the chief pharmacist mate. And at 8 o'clock, they went to the movie. At 9 o'clock, they got up and left the movie and went to the captain's cabin.

The messenger's chair was sitting outside the captain's door. But the messenger was in it. And the captain's door was closed.

And they didn't even bother to knock. They just opened the door, walked in, and caught the red beard in a homosexual act. And they told him he was under arrest.

That they would take him ashore the next day and prefer charges. I said, good Lord, you've made love to him. When he told me this, I said, what happened to him?

He said he was given a general court-martial. His sentence was 12 years hard labor, horseman's label prison. Reduced from a four-strike captain to an apprentice seaman.

Deprived of all pay and allowances, which means he got \$5 a month to buy cigarettes. And at the end of his 12 years hard labor, he was dishonorably discharged from the Navy. And I said, you have strictly made my day.

I was never so glad to do anything in my life. And the thing I regretted was I wasn't there to see it. Because he made my life miserable.

And I do mean miserable. From the airport to that ship in Opera 42. And I was transferred in April 44.

[Speaker 2]

Time to be in a small place with somebody who doesn't like you.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, the intimate living aboard ship. You're close. And if there's anything that gets on your nerves, it'll drive you right out of your gourd.

And believe me, it was hard.

[Speaker 2]

It was rough. Any idea of why he settled on you and the pay clerk? My idea.

I don't know why exactly.

[Speaker 1]

But my guess is that he kind of had something in mind as a relationship between us until I got married. And that, I believe, touched him off. I think it did.

I don't know. I had no idea until I found out that he had been court-martialed for that offense.

[Speaker 2]

But his attitude towards you changed when you came back from your...

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, from then on. It was hell on wheels for me.

[Speaker 2]

That must have been really, really hard. Because it's a relatively small vessel and there's somebody over you in command.

[Speaker 1]

Well, he's God. If he says, over the side, you're over the side, period. And it was no fun for that time.

You did the best you could. But any one of those jobs was a full-time job. And that particular ship service, I had charge of the barbershop, the geed-up stand, which is a ship store, and the laundry.

I had to watch every penny. If I was out a penny, what would give you an idea? We were leaving port.

We had told the Lord, you can't go to port, you can't leave port without your blues on. So, that is, blue uniforms, dress uniforms. And so, I had on those.

Immediately, we left the harbor. We shifted to khakis. But while we were at quarters, we always stood at quarters as we left harbor.

And one of the boys came by and handed me \$7.50 for his division. He was the laundry petty officer. And at times, stuck it in my pocket.

When I changed clothes, I forgot to take the money out. When I made up my statement, I was \$7.50 short. So, I reported it that way.

I wasn't going to make it up and then find out later that I shouldn't have. And all of the dressing downs I ever got was over that \$7.50. And he, in this tone of voice, well, Mr. Harris, why did you join the Navy? And I said, it might have been a personal grudge.

I might have had a particular reason with a relative that was in prison. But whatever the reason was, it was not to learn the laundry business. Well, get out of here.

[Speaker 6]

That was his attitude. That's the way he treated me.

[Speaker 1]

But when we came back, another month had passed. And we dressed to enter court. And there's the \$7.50. So, the next month, I reported \$7.50 over. But I never let down the fact that I'd had a short haul with the Lord. He had a lot to say about it. Another time, I requested permission to leave the ship.

He said, no, you're going to the theater with me and Cornelius Francis McKeel. And we went to the theater and we saw The Voice of the Turtle. But on the way to the theater, we stopped at United Church Street, which is a Navy installation in New York.

And in the elevator, we started up. Almost, some ladies got aboard. I took my hat off, put it under my arm.

And he informed me in front of them, naval officers do not remove their hats in the elevators. And I said, sir, I was a gentleman before I was a naval officer. And I left my hat off.

So, maybe I did needle him a little bit.

[Speaker 2]

Very few opportunities to do that.

[Speaker 1]

I didn't get to too often. But that's the story I wanted to tell you. I want that on permanent record.

Because I'm serious. If I'd had a chance, I'd kill him.

[Speaker 9]

What was his name again?

[Speaker 1]

R.B. Van Ness. Van Ness. Class of 25, United States Naval Academy.

After we finally got that pile of junk to run during the Korean situation, I was transferred to the admiral's staff in New Orleans. And there was a captain there from California, a Naval Academy graduate. One morning at breakfast, we were discussing just the story I've been telling you.

And he said, the captain from California, he was captain of operations, assistant chief of staff for operations on the admiral's staff. And he asked me what his class was. And I said, Captain, it was your class.

Class of 25. And he said, what was his name? And I said, I'd rather not disclose that.

He said, I'm going to write a name down here on a piece of paper. And there were other officers at the table. And he said, I'm going to write a name down here on a piece of paper.

And you look at it and tell me yes or no. I picked it up, and it was R.B. Vaness. And I said, well, why did you do that?

And he said, we had to call him down when he was a third classman from whipping plebs with coat hangers. I said, we had to call him down. I said, well, there's something wrong with him then.

I was delighted with what happened to me.

[Speaker 2]

Couldn't it happen to a more deserving person?

[Speaker 1]

I asked this captain of operations, what can a man do with a sentence like that? And he said, after the sentence and the dishonorable discharge, he should go to a foreign country and change his name so that the better off he can. And I guess he did that.

[Speaker 2]

One wonders what did happen.

[Speaker 1]

It's just good that I never did see him again. If I were to see him right now, I'd kick him right in the face. No kidding.

He has no idea what that was like to have him aboard. Everything, anything I did was wrong. Everything was wrong.

[Speaker 2]

Every day, every night.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. For instance, we had .30 caliber machine guns mounted on each side of the 57 foot vessel. LCVPs, landing craft personnel.

I was to take several gunners off of the gunners and to take them to a beach with which I was acquainted and we would fire, just fire at the beach, train these boys and use the machine gun, which we did. And it's a wonder I wasn't thrown into prison. Excuse me.

Because that beach, the Red Beard knew it. That beach had been converted to a hospital beach. And there should have been, unless it was just that we started firing as early as we did, or the beach had been covered with casualties from the first general hospital in a little town called Ain al-Turk.

It was right outside of Iran. And, oh, good Lord. They finally sent a boat with another officer aboard and said, Harris, stop, that's a hospital beach.

I said, good Lord. But that could have gotten me into some serious trouble. Another night, we pulled into the Firth of Clyde.

We were riding at anchor down at Greenock. And that's, oh, I guess, 50 miles from Glasgow. And the executive officer, not the Red Beard, the Red Beard captain, and there was a Lieutenant Commander Wilkinson that was referred to by everyone as Grandma, and with disrespect.

And the Grandma asked me if I wanted to go ashore. And I said, sure. And he said, well, why don't you ride with the pilot?

I said, he's leaving the ship.

[Speaker 10]
Fine, I will.

[Speaker 1]
So I took off. Went into Glasgow and went to a movie and just kicked around, didn't see anybody, and caught a train by the ship about midnight. When they blacked out in England, they blacked out.

It was as black as the inside of your pocket. And I went to the Liberty Landing being operated by the British, asking to signal the thirst and send a boat. And while I was waiting for the boat, there was the postman.

The postman paid off from the ship with the ship's mail. And the answer came back to the ship that their boats were secured for the night. In other words, I was going to be late over leave the next morning because they wouldn't send a boat until after 8 o'clock, and that was late over leave.

So the British officer closed the office there where his landing was, and the postman and I stepped out on the dock, and we just hoped the dock was there because you couldn't see it. And somebody fired up a boat down at the end of the dock. And I said, good Lord, if there's a boat going to move, let's see if we can't get him to give us a ride.

And there was a Scotsman going across to Grenwick, or Gurick, which is on the other side of the First of Clyde. And we told him we'd give him a half crown to take us to the anchorage. He said, I'm not supposed to go in there.

I said, well, I can give you a ride if you're going to, which I couldn't, but I told him I could. And he said, well, he'd do it. He knew we needed to get there.

So the postman and I jumped in his boat. He came alongside. I said, don't stop it.

Fortunately, the gang ladder was down, and the lights were on the gang ladder. I said, don't even stop. Just go close by and we'll jump.

Well, we jumped and made it and went up the gutter. And as we approached the quarter deck, the communications officer, Mr. Porter, was on duty. And it scared him.

He said, where in heaven's name did you come? We told him we thumbed a ride, and there was a boat pulling away, and that was it right there. Well, for heaven's sake, so he logged us aboard at 12 o'clock.

And the next morning at quarters, I was standing with my division, head reporter, chief engineer, all present and accounted for. And he went to the captain's quarters for the plan of the day. And the executive officer in Grandma Wilkinson asked him if Mr. Harris was aboard. He said, yes, Mr. Harris was aboard. And then Grandma Wilkinson came and looked over the edge of the flying bridge to see if I was damaged. And I was.

And there again. And the good Lord was looking after me because they had me. They had me strung up.

But I wasn't supposed to be able to get back.

[Speaker 2]

But I did. Sounds like you were on board with Cap Quig on his worst days. It was worse than Quig.

