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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Peter Duhe
Conducted by Robert Tidwell
September 26, 2003
Transcribed by Laura Darden

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

- 1 Robert Tidwell: This is an oral history conducted by Robert Tidwell with Mr.
2 [Pete] Duhe on September 26, 2003, in the Vietnam Center interview room via telephone.
3 How are you this morning Mr. Duhe?
4 Peter Duhe: Very well sir, thank you.
5 RT: Mr. Duhe, to start off, where were you born?
6 PD: I was born in Garyville, Louisiana, 1926. Excuse me, July 14, 1926.
7 RT: What town is Garyville next to?
8 PD: Garyville is about an hour out of Baton Rouge and about twenty-five
9 minutes out of New Orleans, right off of I-10. Right along the Mississippi River.
10 RT: What about your parents? Who were your parents?
11 PD: My parents was Joseph Duhe and my mother was Marie Vicknair.
12 RT: Were they both from Louisiana?
13 PD: Yeah, my daddy was from Litcher, Louisiana, which is only about ten
14 minutes from here. And my mother was from Reserve, Louisiana, which is ten minutes
15 south of here. One is west and one is south of here, yeah.
16 RT: And both of them were born in their respective towns?
17 PD: Yes, correct.
18 RT: What sort of education did your parents have?

1 PD: My mother was educated in an elementary education. I think that's all she
2 had, and that was in French mostly.

3 RT: In French?

4 PD: Yeah, the schools at that time were teaching French down here. A lot of this
5 is French country down here, you know? A lot of Cajun people. And my father, I
6 couldn't tell you. He died when I was three years old, and I really don't know what kind
7 of education he had.

8 RT: So, since your father died when you were three years of age, did you have
9 any male relatives who kind of took up the role as a father?

10 PD: Well, yeah. I had my brother. He was about fifteen, sixteen years older than
11 I was and he sort of took the part.

12 RT: Okay. How many siblings did you have?

13 PD: Whom, myself?

14 RT: Well, yes.

15 PD: Four.

16 RT: Okay. Wow, so five children all together. Were you the youngest?

17 PD: Oh, you mean in my mother's family?

18 RT: Yes, well, I mean, how many siblings did you have?

19 PD: Oh no, we had seven in mama's family, yeah.

20 RT: How many brothers and sisters?

21 PD: I had three brothers and four sisters. Wait, let's see, one, two, three—yeah,
22 that's correct.

23 RT: So, were you the youngest or the oldest?

24 PD: I was the youngest, only one living.

25 RT: Okay. You're the only one who's living?

26 PD: That's correct, yeah, of the family.

27 RT: Wow. That's amazing. So, did you grow up in Garyville?

28 PD: Yes, sir, my whole life.

29 RT: Okay. Wow. What kind of childhood would you say that you had?

30 PD: Hell, a happy one.

31 RT: Okay, that will work.

1 PD: You know, it was the Depression time, but ain't nobody had too much. But
2 we were all happy.

3 RT: Well, especially since you had so many brothers and sisters, you had a pretty
4 good support team there.

5 PD: Oh yeah, very well, very well supported.

6 RT: Did you get along well with your brothers and sisters?

7 PD: Sure did.

8 RT: So, what kind of things did ya'll do when you were kids?

9 PD: As young people, we played a lot of baseball, basketball, football. We did a
10 lot of hunting and fishing.

11 RT: What did you hunt?

12 PD: Mostly rabbits and birds like doves, and snipes, and stuff like that. Mostly
13 rabbits.

14 RT: What kind of fishing did you do?

15 PD: Fishing, we just fished all day in the ponds around the Mississippi River or
16 in some of bayous around here, you know. It was just mostly, at that time, we didn't
17 have rod and reel, it was just mostly use a cane reed poles, and just a regular line. We
18 made our own lines. It's not like it is today with everybody has got these rod and reels
19 and stuff. We didn't have such thing.

20 RT: Did you make your own poles and stuff?

21 PD: Oh, yes. We cut the cane reed poles. We get the cane reed poles out of the
22 woods and we make our own fishing lines, yeah.

23 RT: That's pretty ingenious.

24 PD: Buy a sinker and stopper and your string and you made your own line.

25 RT: That must've helped a little bit in terms of food.

26 PD: Hey, we ate a lot of fish, I guarantee you.

27 RT: Did you ever have it fried on Friday night?

28 PD: Well, we fried fish anytime we had it. It didn't have to be Friday nights, we
29 had it just anytime. I had a brother; my oldest brother, that, like I was telling you, he did
30 a lot of hunting. He'd hunt deer and, hell, caught frogs. He was an avid hunter. He just

1 loved to hunt and fish. Until the day he died, in fact, he was like that. His whole life, he
2 worked at an oil plant and all his spare time was hunting and fishing.

3 RT: So it was more than just a hobby with him.

4 PD: Huh?

5 RT: I said it was more than just a hobby with him.

6 PD: Oh, yeah.

7 RT: Did you and your siblings work when you were children? Did you have any
8 kind of part-time job or after school job?

9 PD: Oh, yes, I did. I worked just about all through high school. I worked in a
10 grocery store company, which was called The Old Company Store in Reserve, Louisiana.
11 I worked my whole high school career through there. I was a young boy, probably
12 twelve or thirteen years old when I started there, and I just worked all the way through
13 the store, all through high school until I graduated.

14 RT: Did you say that was a company store?

15 PD: Yes, what they called it, company store. Godchaux in Reserve, Louisiana
16 and they used to call this store The Company Store. The store that just had everything.
17 We had hardware; we had a barroom in there; we had a meat market; we had clothes; just
18 about anything you wanted. It would be considered a Wal-Mart of the day, but not quite
19 the size, you know what I mean? They had everything in there a person needed.

20 RT: So, did you just do this job on the weekends or after school?

21 PD: After school, yeah. I'd get off, I think at two o'clock in the afternoon. My
22 last two hours was phys-ed and study hall and the principal let me go to work.

23 RT: Then you'd work until about what time?

24 PD: Oh, I guess 7:00, 7:30 at night. Then I'd work all day on Saturdays and
25 during the cane grinding season we'd work half a day on Sundays.

26 RT: Okay, so there must have been a sugar mill nearby?

27 PD: One of the biggest, yeah, Godchaux Sugars.

28 RT: Good cane sugar, too. Did any of your siblings ever work for the sugar mill?

29 PD: Well, one of my brothers at one time did work a few years there, but he
30 didn't stay there very long. He went elsewhere. But I'd say he worked there a couple of
31 years, one of my brother's did. But the rest of them—two of them worked in the oil

1 refinery in Norco, Louisiana with Shell Oil. The one that worked at the sugar mill, he
2 ended up being an insurance salesman.

3 RT: Okay. How many of your siblings still, well, when they were alive, how
4 many of them still lived in the Garyville area?

5 PD: They all just about lived around here. I think the furthest away was probably
6 five or six miles. We all lived in the same area, more or less in the same parish or
7 county, you all would say.

8 RT: I gather you were a pretty close family?

9 PD: Oh, yeah.

10 RT: Did you get into a lot of activities together as a family or as a group itself?

11 PD: Well, really, we did a lot of fish fries and played a lot of ball together, you
12 know baseball and stuff like that. We'd go hunting together, we'd hunt and fish together,
13 but that was about it, I guess. That was about it.

14 RT: As far as playing ball, you had enough people for your own team, just in
15 your own family.

16 PD: (Laughing) Well, when I say play ball, they played, they were a little older
17 than me, they played with a different group. We all, that was one of our important
18 hobbies, playing ball. We loved all those sports.

19 RT: So, which of the sports was your favorite?

20 PD: I'd say baseball.

21 RT: Oh the Great American Pastime.

22 PD: Yeah.

23 RT: Which position did you usually like to play?

24 PD: Oh, I did a little third base, I played a little bit and I caught a little bit; mostly
25 third base. That was my base, my position, yeah.

26 RT: What sort of education did you have before you went into the Navy?

27 PD: High school education was as far as I went. Joined the Navy at seventeen.

28 RT: Oh, okay. So you basically joined right after you graduated?

29 PD: A few months after, yes. I couldn't get my mother's permission. She
30 wouldn't sign, she didn't want me to go.

31 RT: What changed her mind?

1 PD: Well, I just told her I didn't want to go in the Army that I wanted to go in the
2 Navy.
3 RT: So, it took a little bit of salesmanship on your part then?
4 PD: Yes, she had two kids, two boys in there already.
5 RT: Okay. What branch of service were they in?
6 PD: One was in the Navy and the other was in the Army. In fact, he served in
7 Texas, I think, one of the bases in Texas. And the other one in the Navy, he spent four
8 years on the USS *Rhind* [404].
9 RT: What kind of ship is that?
10 PD: A destroyer.
11 RT: Okay.
12 PD: That was 404.
13 RT: Are you married yourself?
14 PD: Yeah, sure am.
15 RT: How many children do you have?
16 PD: Four.
17 RT: What the mixture of boys and girls?
18 PD: Two boys and two girls.
19 RT: Do any of them live in Louisiana?
20 PD: Hell, they're all right around here, every one of them, just right in the area. I
21 guess the furthest one is twelve minutes from here.
22 RT: That's a short drive.
23 PD: You bet. In fact, we got a grocery store up in Garyville, my oldest son has.
24 He owns a grocery store in Garyville. We have one, my oldest son owns the store and I
25 have a son and a daughter that works in the store with us, and plus myself. I'm still
26 working. In fact, I just left the store.
27 RT: Okay. So, you're only semi-retired then?
28 PD: I would say that, yes. I'm retired, but I'm doing what I like to do.
29 RT: What did you do before you retired?
30 PD: I worked in a grocery store my whole life. I worked at The Company Store
31 that I told you about that I worked at about twenty-one, twenty-two years and then after I

1 left The Company Store, the thing was getting—It was an old building, old store that they
2 decided to shut that down. Godchaux shut down in Reserve, the sugar mill did. And they
3 shut the store down, so I went and worked with a supermarket in Reserve and I stayed
4 there about twenty-one, twenty-two years. So, that's all I ever did my life was grocery
5 work. Well, when I say grocery, mostly in the meat department.

6 RT: So, did you actually do any meat cutting?

7 PD: Oh yes, I still do. In fact, they would call us a butcher.

8 RT: Well, you don't see too many genuine butchers anymore.

9 PD: Well, when I say butcher, I wasn't a guy that went out there and killed and
10 skinned those cows and everything else. We just mostly, we get our meat through a meat
11 wholesaler and it's all done. All we have to do is cut it and it's all boxed and everything
12 today. It's altogether different than it was. We used to cut meat by hand a long time ago.
13 You had a saw, and cleaver, and a knife. Today we have—meat sawing is just so much
14 easier. It's altogether different.

