

Johnston, George M-5-22-97-Pt1.1

[Speaker 2]

The following is an interview with Mr. G. M. Mack Johnston, Route 6, Box 121, Shelbyville, Tennessee.

Interview conducted by Dr. Charles Johnson at the Center for the Study of War and Society at the University of Tennessee on May 22, 1997. What I normally do, I like to start out trying to get some background on the person's life before they went into the service. He went in at 17, so there's not a lot back there.

[Speaker 1]

I was born and raised in New Orleans, and my father had been in the Navy during World War I. And I had determined, see when the World War started, I was still in high school, because I actually went into the Navy in July of 1943. But even before I signed up, I knew that I wanted to be in the submarine service, because I didn't want to get into a part of the service where, well, what the hell, you know, why am I here, and what am I doing, and nothing's going to happen.

[Speaker 2]

Your father wasn't in submarines?

[Speaker 1]

Was not in submarines, no, no sir, he was not. He was on a big cruiser, I guess it was.

[Speaker 2]

Do you have brothers, sisters?

[Speaker 1]

I had one sister who is dead now, and she was not in the service at all, no. But my dad had been in the Navy. And, as I said, I determined that I wanted to be somewhere else where I would be busy and see what was going on and get involved in the war itself, and I knew that submarines was one place to do that.

Having heard all the stories of the German submarines and what they had done to the Burmese crew, and to the ships carrying supplies to the Middle East and this sort of thing to Europe and England. So, as luck would have it, when I went in, I did my boot camp training in San Diego. I remember that was something like 12 or 13 weeks.

Well, then you took a test, and I had already let them know my interest in the submarine service, and I took that test, and I had a high enough rating that I had no sweat at all to go into the submarine service. Now, you say, okay, where did you go to submarine school? I didn't.

At that point, they needed people very badly. And, you know, the normal thing was to go to New London for so many weeks and retrain and all this business. And to do that, I got on a merchant marine ship from San Diego and wound up in Pearl Harbor.

And you know about Pearl Harbor, the submarine base there.

[Speaker 2]

Did they tell you that they were just going to sort of skip all this and give you on-the-job training?

[Speaker 1]

They don't talk about nothing. You're going to Pearl Harbor, and I said, great. So we got to Pearl Harbor, and I was assigned to what they call a relief crew.

And what that meant was that an operating submarine would come in and would be in for normally one month. The first two weeks, the crew would go wherever. It was an honor system.

But you had to be back by a certain time, and that even applied in Australia. But during that first two-week period, the relief was 24 hours round-the-clock. Maybe rebuilding engines, reseeding valves, installing new pumps or compressors, whatever had to be done.

That was done 24 hours a day. And you weren't too fan of it. Now, that's the first two weeks.

And if everything went right, then the second two weeks, the crew returned and tested the boat, everything. Deep dives, fired dummy fish, the guns, the whole shooting match. And while they're doing that, of course, you're working on another boat for two weeks.

Well, I wasn't there, it seems like, just a month or two. And I don't have an exact date on that. But the next thing I know, I was on the Orion, which was a new submarine tender, and on the way to Australia.

[Speaker 2]

Before you get there, what sort of work did you do on the relief crew?

[Speaker 1]

Okay, you had people that worked for the Bosun, those were the deck gang people, and the gunners. You had main engine crew, the diesels, and then you had the auxiliary crew. And the auxiliary crew is the one that took care of compressors, hydraulic systems, all valves, all pressure systems.

So you had low pressure air all the way up to 3,000-pound air. The 3,000-pound, of course, was for blowing the ballast flames. Anything to do with air, compression, hydraulics, the compressors themselves.

You had two big compressors just below the control room. That was the maintenance. Then you also had electricians, as you know, and torpedo men, and you had quartermasters, and you had cooks.

And I happened to land in the auxiliary gang. And I guess I understood what was going on and caught on quickly, because I stayed in the auxiliary gang the whole time I was in.

[Speaker 2]

Had you had any experience or training?

[Speaker 1]

Other than working on a bicycle or a car, that sort of thing, no sir, I had not. But I knew that I would rather do that than be a deck monkey and constantly be scraping paint and all that stuff. Oh, and one of the other things they did, they had dry docks at Pearl Harbor.

And to increase the possible speed of a sub underwater especially, you had to get all the junk off the hull and repaint it. Well, that was an operation in itself. They'd go into that dry dock and there you are hanging by a rope off the side with a chipper and a brush, and the whole bottom had to be redone.

And that was unbelievably terrible work. Unbelievable. But anyway, I did it right along with the rest of them.

And then, let's see, I got to go into Honolulu a couple of times, but it was just all servicemen, so you know where I go. So I didn't, there were no girls, you know, nothing, and I was 17, what did I know. I got to see mock attacks from our own Navy and Air Force planes, you know, dive bombing attacks, all that stuff.

Mock attacks, of course.