[Speaker 1]

Sounds like it. When I was telling somebody about it, they said, did you see K-Mutiny? And I said, yes, I've seen K-Mutiny.

It's been worth a lot to personally. You remember Mr. Roberts? It reminded me a lot of Mr. Roberts.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, the captain of Mr. Roberts.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. He wanted to make three stripes with the scrabbled eggs on his hat. And it was this operations officer, I was telling you about in New Orleans, took 10 or 11 of us to see Mr. Roberts with a traveling company coming out of New York. And it showed at one of the programs there in New Orleans. And he took, oh, I guess 10 or 12 of us to it that night. And all of us wore our whites and full dress and paraded.

And there was all sorts of whispering. Went down the aisle and took our seats. And there comes the Navy.

But, you know, I saw Mr. Roberts. He finally caught up with his war. Kind of sad.

[Speaker 2]

Right. But what was the— He wanted to do that.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

What was the ensign's name? Palmer.

[Speaker 11]

Palmer. Jack Lemmon plays him.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, golly, I'll never forget that. You remember when he'd say, well, bang, bang. Have an explosion.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, that was funny. That's a wonderful, wonderful play, wonderful film.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

How old were you when you went in the Navy?

[Speaker 1]

26. No, I was 7. I wanted to fly.

And I was about two months too old. They would not take a man that had passed his 27th birthday. And the thing I was afraid of was passing the Navy physical because the Navy physical was the toughest flight.

And I passed the physical. And he said, when can you go? And I said, give me two weeks with the boss and two weeks at home.

He said, fine, Corpus Christi in five weeks. Good. Out the door he said, son, how old are you?

I said, I'm 27. I'm sorry. He threw it over in the mailbox there.

No dice. I asked him what was the next best deal. He says, right down the hall that door that's B7.

He said, you're qualified for that, college graduate. You're qualified. And he said, you'll enjoy that.

You'll come in as officer of status. And I did.

[Speaker 2]

You were brought here from UT, by the way.

[Speaker 1]

Yes, I finished UT. Barney, Barney had a high school ROTC. And he got his commission as first lieutenant when he left the university.

And he was a major and assigned to chemical warfare with the Marines. And he was disarming a dud. And he removed the nose and handed it to his sergeant and said, put that in water.

He had the bucket of water there. And it exploded and broke his jawbone, both jawbones on one side and one on the other side. Fortunately, he fell with his head down or he had drowned in his own blood.

And he wound up in the hospital in San Francisco. And then Korea came along. I went by to see him.

He lived in Houston with Shell Chemical. I went by to see him with my uniform on to see what he'd say. And his wife just raised hell with me.

She said, he'll never be satisfied until he gets his uniform back on. And sure enough, he put his uniform back on and he stayed in. And the last I heard of him, he was at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

And I was in New York City with the company I worked for. And I got a letter from him stating that this is the last time he could write to me and for me not to answer because he could not give me a return address. He was under secret assignment.

At that time, he was a bird colonel. He carried an eagle. And he was working for a general.

I found out later he was sent to Turkey in charge of all of our missiles in Turkey. That's the last I ever heard of him. He had picked up malaria while he was in World War II.

And it was undulant. He'd be sick as a dog for maybe a week. And then he might go six months, a year, and then down again.

And I feel sure that conditions in Turkey were not compatible. And he probably died right there in Turkey. I haven't heard of him since.

And he and I were in the same class. And nobody seems to be able to find out what happened to him. I asked the ROTC.

I asked the Alumni Association. See what they could find out. Nobody found anything.

We just know he's not there.

[Speaker 2]

Well, one of the best ways I found to find out something like that is to contact either a Senate congressman.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, I wish that was so.

[Speaker 2]

Is that? Yes. They won't see it, of course, but some staffer will bump into it.

[Speaker 4]

Affirmative, officer, for the 8th Naval District. And as I mentioned before, that restricts your faith in humanity.

[Speaker 1]

Some of the excuses people use to get out of serving their country, I could understand. But believe me, everybody came to alert status. A lot of congressmen or senators came in and said, what is the status of this young man?

Good for you. And the interesting one was that LBJ, I think he was a senator at that time.

[Speaker 4]

Senator of Texas. Yeah, I think he was a senator at that time.

[Speaker 1]

And he was scribbled on a five-card advised status on LBJ. And that carried just about as much weight as he could get behind it. And the trouble was he, well, he inquired about, let's say, A.H. Smith. Well, it happened that we did not have a man, A.H. Smith, but we had a C.B. Smith that was from his town and from Texas, and that was the man he was asking about, and I knew it. But I wrote him the nicest letter for the admiral's signature ever seen, informing him that we did not have any records concerning Mr. A.H. Smith. If any orders arrive or if for some reason we come in contact with A.H. Smith, we will certainly advise you of his status. But as of this date, we do not know A.H. Smith. We sure did not know C.B. Smith, and he went to the service.

[Speaker 3]

He was called back. I never did hear any more about it. But quite frankly, the admiral did it, LBJ, because instead of writing a letter as all the other congressmen and senators do, he just scribbled it on a piece of paper and said, Let me hear about this.

[Speaker 5]

There are many ways in a bureaucracy to get things done or not done.

[Speaker 3]

Just be totally honest with him.

[Speaker 2]

We don't know this boy. Your first experience in landing craft or assaults was North Africa.

[Speaker 1]

North Africa. Yeah. That was the baptism of fire.

[Speaker 2]

What job did you have there?

[Speaker 1]

I was in charge of the first wave.

[Speaker 2]

Went into Oran or?

[Speaker 1]

No, we went into a little town called Fadala, about 20 miles north of Casablanca. The interesting thing before the invasion, before it actually landed the troops, was the ship's firing. Jean Bart, by the League of Nations, had taken her propellers off and put them on the dock.

But she was tied in a very potent set of guns she had aboard, and they were mounted four in a battery instead of just three. And they were 20-inch guns, by the way, measured in millimeters. But our battleships were significant.

The battleships traveling with that convoy were the old USS Texas. She was a big old waddling. Her beam was almost as much as her fore and aft.

But the Massachusetts was a brand-new battleship, and she was riding with us too. Well, Jean Bart fired and went over the anchorage, which told us we were bracketed. She could drop a shell on us any time she wanted to.

And the old Texas waddled over there where she was clear, and she returned fire. Well, this caused the Jean Bart to keep firing. The Massachusetts, in the meantime, pulled up from the convoy and zeroed in on the source of the firing.

You could see the shells. They were just red balls flying up through the air. And when she opened fire, she was putting it right down the stack.

She was really good damage. And she damaged the Jean Bart to the point she could go over fire. But I'll tell you what, we were worried when she put one over us.

She could fire 25 miles and left the trouble. That's about 20 miles away. And she threw that shell right over our head and said, Lord, all she has to do is come down and knock you to it, and we'll get it.

[Speaker 7]

Big shells coming at you.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. But I got them organized, and we went to the point of departure. What troops did you have on board?

I don't know. I don't know who we were landing.

[Speaker 2]

They were American troops?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yes. Yes, they were American troops. If you know the shoulder patch, I can tell you what it was.

It was blue and white diagonals.

[Speaker 2]

3rd and 4th Infantry. I'll have to look it up.

[Speaker 1]

Whatever it was, but that was their patch. And we set sail. The only harbor they had was just an artificially erected breakwater.

And the Germans with French, the Vichy French was the partisan one, but the Vichy French and Germans had mounted what we believed were 75 millimeters on top of that breakwater. And we had to run past that breakwater to our beach and then come backpacking on the way out. And how they missed us, I don't to this day know, because they're good artillery, both of them, the German and the Frenchmen.

And they'd pop a shell right in front of us and say, well, that next one's going to get us. It would pop behind us, and then there'd be one overhead and then another one in front. And I said, what's the matter?

But we got in and got out. And I'll say something else. The fright that such a vampire experiences produces an extremely lucrative condition in the colon, because as quick as we were out of range, we held two, and everybody hung over the side.

I'm serious. Everybody did. Holy Lord have mercy.

But I don't think I've ever been as scared in my life.

[Speaker 7]

It stirs up the balls, as they say.

[Speaker 1]

It sure did. I had a very calm coxswain. Knoblet was that boy's name, and I'll never forget him.

But he stood right there and flicked flack off of his lay waist and held that boat on the beach until the soldiers were gone. He upped the ramp and he backed her down and turned her around and took off. And I said, buddy, that took some steady nerves.

It did. Beautiful.

[Speaker 2]

That's a good memory.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. And we had the first wave again. And as quiet as Sunday afternoon, the soldiers just walked off of our ramp with their rifles slung over their shoulder because nothing was happening.

[Speaker 2]

Was it still dark or was it warm?

[Speaker 1]

It was dark. Dark. Night.

And we had come up off Malta, had experienced some foul weather there for a little while, and my wife just backed out and returned to the ship. And when I got back to the ship, Captain wanted me to come aboard. Now, this was Captain Herb.