15 RT: I think it would take a lot less time to make your cuts.

16 PD: Well, hell of a lot less work and a lot less time and a lot less work, and not as
17 hard.

18 RT: So, you were seventeen when you decided to go into the Navy?

19 PD: Right.

20 RT: What made you think about the Navy?

21 PD: Well, I guess my brother, one of my brothers right before me had been in
22 there awhile, and I just wanted to go in there. Because for some reason, I just didn't want
23 to get in the Army. I'd just rather be in the Navy, I guess.

24 RT: Before you entered, did you have any thought about going into the military
25 at all? Was it something you thought about for a fairly long time?

26 PD: Well, the war was still on, you know and we were probably in the middle of
27 the war and you just assumed already that you were going to go in. Rather than get
28 drafted, hell, a lot of young people did the same thing. They just signed up, went in the
29 branch of service they chose, you know. If you got drafted, nine chances out of ten, you
30 ended up in the Army. That's mostly young kids that I grew up with and finished school
31 with, a lot of them went in the Navy; some of them in the Army. In fact, after I got in the

1 Navy, I talked a few of them into joining the Navy. You know, write to them and tell
2 them, “Hey look, man, join the Navy.”

3 RT: So, you were Navy booster then?

4 PD: Yeah, I guess you could say that.

5 RT: Maybe they should’ve given you a little extra in your pay packet for
6 recruiting. So, you actually had some of your friends who had gone into the Navy, did
7 ya’ll discuss this before you made your final decision? Was it something that ya’ll had
8 talked about?

9 PD: Well, no. I finished school in ’43 and some of these guys didn’t finish until
10 ’44 and they were good buddies of mine and I’d just write them a letter and we’d keep in
11 touch. I’d write them and say, “Look man, if you’d rather go in the service, go in the
12 Navy.” I had several of them did that, you know. One of them served aboard the USS
13 *Wichita* which is a cruiser. I don’t know when the other kid served; Norman, he was in
14 the Pacific with me, I think. He was on the big one of these supply ships or something,
15 but he was out there with me. We still talk about that, he still sometimes gets on me
16 about getting him to join the Navy, I don’t know if he didn’t like the Navy or what, but
17 he still sometimes when I run across him say, “You got me to join the Navy.” I said,
18 “Well, I just thought I was doing you a favor.” Well, it’s all just in jest, all in fun. He
19 was glad he went in. But he’s not in Garyville anymore, this guy I’m talking about. He’s
20 in New Orleans now.

21 RT: Okay, that’s not too far away is it?

22 PD: No.

23 RT: So, you’d mentioned earlier that your mother didn’t take the news very well.
24 How did the rest of your family take it whenever you told them that you wanted to go in
25 the Navy?

26 PD: Well, like I said, they didn’t like it too much, but they really didn’t have any
27 choice. Because sooner or later you were going and you might as well be in the branch
28 of service you wanted to be in, that’s the way I looked at it, you know. In those days, all
29 the young kids when they got out of school—some of them in fact quit school to join.
30 Several of my classmates quit to school to join. Well, I didn’t want to do that, I figured.
31 When they got out of service, they went back and through the GI Bill they got their high

1 school education, you know? But, I didn't want to quit school to join. In fact, I was too
2 young anyway. When I graduated from high school, I was sixteen years old. So, I was
3 too young to go if I wanted to unless I lied on my application, then I still would have to
4 get my mother's signature and she wouldn't sign. I just waited until I got old enough and
5 went in.

6 RT: So, when you decided to go into the Navy, did you tell your older brother
7 who was in the Navy?

8 PD: Well, yeah, he knew I was going in.

9 RT: Okay. Did he kind of pat you on the back and say, "Welcome"?

10 PD: Yes, he thought it was a wise decision.

11 RT: Where did you go for your physical and all of that?

12 PD: Physical was at the customs house in New Orleans on the foot of Canal
13 Street in New Orleans and I got accepted. I went to boot camp in San Diego, California.
14 I spent six weeks there and came down to cooks and baker school up in Corpus Christi,
15 Texas, and spent four months there. From there, we were shipped to Norfolk, Virginia, to
16 be assigned a ship and that's where I was assigned for the *Evans*. Out of the pool of men
17 that were at Norfolk, Virginia, we were assigned to it. The ship's crew was formed in
18 Norfolk; the whole crew.

19 RT: Where did you go when you actually signed your enlistment papers? Did
20 you do that in Garyville?

21 PD: No, that was done at the customs house in New Orleans, yeah at the customs
22 house.

23 RT: Did you make your enlistment and get your physical all in one day?

24 PD: Yeah, we signed and they gave, I think, like ten days to get my stuff
25 together. I think that was like May 1st. And by May 10th I was on my way to California.

26 RT: You'd mentioned earlier that your mother, when she went to school it was
27 taught almost entirely in French.

28 PD: Yeah, her school was strictly French, yeah.

29 RT: So, did you grow up speaking French and English?

30 PD: I can hold a conversation in French pretty good, yeah. Not as good as I
31 should, but I can get by and as far as understanding French, I understand it 100 percent. I

1 can read French to a certain extent. But talk; and I am not that good at speaking it, but I
2 can get by. If I ran across Frenchman, I could get by.

3 RT: *Trés bien.*

4 PD: Yes, *trés bien* is right. It helps.

5 RT: When you went to San Diego, was that the furthest you'd ever been outside
6 of Garyville?

7 PD: Sure was, I guarantee you. That was a long ride.

8 RT: Before you had gone to San Diego, was New Orleans about the largest
9 community you'd ever seen?

10 PD: I spent a few summers, not summers, a few weeks along the Gulf Coast in
11 Mississippi with my sister. She was in a family from New Orleans that owned a little
12 house in Wayland, Mississippi, around Bay St. Louis around there and we'd go spend a
13 week there every now and then. I say we, but mostly myself, with them.

14 RT: Okay. So, San Diego, was that the biggest city you'd seen up to that point?

15 PD: If it was bigger than New Orleans, it was. I don't really remember the size
16 of New Orleans and San Diego at the time, but yeah. I had been in New Orleans. I was
17 familiar with New Orleans. I was only twenty-five minutes out of there and as a young
18 man; we took a lot of trips to New Orleans.

19 RT: So what were your first thoughts when you arrived in San Diego?

20 PD: "Man, what the hell did I get myself into here?" (Laughing) Really, you
21 know? You're getting out the bus and these guys holler at you, "You'll be sorry," and
22 stuff like that. "What did I get into here?" But it really wasn't that bad really. It was all
23 right.

24 RT: You said you got off the bus, so you obviously took a bus trip. How long
25 did that take?

26 PD: Well, the bus trip was from there, the train station to the base.

27 RT: Okay, I was about to say, a bus trip from Louisiana to California—

28 PD: No, no. We went by train, by Southern Pacific Railroad, we caught it out of
29 New Orleans across the Mississippi River, went through Houston and all through Texas
30 and then to New Mexico, Arizona, and San Diego. When we got to San Diego, they
31 transported us from the station to the base in a Navy bus, I guess.

1 RT: So, what was it like on that train trip?

2 PD: We had a bunch of Louisianans on there, so we had a good time. We were
3 enjoying ourselves. We didn't know what we were getting into and what we were to
4 expect, so we just made the best of everything. But we had a bunch of boys from New
5 Orleans that were going in and we had a bunch we picked up in Lafayette, Louisiana. So
6 we had a bunch of Louisiana boys that were in the same company.

7 RT: That must have made the trip a little bit easier, then, because you had a
8 bunch of people from the same state.

9 PD: Oh yeah, we had a good time. We were just resigned that we were going
10 into service and that was it. Heck everybody, you had eleven million people in the
11 service in World War II, so we were just one of them.

12 RT: Then you said that when you got off the bus, a bunch of guys were teasing
13 you about—

14 PD: That was slang in them days, you know, "You'll be sorry." We were a
15 bunch of boots, recruits and them guys had probably been in the Navy awhile and they
16 were having fun. They'd be shouting right at you, "You'll be sorry!" It kind of made
17 you say, "What the hell are we getting into here?" But, it wasn't bad. Really, you just
18 picked up a lot of discipline.

19 RT: How long was your boot camp?

20 PD: Six weeks, at that time. I remember they used to be twelve weeks or sixteen
21 weeks and then as the war progressed, they just cut that boot camp down shorter and
22 shorter. We got in at six weeks and I think that was about the shortest they had at the
23 time. They were producing, putting out a lot of ships and they needed men to get on
24 them, they just cut that boot camp period down.

25 RT: What was it like in boot camp?

26 PD: What it was like? Up at five and trained all day. In fact, you didn't have any
27 time for yourself. At nine o'clock you were in a bunk going to sleep and glad to be in
28 that bunk, you were tired. That was it. From "Taps" to "Reveille." It kept us on the go,
29 you know, training and different classes. I couldn't swim when I joined the Navy, if I
30 wanted to leave from Louisiana, I couldn't swim. But I learned how real quick. They
31 threw you off on a deep end of the pool and you better learn how to swim, brother. What

1 gave you the incentive to learn how was if you can't swim when boot camp is over, you
2 don't get a boot leave. In other words, you don't get to go home. Well, I guarantee you I
3 learned how to swim right quick. I didn't take me long.

4 RT: That was plenty of motivation. First they dump you into the pool and then
5 tell you if you don't swim, you can't visit home.

6 PD: Yeah. You'd be surprised the kids that couldn't swim. You'd think
7 everybody learned how to swim, by the time they were that age. But you'd be surprised
8 the kids that really didn't know how to swim. In fact, I took swimming lessons from a
9 chaplain. A chaplain that gave us swimming lessons. We'd go like an hour everyday or
10 so and they'd give you swimming lessons. It didn't take long, I guarantee you.

11 RT: What kind of classes did they send you to when you were in San Diego?
12 You said you spent a lot of time—

13 PD: Well, mostly they'd teach you about identification of ships and stuff like
14 that, you know, and a little bit gunnery, not much. Because you learned that later when
15 you got ready to go aboard ship there, we had a pretty good training period before we
16 went on the ship. We trained as a crew together. It was just mostly drilling and training.
17 I guess discipline more than anything else they were teaching you. Ship identification,
18 what I'm trying to think of now, there's a shooting familiarization I was shown, but a few
19 of the Navy guns. You know how to shoot a pistol, how to shoot a rifle. They taught
20 stuff like that, but not too much. It was mostly stayed on what they called a grind out
21 there all day long and drilled and drilled and drilled.

22 RT: Then as you said by the end of the day, you were happy to be in your bunk.

23 PD: Oh, yeah. You wouldn't get in your bunk until nine o'clock. After you
24 finish your day's work, they still had stuff for you to do and you had to clean the latrines.
25 San Diego was a real beautiful naval station and it was clean and boy they taught
26 cleanliness, that's one thing they stressed. I guess, they knew you were going to live
27 aboard ship and they had stress cleanliness. Because you get 360 people on a ship and
28 packed up like we were on a destroyer and that was one of the things the Navy taught,
29 cleanliness.