[Speaker 2]

What ship was the harbor in at that stage?

[Speaker 1]

Well, of course, Arizona was where it was. There was still a hell of a lot of work being done to some of the other battleships and cruisers that had been hit. Because, see, December, when you talk about December of 41, you had the full year of 42, and here it is two-thirds of the way through the second year, but just over a year and a half down there.

So, you know, not everything was done or repaired by any means. Because, you know, Hickam Field, well, I never saw Hickam Field. I had pictures of what had happened there, and I was still having a hell of a time putting that back together, too.

But things that you remember about the place was that it rained like you could tell time by it, and it was an outdoor movie theater, outdoor screen, benches for you to go see the movies. Well, you knew when it was going to rain, so you'd take a paper or something, you'd put it over your head, and you sat there, and it rained for so many minutes, and it went away. But then you went and saw movies.

[Speaker 2]

Did you go up there with people you knew, or were you on your own?

[Speaker 1]

No, a lot of the people that I knew in boot camp went into the Seabees. And I can't think of one person, no, no, I was the only one. As I remember, I was in 43-309, I'll never forget that.

It was 1943, boot camp. Series or platoon? Class 309 of 1943, 43-309.

And not one of the people that I knew went into the submarines in that whole group. But anyway, let's see. Oh, one of the things that I remember about Hawaii, dull pineapple.

You know that when pineapple gets to a certain stage of ripeness, it can't be shipped. So they send it out to the bases. And you've never eaten pineapple like that in your life.

It's something I still remember, and I love pineapple. But these ripe pineapples, it's just like squeezing sugar. And just delightful.

[Speaker 2]

I was down in Puerto Rico, my brother-in-law was in the Navy. And we got some out of the field. Well, somebody got them out of the field.

[Speaker 1]

Well, you know what I'm talking about. When you eat one that's ripe, it spoils you for anything. As you see them in the store now, they're still green.

[Speaker 2]

So how long were you in Hawaii?

[Speaker 1]

That's what I'm trying to remember. I can't imagine that it was over two months. It was over two months, because I then got on the new subtender.

And we made that voyage from Pearl Harbor to Brisbane first. And on the way, I slept in my hammock. They had a number of decks.

And they had hooks underneath the deck above for stringing your hammock. Well, here was the railing. And right over here was the ocean.

And I had my hammock right here, as far outboard as I could get. And you heard the sound of the water and the waves and the wind blowing. And it was something else.

[Speaker 2]

It must have been balmy.

[Speaker 1]

It was unbelievable. It was cool. And you slept under a blanket.

And, of course, we went through the crossing the equator. I'm trying to remember what that was called.

[Speaker 2]

Neptune.

[Speaker 1]

There you go. We went through that phase. And somewhere, I had a piece of paper that said that I'd done that.

[Speaker 2]

A big, usually big, scrolled piece of paper.

[Speaker 1]

Well, these were small, but said the same thing.

[Speaker 2]

Shellback cards.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, there you go. And I have that. Of course, that's been gone for years.

I have no idea where that is.

[Speaker 2]

Do you remember offhand what you were hearing about how the war was going at that stage? What sort of sense you had of what you were going to get into?

[Speaker 1]

Nobody told you anything. Nobody told you anything. And the only contact you really had was by the guys that were on the sub that you happened to be working on, talking to them or talking to one that had transferred off and come into the relief crew about approximately where they were.

A lot of times, you didn't even know where the hell you were. You really didn't. Because some of the names mentioned in that log, I don't remember at all.

I remember that, of course, Lombok Strait very, very vividly going and coming. And I remember going up the west side of Borneo and being in the Gulf of Siam, which is now renamed all through the South China Sea and along the west section of the Philippine coast.

[Speaker 2]

Any sense of how the morale was on these submarine crews that you were working with?

[Speaker 1]

Excellent. We were all young, and we all knew that we were going to live forever. That's why you got young people fighting wars.

Exactly right. But, you know, we knew we were better than anybody else, and we had a great skipper, and we had the best boat, and we were smarter than anybody else.

[Speaker 2]

Tougher, luckier?

[Speaker 1]

All of that. You were immortal at that time. Mortality comes a lot later in life.

[Speaker 2]

I understand.

[Speaker 1]

No, we were immortal. And I remember being pissed off that I wasn't on a sub yet, but knew that going to Australia, and I had no idea where the remand in Perth was at that time. I'd heard of Brisbane.

But we went across, and it was a jolly ship, and no escorts or anything. No escorts. If they'd had Japanese men smart, they'd have a sub sitting out there 50 miles from Pearl Harbor just waiting on guys like us to go tell each other what they've been doing.

So anyway, we go across, and it was not a bad voyage at all. And we go into Brisbane. And I remember the colorful roofs of the houses, and not all of Brisbane, because we were there just a couple of days.