I came aboard, and he wanted me to report on what was going on, as best I could. And he said, you'll have to take the third wave because Ensign Frost has gone to the hospital with a nervous collapse. He's just palpitating.

And so I took the third wave, and as we approached, some German turned on a floodlight or spotlight that was on top of a building that was just on top of the dunes. And they were searching the area, and they came around and just tipped the end of a destroyer with that light, and that destroyer fired everything she had and tore that building clear off the dune. There wasn't anything left, but hell broke loose from there on.

It was hot from there on. The third wave was nothing left. It was quiet.

We were lucky to get in and get out. There was a funny thing that kept happening. A two-thing.

There was a mountain to the left and behind Taylor, and there was an 88, which in my estimation was the best gun in the war. And there was an 88 mounted up there that nobody could find, and they kept firing at an LST all day, all day long. And they were over and they were under, and they were over and they were under, and they never did hit that LST, and she discharged it to come back up without a scratch.

But I think the Nashville or the Philadelphia cruiser was in there, had a biplane, and that rascal, they fired him off the catapult so he could go find this 88 mounted up there on that mountain somewhere. And every time he'd go over there, here'd come some fighters that were builders and a lot faster and a lot more heavily armed, but he could turn inside of them because he flew slower, and it was a biplane, and he could turn inside of them and evade them. And he would do everything but tie that little plane in a knot, and he kept all the time getting closer to the ships, and when he got out of here on the ship, then the ships would start firing the fighters and run them off.

And here he'd go back over the mountain, and then here he'd come back just tied in a knot again. It got to be funny. Thank the Lord it was something to laugh at occasionally.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, you had to. Things that might not have seemed all that funny otherwise.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. But that's about it as far as we can tell.

[Speaker 2]

Were you involved in the Salerno operation or not?

[Speaker 1]

Actually, no. Captain Hurt, we were scheduled, and I do know that they were hot. Both of those landings were hot.

But the night before, a convoy was to leave Algiers. They pulled the Stanton, which was a sister ship of ours, a Trans Div 15, I think, was our cockpit. They pulled the Stanton out of that convoy, coming back to the United States, and put Hurston in.

So Captain Hurt could go to the hospital, and he later came out. He was put in charge of a squadron of destroyers, and later I heard he was captain of a cruiser.

[Speaker 4]

Yeah, a cruiser. But they did pull him out.

[Speaker 1]

He was wounded from shell fire? No. When we invaded Sicily, all the ships dropped their anchors, and these German planes, smart, they knew how to fight.

They would come in maybe 50 feet off the water and fly between the ships, which made the ships firing at each other. And Captain Hurt was on deck, and a 20-millimeter exploded and hit him in the heel. He almost bled to death, but they saved him.

But he was retired from captaincy right then. That's when the Red Beard took over. But Captain Hurt was a great officer.

He was a great officer. I take pride in saying that when he made out his fitness report on me, I was classified as the second-best officer on the ship. And the other officer that was better than me was an academy graduate.

[Speaker 2]

Good for you.

[Speaker 1]

And it made me feel awfully good.

[Speaker 2]

That's a real point of pride, and you should be proud.

[Speaker 1]

And, oh, good Lord, the fitness reports that came from the Red Beard were something else again. It was 2.6. In other words, if he gives me a 2.5, I can respond. 6, you can't.

[Speaker 2]

So I got 2.6. It's good that you had some ahead of his.

[Speaker 1]

Yes. And the interesting thing was the last fitness report came from Captain Flynn, personnel branch, assistant chief of staff personnel, 8th Naval District. And I saw that fitness report, and nobody's that good.

It was 4.0 all the way, and I'm serious, nobody's that good. But Captain Flynn liked the way I handled it. And so the first one and the last one, I hope they rule, at least it suits me.

Yes, they should. Another thing, Captain Herff gave medals to McKeel, the lieutenant himself, for the work we did in preparing. I showed you that little profile, what we did in preparing for the invasion of Sicily.

And participation, and that's the way Admiral Kirk signed the letter of commendatory action. It's a small medal, just a green, white stripe. And I was transferred, and the day I reported to Captain Palmer in Baltimore and requested a transfer, an envelope arrived for me, and inside was a classified envelope, which is against every naval regulation.

And I opened it, and here's the letter of commendatory action from Admiral Kirk. And it was classified, but I never did get the medal. It was never hung on me.

I had the letter, and so I asked somebody in naval intelligence, and he tells me, there's the letter, put it on. And so I wore the ribbon over my pocket, but the medal was never awarded. And I'm quite sure it was purely intemperate because the Redbird didn't want to give me the honor of receiving the commendation.

And I'm sure he gave the others, made them McKeel theirs.

[Speaker 2]

A navy gives an officer an awful lot of power, and it can certainly be abused if you get somebody who wants to.

[Speaker 1]

The captain of the ship is God. His word is the end of it. Yes, sir.

I don't know whether he has the authority of life and death. In certain circumstances? In certain circumstances, probably so.

But I know he... Oh, at Captain's Inspection, every Saturday morning, Captain's Inspection. I don't care if it's a rolling sea or not.

We had Captain's Inspection. And as he would approach my division, I would give my company right-hand salute. He would deliberately go over and inspect something else, a gun mount or a hatch cover or something else.

And two boys would come down. Then he'd jump back in front of me and look at me like, why haven't you brought your company to salute? And he'd come back down.

And I'll never forget one boy, a second-class machinist mate. And his... they call him Crows.

It's his badge of rating on the ship was faded. And the captain wanted to criticize something in that division, so he asked this man, he said, when did you get that rating? He says, 19 and 18, sir.

He was in World War I. He hadn't gotten his rating yet. He finally made him cheat.

But he did. When he said World War I, I told him, Lord, he'd catch hell for that.

[Speaker 2]

Talk about a rolling sea. You said you were in the Pacific. Were you there when the typhoon hit in the summer of 45?

[Speaker 3]

Yes. It's written up in the set of books you have in there, by the way. That...

[Speaker 1]

I have 39 of those things. I've got the whole shelf of them. And it's written up in there, that storm, because Hulse's weather project was the ball that day.

I had the engineering watch. And we had specific orders from the chief engineer, if your vacuum falls below 30 inches, it needs to be called to the engineering platform immediately. And I called him, because it was dropping.

He was from the merchant service. He was not a college-graded engineer. And he said, good, what's the matter?

We're losing vacuum. I think it's due to a low-pressure area, because the Borden tube just couldn't pull that needle over there far enough. There wasn't enough atmospheric pressure to go over there.

No, to hell with it. It's a candle every flange in the ship, in the engine space. And so we lit our candles and went on bases.

And the reason you do that is if you find a leak, it'll be a vacuum leak, and it will draw that flame, and that flame will point right to the leak. And that's the reason he wanted to go on camp. And after we finished candling, I reported no leaks.

He said, do it again. And we did. Didn't find any leaks.

But our weatherman, the meteorologist on the bridge, did a fit, because he had what they called a V. The barometer had dropped and then had come back up, and he had a V. And, oh, it was a great slab.

He'd walk around looking at it. Look at that V.

[Speaker 12]

Well, you don't have it too often.

[Speaker 2]

But, oh, I'll never forget that.

[Speaker 1]

You couldn't see. You couldn't see 50 feet.

[Speaker 2]

Were you underway or at anchor?

[Speaker 1]

No, no, we were fueling the fleet. That's when we lost those three destroyers. They had pumped out.

And they'd knocked off fueling operations. The drop in barometric pressure. And then all you could do, because you couldn't see, you didn't know whether the ship right in front of you, right next to you, where'd the rest of those ships go?

Because the whole third fleet was there. And we were what they called Shangri-La. I don't know whether you've heard of this or not.

But Shangri-La was a fleet of 30 big tankers, tremendous tankers. And that was made up of six, made up of five. Wait a minute.

It must have been 36 tankers. Because there were six tremendous tankers in each unit. And there were six units.

And a unit consisted of tankers, ten destroyers, and a jeep flat-top. And that was a unit. You would go out and stay five weeks fueling the fleet.

If the third fleet, fifth or seventh, were going to bombard Tokyo, you went up in that direction. And you were to rendezvous before they went in to do their bombardment. They came back out, you fueled them again.

And if they were going to Okinawa, you went toward Okinawa. Before they went in, they'd fuel again, and then lay down their bombardment, come out and fuel again. But at the end of the week, one unit of that Shangri-La would back to Ulysses for a week's availability.

In the meantime, she'd repair, make minor repair, and take the board of cargo. And when I say cargo, I mean more than oil. We had lube oil and drums on deck, had tons of mail.

We had clothing, medical supplies, food, everything else on our ships, on our decks. And when we came out, we would transfer that stuff during the operation to whatever ship requested it. And that included movies, too, by the way.

And we had five or six movies aboard, and we would shift movies to whatever they wanted. When one unit reported back to Shangri-La, then another unit would go into Ulysses for a week's allowance, and come back out, and they'd leave, go back. But there were always five out and one in.

And that was coming along.

[Speaker 2]

That's a very efficient way to do it.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah. And the Japanese swore we had five or six battle fleets instead of third, fifth, and seventh fleet. But they swore we had more than that.