30 RT: Did you ever have any incidents that stand out in your mind, anything that
31 may have been humorous or maybe not humorous during your time at boot camp?

1 PD: Not really. The funniest thing I guess happened was we had a bunch of
2 Frenchmen in there from around Breau Bridge and Lafayette, Louisiana, and most of
3 those guys, they spoke French as well as they spoke English. And at night after the lights
4 would go out, and they start rattling off that French and a lot of these guys—we had a
5 bunch from Texas and Mississippi and in that company also and a few from Arkansas.
6 They didn't know what the hell was going on with that French talk and I was pretty well
7 off. I understood everything that was going on, you know? They would just rattle off that
8 French after dark and amongst themselves and loud enough for everybody—but nobody
9 knew what they were saying. That was pretty funny, you know.

10 RT: Well, as you said, you're so tired by the end of the day and no one had the
11 energy for mischief.

12 PD: No, no. And they'd check on you. They'd come in there and check on you,
13 make sure you were sleeping. In fact, you didn't have any trouble going to sleep, I
14 guarantee you. You only had trouble getting up in the morning. That was a short night.
15 It went by, that six weeks flew by, I guarantee you.

16 RT: Well, especially when you've packed that much activity into such a short
17 period.

18 PD: Yeah, I think after three or four weeks, they gave us a day off, I think. They
19 let us go ashore and let us go into town.

20 RT: What'd you do when you went into San Diego itself?

21 PD: Hey, just went sightseeing. Just as a young kid, didn't know where he was
22 anyway. You had to make sure you didn't get lost. I guess. But we just were mostly
23 sightseeing.

24 RT: How would you describe your living conditions in boot camp? Were the
25 barracks pretty descent?

26 PD: Oh, yes. They were very clean, first class. In San Diego the days were pretty
27 warm. But when I say warm, you stood out there all day long and you got sunburned.
28 Between the wind and the sun, you got sunburned, windburned. At night, the nights were
29 real cool and I guarantee all of the windows in the barracks—I think we had eighty men
30 in each wing. But I think we had 160 people in our company and we had 80 in one wing

1 and 80 in the other and the windows had to stay open all night. You had these two Navy
2 blankets. You covered up pretty good at night because it was pretty cool.

3 RT: Especially with that sea breeze coming in.

4 PD: Yes, the nights were beautiful over there. In fact, we visited San Diego a
5 few years back on one of our reunions. And it brought back memories, but so much has
6 changed that you really didn't recognize. Just like when we had a reunion in Corpus
7 Christi, Texas, a few years back, maybe eight, nine, seven, eight, nine years ago. I spent
8 four months there and when I got to Corpus Christi I was just plum lost. It was nothing
9 like it was when I was there. It's completely changed.

10 RT: So, when you were in boot camp, did you have any idea of what you wanted
11 to do in the Navy?

12 PD: Not really, no. I didn't know what I was going to do there. They gave you a
13 few tests, but you didn't exactly know what you were going to do. I had a choice towards
14 the end of boot camp, they were assigning you somewhere and I had a choice of either
15 going to amphibious school and that would've been off around Coronado, I think. We
16 had an amphibious school there. I could've gone there or I could've gone to cooks and
17 baker school at Corpus Christi. I thought about amphibious and I got to thinking, I said,
18 "No, I don't think I want to go in amphibious forces." So I said, "Let me go to school in
19 Corpus Christi." So, I spent four months down there, cooks and baker school.

20 RT: Well, that and Corpus Christi is a lot closer to Louisiana.

21 PD: Yeah, and a lot of fellows got boot leave after six weeks. For some reason or
22 another, I don't know why. I don't why anybody in our company got it, but I know I
23 didn't get any boot leave, so they shipped me straight to Corpus Christi. Maybe it had to
24 do something with the beginning of school, you know. But I got shipped right straight
25 without a boot leave. In other words, when I went in service, I didn't get out until two
26 years later when I got my first leave. Now, I stayed in that two years before I got a leave.
27 So, I didn't see my folks for two years. A lot of kids got boot leave, some of them got
28 stationed where they could get to their homes and stuff, but for some reason or another,
29 every time I got ready to ask for leave, we were about to go somewhere. They said,
30 "Sorry, you ain't got but three or four days. Can you make it home in three or four days?"
31 "Hell no man." I couldn't catch a train in Virginia and get to New Orleans and back in

1 three or four days. You couldn't fly in those days, they didn't have that much; very little
2 flying and probably didn't have the money to fly anyway, you know?

3 RT: Yes, that's a lot more expensive.

4 PD: So, I just had to say, "Well, I just have to pass it up." They offered me three
5 or four days. I went to see the chaplain one time and I said to him, "Man, I need a leave.
6 I haven't been home." I said, "They didn't give me a leave at boot camp." He said,
7 "Hell, I'm looking for a leave myself." He says, "I'm trying to get out." He told me that,
8 and I said, "Well, ain't no use worrying about it." So, from there we just stayed in until
9 after the war, we got back to the States and I had sixty days coming. I had two months for
10 two years. Thirty days a year and they gave me twenty days. So, I went and came home
11 for twenty days and I went back, did forty then came and got discharged.

12 RT: Twenty days at home must have been quite a bit of rest for you.

13 PD: Oh, yes. That was nice, it went really well. But then a lot of the guys that
14 had been just short out of the service. I got to see all my friends again.

15 RT: And see how much had changed since you left.

16 PD: Yeah.

17 RT: So, you went to cooks and bakers school. How long again was that?

18 PD: That's four months. I spent four months.

19 RT: Four months. So, what kind of things did you do in cooks and bakers
20 school?

21 PD: We did a little class. We had a little classroom work and I think one or two
22 days a week and the other three days you spent in the galley learning to do by doing.
23 You're working with the cooks in the galley and you'd learn from there. It was pretty
24 interesting.

25 RT: So, I guess in that four months, they taught you how to cook a little bit of
26 everything?

27 PD: Yeah, oh yeah. We had a pretty good background of what was going on,
28 yeah.

29 RT: So, they taught you how to cook more than just opening some things out of a
30 tin?

1 PD: Oh yeah, you bet. We had a big old cookbook about the size of a Bible; a
2 big, old book and you had recipes in there, you can cook out of there and if you had your
3 own recipes, I guess you could use your imagination and cook. I ended up getting a
4 third-class rating before I got out of the Navy. I got to make third class. So it wasn't too
5 bad. I ran watch on the ship, you know. One watch. So it wasn't bad.

6 RT: So you said that they would allow you to use your own recipes if you wanted
7 to so—?

8 PD: On aboard ship, yeah. We deviated.

9 RT: Did you ever get to make any gumbo while you were on ship?

10 PD: No I didn't. I sure didn't. I wouldn't have went that far because you sort of
11 had a thing you went by and that was it. But no, I didn't make any gumbo.

12 RT: Well, besides I doubt on board ship you would have had any ground
13 sassafras to make the roux anyway.

14 PD: No. Yeah, we could've, we had flour and wheat, we could've made the
15 roux. Yeah, we could've made the roux. But, if we'd given guys gumbo, they wouldn't
16 have known what to do with it anyway. (Laughing) We cooked rice or something one
17 time and I forget what we had cooked rice for—every now and then we cooked rice. We
18 cooked it one time and them guys were putting Pet milk and sugar in it, making a
19 pudding out of it. That wasn't the purpose of the rice. In the Navy, you used a lot of
20 potatoes. It's not like down here, we use rice down here. Over there is potatoes. Up
21 north and everything, the people, they're potato eaters. Down here, we eat rice, we're
22 like Chinamen, we eat rice two or three times a day sometimes. We use a lot of rice
23 down here.

24 RT: Well, in fact, make sausage out of it. It makes some good boudin.

25 PD: Yes, that's right. We got a place right here down only four miles from here
26 that makes white boudin, Veron's Provisions. We get white boudin with them.

27 RT: Overall, how would you rate your time in boot camp and cooks and bakers
28 school? Would you say it was a good experience?

29 PD: Oh, yeah. I had a real good time in Corpus Christi. Corpus Christi was a
30 fine place. There was a big naval air station down there, you know? Them and
31 Pensacola was the two biggest stations in the United States at the time.

1 RT: Yes, indeed.

2 PD: They had all these auxiliary fields down there around Beeville and
3 Brownsville and all that. They had these auxiliary fields and it was a pretty big station
4 and we had a good time. We were well-treated, you know. It was almost like being at
5 home, I can say. We were well-treated down there.

6 RT: So, then you would say that—or would you say that the time that you spent
7 in boot camp and then in the cooks and bakers school prepared you for life aboard ship?

8 PD: Oh, yeah. Plus, like I say, we had more training after that, you know. We
9 had training at Norfolk. We trained as a whole crew and then the crew was assembled at
10 Norfolk and we trained as a crew. The cooks worked in the galley at Norfolk at the base
11 and we also went aboard a training ship in Chesapeake Bay. I forget what destroyer—
12 whether it was a destroyer just like we were on, a Sumner class destroyer—and we spent
13 a week on it just learning, you know, life at sea, I guess. We wouldn't sleep aboard it,
14 but every morning they'd take a bus and bring us to the ship and we'd spend all day. At
15 night, we'd get back to base and we trained as a crew on another destroyer. I guess they
16 had a skeleton crew on that destroyer and the whole crew was trained on this destroyer
17 here, you see.

18 RT: Well, you had mentioned a couple of times that you learned a lot of
19 discipline in boot camp. How did your instructors enforce that discipline?

20 PD: I tell you the truth, I was just plum scared of them anyway. They didn't have
21 to enforce it on me. Hey, I wouldn't step out of line, I guarantee you. I didn't ever have
22 a chance to. I never got in any trouble, I guarantee it, because I just went by the book. I
23 just figured, hey, these guys they weren't that tough but they came on pretty tough and
24 after you graduated it was a whole different story. Really, they came on like they were
25 mean as hell, but they were really down-to-earth people.

26 RT: And you respected that?

27 PD: You bet.

28 RT: So, was it during the end of your cooks and bakers school, or was that the
29 end of it that you learned that you were being assigned to a ship?

30 PD: No, not really. We were assigned at the naval base at Norfolk, Virginia. And
31 from there we figured we'd be assigned to a ship, yeah. But we went down there and I

1 think it was at the end of October. Then, we arrived there on a Sunday night in October,
2 the end of October, and we stayed there. We didn't get assigned that ship until December
3 sometime. What we did, we just did our jobs over there. We'd be in the barracks and
4 everyday they'd give you a work detail. I worked in a grocery store. I cut grass at an
5 admiral's house. We just had everything—I stayed watch in the machine shop over there
6 and just everyday you had something different to do. They just kept you busy and every
7 morning you'd go out to this big yard or whatever you want to call it, I don't know what
8 it was, it was this big area and they had like a big chalkboard up there. And when I got
9 assigned, my name was up there and it said the USS *Frank E. Evans*. That's when I got
10 assigned and they pulled us all out and then they put us all in a barrack by ourselves. Our
11 whole crew was in one barrack. Well, one or two barracks, I don't know how many
12 barracks. And I said the whole crew, I guess most of the crew was, I don't think we had
13 all 365 of us there. But we had most of us there and we slept together and worked
14 together and we trained together and that's when we went to gunnery school, from there.
15 We went to—like I said, we spent a week aboard this destroyer, get our little sea legs on
16 or something, I don't know. Anyway, we went to a lot of gunnery school from there.