The one thing I remember is we were on the shore, and all the girls we met, they said, Love, I'm so glad to see you. I thought I was making out like a bitch. What I didn't realize at the time was they called everybody love.

They'd say, Hey, buddy. That's about what it meant. But they were very nice, and I'm sure you're aware that jolly old England sucked up every young to middle-aged male of New Zealand, Australia, India, Africa, whatever.

And that's who fights England's wars. Aside from all the other bullshit that you've heard, that's who fights the wars. But the people were great.

I loved Australia and the people there. We met immediately, and I had no problems with Australians. Now, a lot of the Australian servicemen did not like us because we were there with their girls, and we had money to them.

Same way with the New Zealanders. The Marines really screwed up New Zealand because they were not so nice, and they did a lot of training in New Zealand. Well, the ANZACs down there just absolutely despised the American servicemen, especially Marines.

But anyway. So we're a few days in Brisbane, and then we leave, and of course you go through what I call the Australian Bight, which is between Tasmania and the lower part of Australia. And the weather is unbelievably bad now.

Of course, you're getting closer and closer to the South Pole. So all of a sudden, here we get on the West Coast. This is the Indian Ocean now.

And we pull into this little river. It's not a big river. It's a little river.

And there's all those submarines. And I'm in another relief crew. I'm immediately transferred off of that subtender into a base on the shore, right there at that dockside.

It's not like you had a long way to go because you walked from work. It was that close. So I'm transferred into another relief crew.

Before you know it, I'm assigned to the bank. SS-256, the bank. And off we go.

[Speaker 2]

What was your rating? What did you do?

[Speaker 1]

I never got above primary and second class, and I'm going to explain that to you. There wasn't time to study, for one thing. And when you're on the boat, you're four on and eight off.

And that doesn't mean that you've got eight hours to sleep or do whatever. You're doing something else all the time. But in that time to be qualified, you have to trace every line.

You have to know what every valve is for, what every switch is for. I was even qualified in ballasting the boat by counting to myself the blindfold and transferring ballast from one tank to another. Okay?

Now, what I could not do was in the maneuvering room, which is just forward of the aft torpedo room, where they're doing the big... with the different speeds. Because, as you know, everything is run off of the batteries, goes from the engines through the batteries, and then you can direct connect to go to the...

through the... the gearboxes to the propeller. But when you're trying to get qualified and be able to identify all these things and you're working...

And I... I just was not gung-ho about getting another rate or another rate. I was single.

I didn't give a damn. You know, I was doing... I had unbelievable eyesight.

Still do, as a matter of fact, even with these glasses. And... Remind me to bring that up again, because on the first boat, I was a...

What's it called? A battle station lookout. They found out I could see good, and...

And, of course, if you start out, you do a lot of KP stuff, too, washing dishes and all that sort of thing. How many on a crew? Well, it averaged around 80.

About 80. And that could be from 75 to 82 or whatever. But as I remember, 80 was sort of an average line.

And... We... We stayed on the surface all the time.

All the time. Unless you made a contact. And if you made a contact at night, that didn't necessarily mean that you were going to die.

Depending on what their course was, you would try to get ahead of them and not necessarily submerge them, depending on whether or not they had escorts or not. But, anyway...

[Speaker 2]

Did you know anybody on the HIC when you were assigned there?

[Speaker 1]

No, sir. No, sir. Starting off from scratch again?

Yeah, and that was a bad thing because what they called the chief of the boat, who was in Mr. Mann, but a chief, not a commissioner, was a guy by the name of Sam Rivett. And Sam

and I didn't get along. In fact, I threatened to whip his ass right in the control room while he was submerged one day.

He always gave me a bunch of shit, a lot of mouth. And I was never...

[Speaker 2]
Never took that well?

[Speaker 1]
I was never able to accept that from anybody. So I said, you know, right now, get up and I'll whip your ass. Well, that didn't go very well.

But we did sink ships. And as I remember, we sank four on that patrol.

[Speaker 2]
Before we get to that, any reason why he had taken a dislike to you?

[Speaker 1]
He was old-time Navy, had been on the S boats, which were some of the very, very early boats, thought he knew everything. And I was a young kid on board that he thought he was going to build ship. And he had another young fellow that had been on, I guess, as...

What do they call it when you start off with the boat?

[Speaker 2]
Plank owner?

[Speaker 1]
He was a plank owner. Eddie Hallman, who was his boy. It was sort of disgusting.

And you wonder whether at this point whether Sam was queer or not. But...

[Speaker 2]
Certainly could have been.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, could have been. Anyway, Eddie Hallman was his boy and everybody on the boat knew it. And I took it for a little while, but couldn't very long.

And that's when I said, don't flip your ass right now. Well, I didn't go over good with the captain or anything because he didn't know anybody. And I had no problems with anybody else.

And nor do I remember anybody else having problems. Everybody's so busy and you're there to try to accomplish something. You know?

So... That... I remember...