Because one day we'd be bombarding Tokyo or the southern islands. And every four days later, we'd be over here working on Okinawa. And they can't get over there, that place.

They've got to go in and refigure it around what they call Shangri-La. It was interesting to me.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, sure. How long did the typhoon last? Do you remember?

[Speaker 1]

It broke at 9 o'clock. That is, as I said, I had the watch, and I was on for 12. And at 12, it was at its worst.

I had to go forward. The seawater was getting into some batteries up forward, generating chlorine. And they wanted an engineer to come up there and do something about it, which they called on me.

And to go forward from the engineer's house to the midship's house, I had my arm locked around a, I would say that was a two-inch hoser, and made my way forward without going off my feet. And then I was at the midship's house. And I stood at the porthole and watched a wave pick up the 105-foot motor whale boat.

That's the Liberty Boat crew. And go across our deck taking two steam winches right on the other side of the whole thing. That's the power of that water.

About 4 or 5 o'clock that afternoon, you could see clouds breaking up ahead of you. And the sea calmed down. And there was nobody near us.

We didn't know where the rest of the crew was. By radio contact, they got us back together. But fortunately, we didn't hit anything.

As far as I know, nobody hit anything. But that was a doozy. I'll never forget that story.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, I talked with people who were on Okinawa when it went through. It just peeled at that.

[Speaker 1]

It tore the post office all to, nobody got the mail. And that was, we couldn't figure out what's happened to the mail. It blew the post office.

[Speaker 2]

It just tore it up. But I'll never forget that story. Now, I don't remember from what you said earlier, did you get to Japan at the end of the war?

[Speaker 1]

Yes.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, I thought so.

[Speaker 1]

We were, this is back, this is in the roulette. She was an AK, AKA 99. And we were combat loaded.

We didn't know whether we were going back to another dry run. Practice run on some other beach there in the Philippines, or whether we were headed to Japan. We never did know and never will know.

But we were riding, I don't know whether we were anchored or tied up, but we were about Cebu City, I think, as I recall. And we were showing Laura, was the name of the movie that night, on deck. And the Philippines had been secured by that time.

And the captain was sitting on my immediate left. The flying bridge, the communications shack on the flying bridge, the hatch banged open and this boy practically jumped all the way to the main deck. I mean, he was down there, nothing flat.

Dashed up to the captain and said, here's a message, captain. And the captain read it, and looked, and the captain went forward and said, fellas, fellas, now that the, or men, I believe it was, now that the Roulette is out here, Japan's decided to quit. I said, well, that's a good way to put it.

But we, oh, later on, when I say later on, I'm talking about maybe 15 minutes, a pyrotechnic display broke loose. People were firing guns and pistols and Lord have mercy, I don't know what. And the commander put the word out and immediately ceased the pyrotechnic display.

[Speaker 3]

It's a wonder somebody hadn't gotten killed. Yeah. It's a wonder, because everybody was firing.

[Speaker 1]

The, uh, I think that was the group we took. We just stayed loaded and took off immediately. We took, and we were there for the signing.

And then we came back to do, to the Philippines. I don't recall what we picked up and took up to Hokkaido, Polkadotty, the North Island. And, uh.

[Speaker 2]

Might have been 11th Airborne, because they were up there.

[Speaker 1]

Well, they could have been. I just don't recall. And then we, it went back to, uh, I think it was Samar and picked up the 130 BBs and took them into China at Tien Sin, Tien Sin Tao, and Piping, or Beijing now.

Um. And then came back to the Philippines in Samar, in Samar. And I was detached from the ship and brought the ship home.

And that was a delightful 19-day trip to Seattle, Washington. The, uh, longshoremen had a strike on in Los Angeles where we were originally going. And so they diverted us to San Francisco and the strike spread, and they diverted us to Portland, Oregon, and the strike spread and we went into Seattle.

Hehehe. You kept heading north. To get away from it.

Oh, covered in snow. Caught a train, went down through Chicago, and permanently transferred from one railroad station to the other. And those poor wrecks that they were driving broke down and we missed our train to go to Memphis and be detached.

My wife had already flown to, to, uh, Memphis and was going to meet me when I got there. And I was traveling with, uh, a man that was in, in my outfit in my engineering department. His name was Chris.

He was, uh, a chief ward electrician. Very good one, too, by the way. And, by the way, he was from around here, just, uh, Columbia, Tennessee, just south of, uh, Nashville.

And he said, Good Lord, Mr. Harris, what are we going to do now? And I said, Well, I'm going to the airport. He said, We can't.

Priority? We can't get on a plane. And I said, You can't get on a plane in a railroad station, but you can out there.

Let's go. But, uh, we went to a hotel and, uh, got a limousine and went to the airport. And, uh, Capital Airline, no, Chicago and Southern was flying north and south at that time.

And, uh, we went to their, uh, desk and asked if there was any, uh, possibility of getting a seat. And they said, No, sir, we've got to wait about 15, 18 people waiting. Good Lord.

And so, this girl who was behind the counter went in an office and we asked if we could put our bags in there. I had a sea bag and a traveling bag. could we put our bags in her office?

[Speaker 10]

She said, yeah, that'd be fine.

[Speaker 1]

And then we asked what we could do to help her. Oh, Lord, you can't. You can help me do this or you can help me do that.

She was working short-handed. And we said, I can't get to see the plane. Doesn't make any difference.

We've got to have something to do. We took her to lunch and, uh, oh, we did everything good. And that plane, it was about 5 o'clock that afternoon.

She got up on the little stand there in the counter and said, uh, uh, flat so-and-so to St. Louis, Memphis, New Orleans. And, oh, good Lord, here came a crowd. She said, uh, I'm not going to use the words Smith and Jones.

Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones, you have not picked up your tickets. Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones, this is the last call. If you don't pick up your tickets immediately, we'll give the seats to someone else.

And no Mr. Smith, no Mr. Jones. And she said, New Terrace, Ward Officer Carruthers, are you here? He said, yes.

He said, would you pick up your tickets, please? God, he flew that night. And we made it.

The funny thing was, he had my baggage and I had his. When we got to the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, my wife had gone to the railroad station to meet me. And the train that I had missed that morning was about ready to come in.

And, uh, I picked up the reservations and the key in my room. And the phone rang in a little while. And it was Carruthers.

And he said, he said, Mr. Harris, I said, yes. He said, I've got your wife down here. I said, well, I've got your bags up here.

He said, I've got your bags too. So, I caught an elevator and went and took his bags to him. My wife was there at the door and we had it round and round right in the lobby.

[Speaker 2]

How long had it been since you'd seen her?

[Speaker 1]

Uh, good lord. Let's see if I roll that. Hmm.

It had been close to a year. Close to a year. At best I can figure out.

I just don't recall. I never thought about it.

[Speaker 4]

But, uh, I picked up that roll-on-my-robe as we called it and took her to the Pacific Bay. Nine months to a year somewhere in there.

[Speaker 1]

But, uh, then we went to dinner and dancing on the Peabody roof that night and the next day, no, it took me three days to get out of the Navy. When the roulette went to Honolulu, one of our boys aboard had broached cargo and these fleece-lined parkas, beautiful things, worn, zippers and all sorts of things and, and, uh, fleece-lined gloves and all that. And, uh, these parkas where they had the hood on and that was cargo for Chicago.

We dropped this in Honolulu. And one of my boys, I said, where are those parkas coming from? I keep seeing.

He said, they're down number three hatch. You want one? I said, you want one?

He said, he got me one. What size? I told him.

Here it came. And it fit perfectly. Uh-huh.

We stayed there in the Tropics Creek worn. And, uh, when I got ready to leave the ship, I asked the supply officer. I said, I'm going to turn this thing in.

It's not mine. He said, I don't have any numbers to pick that up. I can't figure it out.

He said, somewhere along the line somebody will figure it out. But I got to to the T.O.Q. in Samara after leaving the ship. I asked the man that I registered with, where can I leave this?

And he said, we don't have any numbers. Can't do it. Got into Seattle.

My orders weren't written right. And we had to stay overnight. There was a warrant carpenter and Chief Warrant brothers traveling together.

And our orders were wrong. So we had to stay overnight. We were fortunate enough to get a room and actually got a suite.

And, uh, the, uh, of a, uh, I think that's a 13th Naval District. Rewrote our orders properly. Sent it to Memphis.

Then we picked them up the next morning, caught a train, and left. But, uh, I asked there. I said, surely you've got some numbers, Mr. Plow. I said, surely you've got some numbers. You can pick this up. I told him where I got it.

He said, no. I don't have the inventory for that thing. He said, they'll get it in Memphis.

Well, I got to Memphis. And I couldn't find anybody to give it to, and I've still got that thing. And when it gets cold, I wear it.

Fair enough. Listen, it's just as warm as tungsten. Very fond of it.

Now, the funny thing is Hunter was a football player in my class when we graduated in 41. And I hadn't seen George. And the, uh, first game I saw after returning was the Vanderbilt game in Knoxville.