17 RT: So, you actually had an opportunity to go to gunnery school?

18 PD: Well, what happened, and you see on a destroyer, you don't have one job.
19 Whatever you are, when general quarters sound, you had a battle station and mine, I was
20 a loader on the 20-millimeter. You just didn't learn to load. You had to learn to shoot the
21 gun and everything. So we would train like that. We went over to somebody's—in the
22 Virginia area off maybe twenty, thirty miles out in the country from Norfolk and there
23 was all the water and I don't remember exactly what it was, but it'd have a whole bunch
24 of guns out there and 20s mostly where I was, because that's what I was training to be, on
25 a 20-millimeter. And they'd pull these sleeves over with the plane or send these little
26 drawn planes over and you'd shoot at them all day long. That was the kind of training I
27 got on the gun. We were pretty well trained, I guarantee you. When you left there, you
28 knew what the gun was all about. On every 20-millimeter, you had three people. You
29 had a range setter, a gunner, and loader. We had three guns on the fantail of the ship
30 where I was and we had ten people. We had three on each gun plus our gun captain,
31 who's a gunner's mate third class, and that's how we were on battle stations on the ship.

1 RT: So, did you have drills as well?

2 PD: Oh, yeah, all the time. On our way over to the Pacific area, every time you
3 turned around, when you get close to land, there was some plane dragging a sleeve over
4 the ship and you were shooting at it. Not just 20s, but 5-inch guns to 40-millimeters and
5 they learned to drop depth charges; the depth charge crew, and then you had your
6 torpedoes; they'd fly torpedoes and you went through the whole works. Really, you were
7 well-trained, I guarantee you. They didn't spend all that money on that ship for nothing.
8 They had a well-trained crew.

9 RT: You said that you were able to do several different kinds of jobs before you
10 actually went onto the ship or before you were assigned the ship?

11 PD: Yeah.

12 RT: So, they kept you pretty busy then.

13 PD: Oh, yeah. You always had something to do, I guarantee you. There was no
14 laying around the barracks. There was no such thing as that.

15 RT: Did you ever get any leave to go into Norfolk?

16 PD: Oh, yeah. We went Norfolk and Newport News. We'd go in anytime you
17 wanted. You had liberty at night, whenever you wanted to go. I think every other night
18 they allowed you liberty at a time.

19 RT: So, what kind of things did you do on liberty?

20 PD: On liberty? We'd go to movies, go drink a few beers maybe, a lot of sight-
21 seeing, and whatever. Go to church sometimes. Just whatever time you had, you just—

22 RT: Made the most of it.

23 PD: Yeah.

24 RT: Did you have an opportunity to go to anything like an USO (United Service
25 Organizations) program?

26 PD: Oh, yeah. Not Norfolk I didn't, but when we were in New York, I went to a
27 couple of USOs.

28 RT: So, you were in New York? What were you doing in New York?

29 PD: Well, that's where the ship was commissioned. The ship was built at Statton
30 Island and was commissioned into Brooklyn Navy Yard. So I guess we spent probably a
31 month or so before we went on the shake down cruise. We went on the shake down cruise

1 in Cuba off of Guantanamo Bay. Like I said, we had liberty. In fact, I was a cook and I
2 had a liberty every night. After I finished my duty in the daytime, I could go ashore
3 every night and mostly the ship's crew had its starboard and port; port side one night,
4 starboard side the other night. But the cooks, for some reason or another, we had more
5 privileges on that. I don't know why, but I guess maybe we put in more hours than some
6 people.

7 RT: Maybe they were trying to keep happy the guys who made the food.

8 PD: Maybe so, but we got to go on liberty. If you had money, you went on
9 liberty. Sometimes you were broke, you didn't go. I went to a couple of USOs in New
10 York, yeah.

11 RT: So, you were a plank owner then for the *Evans*?

12 PD: Yeah, sure was.

13 RT: When you were aboard *Evans*, how long did it take before you and the rest
14 of the crew were told that the ship was going to Pacific?

15 PD: Well, when we got off of the shake down cruise, we went back to the
16 Brooklyn Navy Yard just for I guess, you can say a checkup or whatever; made sure
17 everything was under control. And from there we figured we were going and I guess it
18 was around the middle of April or so, we headed for the Pacific, maybe before. I don't
19 exactly remember when. But we left Brooklyn in April and I know we went to Norfolk,
20 we stopped off at Norfolk, and then I think we might have gone to Cuba, I believe, and
21 then back to pick up a cruiser, too, and we went through the canal and from there we
22 headed to Pacific.

23 RT: When you discovered that you were going to the Pacific, what was your first
24 reaction?

25 PD: We were sort of—I guess most of the guys, they wanted to go. This
26 destroyer we were on was quite a ship and I guess we were trained for that and I guess
27 we're just ready.

28 RT: What about your parents whenever you told them, well, I mean your mother?

29 PD: I never did tell them too much, really. My mother, she was home by herself
30 at that time. All the boys, like I say, a couple of them went into service, the oldest boy
31 gotten married, and my two sisters, one was in Houston, Texas, and she was a nurse. She

1 was in Houston and the other sister was in New Orleans. So I never did tell them too
2 much. I never did tell them anything to let them worry.

3 RT: When you were in boot camp and then when you went to your additional
4 training such as the cooks and bakers school and then when you went to Norfolk, did you
5 stay in touch with your family and your friends?

6 PD: Oh, yeah. I had different people I'd write to all the time and we wrote
7 regular.

8 RT: Did you ever hear from your brother who was in the Navy?

9 PD: Oh, yeah. In fact, we were talking about Norfolk. When I was in Norfolk
10 waiting to be assigned, his ship pulled into Norfolk one day and we went out and had—
11 myself and boy from Bonanza, Arkansas, and my brother went out and drank a few beers.
12 He came on the base and looked me up, I didn't even know he was in, you know, and he
13 knew I was in Norfolk because we used to write each other. He knew I was in Norfolk
14 waiting to be assigned and he came over there and looked us up and I didn't have liberty
15 that night, but I got permission from one of the officers, the officer of the day, and he let
16 me go ashore with him and we went out and drank a few beers and spent a night together.
17 That was nice. In fact, I even went to visit his ship he was on, the *Rhind*, the USS *Rhind*,
18 the 404, and he brought us aboard the ship and went to visit. We had never really on a
19 destroyer too much and we didn't know too much about it. That was a small destroyer
20 that was one of the oldest ones, I guess, the Navy had in action at that time.

21 RT: Was it a four-stacker?

22 PD: No, it wasn't a four stacker, it wasn't that old, but it saw quite a bit of action.
23 In fact, they got hit, I think it was off Sicily, they got hit by a couple of bombs. It didn't
24 do too much damage. I guess mostly shrapnel hit or something. But he spent four years,
25 that boy spent four years on that ship. He was a machinist's mate.

26 RT: So, the two of you were actually able to spend some time together and also
27 get to know what the other was doing?

28 PD: Yeah. Well, I always wrote to him and he wrote back, we kept in touch, you
29 know. We kept in touch with each other.

30 RT: How was the shake down cruise?

1 PD: It was quite an experience. We worked real hard and done a lot of training
2 and everything went smooth. We had a wonderful ship. It was a great ship.

3 RT: What was the daily routine on the shake down cruise?

4 PD: Like I say, I was the ship's cook, so I got to cook. What I did, I'd go on at
5 twelve o'clock in the daytime and we cooked supper that night in my shift and we'd wake
6 up early the next morning and cook breakfast and dinner then you were off for the next
7 three meals, we were off. You see, we had two crews, two different—you say we worked
8 a day and we were off a day and in between that, we had all these training exercises of
9 general quarters and did a lot of gunnery training, you know. In fact, we even went
10 ashore one day and practiced. I don't know on what island, one of them little islands out
11 there. We ended up practicing shooting 20-millimeters all that day. It was pretty good. It
12 kept us quite busy. They had to find out what the ship was going to do and I guess they
13 found out what it could do.

14 RT: You said that earlier on the shake down cruise, you had sailed to Cuba. Did
15 you have any opportunity to go ashore in Cuba?

16 PD: No, we never got liberty, no sir. The only time we went ashore one time,
17 like I said, I recall went on the one of the little islands around there somewhere where the
18 Navy had a gunnery range and we spent a day or two. I can't remember if it was one day
19 or two days, but we did spend a day out there and they even gave us a little box lunch, we
20 had a little box lunch. You know, this was the gun crew, you know? And we spent a day
21 out there shooting at those 20s all day long. We never got liberty off in Cuba, no. In
22 fact, we got very little liberty. We got liberty in the States, but even after we left, we had
23 liberty at the Canal Zone. When we got to Hawaii, we had liberty and then I think once
24 after that we stopped at Guam and they gave us a day off and we went to an island. In
25 fact, we played a baseball game against another ship. But after that, boy, it was no liberty
26 at all after we got in the Pacific. That was it.

27 RT: After the shake down cruise, you returned to New York?

28 PD: Went to New York for what they call an "outfitting" or whatever and then
29 stayed there a little while and went to Norfolk, went back to Guantanamo. I don't know
30 what we were going to do over there, I can't remember. Anyway, then we went through
31 the canal, right into Pearl Harbor, you know.

1 RT: So, you got to see, at least had an opportunity to see the Panama Canal?

2 PD: Oh, yeah. That was quite an experience, I guarantee you. You can't describe
3 it, especially from the deck of a destroyer, you couldn't, there's no way. Then at the
4 same time we were going through, there was an aircraft carrier going through and I'm
5 still trying to figure out how they got that thing through that canal.

6 RT: It was pretty impressive.

7 PD: You bet, it was quite and then you get quite a few miles of nothing but
8 jungle, you know. I just spent the whole day on the deck watching the monkeys play
9 around in the trees, man. It was like at a zoo. I'm telling you, the exotic birds and it was
10 all jungle for a good portion of the way and I just enjoyed that day. I happened to be off
11 that day when we went through the canal and I spent my whole day topside, leaning over
12 the railing, just watching everything. It was quite an experience.

13 RT: How long did it take for you to get through the canal?

14 PD: I don't exactly remember. It just about took us all day I guess. I don't
15 remember. I swear I don't. I know we spent a good while going through that canal.