Even servicing and sinking the ship with deck gun. Aiming just below the waterline. And usually you hit the bridge first.

And then our gunners were good. And then you know where the stack is and you know where the boilers are and that's where you shoot next.

[Speaker 2]

You have three inch or what was...

[Speaker 1]

Three inches, yeah. His army was 3.3 somethings. 3.35. Then they went to the 5.32, which was a larger, shorter. The three-inch gun was put on originally because it had been used as an anti-aircraft gun too. Which is ridiculous. No way in the world you're going to hit an airplane with a three-inch gun on a submarine that's doing this on the surface.

So they changed those out to 5.32, I think, was the size of the new guns that they put on. A lot of them started out with the gun forward of the conning tower. Mistake.

Big mistake. Because if you're running and you're heading for a cloud or a rain shower, which is a good way to hide, you want the gun behind the conning tower shooting at whoever's trying to chase you. Made a big difference.

I wouldn't have thought of that, and obviously they didn't either right away. Exactly right. As you know, the new ones don't have any deck guns at all, but they're so unbelievably fast.

It's quite a different kind of war nowadays.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, your boat was a boat that was mainly a surface craft.

[Speaker 1]

The first one was what they called a 300-foot boat, tested to 300 feet. The second one, the Barbaro, was a 600-foot boat, thank God, and I'll get into that later. But I remember that I had gone in boot camp through a, I guess because I was in submarines, or going to submarines, I remember going through a course, listening to the sound of destroyers and battleships, cruisers, and this sort of thing, from underwater.

And me and my mouth, we had sunk the ship and the escort was coming at us. And the sound is like you're standing under the trestle of a bridge and the train goes over. That's what it sounds like.

And his smart old me, the captain said, I think that was a so-and-so, and I said, no, sir. I couldn't help myself. No, sir.

That was a so-and-so. Whoops. It turned out I was right.

But boy, there was dead silence when I said, I mean, dead silence. And his name was Captain Jack Broach. He had been around for a good while.

He was not one of the younger commanders. And the captain was a commander on the sub at that point. But that went over like a lead balloon.

Anyway, we got back in because of my great dislike for seeing me that I was transferred off to another recruit.

[Speaker 2]

You requested transfer?

[Speaker 1]

No, sir. I did not. No, I hadn't screwed up.

There was no captain's mask or anything like that. They knew that there was a real problem there and it would have gotten worse.

[Speaker 2]

Well, it's better for everybody.

[Speaker 1]

It was better for everybody that I got off. Me included. But...

[Speaker 2]

When you get back to port, did you get any mail when you got back there?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah. The wonderful thing is when you came back in, as you were coming, about to come into the mountains, I could use a 7-Up or something like that. Tell me exactly what you wanted.

I'll take care of it. I can get you juice. If they have a 7-Up or a Coke, either one is fine.

Do you need any change? Do you need any change? No, I'll take care of it.

Okay, I got you. There was a pilot boat. Not really a pilot boat, but that kind of boat would come out and offload mail and five gallons of milk.

And the milk was so great that just the shaking of being transported there were little globules of butter. Well, to this day, I could drink a gallon of milk a day. I don't, but I could.

I love milk. And it was ice cold. And the mail and fruit.

[Speaker 2]

Welcome back.

[Speaker 1]

God, yes. And on the way home, whoever was talented would paint a certain number of Japanese flags on them.

[Speaker 2]

Do you remember anything particular about the sinking of that first ship or the ships that were sunk on that cruise?

[Speaker 1]

Let me think of where I was. I guess at that point I was on damage control. I wasn't in a torpedo room.

My bunk was just, of course, you've got your forward torpedo room. Then you have the ward room, officer's quarters. Then you have the galley, excuse me, officer's quarters, control room, galley, cruise quarters, heads, showers, engine room, two engine rooms, maneuvering room after torpedo room.

And as I remember, I was in damage control stationed approximately in the galley, cruise quarters area. And I remember the baker, Chuck Lund, that's what I want to think, was standing there with me. And we heard the explosions from the torpedoes.

And he said, you've just got your combat badge, meaning you know what a submarine pin looks like. He said, you just earned your submarine pin. And as I said, I remember something that we had gotten like four ships.

And the goosy one was, one of the goosy ones was sinking the ship on the surface. The ocean was as flat as this table. And of course, when the ship is on fire, there's a huge black plume of smoke going up.

And in that area, you're never really very far from land. Not really, except long patrols, air patrols. Or from DEs, with classes of DE or frigate.

So you're really watching the horizon and the sky. Because that's a perfect indication of what has happened. There's got to be a submarine.

We stayed there and blew the hell out of the thing from the surface. And then went through slowly through what survivors there were, that weren't me. But I guess that picture will be in my mind forever.

[Speaker 2]

So some of the crew got off the ship and into the water? Not many. Were they life jackets or in a whale boat?