And as I was leaving, here comes George. He said, why, damn, you said, how did you get that thing? And I said, I couldn't get rid of it.

He said, I tried all during the war to get one. And I said, did you hold one of the Army carbines? He said, yeah, I had that.

I got that. I said, I tried all during the war to get one of them. And I had to buy one.

But it was, that's George. He lives here in town now. Married, uh, Marion Thompson.

Her husband, Jack Fletcher, died. He was in our class too. And he died.

And Marion married George. They still married.

[Speaker 2]

It was quiet in Florida, wasn't it?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah. Well, I was at Chateau Club the other day. And we got to talking about the war.

Some of the funny things that happened because some funny things did happen. There was Carl Maples and Charlie Higdon. Just a whole bunch of George Burrus was a flyer.

He flew. Charlie Bensinger was a flyer. Telling some of the funny things there.

And I made the remark. I think it was Carl Maples made the remark that it's funny how we can remember these things. And I said, well, that's the biggest thing that happened to us.

And he says, yeah, come to think of it, it's the biggest thing that ever will happen to us.

[Speaker 4]

And that's the reason we remember.

[Speaker 1]

I like to remember. It was it was fun in a way. As I told my father, he asked me when I got home, he said, how do you feel about it?

And I said, I wouldn't take a million dollars for what I've been through in the past four or five years. I wouldn't two million dollars to do it again. I've had enough of it.

And then I got picked up doing Korea and got two more years. Then I resigned that commission while I was traveling with the Ethel Corporation. And I couldn't use a satisfactory year.

So it wasn't fair for me to occupy the village. So I just resigned. And I've got an honorable discharge which hangs on the wall.

[Speaker 2]

Where not to.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. It says satisfactory service signed by Forrestall. And my commission is signed by Secretary Knox.

Through? Those were the boys. Forrestall, bless his heart, he was a good man.

He lost his he went off to deep end.

[Speaker 3]

Right. It's a shame.

[Speaker 1]

He was a big carrier. Yes. Quite right.

I've seen the Forrestall. He was a good rider. I've seen him.

Matter of fact, in Roosevelt, when this pilot jumped that I had doing Korea, I was downtown Norfolk one day and ran into a Chief Warrant Officer off left. And he asked me, is there anything I can do for you? He was one of my Chief Warrant Officers on the left.

And he had reverted to Chief Petty Officer, but he was in charge of the fire room on the Roosevelt. And I said, the burner plates on this pilot jumped that I'm trying to steam have one hole that fires the oil right to the after end of the boiler. And it's burned through about 14 inches of brick and we got about two inches of fire brick left.

I said, can you get hold of a dish set of burners that will flare the stuff, flare the oil that's heated on fire? He said, sure.

[Speaker 10]

Oh, sure.

[Speaker 1]

He said, can you come over to Roosevelt? Come aboard. And so I did.

He came down and got me and I walked around and saw a lot of them. The only way to describe those things is they're vast. They're just big beyond...

We went down to the stock room and he signed some kind of a check and got me a full set of burners for both boilers. And we didn't have any more trouble. We did have to rebuild the boiler but we didn't have any more trouble with burning up fire bricks.

It was good to have a friend around. Always good.

[Speaker 2]

Particularly people who can make happen in the Navy are...

[Speaker 1]

And that's the Chief Petty Officer usually. That's the backbone of the Navy. Boy.

You get your Chiefs to working for you. And if it hadn't have been for Chief Eckman on the Thursday when they made me ship service officers. He ran that laundry for me.

He absolutely ran the laundry for me. And if it hadn't been for Chief Eckman I don't know what I would have done. Lord have mercy.

He was quite a man. Needless to say he had anything he wanted as far as I was concerned. If you want special liberty go.

That's the way it has to work. Sure. They tell you when they took me to school take care of you and they'll take care of you.

But you growing up in the ground you can really care. I've taken too much of your time.

[Speaker 2]

No, absolutely not.

[Speaker 1]

As I said, my first ship assignment was the USS Thurston AP 7. She was an amphibious mothership and carried around 20 maybe 25 boats on her deck. When I was assigned to her Captain Hurth was captain of the ship and the executive officer was R.B. Vaness. He was a class of 25 from the Navy. The most despicable man I have ever had the displeasure of knowing. We got along fine when we were training up for Chesapeake and we made the invasion of North Africa and came back to New York.

Captain Hurth had requested three of us. We had about eight or ten amphibious officers and something around 100 to 115 to 20 enlisted men as boat crews and Captain Hurth requested three of us. Cornelius Francis Keel was his name from Providence, Rhode Island and was by the way my roommate at the time.

Hicks Car Maiden was from Dallas, Texas. He is an executive officer probably retired now from one of the major banks there in Dallas. But the three of us and myself was the third.

I was in the engineering department. They were in deck watches and I stood in engineering watches. The Bureau of Naval Personnel allowed the Captain to retain the three of us and 40 men.

And he allowed us to select 40 men and of course we selected the best men we had. And we became part of ship's company as long as we were operating as support vessel. If we went into an amphibious landing, then trained and took part in the amphibious landing, the 40 men and the three officers.

[Speaker 2]

About what time was this? This was 1943?

[Speaker 1]

No, November the 8th, we hit day two. We hit North Africa and came back to the United States. That's when we got permission to stay aboard.

And then the rest of the amphibious force was taken off the ship in Little Creek just outside of Norfolk Naval Base. And the rest of us went to New York with the ship and went to the dry dock and whatnot for repair. At the end of which I had four days leave granted by Captain Hurth to get married.

And we had a four-day honeymoon at the Commodore Hotel. The interesting thing there was the other ship's officers said they were going to give us hell, my wife and myself. And I'm sure they tried because they told me after we got back to the ship and we headed back to North Africa to Blanca on support stocking.

They said, you didn't stay anywhere near Manhattan Island. And I said, I did stay in Manhattan. And they said, well, you stayed in some tramp of a hotel.

And I said, no sir, I stayed in a fine hotel. And they said, well, we called every decent hotel on Manhattan and you weren't registered. And I said, did you call the Commodore?

And they said, no, we were staying there. And I said, so did I. And I did.

I stayed. They didn't look for me. But after I got married, this R.B. Vaness, Commander Vaness, treated me worse than dirt under his feet. I've never been any dirty dewy to me. As I said, I was an engineering watch tender. I was a B division.

I had charged the boilers and the men operators, the water tenders. I was a boat division officer. And he assigned me the duty of ship service officer.

Naval regulations require that that job be rotated among the officers every two months. I was relieved in 11 months. And it was, it was hell because he had, for some reason or the other, he held his payday on the fifth of the month.

Rather than keep track of each man's laundry, we charged every man 50 cents a month. And he could send everything he had or he could send nothing, but he still owed us 50 cents. Officers, a dollar.

Well, that adds up to about 300 dollars accounts receivable on the fifth of the month. Because I closed my books as of the first of the month. So on the fifth of the month, I showed, let's say, 300 dollars accounts receivable.

And every time he looked at my statement, before it was sent to U. Purse, abuse ships, he would call me to his room and raise unmitigated hell. What are you doing about the accounts receivable?

And I explained to him again and again and again that if we had to close my books on the first of the month, would have to close my books on the first of the And I would have my on the first of the month. I have my books on the first of the I would have my books on the first of I would have my books on the first of the I have my books on the month. I would my books on the first of would have my on have my first of I would on the the It of his force.

It was approved. My relief came aboard and I kind of pulled a shenanigan there. My orders came in.

I was on the decoding board and the signalman, or radioman, woke me up about three o'clock in the morning. He said there's a message for this vessel to be decoded. I had the duty at that time, so I dashed up and decoded it.

What I was decoding in there was my name. That was my orders transferring me to another ship or to the United States. I went in, woke Captain Palmer, and told him I had a vessel.

We had orders. If there's anything pertaining to our unit, our task force, or anything else, he was to be waking. I said there's a message for this vessel.

He said, what is it? What is it? Quick.

I said it's my orders back to the States. He said, Harris, if you're jesting, I'll give you a general course. I think he would have, but we went into the decoding board.

He said, tear the machine down. I did. He said, set it up again.

I set it up again. He says, now decode. I decoded and there it was.

That was none to it. The executive officer was not too highly experienced there. He said that on such and such a date, I would be transferred to the USS General Sturgis, which was a station, a floating hotel for officers and enlisted men waiting for ships or waiting for transfer.

I said, you're not transferring an enlisted man. The officer was supposed to know how to get around by himself. He said, well, you write the orders if you're so smart.

Obviously, he didn't know how to do it, so I wrote them. In paragraph one, the orders, they're quoted for your interest. Paragraph two, you're hereby directed to take first available government transportation and right there is where I made the shenanigans.

Supposed to be comma, not to include air, and I just left that out. Then paragraph three, delivered, execute. I took those over to the ship island command and handed them to the captain there.

I said, can I fly home? He said, sure. He said, those orders will take you home.

I said, isn't that nice? We flew up to that afternoon. We flew up to Guam.