16 RT: From the Canal Zone, you went to Pearl Harbor?

17 PD: Yeah, Pearl, yeah.

18 RT: So, had much of the damage from Pearl Harbor been repaired by the time
19 you got there?

20 PD: Oh, yeah. Pearl was in full swing by then. It was quite a base by then. You
21 still had the *Arizona* sitting out there. They hadn't done anything with it, but—

22 RT: Oh, you could still see it?

23 PD: Yeah.

24 RT: What were your first thoughts when you saw it?

25 PD: Well, I'd seen pictures of it before and everything. It was just a hell of a
26 thing just to think about it. I guess you knew that's why you were fighting this war.

27 RT: How long were you in Pearl Harbor?

28 PD: I guess we stayed there about a week. I don't exactly remember. I would
29 say maybe two weeks. We had liberty there and everything, so we stayed there awhile.
30 Probably from part of May to the end of—I'd say about twelve to fifteen days.

1 RT: So, you actually had an opportunity to see a fair amount of Pearl Harbor
2 itself?

3 PD: Yeah.

4 RT: Going ashore.

5 PD: Yeah.

6 RT: What kind of things were there for you to do in Pearl Harbor?

7 PD: Huh?

8 RT: What kind of things were there for you to do in Pearl Harbor?

9 PD: Well, not on the week going over, but on the week coming back, I had more
10 time. You know what I did, I visited one of the Dole pineapple plants. Went up in the
11 hills, took a little train, me and a couple of the buddies and we went and visited that Dole
12 pineapple plant where they canned this pineapple, you know. We did that. That was on
13 the way back, coming back from after the war. But going over there, we mostly, I didn't
14 do too much. Just sight-seeing around, went to Waikiki Beach, made a few ballrooms
15 that didn't kick you out because you're under-age, but we didn't do too much. It was
16 mostly sight seeing and Pearl itself. We had a nice time there. After we left there,
17 brother, that was it. I think we stopped at Guam and they gave us a day off at Guam. We
18 went and drank a beer and had a ballgame and they let us bring a few cases of beer
19 aboard with us. A bunch of us went and we had a good time, but after that, that was it.
20 We didn't get any more liberty until after the war.

21 RT: What sort of things did the Navy have the *Evans* do when you were stationed
22 in the Pacific?

23 PD: Just a lot of patrolling and we were on a picket line off of Okinawa and
24 we're escorting ships and just—we were always on the go. We just moved from island to
25 island just mostly around Okinawa.

26 RT: You were there for the battle for Okinawa?

27 PD: Yeah, we were there. We got there a little late, but they were still going on.

28 RT: So at anytime did you have to man your station?

29 PD: Oh, yeah. Many times. Mostly at night, these planes would come over at
30 night. By the time we got there, the big Reds had kind of slacked off and what they were
31 doing, they were just harassing you to come over at night with one or two planes, you

1 know, and they'd try to sink or destroy whatever they can. Hell, they wanted to die, so
2 they were just killing themselves. They would get on these damned suicide planes and
3 they didn't give a damn. They saw something out there and they'd just go right into it.

4 RT: So, you actually got to see some kamikazes then?

5 PD: Yeah.

6 RT: Were there moments when you were at general quarters where you had to
7 actually fire upon any of these aircraft or—?

8 PD: A couple of times at night.

9 RT: That must've been interesting to try to fire on—

10 PD: Well, we weren't firing the little guns because the little guns wouldn't do
11 any good, so they'd find the 5-inch guns. We were at general quarters and I was right
12 under the 5-inch gun. That thing was right over my head. They were flying at night. A
13 couple of times, we got, one or two of those Japs would come over and we'd fire at them.
14 I don't know if we did any good, but I know one thing, we were cutting lose at them.

15 RT: That must've made a terrific noise, being that close to the 5-inch gun.

16 PD: Oh, yeah. You have to have earplugs. I know I always wore my earplugs.
17 I'd be deaf today if I didn't. I was right under that—on the fantail, we had those three
18 20-millimeters and they were right under the 5-inch guns, right next to it.

19 RT: Well, the 20-millimeter guns alone must have made quite a bit of racket
20 whenever you fired them.

21 PD: Yeah, they were the smallest guns we had on there. We had the 40s, which
22 were a little bit bigger and the 20s were the smallest guns we had; strictly an anti-aircraft
23 gun. Like I said, those 5-inch guns, they'd cut loose with those, man, and those things
24 made some noise.

25 RT: Out of the time that you were at general quarters or that you were on top,
26 were there any particular actions of bravery that stand out in your mind or anything that
27 particularly stunned you or amazed you?

28 PD: No, not really, no sir. To be honest with you, no.

29 RT: So when you saw those airplanes coming over at night—

30 PD: Well, to be perfectly honest with you, I didn't see them.

31 RT: Oh, you didn't?

1 PD: I just knew that they were there and radar knew they were there, you know?
2 And they'd fire from the radar, you know? I didn't see them at night, but they would be
3 firing. They'd pick them up on radar and they'd fire from the radar.

4 RT: On board ship, what was your daily routine? What was an average day for
5 you?

6 PD: Like I said, every other day I had watch in the galley, so that kept us busy all
7 day. Every now and then—most guys, they were painting and chipping and keeping the
8 ship clean in ship-shape and just cleaning and just working on keeping the guns clean.
9 Just a general workday. Every now and then, we'd get what they call a "holiday routine,"
10 they'd just let us all take it easy. Except for the cooks, if you were on duty, you didn't
11 have no holiday because you had to cook because those guys still had to eat. We'd have
12 holiday routines every now and then when there's nothing too much to do. We had a
13 pretty good skipper. He was pretty good at that.

14 RT: Who was your skipper?

15 PD: Harry Smith.

16 RT: Okay. How often—

17 PD: He was the spitting image of Hopalong Cassidy. He was. I swear. Don't
18 you remember Hopalong Cassidy? He was an old gray-headed, white-headed cowboy,
19 you know? This guy, the first time I looked at him, I said, "Man to God." I just thought
20 that was Hopalong Cassidy. He was the just spitting image of him.

21 RT: I don't think anyone ever told him that to his face, though. I don't know.

22 PD: I don't guess, but boy, he just reminded me so much of him with his white
23 hair and his big tall stature. He was a big guy. He was a hell of a skipper. He was good.

24 RT: How often did *Evans* pull into port while you were aboard?

25 PD: Do what?

26 RT: How often did *Evans* pull into port while you were aboard?

27 PD: Well, we would pull into Okinawa or Buckner Bay, one of those bays around
28 there and we'd stay a day or two and refuel and take on supplies and we'd go back out on
29 the picket line. We spent two or three days out on the picket line with two other
30 destroyers and we had maybe four or six Navy corsairs over us just to protect us in the
31 daytime.

1 RT: So, you had a carrier nearby then?

2 PD: No, there was corsairs that would work off the land. We wouldn't be that far
3 from the island. That radar picket station was just a bunch of destroyers, and I think there
4 was like three in a group, and we'd just patrol around the island. And planes that would
5 come in, you pick them up on the radar and you alert the island that their coming or
6 something like that. That's how the picket thing was. After they established the radar on
7 the island, I guess, it wasn't too bad. When they first got there, those picket ships caught
8 hell. We were fortunate. We got there, like I said, we were fortunate. We got there when
9 the heat of the battle was just about over, really. It was still harassment. They'd come
10 there night and harass you and everything else. They sunk, in fact July 29, only the week
11 before the war ended, a kamikaze sank the USS *Callahan*. They lost about seventy-
12 something guys or sixty-something guys on it and that was July 29. The war ended on
13 the 15th or 14th of August and that was just two weeks before. That was about the same
14 time the *Indianapolis* got sunk off the Philippines.

15 RT: Yes indeed.

16 PD: *Callahan* was lost and there was another ship beside the *Callahan*. I think,
17 the *John Rawlins*, R-a-w-l-i-n-s. I think they got hit about the same time. I think the
18 *Rawlins* got hit on the 28th. The *Callahan* got hit on the 29th of July. We did have the
19 distinction of picking up a couple of pilots. We saved a couple of pilots' lives. Their
20 plane went down, you know, and we picked them up out of the water, a couple of them.
21 One of them the July 4 and I think one was July 30. We picked up those two pilots. One
22 of them, I think, I don't know what happened to him, but we picked him up the next
23 morning. And one of them was the 4th of July. He was patrolling over us and his plane
24 went out of commission, so he had to beach it. He just landed in the water and we picked
25 him up and brought him home. Like I say, we were fortunate. We got there towards the
26 end of the war and I think if we'd been there a month earlier, we'd have been in trouble.

27 RT: That goes without saying. When you were aboard ship, then, you mentioned
28 that you had a fair amount of free time. What kind of things did you do for recreation
29 when you onboard ship?

30 PD: We watched movies at night, indoors. You couldn't watch them outdoors
31 because you couldn't have any light. Everything was in dark, you know. Everything was

1 always lights-out, no lights at all. We'd watch them indoors, maybe, probably in the
2 [mess hall] we'd be watching movies. We'd get a pretty good amount of movies. And
3 then a good buddy of mine from Carolina played music. He had a guitar. He played
4 music for us. We played a little cards, did a lot of sleeping, but all in all, it was pretty
5 nice. We were fortunate.

6 RT: So, the movies that you were able to see, were these fairly new movies or
7 were these a little older?

8 PD: Oh, yeah. Well, I say new. I guess *Casablanca* and one with Bing Crosby
9 with the nuns; I forget the name of it. But no, we had some pretty good movies. What
10 they'd do is they'd exchange movies with other ships and we got to see movies pretty
11 regular. And after war ended, we stayed out there quite awhile after the war ended. We
12 were in the China area up and around the Yellow Sea and went to the Shanghai, Tsingtao,
13 those places. We got to look at movies top side. They put the movie on the forecastle of
14 the ship and we'd just sit topside and watch the movie then because you didn't have
15 lights-out. You didn't have restriction on the lights. It wasn't bad life aboard ship. We
16 didn't get to go on liberty that much until after the war. After the war when we got in
17 China well then we got liberty every day when we were in Shanghai, Tsingtao, or went to
18 Jinsen, Korea. Went up to Dairen, Manchuria. We did a lot of traveling.

19 RT: Well, you definitely got to see good part of the world.

20 PD: You bet, I guarantee you. Like I say, after the war, we spent part of our time
21 shooting up mines. They layed a lot of mines out there during the war. I guess some of
22 them were ours and some of them were theirs, I don't know. But we shot up quite a few
23 mines. In fact, we'd be looking for them all the time and we'd run across them and they
24 would just shoot them with the 40-millimeter and the 20s and blow them up. That was
25 after the war, naturally. I tell you what, time passed pretty quick. It didn't linger.

26 RT: When you were aboard ship, did you get to listen to the radio very much?

27 PD: Not very much, no. I didn't get to listen to the radio very much. We'd hear
28 it now and then. Sometimes I'd go up to the radio room and they'd have it on there.
29 They'd have somebody that had a radio in there and I'd listen to it, but not quite very
30 much, no.