[Speaker 1]

Some were, some were hanging on to debris. And of course, all of those were shortboarders, you know, in that part of the country.

[Speaker 2]

But anyway... Of course, you couldn't pick up any prisoners or anything like that?

[Speaker 1]

We wouldn't, no. No, because at that point, we had... Man, I'd been gone that long, and we didn't have room for them, didn't want them, didn't anything.

And in fact, there were accounts of men in the water and being run through by the propellers. There was that much fury about what was going on. Let's see what else I can think of in that first...

There was always something to do though. Something to repair or something to change or a valve to grind or a compressor valve to reseal, because these were four-stage compressors building up. And remember, I told you that 3,000 pound air, and that had to be replenished.

And we would dive at least once in the morning, early, to make sure that we had the proper balance where it should be. And, of course, you were always using fuel when you were on the surface, and that lightens the load, and you have to re... Balance is not the word.

Re-ballast. We'd have to re-ballast the sub. But the rest of the time, you're on the surface.

Funny thing, one of the most dangerous things for us was our own PBYS. Do you know what I'm talking about? Oh, yeah.

You know what a PBY is? Okay. A number had been captured in Singapore and Philippines when the Japanese had them.

And what they do is they'd be this far off the water. And you had to really be looking sharp to see them, because they were camouflaged. In that gray to black to a light, light gray.

And you'd spot one. And you never knew if it was yours or not, because at times we would be somewhere close to where it might have been one of our patrol aircraft. But when you saw one, you didn't take your eyes off, because the moment he started to turn, we'd submerge.

And here they'd come. We'd drop dip charges. You know, whatever they do.

But they were... I guess we lost ourselves to them at the early part, because they were expecting our fellows to be in them on patrol, you see. They weren't.

They were Japanese with dip charges. Blew the hell out of them. But the funny thing about the PBY was it took off, cruised, and landed at 90 miles an hour.

You know, it was very slow. Carried a good load, but it was no... no speed deal.

There were a number of them based out of Fremantle in that area, though I never saw them. But Owen mentions them in his letters to me about the number of PBYS operating out of there on patrol, because they were always afraid that the Japanese were coming to Fremantle to get us. And, of course, there was a threat of invasion before we got there, and then it happened another time, while we were there, that the Japanese were sending a big flotilla down, and it didn't happen.

They were stopped. I guess Battle of Coral Sea or something. I can't remember which battle it was.

[Speaker 2]

Coral Sea would have been in May of 1942.

[Speaker 1]

No, what was the big one later?

[Speaker 2]
Lady Golf. Well, no.

[Speaker 1]
See, I was involved in the Lady invasion. I was involved in that.

[Speaker 2]
It could have been Santa Cruz Islands or something like that.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, but there was a big group that was headed that way and got stopped anyway. I'm trying to remember more about that first one.

[Speaker 2]
Nothing else sticks in your mind particularly?

[Speaker 1]
The... There's nothing that rolls like a submarine.

[Speaker 2]
I didn't know that.

[Speaker 1]
Nothing that rolls like a submarine. Underwater, submerged. Around the Natuna Islands, though, they have tremendous swells, and that's off Borneo.

And you could feel just a little bit of movement from those swells. But on the surface, you blow at it, and it does this. And it's all over the place, up and down.

I was sick for two weeks on the first one. And finally, a guy said, quit drinking water. Go get crackers.

And I got better. But I was a sick bastard there for a while. But still had to do what I had to do, okay?

But I'm telling you, I had to go through the galley and smell bacon cooking or eggs or whatever. And at that time too, I was washing dishes. And this helped a lot with the grease and the rest of it.

[Speaker 2]
How was the food?

[Speaker 1]
The first few weeks, it was fine. But then the longer you stayed out, the more the odor or taste of diesel fuel got involved with your food. And again, going to the second side of the Barbaro, we were out so long that the last two weeks we ate spaghetti.

And that was it. We had run out of food, even after replenishing it at BIAC New Guinea and heading back out. It was a double run is what it was.

But no, normally the food was okay. It was okay. You had ways too of getting what you wanted.

Like I might go steal a can of pizzas and eat the whole damn can. And one thing that kept me alive, and this is going to surprise you, Ovaltine. They had Ovaltine, which I love.

And Ovaltine is very nourishing. I don't know if you know that or not. It's not just a sweet drink.

It's very nourishing. But when I didn't like what was going on, I'd fix myself Ovaltine. I think I L'd on Ovaltine, I'll tell you that.

And I've never been a bean man, really. You know, like red beans or stuff like that. Pork and beans, I couldn't eat.

And the Navy's great on pork and beans. But I'll tell you what I loved. That was great.

That's what they call SOS. Which is, you know, the chipped beef on toast. That was one of my favorite meals.

And so many guys couldn't even look at it.

[Speaker 2]
I love it.

[Speaker 1]
Well, I still make it. That's one of my favorite meals. My mom always makes it.