We were grounded there for about three days. As we were playing bridge in transit officer's quarter and this warrant officer, we got to asking him, playing the game, where are you from and who do you know? He said, I told him I was from the University of Tennessee.

He said, well, my major is from University of Tennessee. He played football there. I said, I'm sure I know him.

Who was it? Turned out it was Pappy Joe Wallen, a fraternity brother, and he was a major down on the other end of the island. He came.

I called him over these telephone systems that the army had set up and he came up to see me and bless his heart, he had a bottle of scotch whiskey and it's just delightful to see somebody from home. It really meant a lot. But then a few days later, we flew to Kwajalein and then Johnson Island and then Lula and then San Francisco.

[Speaker 8]

What kind of a plane were you on? Do you remember?

[Speaker 1]

I was on a DC-3 from Ulithi to Guam. And then our Navy designation was R-5D. That was, I think, a DC-4, if I'm not mistaken.

It was a big four-engine job and it was overloaded. Lord have mercy from Honolulu to San Francisco, it was overloaded and that boy bent the floorboard and the wheel back, pulled the stick back to get over the mountain, trying to get off the ground. I'll never forget it.

And they let us come forward. He flew at about 12,000, 13,000 feet. That way we didn't have enough oxygen, everybody went to sleep instead of moving around.

Everybody went to sleep and that's what the pilot wanted. But he would allow us to come up on the flight deck and smoke cigarettes. And if you've ever smoked a cigarette at that altitude, you know exactly where your dental work needs to be done.

It hurts. If you did that, you'd just spray every tooth you had. But when I went up, the pilot was asleep in the bunk and the pilot had his leg over the arm of his chair, pilot's seat, talking to the radio operator.

And he was taking the droop out of the automatic with an extension he'd put on the button to turn to take the droop out. And as I walked in, I looked around and it was as black as the ace of spades out every window in the pilot's compartment. And my first question to him was, who in the hell's watching where we're going?

He said, George is flying at me. He knows where he's going. And when we got in San Francisco, we had to just nose almost straight down at a steep level through a dense fog that broke out.

I don't recall where, somewhere around a thousand feet and landed. And I was never so glad to get my feet on the ground in my life. Look, when we reported to the, I think that was the 12th Naval District, there to await further orders, we were given a telephone number and told to call that number at 11 o'clock every morning.

Otherwise, don't come near the headquarters, which we were glad to comply. And I have three friends. When you're under such difficulties as you're experiencing a flight like that, you make friends rather quickly.

Everybody's subjected to the same difficulties and you help each other and you get to be friends. One boy was off to South Dakota. One boy, he'd been out there for about three years and he was injured.

He'd gotten winged in some battle and he was on his way back to the States. He was ambulatory. There was a Marine that was a spy in Japan.

I'm sure he had treated his skin with something to turn him that yellow color. And his hair was cut very short and he would never tell us how they got him off the island. We had kept asking, but he wouldn't tell us, never did tell us.

He was from Seattle, Washington. A boy from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, John A. Vanderslice, was, he was returning to his ship a destroyer from Damage Control School, which he's been attending in Honolulu, when we encountered him in Guam.

The reason he could not proceed to his ship was because, I'm sure you've heard of the awful hurricane that was detected, and we were supposed to fuel the third fleet that morning.

And we could take on the battleship and a carrier on our forehand, and I had two destroyers at a time on our starboard hand. And the destroyers were of the Monaghan class.

They were the Hull, Spence, Monaghan, and Erie. I'll never forget those names because they had pumped out their ballast and were just literally sitting right on top of the water. And when that hurricane broke on us, three of them turned over, and they got six men off of those three ships.

The Erie rolled to a record 72 degrees and righted herself, and they don't know yet how she did it. She did. But Vanderslice was on one of the ships that sunk, and so he was given 30 days' sunk ship leave, and was on his way home.

He was a junior officer, so we put him in charge of the lunch. We were met. The two of us were supposed to go to the hospital.

They had found a spot on my lung, which later took the benign form of histoplasmosis, but they said it's a diagnosis undetermined, possible tubercular. And I was to report to the hospital when I got to my next assignment. But that was my next assignment.

I was supposed to go to the hospital there, and we were met by two WAVES officers in a station wagon when we got off the plane. And they said, we have to take you to the hospital. Well, we're not going to the hospital.

And where are you going to stay? They said, we're going to stay in a hotel downtown. Now, if the doctors won't see us, we'd be glad to meet them there any time they want to come down.

They said, well, we'll tell them, but we don't know what'll happen. So it turned out that Harry Fitch, the kid off the—he wasn't a kid, pretty good officer—off in the South Dakota, knew the assistant manager of the Sir Francis Drake. And he rained down on him in his office, and he says, good Lord, all I have is the bridal suite.

And he said, that'll just be fine for all four. Where we stayed, and we had a party 24 hours a day for eight straight days. And my part of the bill was something like \$400 when I got my orders, and there were two of them still there.

The Marine, I thought it was for him, called his father and found out his wife was living with somebody else. And he immediately dug into his bag and found his automatic, put it in his pocket, and called a train night for Seattle. And what happened, I don't know, but I can't blame him.

[Speaker 2]

That's something to come home to, isn't it?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, what a way to say welcome home. But that was the last we saw of him. And then eight days later, my orders came, the other two were still there in the suite, and I paid my part of the bill, took off.

I was going to Providence, Rhode Island, and so they sent me from San Francisco to Los Angeles, to Phoenix, Arizona, El Paso, Texas, Oklahoma City, Memphis, Washington, New York, and Providence, Rhode Island. I was allowed four travel days, and it takes six days to make the trip. I had an awful time getting two extra days paid, because they said I was over leave.

[Speaker 2]

Did you have that long attended to when you were in San Francisco?

[Speaker 1]

I went to the hospital as soon as I reported to Fort Rhode Island. That was Commodore Magruder's Navy up there. Holy Lord, he had a ramrod for a backbone.

And the first thing I would have done, I was stopped by another officer wanting to know where my gloves were, and I had the slightest idea where my gloves were. But you don't parade yourself around that base without your gloves on, if you're wearing an overcoat. But I did go to the hospital, spent 30 days there, and they examined me thoroughly.

They shook tests in my arm, and when the technician came back and said, which arm was it in, and I said it was this, and they didn't believe it, so she gave me one in each arm, and they disappeared. So I did not have tuberculosis. After 30 days, the doctor told me, said, Harris, we don't know what's the matter with you.

If you want the diagnosis of tuberculosis, we can give it to you, and you have a medical pension the rest of your life, or you can go back to active duty. I said, well, hell, I volunteered, and the war's not over, so I'm going back to active duty. Fine.

And I did. After the war, I went to, by the way, Dr. Hollis Johnson is his name. I wondered if you were related.

He's a doctor, a lung specialist in Vanderbilt, and has his own TB hospital there at that time, and he looked me over closely, and he said, your doctors in the Navy were telling you the truth, because we did not find this benign form of histoplasmosis until about two months ago, and they didn't know what was wrong with you. I said, what'd I do, drink milk, get a lot of what, and he says, just live a normal life, perfectly all right, and I guess I still have it.

[Speaker 2]

It must have been good to hear.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, delighting. There's no idea, but while we were there in San Francisco, the officers club was at the Fairmont Hotel, and naturally, every night, we went in. One reason I loved to go up there was to ride that cable car, because as long as you can grab something and hold on, that's all that was necessary.

People just literally riding everywhere but on the roof, but we'd go up to the officers club every night, and one night, I ran into four officers from the old USS Thurston. The war was over in Europe, and she had come back to the States and was riding between buoys in the

San Francisco Bay, and I said, I'll go down tomorrow. Well, the next day, my orders arrived, and I didn't get to go see the ship.

Now then, let's skip from World War II to the Korean situation. I got called back. My name must have been laying right on top, because I had put three or four ships in commission, and they were pulling, at that time during the Korean situation, they were pulling ships out of the mothballs, and I was assigned in Orange, Texas.

At that time, I was living in Houston, and we pulled that one out of mothballs. I won't go into much detail about that ship. She was LSD.

She was built for the British, and the mistake that was made was they didn't give it to her. They gave her to the British. She was, for instance, we had generators for 230 volt two-wire systems, and I had an awful time even buying light bulbs.

I was chief engineer of that ship, and you had to go to Westinghouse or General Electric, export production, and if I threw normal channels, it would come back. I would order cases of light bulbs, and it would come back marked out in red, and the 230 volt was marked out in red. 115 was put there.

Well, that's American, and this was not an American ship, but I don't want to go into that too much, because one afternoon, we were in Norfolk. We finally got her into Norfolk, and incidentally, when we got there, we were using 15,000 gallons of makeup feed water an hour, and I had told the captain, we may make it, and we may not. You better arrange for a tug, and he did, but we did make it, and when it cooled off, and we crawled in to see what was the matter, I found tubes with holes in them that I could literally drop a pencil through.