31 RT: Did you ever have an opportunity to hear the infamous Tokyo Rose?

1 PD: Sure did. That was after the war; well, in fact, during the war. Right before
2 the war ended, a few days before the war ended, they hit the USS *Pennsylvania*. We lost
3 a few guys. A bunch of quartermasters got killed on there where they hit it and didn't say
4 too much about it, but Tokyo Rose is up there bragging about that. They sort of knew.
5 She knew. She got information pretty damned good. I don't know how she did it. What
6 some of them guys tell me, they used to listen to her and she kind of pretty much knew
7 what the hell was going on. Probably knew more than we knew, I don't know.

8 RT: Overall, what were your living conditions like aboard ship?

9 PD: Living conditions were good. They weren't bad. We got three square meals
10 a day, we had fresh water to bathe, the ship was pretty clean. We had a good life. We
11 were fortunate that we didn't get busted up or anything, but we had a pretty good life as
12 far as I'm concerned. I don't regret it. I enjoyed my two years in the Navy—a little over,
13 twenty-five months—and then when I got back to the States after the war, I even enjoyed
14 it more than that. But it wasn't bad. I guess a lot of fellows had it a hell of a lot worse
15 than we did.

16 RT: Oh, yes. Especially as you'd mentioned earlier about the *Callahan* being
17 sunk by a *kamikaze*.

18 PD: Oh, yeah. We were fortunate. We had just got off of picket duty that
19 morning. In fact, she relieved us that morning and we were in port that night and we had
20 to light up and go back and look for survivors. We didn't find any survivors. By the time
21 we got there, they picked most of them up, I guess, but we did stay out there. That was a
22 Saturday night, July 29, and Sunday morning. I was off duty that morning, so I stayed
23 topside and all they were doing was dragging in debris from the *Callahan* and pieces of
24 life rafts and pieces of boat and just whatever was floating around the ship, they were
25 picking some stuff up. Yeah, we were fortunate. Hell, it could've been us. That's the
26 way I look at it. I think she took a hit for us because we were out there that morning and
27 in that area. That was our picket station where she got it and it could've been us. We were
28 fortunate. We had a lot of luck, I guess.

29 RT: I would say so. So, when you were aboard ship, did you have any guys who
30 were kind of wise guys who got into some tomfoolery or any kind of practical jokes or
31 anything of that nature?

1 PD: I guess we did. Out of 365 men in there, we had some crazies, but they were
2 all young kids. We were all a bunch of young kids. We had one of them, I'll never
3 forget, he was boy by the name of Barnes. We were out in the bay and that sucker dove
4 off that yardarm and that scared the living hell out of me, seeing this guy. Of course, he
5 was like a fish in the water and he dove off the yardarm of that ship and I'll never forget
6 it. I was standing up there watching that and I couldn't believe that. He dove off of
7 there. Just stuff like that, you know. We had all kinds of people aboard that ship and
8 some of them were a little rowdy, but most of them were pretty down-to-earth people.
9 We had a few young guys that were rowdy, but we didn't get in too much trouble.

10 RT: Well, especially since, as you said, you didn't really have any liberties while
11 you were out in the Pacific.

12 PD: Not during the war. After the war, we had liberty. Every time we'd hit
13 Tsingtao, they'd let us go ashore and Shanghai, we'd go ashore. Sometimes in Shanghai,
14 we'd get on these rickshaws and if we had a little bit too much to drink sometimes, we'd
15 let the rickshaw driver get in the rickshaw and we'd pull him, like that. That actually
16 happened. We're pulling the damn rickshaw with the rickshaw driver in it. (Laughter)
17 We couldn't—hey, we couldn't go very far because those guys, they were trained to do
18 that and them rickshaws, hell it wasn't easy to pull. Stuff like that. In Shanghai we had a
19 good time. We really did. Shanghai was quite a city, but it's nothing like it is today, I'm
20 sure. But they didn't have too much then with all the war going on and everything and
21 things were pretty scarce. Now and then, we made friends with a couple of Chinese
22 people over there and we'd bring them something ashore. We'd bring them a little bag of
23 coffee or a pack of cigarettes or something. Hell, cigarettes were a nickel a pack in them
24 days and you could afford them. You weren't supposed to do it, but we'd sneak it ashore
25 and bring it to these guys. After the war, we had a lot of fun on liberty.

26 RT: It sounds like you did.

27 PD: Yeah.

28 RT: So, when you were aboard ship, did you write to your friends and relatives
29 very often?

30 PD: Oh, yeah. I guess I wrote at least once a week probably, especially to my
31 family. My friends, I didn't write quite as often. But I'd write Mom, I guess, once a

1 week. Sometime I might go ten days. Really wasn't too much to say, you know? And
2 you couldn't say too much anyway when a war was on because they used to check your
3 mail over and make sure you didn't say too much or something you weren't supposed to
4 say. They'd read your mail and censor your mail, in other words. They didn't want you
5 to say where you were and nothing like that for some reason or another. I don't know
6 why. Then, we did have an experience of riding out two typhoons out there. That was
7 quite an experience, I guarantee you. Two typhoons. They were not, I don't think, they
8 were three weeks apart and we rode out two of them. One of them really hit Okinawa
9 real bad. In fact, I got some mail I still didn't receive up to today. Really. They wrote
10 me some a couple of letters and sent some pictures, and I still haven't received them. I
11 know what happened because the whole post office blew over and then they had letters
12 scattered all over the island of Okinawa. That's what they told us, anyway.

13 RT: Wow.

14 PD: We rode those two out and we had to go to sea to get away from them. That
15 was quite an experience. That was pretty scary.

16 RT: I would think so. For one thing, that's a far cry from going through a
17 hurricane on the coast. Not only that, you were on ship, as well.

18 PD: Yeah, and that destroyer wasn't the biggest ship in the world. In fact, we
19 still talk about that night when we were riding that destroyer. When we go to reunions,
20 we talk about that night. It must've took about a sixty-degree list, I guess, and we were
21 practically on our side. It was probably almost laying down in the water and it just
22 shuttered and sputtered and come back up and straightened out and I think—I was talking
23 with this boy, Higginbotham, a good friend of mine was on the ship at that time, he told
24 me, he said, "Duhe, I was actually scared. I was scared to death." I said, "You know, I
25 probably didn't have as much sense as you because I don't remember being scared." But
26 I said, "I guarantee you, I should've been." Being eighteen years old, shit, you don't—I
27 guess right now, I couldn't go through that ordeal.

28 RT: Especially with the two of them so close together.

29 PD: Yeah. We rode through two of them damned things. What they did, we went
30 out to sea to avoid them, but you've still got to—those things reach out for miles and you
31 still got them. You batten everything down, man. You tie everything down and you take

1 off and you get away from that sucker, but you can't get far enough. I saw some of those
2 destroyers that were battered up pretty good with that typhoon. They just beat them to
3 death.

4 RT: I bet there are quite a few guys aboard ship who got pretty green during that
5 time.

6 PD: Oh, yeah. Well, you know what happened. Once you get used to that, it
7 doesn't bother you, though. Once you get rough weather, it doesn't bother you. The only
8 time I got sick was when I was when the shake down cruise was off of Cape Hatteras.
9 We were going to Cuba and the weather was real rough off of the cape. I guess the whole
10 ship, all us rookies, we all got sick. The only guy that didn't get sick is the guy that had
11 been out to sea before. But you know, after that I never did get sick and I had some rough
12 weather. But I never did get sick after that one time, and boy I was sick. Some of these
13 guys wanted you to throw them overboard they was so sick. They were wishing they
14 were dead. You couldn't get out your bunk. It was terrible. After that, we all settled
15 down and I don't remember anybody getting sick, except we had one kid that had, what
16 they call chronic sea sickness, and I still think up to today. In fact, I got a picture of that
17 boy from Ohio. I still think up today, he shouldn't have been aboard the ship. Every time
18 we'd get rough seas, he'd get sick. And after the war, coming back to the States between
19 Hawaii and California, we got some real rough weather and they had to feed him
20 intravenously. We were going to lose him if they didn't because he was that sick. He
21 couldn't hold anything in the stomach. They always thought he was bluffing. They
22 thought he wanted to just get off the ship. But he wasn't bluffing. That kid was just sick.
23 He couldn't stand the sea. All in all, I'd say, it was quite an experience. Now that it's
24 over with, I'm guess I'm glad I went through it, you know. It gives you something you'd
25 be proud of.

26 RT: Well, and between those two typhoons, you have some pretty good stories to
27 tell.

28 PD: You bet. I'm telling you. That was quite an experience, really, it was. I
29 think of that over here, we get these hurricanes down here like you people. Well, not too
30 much where you're at up in north Texas, but down here on the water, you know? We get
31 these hurricanes down here and I think about that all the time. I say, "Man, at least over

1 here we're in a house. We're in a shelter or something." Aboard that ship, we caught
2 some hell, man, but we survived. We did all right.

3 RT: Well, you came through it okay.

4 PD: Oh, yeah. That was a great ship we were on.

5 RT: So, for your time in the service, what kind of awards or citations did you
6 receive?

7 PD: Well, we got the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal and we won star, won the
8 Battle Star for Okinawa. That's all, you know. And American theatre and the Good
9 Conduct Medal and stuff like that. But really, the only real award I consider is the—
10 because anybody that was in the service got some of those. The one I consider a real
11 award is the Okinawa battle. We got a star for that. We saw enough action, we were still
12 in the battle, you know, and they gave us a Battle Star for that. That's it.

13 RT: Getting back to the typhoon, during your training, did you receive any kind
14 of training on how to deal with that rough weather?

15 PD: Not that I recall, no sir. That was just one of the things that you learn on
16 your own, I guess. Really there's not too much you can do. I remember when they said
17 the typhoon is coming, you batten everything down, you had to tie everything down.
18 Everything in the galley, everything on the topside, everything that had to be tied. Hell,
19 for two days, we didn't cook. We couldn't cook. We made a big ol' kettle of coffee and
20 they ate coffee and sandwiches. We made sandwiches for them. But you couldn't put
21 your cup down because if you did, your cup went through the air like a missile.
22 Honestly, you sat in the galley, I mean in the mess hall, and you sat down, you couldn't
23 put your cup down on the table. You better hold it in your hand. But I promise you, that
24 thing was rocking and rolling, and that thing would go across that table like a missile,
25 man. I recall that very well. Drank a lot of coffee and we ate a lot of sandwiches for two
26 days. Everybody survived. What the hell?

27 RT: So, you were aboard ship then when the announcement came through that
28 the war in the Pacific was over?

29 PD: Yes, sir. We had a party that night.

30 RT: So, what kind of things did you do for the party? I would guess that you
31 cooked something special.

1 PD: No, we got some torpedo juice.

2 RT: Some torpedo juice?

3 PD: Yeah. That's 190-proof alcohol, no kidding. Hey, this is this, we got the
4 190-proof alcohol. We had about six of us, not many, but there was about six of us in the
5 galley. I made a big ol' pot of lemonade. At the time, we didn't have lemons, but we had
6 this powdered lemon stuff. We got torpedo juice from the torpedo men. It used to come in
7 five-gallon drums and we were in those guys, and we got some of that. We made a big
8 ol' bunch of torpedo juice lemonade and we got drunk as skunks that night. I swear to
9 God, if they had caught us, they would've probably put us all in the brig. Honest. The
10 only thing I really screwed up on, I think—and really, we did throw a party. When the
11 war was ended, we had about six or eight of us. I remember boy Roy Stephens from
12 North Carolina. A couple of the cooks, and we had about six or eight of us and ain't
13 nobody knew we had this, man. We just had a hell of a time. We just got drunk as
14 skunks. We drank every bit of it. We just knew that, hell, the war was over and we were
15 going to celebrate, and we did. I guess some others aboard ship celebrated, too, you
16 know. This was just a few of us got together and we happened to be able to get the stuff
17 and we did. What it is is 190-proof alcohol that they use in the torpedo tubes and we got
18 hold of some of that. They also had the medical alcohol, the one that doctors had some in
19 the sick bay that you could get, too, you know? But we didn't get none of that. But, we
20 had a good time. We had a good party that night.

21 RT: When did you get news of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

22 PD: It was around the 15th of August, it's around that time. Really before that,
23 when they dropped the bomb, but the war didn't end, I think, till the 14th. We got news
24 that the war ended around the 15th, I think. The same day it ended, we got the news. We
25 all pretty much felt relieved. But then, like I say, we had to go through the ordeal of that
26 China thing, you know, going into different ports and fighting and stuff. I think that was
27 the scariest thing of all. I'd go to bed at night sometimes, get in the bunk and think about
28 them damned—I was sleeping right above water level and I think about them god-
29 damned, excuse the expression, those mines. They had a lot of mines out there and that
30 was the scariest part for me of all. Hey, the war is over and I might get killed by a
31 damned mine, a floating mine. I thought about that. You know, if you'd have got killed

1 during the war, it's one thing. But the war is over and you're out there dodging mines all
2 up and down the China Coast and there was a lot of them out there because we blew a
3 bunch of them. But that sort of kind of bothered me a little bit. That's about the only
4 thing really worried me, I think.

5 RT: Wow. That would be an awful thing, not just having the mine go off, the fact
6 that the war is over and something like that would happen.

7 PD: Yes, that's what bothered me. Hey, if I had got it during the war, I say,
8 "Hey, this is war, you got it." But I just didn't want to get bumped off after the war,
9 really. When we left, I think March 7, we left the Okinawa area and come back to the
10 States. We got home about April 1.

11 RT: Well, you were probably on board ship, then, on board ship in April of '45,
12 weren't you?

13 PD: Yeah.

14 RT: So, ya'll received the news of Germany's surrender then?

15 PD: Yeah. We were right around Pearl Harbor, I think.

16 RT: Okay. I assume your reaction was pretty good to that, as well?

17 PD: Oh, you bet, man. We just knew, hey, we kind of figured, "Hey, look this
18 thing will come to an end now."

19 RT: You thought it was on the down hill slope?

20 PD: Oh, yeah. We all figured that, yeah. But we didn't know anything about the
21 atomic bomb, either. But you know, we were getting ready. After we secured Okinawa,
22 they were gathering all the ships together. It looked like they were planning on going to
23 Japan, I'd reckon. Man, I've never seen so many battleships and aircraft carriers and
24 cruisers and destroyers in all my life. They looked like they were gathering somewhere. I
25 thought they had to go to Japan, I reckon, and when the war ended, well—I think they
26 were getting ready to invade Japan.

27 RT: Oh, yes. It was in the plans.

28 PD: When they dropped this bomb, we knew that was the end of it. We knew,
29 "Hey, this is it." It finally came to an end, though.

30 RT: Then you went cruising around China after the war was over?

1 PD: Yeah. We went up to Dairen, Manchuria, to look for some Americans. There
2 was supposed have been some American prisoners of war there, but we never did find
3 them. We went ourselves in the USS *Hubbard*, which was the flagship of our squadron,
4 it was another destroyer and we went up there. But we didn't come back with any
5 prisoners of war. Evidently, the Russians got to them first and they killed them or I don't
6 know what the hell happened to them. But that was a long way up there, too. We didn't
7 find anybody there. We had even got there and they even made us make a big old kettle
8 of soup and stuff. They were going to feed them good when they come back and give
9 them some nourishing food and stuff when we get them aboard ship, but we never did get
10 one, so I don't know what happened to them. We had a crew from the ship went aboard.
11 Some officers and men went aboard with guns and rifles and machine guns and stuff.
12 They were going, supposed to pick them up, but they came back empty-handed. So I
13 don't what happened there. I never did find out.

14 RT: How much longer after the war were you on *Evans*?

15 PD: I stayed on the *Evans* until June of '46.

16 RT: Then you received word that you were going to be—

17 PD: Discharged.

18 RT: Discharged.

19 PD: Yes. Got discharged at the naval air station in New Orleans; Lake Front Air
20 Station of New Orleans is where I got discharged, yeah.

21 RT: That's not bad. You actually went home to be discharged.

22 PD: Yeah, yeah. They shipped us home. They shipped us to New Orleans. I
23 think I was only one aboard—no, we had a couple of other guys, but they had left early.
24 They had been in the service before me. They were a little older than me, and one from
25 Lafayette, Louisiana, and one from Houma.

26 RT: How did that happen? Did the ship pull into San Diego and then you took the
27 train over or—?

28 PD: No, we pulled into Frisco.

29 RT: Okay.

1 PD: Then from Frisco, went over to Oakland, went and docked in Oakland. I left
2 out of Oakland and came home on leave, like I say, for twenty days and I went back and
3 had forty days to finish off and I got discharged forty days later.

4 RT: Then you finally got to spend your boot leave.

5 PD: Yeah, I never did. In fact, they paid me—they owed me. I got twenty, they
6 owed me sixty, so they owed me forty days. They could've discharged me then, but they
7 didn't. So I just spent forty more days in there and after the war, they sent me the money
8 for my leave. In other words, for the days that they owed me, they paid me for it.

9 RT: Well, you must've enjoyed that.

10 PD: Yeah, you bet. I was always broke anyway. What the hell? We spent all our
11 money in the Navy. No, that was pretty nice.

12 RT: Did you ever send any of your money home?

13 PD: Believe it or not, when I joined the Navy, when I got in boot camp, I took a
14 war bond, which was a war bond at that time, \$18.75 I think it was, during the war. And
15 it was a \$25 dollar bond. You paid \$18.75 for it, okay? And I sent one home every
16 month out of my paycheck. I'd put it in my mother's name and she never did spend it, she
17 just kept it. And, hell, after she died, she'd always told the rest of the kids, "Look, this is
18 Ned's money." She died in her sixties and that's how long I kept those bonds, the late
19 sixties. Well, even longer than that, I think, before I cashed them in. They were due
20 anyway because I bought them in the forties, so they were twenty something years old, I
21 think. She kept them all and she wouldn't spend them. I told her to go head and use it,
22 and she needed the money, go head and use it, it's hers, but she wouldn't spend it.

23 RT: So, after you pulled into Oakland and then you took the train over to—

24 PD: Went and took the train to LA. Went down, of course, to LA and then from
25 there across the country though Texas, up into Louisiana. Hell, it took up two days to
26 cross Texas. Man, ya'll got a big state. (Laughter) That was a hell of a ride.

27 RT: Probably thought you were going around in circles.

28 PD: I'm telling you, man. But I enjoyed it. Like I say, I'd never been away from
29 home, so it was something, quite an experience, I guarantee you. I don't regret it.

30 RT: So, when you made it back to Louisiana, did anyone meet you at the train
31 station?

1 PD: Well, no. They send us right to the naval base, you see, and I spent two or
2 three days there before they discharged me. So I didn't tell anybody nothing. My sister
3 lives in New Orleans, well in Metairie, right outside of New Orleans, and I just got a bus
4 there and walked down Canal Street, New Orleans, got a bus and went down to Metairie
5 and announced that I was there. And from there I caught a bus to Garyville, another bus
6 that used to come along the River Road and we ended up in Garyville. I've been there
7 ever since. I didn't go anywhere. Once a year, I go on my reunion, but I don't do too
8 much traveling. I enjoy getting together with these guys once a year, though. With CJ
9 and Nichols and all these guys. I enjoy getting together with them every year. They were
10 in a different war than us, but it's still all the same, you know? That's how I feel about it.

11 RT: So, how did you feel about your last day aboard *Evans*, when you realized—

12 PD: I had mixed feelings really. I hated to leave. I started to re-up. I really
13 started to stay in the Navy. But then Mom was getting old and I say, "You know one
14 thing, I ain't going to do that. I'm going to go home." I was the last one left at home
15 anyway. The other boy was out of the Navy and he had gotten on his own and the others
16 all got married, so I said, "I'm not going to leave Mama by herself. I'm going to go back
17 home." But I started to re-up and I didn't. When I got to the naval station, they show you
18 gung-ho movie in the Navy and they want you to join the reserves, you know? So, I told
19 them, "Okay, I'll join the reserves." I was going to join the reserves. I signed the papers
20 for the reserves. This is hard to believe. So after being right at the naval station in New
21 Orleans, over the PA system, my name comes up and they say to report to a certain,
22 certain building and I'm thinking, "What the hell's wrong with me?" I say, "Lord, I hope
23 I don't have anything wrong with me. They ain't going to be able to discharge me."
24 Then the guy, I go in there, and this officer sits me down and he said, "Look, we can't
25 accept you in the reserves." I said, "What do you mean you can't accept me in the
26 reserves?" He says, "Your eyes are too bad." My eyes are too bad. Now listen to this
27 now. I said, "What do you mean my eyes are too bad?" He says, "Well, your eyesight;
28 you got terrible eyesight." Which I still have bad eyesight. I said, "Man, how can you
29 tell me that? I just came off of a destroyer out in the Pacific. I've been in the Pacific out
30 there since April of last year," and all this. And I say, "You're telling me I'm not fit for
31 the Navy?" He said, "Well, I'm sorry, I can't accept you're here." But he said, "Go to

1 Customs House, Room 308,” and he says, “after you get home and they’ll probably
2 accept you.” This is what he tells me. After I got home I got to thinking about, I say,
3 “You know, I think I’m having a good time at home and getting together.” I say, “You
4 know one thing, I ain’t joining anything.” I changed my mind. So they kept writing to
5 me wanting me to go, but after they turned me down, now—So really, I just never did go
6 back and sign, but you know, it’s a good thing I didn’t because I would’ve got called up
7 in that damned Korean War because I was still a young man, you know? And I gotten
8 married and I had a wife and two kids and I’d gotten called up in the Korean War.
9 Because a buddy of mine, Jack Vancelf from Dallastown, Pennsylvania, he got called up
10 like that. He joined the reserves and he had to back in the service. And I would’ve got
11 called up, so I was sort of glad that I didn’t join the reserves. In fact, not that I didn’t
12 join, they wouldn’t accept me. You want to hear a funny story before we close this up?

13 RT: Sure.

14 PD: When I went to join the Navy—listen to this—I was seventeen years old.
15 Now, you tell this to people and they say, “Man, this guy is full of bull.” Hey, I go in
16 there and I pass the physical all except one thing: my eyes. Okay, listen to this, now.
17 The same eyes that we didn’t get—the guy tells me, well, he didn’t tell me anything. He
18 had been going somewhere and I’m sitting at a desk. I had taken all my physicals, you
19 know, so I look at my little card, my paper he had on his desk and it says in red ink, he
20 had on there reject all these R-e-g-e-c-t (R-e-j-e-c-t), reject. And then I’m thinking,
21 “Here I am seventeen years old, I’m fit as a fiddle and he tells me I’m reject.” I said,
22 “Sir, I see you got me rejected. What’s the thing?” He said, “Your eyes are bad.” I says,
23 “My eyes are bad?” I said, “Look, my eyes are not really that bad.” I said, “Let me tell
24 you a story about my eyes.” I says, “Last month, I had a bad case of poison ivy and see,
25 my eyes stayed shut for three days,” which I didn’t lie to him, they did. I caught poison
26 ivy cutting grass and my face was swollen like a balloon and my eyes were stayed shut
27 for three days. And I told him, I said, “Look, I even went to the doctor and got a shot of
28 some medicine or something for the poison ivy.” I said, “Look, my eyes are not that bad.
29 They’re going to come back.” Which I was lying. They were bad. I said, “If you want,
30 I’ll bring a paper from the doctor.” He said, “Well.” You know this doctor scratches out
31 “reject” and accepts me. I tell that to people today and they say, “Man, you’re full of it.”

1 I say, "I'm telling you, the man listened and he fell for my story." And my eyes were bad.
2 My vision was about 11/20 and maybe 14/20, something like that. It wasn't really that
3 bad, but they were bad. So, when I got in the Navy, they gave me glasses, but I never did
4 wear them. You know, I still don't wear glasses. I can read the paper and everything.
5 It's just that my vision from a distance is not too good. But this guy was going to reject
6 me, and I would've been some sick guy. I'd have been a sick young kid. At that time,
7 people wanted to go into service, you know? They thought it was their duty and they
8 wanted to go. That's my story on that.

9 RT: So, did you collect any souvenirs when you were in the Navy?

10 PD: I brought a few things home. I don't even have them anymore. I'll tell you
11 what I did. My dentist, an ol' Doctor Ore, he was an old dentist in Garyville, and he used
12 to collect these paperback, not matchboxes, not boxes, but were matchboxes in a little,
13 you know, matchboxes you carry in your pocket? The little folding match things you
14 know?

15 RT: Oh, yeah. The matchbooks.

16 PD: Yeah. He used to collect that and I thought of him when I was in Shanghai
17 and I brought him two or three of those from Shanghai, China. I brought back some
18 Chinese money and stuff like that. I don't know whatever happened to that stuff, but
19 Doctor Ore, he was tickled to death when I brought him that. He was my dentist and my
20 neighbor. He lived three or four houses from me and he was like an old man. He was up
21 in age. He's long gone now. But anyway, I brought him that and he was strictly tickled
22 to death I brought him that. That's about the only souvenirs I brought back. I could've
23 brought back a rifle or two, but I just didn't bother with it. Some of these guys brought
24 back a rifle. They had picked up some rifles. I don't know where they got those rifles
25 from. They had them aboard ship. They were Japanese rifles.

26 RT: How long after the war did you meet your wife?

27 PD: Oh, I was going out with her when I left for the service.

28 RT: Oh, okay.

29 PD: Yes, she and I were going out together.

30 RT: Because where you grew up—was she from Garyville?

1 PD: She was from Reserve, where I worked. Like I say, Reserve is about five
2 miles from here, four miles.

3 RT: So, where did you meet her?

4 PD: Huh?

5 RT: Where did you meet her? Did you meet her at work?

6 PD: At school. We went to school together and we did work together awhile.
7 You're right. She worked in the store where I did, at Olton's, yeah.

8 RT: So, you were high school sweethearts?

9 PD: Yeah, you can say that, yeah. Then, we've been married since '49, '48. So
10 we've been married quite awhile.

11 RT: Did you write to her whenever you were aboard ship?

12 PD: Oh, yeah. I wrote to her regular. We wrote back and forth.

13 RT: What kind of things did your family discuss in their letters? Did they kind of
14 give you the news of around town and what was going on?

15 PD: Yeah, that's about it. You know it's a funny thing, Mama couldn't write
16 English. She could read English, but she couldn't write it. She could write in French. I
17 wasn't too good at reading French. I could read it, but I wasn't—so what she did, she
18 used to get my neighbor's little girl, which was in high school at the time, to write me
19 letters. She'd always have somebody write for her. She would tell them what to write
20 and they'd write it. But she couldn't write it. Like I say, she could write a letter in French
21 because that's what she went to school in. She learned French and she could sign her
22 name and she could read English. She could take a newspaper and read it, but she could
23 not write in French because she never learned to write in French (English). Isn't that
24 amazing?

25 RT: I'll be.

26 PD: Of course, she died in '65 and she was seventy-eight or seventy-nine years
27 old when she died. You know, and when she was coming up as a little girl, all they had
28 down there was French people, you know? That's what they taught them in school. But
29 by the time we got to school, they were teaching English, you know?

30 RT: Whenever you left the service and you returned home, you went back to
31 work for the grocery store?

1 PD: I took one month off. I said, "I need a vacation." I took thirty days off and
2 the store I worked for when I left called me up and asked me to go back to work for them
3 and I went back to work for them. I worked for there, like I say, twenty something,
4 twenty-one, twenty-two years, whatever. Same guy I worked all through high school for
5 him. So he needed somebody to work, so I stayed there with them and worked a long
6 time.

7 RT: Until that store closed?

8 PD: Well, what happened is that they tore out the grocery department of it and
9 they went in the dry goods/clothing store end of it and I didn't know nothing about
10 clothes. So a guy opened a supermarket down the street not too far from the store and it
11 was a brand new supermarket and he wanted somebody to run his butcher shop. So I
12 went to work for him. In fact, I left that Saturday, Olton's, I left Saturday my job and
13 Monday morning, I started the other job. I didn't miss a beat and worked ever since.
14 Still working! I think I got about twenty more good years.

15 RT: Oh, at least.

16 PD: I'm only seventy-seven.

17 RT: Oh, yeah.

18 PD: I think I can go until ninety-seven.

19 RT: You can go for quite awhile. You can go as long as you want.

20 PD: No, I'm just kidding. I'm not gonna make it that long. (Laughter) But I still
21 work every day. In fact, I had just left the store when I come here to answer the phone.
22 I hadn't been here five minutes.

23 RT: Well, I'm glad I caught you.

24 PD: Well, obviously I had an appointment. One thing about me, I make an
25 appointment, I'm there. I'm very precise about that. If I say I'll be there at nine o'clock,
26 I'm going to be there at nine. I won't be five minutes late. I may be five minutes early,
27 but I won't be five minutes late. That's the way I've always been.

28 RT: Well, do you have any other things you'd like to talk about or anything else
29 you have a comment on?

30 PD: Not really. I guess I might've talked a little bit too much this morning.

31 RT: Oh, no, no. Just fine.

1 PD: I'm sure when I hang this phone up and I go to thinking about some things I
2 should've said, probably, but you know how that is. It's been a long time ago, you
3 know?

4 RT: Absolutely.

5 PD: You're talking about, what, fifty something years? Let's see, 1940, got out in
6 '46. That's fifty-four, that's about fifty-seven years ago. That's a long ways back. That's
7 almost as old as you, aren't you?

8 RT: Well, I'm only twenty-nine.

9 PD: You're kidding. You're kidding.

10 RT: No.

11 PD: Huh?

12 RT: No, I'm not kidding.

13 PD: You're only twenty-nine?

14 RT: That's it.

15 PD: Well, I'll be damned. That's great. You got a long life ahead of you
16 hopefully.

17 RT: Well, I hope so.

18 PD: Yeah, you're going to be all right.

19 RT: Well, you had mentioned earlier that you had mixed feelings when you
20 received your notice that you were going to leave the *Evans*. It had been your home for
21 quite awhile then and you grew an attachment to it.

22 PD: That's correct.

23 RT: So, when did you find about the collision between *Evans* and *Melbourne*?

24 PD: Now that's, I was going, I had about ten kids in my car. I was coaching Little
25 League baseball and we were leaving Garyville to go to Reserve to play a ballgame. I
26 guess it was about 5:30, 6:00 at that afternoon and it came over. I had my radio on in my
27 automobile and that came over (sobbing) and that just knocked the hell out of me.

28 RT: It must have. Did you pull off to the side of the road or—

29 PD: No, I kept driving, but I just couldn't get over it.

30 RT: I bet you thought about it for the rest of that day.

31 PD: I still think about it. Yeah, I still think about it.

1 RT: There was a lot of good men who went down.
2 PD: You bet. And that's what hurts, really. To see all these young guys go down
3 with that ship. I have a lot of compassion for the lady that lost her three sons. Did you
4 ever meet Mrs. Sage?
5 RT: No, I don't believe that I have.
6 PD: She's a fine old lady. She lost her three sons on that thing, man.
7 RT: That alone has to be a terrible blow for any parent to take.
8 PD: You bet. You know, she didn't come to the last reunion. In fact, I don't
9 think she made the last two reunions. But she's been coming regular and she holds up
10 pretty good. That's got to be terrible.
11 RT: Well, it's bad enough to lose one child, but to lose three in one day.
12 PD: Yeah, lose three, just think of that. I think like eighteen, nineteen, and
13 twenty-one years old or something like that old, or nineteen, twenty, twenty-one or
14 twenty-two. You know, it's just hard to believe that. You got to feel for them and then
15 plus, all the other families. I met quite a few of the parents of the other kids that got lost.
16 It makes you feel terrible. It does.
17 RT: It was a good ship and a good crew.
18 PD: You bet.
19 RT: Well, Mr. Duhe, I thank you for your time this morning and I thank you for
20 talking about your time in the Navy and your thoughts about the Navy.
21 PD: Okay, Jack, it's been a pleasure, I guarantee you.
22 RT: Well, and I've enjoyed immensely on my side, as well.
23 PD: Okay.
24 RT: And I thank you for your time.
25 PD: You bet, okay, good luck. I wish you all the success in the world.
26 RT: Thank you very much and have a good day.
27 PD: Thank you, sir.
28 RT: Bye.
29 PD: Bye.