Anyway. No, I got along fine with the food thing. I got along fine with it.

Everybody did, really. We came back, and even though I was not going to go out again, I was due by two weeks. And this was a fascinating trip.

Three guys and myself caught the train from Perth to Kalgoorlie. Kalgoorlie was 400-some-odd miles directly inland in the desert.

[Speaker 2]
The mining country? Yeah.

[Speaker 1]
At that time, they were the deepest shafts in the world. And we went to Kalgoorlie. Stayed at a hotel.

And got to go through one of the processing plants from this mine. Didn't let you go down the shaft, though. And I don't know if they really wanted to, because it looked pretty pretty old-fashioned to me.

Anyway. Went through that processing plant, where they did everything to even to the boring of the gold and making the big bricks. Well, ingots or bricks, or whatever you want to call it.

Well, we finally got the last thing we saw, of course, was the where they were smelting this and pouring it. This is in a shabby-looking building. It's not even a guard with a gun.

Yeah. They go in there and hear these massive shells. And here the bricks are on them.

And we watched the guy pour the stuff in. I said, I can't believe there's not a guard in there. He said, OK.

You can have one. It'd be great. Go pick it up.

Well, first of all, you can't believe how heavy they are. Now, we're not talking about little bitty things, OK? We're talking about big stuff.

I picked that one up and it went through the floor. It's not in pretty good shape. He said, all right, now you got it.

Well, you can do it. There was not even an airfield in Calgary at that time. The only transportation was by train.

Not a road, by train. And as I remember, we left and spent the whole damn night on the train and part of the next day before we got there. It was only for one and some odd mile, but we made stop after stop after stop.

And alongside of it, the train track had to be a five to six foot diameter pipe the whole distance. That was the water supply for Calgary. For the mines and for the people and for everybody there.

[Speaker 2]

Long ways to carry water.

[Speaker 1]

But he said, well, you can do it. And I said, well, I guess I got a problem. He said, even if you were able to get to the coast with it and we would have put out a message that someone had stolen gold and you took it to wherever, they would know the moment they saw that and by test what mine it came from.

Every mine has a different quality of gold quality, not quantity, but a different quality of gold. And he says, you still want it. It's yours, keep it.

But there wasn't even a guard on the, for that building.

[Speaker 2]

Jumped off a little fingernail floor.

[Speaker 1]

There you go. But the people were delightful. And once they found out the fellows at the mine, when they found out that I was in the auxiliary crew and they worked on pumps and compressors and valves they said, mate, stay.

Don't go back. We'll send you to college. We'll expect you to come back and work with us.

And we'll send you through school with your airplane. They didn't have any people. And they knew that they were losing so many in Africa and wherever else that the English ship and Crete, Greece, everywhere, everywhere.

Burma, Singapore, wherever. And all our young men were getting killed. But he had a feeling that I was going to survive.

And as I say, I loved the people and got along with them just great. If you just listen instead of shooting your mouth off and find out about other folks and what they think and don't try to say you know your hot stuff. It's just how you approach people.

Your first impression means a lot. Especially in a place like that where they're speaking the same language you are roughly. And he was dead serious.

[Speaker 2]

Question that I meant to ask you on your first tour, trip, cruise. Did you come under attack by anybody? You hadn't mentioned that.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, well. That just goes with the territory.

[Speaker 2]

That's a big ocean out there.

[Speaker 1]

Well, yeah. But see, most of the things were getting tough with the Japanese and just about all ships had escorts. Okay.

Very seldom would you find one all by itself as that one on the surface that I'm talking about. Oh, no. But we would outfox them and a lot of times get between them and the ship and shoot the ship and go right past it and go in the other direction and they're still back over here trying to find you.

And sometimes they do find you and there were times that we would the depth charges. This was this was the one place where, you know, slip of the lip since the ship. The Japanese at first had what we would call relatively non-effective depth charges.

Well, they found out that they weren't doing so hot because people were talking about how ineffective they were so they made bigger ones and let me tell you those bigger ones were something else. And once you heard a depth charge attack you could tell by the click where they were and how far. You heard the ship, of course, but you never knew which way the depth charge was coming.

But if they went over you you didn't want to hear that click right away. But the time between the click and the explosion and the the degree of loudness of that click you knew when they were getting close and sometimes it did and of course most of the time we would attempt and I don't know if you know this or not but in the ocean there are warm and cold layers of water. And the cold layers would deflect their sound devices their their their pinging what I call the pinging from the sound gear.

And you were in what was called silent running. Even the steering gear you were doing by hand. The high volume pumps were not running.

All of us wore sandals soft sandals and the the decking for instance in the engine room was a metal what you think that is but it was a green pad on it. You didn't you didn't touch it to it laugh you didn't play music. A lot of times those that didn't have anything to do from the silent running condition were living in their beds and not turning over.

And the screws were just barely doing their just barely doing their so that you could maintain the depth so that you could you know you could control everything with the balanced turn point but unless you have forward motion you can't control it as fast as you would. But you were constantly changing direction to the depth of the boat and you were constantly direction to the depth of the boat and you were constantly changing direction to the depth of the boat and you were constantly changing direction to the depth of the boat and were constantly changing direction to the depth of the and you were constantly changing direction to the depth of the

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[Speaker 2]

you know a lot of sharp things and heavy things.

[Speaker 1]

Amen, amen and you're in amongst the torpedoes the torpedo tubes and one of my friends just happened to raise up too quick and put a gash in the back of his head and of course I got to sew him up and but it's always something like you say sharp edges and everything's so close luckily I never had anything called claustrophobia.

[Speaker 2]

I was going to ask about that.

[Speaker 1]

I know. I'll tell you one man one man out of all the guys that I knew and this again happened on this was on the Barbaro, the second boat. Wait a minute, I'm not clear on that but what I remember and in fact he is in that movie and it doesn't mention his name but he's dressed up with his Anzac hat and his vest and he's part of a submarine group that was over in Australia visited and admits that he couldn't take it.

Nobody ever made fun of you if you couldn't because nobody knows if they've got claustrophobia until you get trapped but he spent days, it was the first boat, first boat, after depth charge it really unstuck him and he spent days sitting with his head between his knees hands over his head.

[Speaker 2]

It's like any other kind of combat situation until it happens you don't know how you're going to react.

[Speaker 1]

And we transferred him to another boat going back and of course he transferred out of the active sub. But he didn't know he had it. Nobody else.

And he'd been through sub school and the whole business but it was being confined and knowing you're not going to get away. If something happens you don't have anywhere to hide there is nowhere to hide. But that was on the first boat.

Your second one was the Barbaro. Barbaro, B-A-R-B-E-R-O, Barbaro. First one was the SS-256, the Hake.

Second was a 317, was a Barbaro and that was a 600 foot boat. I can't think of anything else to tell you about the first one at this point. Then I went back and as I said went into a relief crew again.

Worked on the Nautilus which was one of the huge huge boats. It was a Nautilus, the Narwhal, and the Argonaut. It was a special class that were you know just tremendous tremendous boats.

Did a lot of personnel transfer and into and out of the islands and rescuing people and just did all sorts of things. I was never on any of those boats, those three, but I did work on one when I was in the relief crew. And in the relief crew I also worked on the engines and the subs had two very distinct type of engines.

One was the Fairbanks Morse opposed piston. The other one was a Winton, W-I-N-T-O-N, which was a GM type diesel and was not opposed piston. That Fairbanks Morse would last forever.

The Winton engine you had to put it down eastbound. Changing, re-reaming, putting new rings, bearings and so I think with that Fairbanks Morse opposed piston engine was the engine they had. See there were five, actually five engines on the boat.

The fifth one was also a diesel, but it was known as the donkey engine. If you were using all four engines as propulsion, the donkey was charging the batteries. Because you had no snorkel, you had no way of breathing.

But you had to keep those batteries up all the time because you never knew when you were going to be down there for how long. But anyway, I got back and was in the relief crew and was able to go to nice places like that Swan Club on the river, which was absolutely wonderful. It was a great place for a young kid, and that's what I was, to go and stay out of trouble.

I was telling Kevin, in my visit to that club, I think we mentioned earlier that these girls were investigated and had all sorts of testimonials that they were good kids. They weren't bad girls. So in going there, I met this one young lady.

Her name was Bess Evans. And whenever I was in or able to, I would go pick up Bess. Her family checked me out.

You know, I was a nice guy, and we would go dancing. And when I got on the second boat, the Barbaro, that was a very long patrol, and we'll talk about that. And I mentioned even that we went into Viac, New Guinea and picked up more torpedoes and food and went back out again.

It lasted from October until January. Well, on that one, we got really badly banged up to where we couldn't be repaired in Australia. They couldn't handle us in Pearl Harbor.

They couldn't handle us on the West Coast, and we came all the way back to Port St. Vancouver for repairs. Well, Bess got wind of what actually had happened. And just like that, we were gone.

We got orders and we were gone. And we went to New Zealand, New Ellington, New Zealand, to restock food and fuel, not torpedoes. We already had torpedoes.

And remember, we were at this point, we were limping on one engine, excuse me, one screw. But Bess got wind of what had happened on that patrol and wrote to me at my parents' home. Now, this would have been in January of 1945.

Well, just within the last few months, I made contact through an Australian chat room with the fellow who sent all this. And I told him that I was trying to find the Evans family, they would write to me. And in particular, Bess, I would figure that her mother and father were dead by now.

Because she was, as I said, I'll be 72 this year, and she certainly is at least 70 now. So I said, I really would like to contact Bess. Now, this is the girl I hadn't even kissed.