It was, in other words, the moth balls looked good, but not on the ship. It didn't preserve anything, but that's the end of that. One Sunday afternoon, I was at the Officer's Club, and the big room at the Officer's Club was arranged in theater style, and a large screen television was on the football game, and a guy came in, sat down by me, and in something of an Irish brogue, said he wanted rye and ginger ale, and I made the remark at the time that there was not a son of a bitch in the Navy that would order a drink like that but Cliff Morey, and it was Cliff Morey. I recognized his voice, and he was a friend and an officer for Thurston, but he had been called back in the Navy too during Korea, so we immediately left the football game and went in and started drinking beer and finding out what had happened to all of us. He said, did anybody tell you what happened to the Red Beard?

Now, this Red Beard is the executive officer that hated my son, and when Captain Hurth was injured, he was shot in the battle of Sicily, invasion of Sicily. The Red Beard took over as captain and was later given the fourth stripe, and he remained as captain, and so Cliff Morey asked me if I knew what had happened to the Red Beard. I said no, somebody told me.

He said, oh, you're going to enjoy this, and then he said, do you remember Payclerk Green? I said, yes, I remember. And he said, you and Payclerk Green were the two that the Red Beard despised.

I said, oh, I'm aware of that. He said, I'm going to let him tell you. He is now a lieutenant, two-stripe lieutenant over at Portsmouth Station, there in Portsmouth, Virginia.

I'm going to let him tell you. Well, I had to go over and get the boilers the next day, and they had only two sets of tubes, and I had to re-tube two boilers, and they didn't want to give me both sets because they didn't have any more, which raised the question in my mind is, what did they have in there for the first? And I finally got them loaded aboard our truck, but we were there during lunch, and while we were eating our lunch, here came Lieutenant Green through the cafeteria line, and we had it rounded around right there on the floor because I was delighted to see him.

He said, did you hear what happened to the Reds? I said, Cliff Morey told me that you would tell me. He said, you're going to love this.

He said, we were between Reds and San Francisco Bay. He said, at eight o'clock? Well, let's go back.

He said, do you remember a Dr. McReynolds that came aboard shortly before you left? That's a couple, three months before I left the ship. He said, well, he kept a diary on that fellow.

He said, there's something wrong with him because of the way he treated people, and a most holier-than-thou attitude I've ever encountered. And he said, he kept a diary on him. One night, and by the way, it was that night that I had run into the other officers that were on at the officers club.

I said, he had the duty, McReynolds had the duty. He asked Dr. Crist, now Dr. Crist was a specialist, a four-stripe captain in the medical corps, and he asked Dr. Crist to stay aboard with the chief pharmacist mate. And at eight o'clock, they went to the movie.

At nine o'clock, they got up, left the movie, went to the captain's cabin. The messenger's chair was sitting outside the captain's door, but the messenger was not in it. And the captain's door was closed, and they didn't bother to knock.

They just opened the door, walked in, and caught the red beard in a homosexual act. And they told him he was under arrest, that they would take him ashore the next day, and prefer to. And I said, good lord, you've made life worth living when he told me this.

And what happened to him? He said he was given a general court-martial. His sentence was 12 years, hard labor, horseman's naval prison, reduced from a four-stripe captain to an apprentice seaman, deprived of all pay and allowances, which means he got five dollars a month to buy cigarettes.

And at the end of his 12 hard labor, he was dishonorably discharged from the Navy. And I said, you have strictly made my day. I was never glad to hear anything in my life, and the only thing I regretted was I wasn't there to see it.

Because he made my life miserable, and I do mean miserable. From, I reported that October of 42, and I was transferred in April 44.

[Speaker 2]

It's a long time to be in a small place with somebody like you.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, the intimate living aboard ship, you're close, and if there's anything that gets on your nerves, it'll drive you right out of your gourd. And believe me, it was hard.

[Speaker 2]

It was rough. Any idea of why he settled on you and the pay clerk?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, my idea. I don't know why, but my guess is that he kind of had something in mind as a relationship between us until I got married. And that, I believe, touched him off.

I think it did. I don't know. I had no idea until I found out that he had been court-martialed for that offense.

[Speaker 2]

The attitude towards you changed when you came back from your...

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, from then on. It was hell on wheels for me.

[Speaker 2]

That must have been really, really hard, because it's a relatively small vessel, and somebody over you in command.

[Speaker 1]

Well, he's God. If he says over the side, you're over the side, period. And it was no fun for that time.

You did the best you could, but any one of those jobs was a full-time job, and that particular ship service. I had to charge the barber shop, the geed-up stand, which is a ship store, and the laundry. I had to watch every penny.

If I was out a penny, we'll give you an idea. We were in the port. We've had...

Oh, good Lord, you can't go to port. You can't leave port without your blues on. So they just blew uniforms.

And so I had on my blues. Immediately, we left the harbor. We shifted to khakis, but while we were at quarters, we always stood at quarters as we left harbor, one of the boys came by and gave me seven dollars and a half for his division.

He was the laundry petty officer, and I said, fine, stuck it in my pocket. When I changed clothes, I had to take the money out. When I made up my statement, I was seven dollars and a half short.

So I reported it that way. I wasn't going to make it up and then find out later that I shouldn't have. And of all the dressing bounds I ever got was over that seven dollars and a half.

And he, in this tone of voice, well, Mr. Harrod, how did you join the Navy? And I said, it might have been a personal grudge. I might have had a particular reason with a relative that was in prison.

But whatever the reason was, it was not to learn the laundry business. Well, get out of here.

[Speaker 6]

That was his attitude, the way he treated me.

[Speaker 1]

But then when we came back, another month had passed, and we dressed at interport, and there's the seven dollars and a half. So the next month, I reported seven dollars and a half over. But I never lived down the fact that I'd had a shortage.

Oh, Lord. Yes, sir. Another time, I requested permission to leave the ship.

He said, no, you're going to the theater with me and Cornelius Francis McKeel. And myself went to the theater and we saw The Voice of the Turtle. But on the way to the theater, we stopped at 90 Church Street, which is maybe in New York.

And in the elevator, we started up and on one floor, some ladies got under my arm. And he informed me in front of them that naval officers do not remove their hats in the elevators. And I said, sir, I was a gentleman before I was a naval officer.

And I left my hat off. So maybe I did need him a little bit.

[Speaker 2]

Very few opportunities to do that.

[Speaker 1]

He didn't get to too often. But that's the story I wanted to tell you. I want that a permanent record because I'm serious.

If I'd had a chance, I'd kill him.

[Speaker 9]

What was his name again?

[Speaker 1]

R.B. Vaness, class of 25, United States Naval Academy. After we finally got that pile of junk to run during the Korean situation, I was transferred to the admiral staff in New Orleans. And there was a captain there from California, a Naval Academy graduate.

One morning at breakfast, we were discussing just the story I've been telling you. And he said, the captain from California, he was captain of operations, assistant chief of operations on the admiral staff. And he asked me what his class was.

And I said, Captain, it was your class, class of 25. He said, what was his name? And I said, I'd rather not disclose that.

He said, I'm going to write a name down here on a piece of paper. And there were other officers at the table. He said, I'm going to write a name down here on a piece of paper.

Look at it and tell me yes or no. I picked it up and it was R.B. Vaness. I said, why did you know that?

He said, we had to call him down when he was a third classman from whipping plebs with coat hangers. I said, we had to call him down.

[Speaker 3]

I was delighted at what happened to him.

[Speaker 2]

Couldn't have happened to a more deserving person.

[Speaker 1]

As captain of operations, what can a man do with a sentence like that? And he said, after the sentence and the dishonorable discharge, he should go to a foreign country and change his name. I said, well, he can.

And I guess he did that.

[Speaker 2]

One wonders what did happen.

[Speaker 1]

It's just good that I never did see him again. If I were to see him right now, I'd kick him right in the face. No kidding.

He has no idea what that was like to have him aboard. Everything I did was wrong. Whatever it was.

[Speaker 2]

Every day, every night.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. For instance, we had several machine guns mounted on each side of the 57-foot vessel. LCVPs, landing craft personnel.

I was to take several gunners off the gunners in the boats to take them to a beach with which I was acquainted. And we would fire, just fire at the beach, train these boys and use the machine gun, which we did. And it's a wonder I wasn't thrown in prison.

Excuse me. Because that, the Red Beard knew it. That beach had been converted to a hospital beach.

And there should have been, unless it was just lucky that we started firing as early as we did, or the beach had been covered with casualties from the first general hospital in a little town called Ain El-Turk. It was right outside of Iran. Oh, good Lord.

They finally sent a boat with another officer aboard and said, Harris, stop. That's a hospital beach. But it could have gotten me into some serious trouble.

Another night, we pulled into the First of Clyde. We were riding it down at Greenock. And that's, oh, I guess, 50 miles from Glasgow.

And the executive officer, not the Red Beard, the Red Beard was now captain. And there was a Lieutenant Commander Wilkinson that was referred to by everyone as Grandma, and with disrespect. And he, Grandma asked me if I wanted to go ashore that night.

And I said, sure. And he said, well, why don't you ride pilot? I said, he's leaving the ship.