This is how I was raised. And the father and her family, and they were, as I said, just so kind to me. And Owen Evans, same last name, no relation.

Checked the Red Cross, the newspapers, everything you can think of and couldn't find any trace of her. Now, one thing that I remembered all this time was that her address was number 6 Leroyd, W-A-R-O-Y-D Street, Perth, Australia. And I told Owen that, but what happens?

And finally he had a brainstorm. He says, I'm going to look in that goddamn telephone book. And you're not going to believe this.

He looks in the telephone book, and there is Jack Evans at number 8 Leroyd Street, who is her older brother. Who just happens to have a computer. Owen gets his email address and his telephone address and gets that to me.

And I contact Jack, and through Jack contact Bess Evans. The sad thing about this is, or Bart Twenge is, that she wrote that letter in January 1945. Do you know when I got that letter?

About 1958 or 1959. It had come to my parents' house, and for some reason they had either forgotten it, or thought it would interfere with some other relationship I had. They didn't give it to me.

Until 1958 or 1959. It had never been opened. Never been opened.

And I read that, and I have since, in moving or whatever, lost the letter. But in the letter, I remember reading it, and her concern was what had happened to us during that second patrol. And wondering how I was.

She understood that my whole, I guess, outlook on life had changed at that point.

[Speaker 2]

Let's take a break and walk around a little.

[Speaker 1]

P-39 Aircobra.

[Speaker 2]

No, P-51. Is it?

[Speaker 1]

Yep. Okay. Yeah, it is.

It sure looks like the Aircobra also. No, everything's fine. Anyway, what I did then was write to her through her brother, Jack.

Who was just a real nice guy. He was in the Australian Air Force, and was back and forth in the United States all during the war. He was older than she was.

Just a little older than me. And was just a real gentleman. So we corresponded, and I then sent him a letter through him to her.

And followed that with a handwritten snail, what we call snail mail, with a picture of me. Taken at my mother and father's home in New Orleans. I had only been home a few days in my 36-day leave once we got back to the States for repair.

She didn't remember me. And there could be a lot of reasons for that, as I was telling Kevin at breakfast. So many, there were a number of heartbreaking stories about Americans, and Australian girls, and New Zealand girls for that matter, of abandonment.

Looked down very harshly by their families and returning husbands and brothers. And as Owen told me, he said, Mac, it may be that she doesn't remember on purpose. Because of the stigma that still exists with some people, most of it has gone away.

But the stigma that still exists somewhat in girls that went out with yanks. Because some of them were bad guys. On promises to marry, and getting pregnant, all these sort of things.

And then walking away from it. There were a number of yanks that stayed, and Australian girls that stayed in Australia. And you know a lot of them.

God, anybody could live there, it's wonderful. Especially now that they've gotten rid of their totally socialist government. As you know, at one time the labor unions ruled Australia, and that's different now.

But he said this could be part of it. Now, I have had her letter she wrote to me. And as I told Kevin, she has four grown girls.

All four are redheads. All four went to college. Two are married with children.

Two are not married yet. But her husband is still alive. He's had some serious heart problems.

Definitely hopeful. Yeah. It's very much a different boat, and it's got better than any other.

I mean, the boat's made better than any other. Sometimes it depends on the barbarians. It's not.

The fellow in the over-the-shoulder, whatever he was, in the other... Well, in fact, this is what I've been doing ever since I got here last week. But, uh...

I have a lot of stuff going on in this ship. Yes. And they're all very close to Captain's Bay.

Mm-hmm. And the barbarians... Well, first of all, the fate of the pirates.

The barbarians were made of the same type. And now that you've said that, the pirates, you know... The people of the pirates...

Uh, they're all... They're destroyed. You know, the time that they were brought back.

And... I don't know. I don't know who they are.

I'm sorry. I put this on the floor. I can't see.

I used to be a sailor. I need a break. I can't.

I'm sorry. I can't see. But the pirates moved.

And so... I don't know. I can't see it.

And so I laid this on the deck right here. And I dug it. It was the hardest thing I've ever done.

There was another boat that was working with them. I don't know what happened. It was just a little boat of mine.

It was probably 150 feet at the time. But anyway... After a day and a month...

You know, I think they were working with the boats. Anyway, on the way up... Everybody had to go through one of those...

These diamonds. The last stop before you got to one of those... Boats.

Yeah. It was the last stop before you got to one of those... Boats.

But this is where we got that fuel. I'm not talking about the fuel I used to get every day. So...

And that's where I'm at. But I don't know if you've ever been on a plane before. You know about the...

To go on notice. You know what I'm saying? You know, you will read in that log about the things that you have to do on the way.

So... I call them meetings. I don't really know what the Japanese call them.

It was a small destroyer fight boat that had got guns in each hand and got shot. The legs came out and even before we got there, we just left that there. And all my wife and kids were able to walk up there.

And I said, what is going on? And he said, what is going on? And I said, what is going on?

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