Fine, I will. So I took off, went into Glasgow, and went to a movie, and just kicked around, didn't see anybody, and caught a train back to the ship about midnight. When they blacked out in England, they blacked out, because black is the inside of your pocket.

And I went to the Liberty Landing, being operated by the British, asked him to signal the first and send the boat. And while I was waiting for the boat, there was the postman, the postman, the petty officer from the ship with the shale. And the answer came back to the ship that their boats were secured for the night.

You know, I was going to be late over leave the next morning, because they wouldn't send the boat till after eight o'clock, and that was late over leave. So the British officer closed the office there where his landing was, and the postman and I stepped out on the dock, and we just hoped the dock was there, because you couldn't see it. And somebody fired up a boat down at the end of the dock.

And I said, good lord, if there's a boat going to move, let's see if we can't get him to give us a ride. And it was a Scotchman going across to Grenwick, or Gurick, which is on the other side of the Firth of Clyde. And we told him we'd give him a half crown to take us to the anchorage.

He said, I'm not supposed to go in there. I said, well, I can give you authority to go in there, which I couldn't, but I told him I could. And he said, well, he'd do it.

He knew we needed to get there. So the postman and I jumped in his boat. We came alongside.

I said, don't even stop. Fortunately, the gang lighter was down, and the lights were on the gang lighter. I said, don't even stop.

Just go close by, and we'll jump. Well, we jumped and made it and went up the ganger. And as we approached the quarter deck, the communications officer, Mr. Porter, was on duty. And it scared him. He said, where in heaven's name did you come? We told him we thumbed a ride, and there was a boat pulling away.

That was it right there. So he logged us aboard at 12 o'clock. And the next morning at quarters, I was standing with my division head reporter, chief engineer, all present and accounted for.

And he went to the captain's quarters for plan of the day. And the executive officer, Grandma Wilkinson, asked him if Mr. Harris was aboard. He said, yes, Mr. Harris was aboard. And then Paul Wilkinson came and looked over the edge of the flying bridge to see if I was down there. And I was. And there again.

And the good Lord was looking after me, because they had me. They had me strung up. But I wasn't supposed to be able to get back.

[Speaker 2]

But I did. It sounds like you were on board Captain Quigg on his worst days. It was worse than Quigg.

[Speaker 1]

When I was telling somebody about it, they said, did you see K-Mutiny? And I said, yes, I've seen K-Mutiny. It was the war in Lexington.

You remember Mr. Roberts? It reminded me a lot of Mr. Roberts.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, the captain of Mr. Roberts.

[Speaker 1]

He wanted to make three stripes with the scrabbled eggs on his hat. And this operations officer, I was telling you about in New Orleans, took 11 of us to see Mr. Roberts with a traveling company coming out of New York in one of the auditoriums there in New Orleans. And he took, oh, I guess 10 or 12 of us that night.

And all of us wore whites and full dress and paraded ourselves in and all sorts of whispering as we went down the aisle and took our seats. And there comes the Navy. But I thought of Mr. Roberts. He finally caught up with his war.

[Speaker 2]

He wanted to do that.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. What was the ensign's name? Holbrook.

[Speaker 11]

Jack Lemmon plays him.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, I'll never forget that. You remember when he'd say, bang, bang. Have an explosion.

[Speaker 2]

That's a wonderful, wonderful play. Wonderful film. How old were you when you went in the Navy?

[Speaker 1]

Uh, 26. No, I was 27. I wanted to fly.

And I was about two months too old. Would not take a man that passed his 27th birthday. And the thing I was afraid of was passing the Navy physical because the Navy physical was the tough fight.

And I passed the physical. And he said, when can you go? And I said, well, give me two weeks with the boss and two weeks at home.

He said, fine. Corpus Christi in five weeks. Started out the door.

He said, son, how old are you? I said, 27. I'm sorry.

Threw it over in a mailbox. No dice. I asked him, what was the next best deal?

And he says, right down the hall, door that's marked V7. Said, you're qualified for that, college graduate. You're qualified.

And he said, you'll enjoy that. You'll come in as officer of status.

[Speaker 2]

You graduated from UT by the way.

[Speaker 1]

Yes, I finished UT. Barney, Barney had a high school ROTC. And when he got, he got his degree and he's commissioned as second, as first lieutenant when he left the university.

And he's a major assigned to chemical warfare with the Marines. And he was, he was disarming a dud and he removed the nose and handed it to his sergeant and said, put that in water. He had the bucket of water there.

And it exploded and broke his jawbone, both jawbones on one side and one on the other side. Fortunately, he fell head down or he drowned in his own blood. And he wound up in the hospital in San Francisco.

And then when Korea came along, I went by to see him. He lived in Houston. He was with Shelton.

I went by to see him with my uniform on to see what he'd say. And his wife just raised hell with me. She said, he'll never be satisfied.

He gets his uniform back on and sure enough, he put his uniform back on and he stayed in. And the last I heard of him, he was at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. And I was in New York City with the company, with the company I worked for.

And I got a letter from him stating that this is the last time he could write to me and for me not to answer him because he could not give me a return address. He was under secret assignment. At that time, he carried, he was a bird colonel, carried an eagle.

And he was bucking for general. I found out later, he was sent to Turkey in charge of all of our missiles, Turkey. And that's the last I ever heard of him.

He had picked up malaria while he was in World War II and it was undulating. He'd be a dog for maybe a week and then he might go six months, a year, and then down again. And I feel sure that conditions in Turkey were not compatible and he probably died right there in Turkey.

I haven't heard of him since. And he and I were in the same class and nobody seems to be able to find out what happened to him. I've asked the ROTC, I've asked the Alumni Association, to see what they can find out.

Nobody's found anything. We just know he's not, you know, a man.

[Speaker 2]

Well, one of the best ways I found to find out something like that is to contact either a congressman or a senator to pick him up. They won't see it, of course, but some staff are a bunch of...

[Speaker 4]

...affirmative officer for the 8th Naval District. And as I mentioned once before, that was to keep things in humanity.

[Speaker 1]

Some of the excuses people used to get out of serving I couldn't understand it. But believe me, everybody came to alert status. A lot of congressmen or senators came in and said, what is the status of the man?

[Speaker 3]

And the interesting thing was that LBJ, I think he was a senator at that time, yeah, I think he was a senator at that time, and he would scribble on a little five-by-three-by-five card, advise staff, and shout LBJ.

[Speaker 1]

And that carried just about as much weight as he could get behind it. And the trouble was he, well, he inquired about let's say A.H. Smith. Well, it happened that we did not have a man A.H. Smith, but we had a C.D. Smith that was from his town and from Texas, and that was the man he was asking about, and I knew it. But I wrote him this letter for the admiral's signature, you've ever seen, informing him that we did not have any records concerning Mr. A.H. Smith. If any orders arrive or if for some reason we come in contact with A.H. Smith, we will certainly advise you of his status, but as of this date, we do not know A.H. Smith. We sure didn't know C.D. Smith, and he went to the service.

[Speaker 3]

He was called back. I never did hear any more about it. But I frankly, the admiral didn't like LBJ because instead of writing a letter, as all the other congressmen and senators did, he just scribbled it on a piece of paper and said, let me hear about this.

[Speaker 5]

There's many ways in the bureaucracy to get things done or not done.

[Speaker 3]

Just be totally honest with him.

[Speaker 1]

We don't know anymore.

[Speaker 2]

Your first experience in aircraft or assaults was North Africa.

[Speaker 1]

North Africa. All right. That was the baptism of fire.

[Speaker 2]

What job did you have there?

[Speaker 1]

I was in charge of the first wave.

[Speaker 2]

Went into Oran or?

[Speaker 1]

No, we went into a little town of Caledonia, about 20 miles north of Casablanca. The interesting thing before the invasion, before they actually landed the troops, was the battleships firing. The Jean Bart, by the League of Nations, had taken her propellers off and then put them on the dock, but she was tied in a very potent set of guns she had aboard, and they were mounted four in a battery instead of just three.

And they were 20-inch guns, by the way, measured in millimeters. But our battleships were 16. The battleships traveling with that convoy were the OSS Texas.

She was a big old waddling... Her beam was almost as much as her fore and aft measurement. But the Massachusetts was a brand new battleship, and it was riding with us too.

Well, the Jean Bart fired and went over the anchorage, which told us we were bracketed. She could drop a shell on us any time she wanted to. And the old Texas waddled there where she was clear, and she returned fire.

Well, this caused the Jean Bart to keep firing. The Massachusetts, in the meantime, pulled away from the convoy. And zeroed in on the source of the firing.

You could see the red balls flying up through the air. And when she opened fire, she was putting it right down the stack. She was really doing some damage.

And she damaged the Jean Bart to the point she could no longer fire. But to tell you what, we were worried when she put one over us. She could fire 25 miles without any trouble.

And we were just about 20 miles away. And she went over our head and said, Lord, all she has to do is put a notch or two, and we'll get it.

[Speaker 7]

There were some big shells coming at us.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. But I got the wave organized, and we went to the point of departure. What troops did you have on board?

I don't know. I don't know who we were landing.

[Speaker 8]

They were American troops?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah.