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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Robert Taylor Rhea
Conducted by Laura M. Calkins, Ph.D.
June 24, 2005
Transcribed by Laura Darden**

1 Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Robert Taylor Rhea. Today's
3 date is the twenty-fourth of June 2005. I'm on the campus of Texas Tech in the Special
4 Collections building in Lubbock, Texas. Robert is speaking to me by telephone from the
5 north Dallas area, is that correct, sir?

6 Robert Taylor Rhea: North of Ft. Worth.

7 LC: North Ft. Worth, thank you. Good morning and thank you for participating
8 Robert, I appreciate this very much. Robert, could you tell us where you were born and
9 when?

10 RTR: I was born at Cookeville, Tennessee, eighty miles east of Nashville on
11 August 27, 1922.

12 LC: Did you grow up in that area?

13 RTR: Yes I did, on a small farm about a mile outside of town.

14 LC: Were you able to attend schools?

15 RTR: Yes I was. I attended the city school at Cookeville, Tennessee, where I
16 was an honor graduate. Then I attended Central High School where I was also an honor
17 graduate.

18 LC: What year did you graduate?

19 RTR: 1940.

20 LC: Were you much for sports while you were in high school?

21 RTR: Only in track.

1 LC: That's pretty good. Did you run or jump?
2 RTR: Yes, I ran distance.
3 LC: Oh, okay. So you must've been in pretty good shape in 1940, then.
4 RTR: Yes.
5 LC: When did you enter the military service, Robert?
6 RTR: I was sworn into the Navy in November of 1942.
7 LC: Now in between there, of course, Pearl Harbor—
8 RTR: I was enrolled at Tennessee Tech University as an engineering student.
9 LC: What kind of engineering were you studying?
10 RTR: Mechanical.
11 LC: Did you enjoy that, Robert?
12 RTR: Yes.
13 LC: How did you—well, first let me ask about Pearl Harbor. Do you remember
14 that?
15 RTR: Very well.
16 LC: What were you doing that day?
17 RTR: Well, I was a member of the Tennessee State Guard and we were, that was
18 on a Sunday. We were having drill. One of the officers came out and announced to us
19 that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.
20 LC: How did you feel, do you remember?
21 RTR: No, I don't really.
22 LC: Do you remember how other people kind of acted? Were people upset or
23 outraged?
24 RTR: The young men around me were somewhat surprised and also angered that
25 the Japanese would do this.
26 LC: Yes, sir. Did that motivate you to leave college or how did you come to
27 actually leave the university?
28 RTR: No, it was through the Navy V-12 program that I entered the service. The
29 Navy V-12 program took in one hundred and twenty five thousand junior and senior
30 students from universities and colleges across America. It provided the Navy with a

1 steady supply of young officers, in that it allowed you to continue your college work and
2 on graduation, you would go to officer training, which I did.

3 LC: Yes, sir. So you then entered the Navy fulltime in 1942?

4 RTR: I was called to active duty in May of 1943 when I began my senior year at
5 the University of Louisville, Kentucky.

6 LC: Were you continuing then with your engineering studies?

7 RTR: Yes, I continued and completed my four years of engineering studies.

8 LC: Did you graduate, then, from Louisville?

9 RTR: No, I transferred credits back to Tennessee Tech University and I
10 graduated from there in absentia.

11 LC: Was that then in 1943 or?

12 RTR: Yes.

13 LC: Okay.

14 RTR: Well, no, actually early 1944.

15 LC: Okay. We'll just get those details correct.

16 RTR: Yes.

17 LC: Now let me ask you about your active duty service in the Navy. Where were
18 you trained? Did you go to some kind of basic—?

19 RTR: Well, I was trained at several places. From Louisville, I went to Asbury
20 Park, New Jersey, for four months and then I went to midshipman school in Chicago for
21 four months. I was in a class with 1,225 college men. I graduated number eight in the
22 class of 1,225 men from 145 universities and colleges. From there I went into submarine
23 training.

24 LC: Now did you select submarine training?

25 RTR: Yes, it was kind of exclusive. In fact, they announced when they came to
26 the midshipman school, "Unless you're in the top one third of the class, don't even bother
27 to apply, we don't want you."

28 LC: Wow.

29 RTR: I was given some psychiatric as well as physical examination to see if I
30 were suited for submarine duty, which is very different from all other.

1 LC: Yeah. Robert, as a matter of interest, do you remember any of those tests? I
2 know the physical ones were fairly common, but these tests for the early submarine
3 classes were different.

4 RTR: Well, no, I'm sorry, but I don't remember any details.

5 LC: That's okay. That's okay. But certainly you easily cleared the hurdle.

6 RTR: Yes, I did.

7 LC: To enter submarine work.

8 RTR: Yes.

9 LC: Now what particular job were you going to be trained for on the sub?

10 RTR: I could've been assigned to any duty on a submarine, but I was assigned to
11 engineering division on the submarine.

12 LC: Now did that mean you were in charge of propulsion systems as well as the
13 other internal systems?

14 RTR: I was assistant engineering officer and then later became the engineering
15 officer. It had to do with all propulsion systems and also some other systems of electric
16 pumps and so forth. The principle duties of engineering were with the propulsion
17 systems.

18 LC: Now, Robert, what was the first sub that you were on and where were you?

19 RTR: My first was at San Diego, California, for four months in Submarine
20 Squadron 45, which was a training squadron using what were known as S-boats. These
21 old submarines were built and bought by the U.S. Navy from 1918 to 1924. Some fifty
22 of them were purchased by the Navy. They were used for training purposes. At the very
23 first of the war, some of them were assigned combat duties, but they were obsolete and
24 they were dangerous. One of our officers served on one up in the Aleutian Islands where
25 the water was so very, very cold and all. He told us stories of the many problems they
26 had. But then after the four months in Squadron 45, then I went to four months of
27 submarine school at New London, Connecticut. I graduated there as an honor student
28 and was assigned to a Submarine Division #342 in the Western Pacific and that was
29 where I was serving when I was assigned to USS *Haddo*, what I would consider my ship,
30 my submarine.

31 LC: When did you actually join the *Haddo* and where?

1 RTR: I joined it at Guam around the first of August 1945. I made one patrol on
2 it.

3 LC: Did you have a sense at that point that the war was likely to continue?

4 RTR: Well, from intelligence reports, which came to every commanding officer
5 on a submarine in the fleet, it indicated that the Japanese were greatly weakened and were
6 having great difficulty obtaining oil to run their war machine. They did not have oil
7 production on their home islands and it had to come from Southeast Asia. Our
8 submarines sank so many of their tankers that they were literally starving for oil.

9 LC: So you knew they were certainly in trouble on that score.

10 RTR: Yes. So many of their surface ships, even those carrying other supplies
11 than oil, were sunk. Submarines represented less than two percent of the Navy in number
12 of people, and yet they sank over fifty percent of all Japanese vessels that were sunk.

13 LC: Now, Robert, who was the commander of the ship when you joined?

14 RTR: Frank Lynch.

15 LC: How do you spell his last name?

16 RTR: L-Y-N-C-H.

17 LC: Do you remember much about him?

18 RTR: Yes. He was a man that was about six feet and three or four inches tall.
19 He had been an outstanding graduate of his class of 1938 at the Naval Academy at
20 Annapolis. I can't remember the title given. At West Point in the Army, it's called cadet
21 corps commander, but anyhow, he was honored as the top student in his graduating class.

22 LC: Wow, wow. What kind of a man was he?

23 RTR: He was a very capable officer in every way.

24 LC: Do you know where he was from?

25 RTR: I believe he was from Missouri.

26 LC: Okay. Tell me about your—you mentioned that you went on one patrol.

27 RTR: Yes.

28 LC: Please tell me how that began and what the mission was.

29 RTR: Well, after the submarine had been refitted and re-supplied at Guam, then
30 this tenth and the last war patrol began. We received a radio message that after we had
31 been at sea a little while on our travel up to our assigned patrols on off the coast of Japan,

1 we received the word that the nuclear bomb had been dropped on Japan. Then, of course,
2 we continued and reached our patrol station, which was a 150 miles north of Tokyo and
3 75 miles off the coast. Now that's the east coast, of course.

4 LC: Yes.

5 RTR: By that time, one of the main jobs of submarines was doing lifeguard duty
6 for the hundreds of B-29s that were bombing Japan. When they had to make forced
7 landings, the submarines that were nearby acted as lifeguards saving them from—
8 sometimes they bailed out with parachutes and sometimes they were able to even launch
9 rubber rafts. But anyhow, a lot of submarine duties consisted of lifeguard duties. Since
10 so many of the Japanese ships had been destroyed, about the only thing they had left was
11 small coastal ships.

12 LC: Yes, sir.

13 RTR: That stayed very close in and were dangerous to try to close to destroy.

14 LC: Did your ship pick up any?

15 RTR: Not while I was on it. It had previously. I served on a refit crew at Guam
16 before coming onboard *Haddo* on the *Devilfish*. They had just come off patrol with a
17 young man that was a fighter pilot and he had been rescued when his fighter plane
18 received anti-aircraft damage. It didn't actually knock the plane out of the air. What it
19 did was cut a hole in the oil cooler and he saw that oil pressure was being lost on his
20 engine and he knew it would soon lock up. So he headed out and over the coast and out
21 to sea. Then he finally ditched and had a little raft, a rubber raft that he was in. It was
22 there that the *Devilfish* picked him up as had happened to many, many other airmen.

23 LC: Yes, sir. Did you make his acquaintance?

24 RTR: Slightly.

25 LC: Do you remember his name at all?

26 RTR: No, I do not. On Guam alone, there were 175 B-29s. Over on the other
27 Mariana Islands, Saipan and Tinian, there were also many B-29s. So as we were on
28 patrol station before the war ended and seeing them fly overhead, it seemed like the sky
29 was turned to aluminum there. They were coming over just by the scores going into
30 bomb Japan. Excuse me.

31 LC: Sure.

1 RTR: They had, as we saw later when we were at Tokyo for the surrender, that
2 these B-29s used many fire bombs to destroy much of Japan's towns and cities, which
3 were built of combustible material, wood.

4 LC: Well, Robert, let me ask you about how you came to actually be in Tokyo.
5 How did that come about?

6 RTR: Well, after the Japanese asked for terms of surrender on August fifteenth of
7 1945, we continued on our patrol station until August twenty-eighth, and then we were
8 told to rendezvous with four other submarines and head for Tokyo Bay. One submarine
9 did not rendezvous with us because he had encountered a large Japanese submarine, I-
10 400, that was just dead in the water, I mean, not going anywhere. They contacted the
11 commanding officer and asked if they could send someone over to the Jap submarine and
12 he said, "Don't send any officers, but you could send enlisted men." So the executive
13 officer put on enlisted men's clothing and maybe another officer did likewise, but they
14 did go over to this Japanese submarine and the commanding officer of the Japanese
15 submarine was very troubled about what to do. He had onboard the squadron
16 commander of the submarines who had committed *harakiri*. That is had taken his own
17 life when he heard of the surrender.

18 LC: Yes, sir.

19 RTR: So that submarine didn't proceed with the rest of us. But the four of us,
20 including *Haddo*, went on their way that day about noon, I guess. We went down the
21 coast or wherever the others came from and then we entered the harbor at the south end.
22 Tokyo Harbor is shaped somewhat like a light bulb or a pear with a small entrance to the
23 south. As we were—the next day after we had received those orders to come to Tokyo
24 Bay, we were approaching the harbor. On small islands around, we saw white, maybe
25 bed sheets, I don't know, signifying that Japanese coastal batteries were surrendering or
26 would not interfere. We arrived in Tokyo Harbor just off Yokosuka Naval Base, which
27 was very large, equivalent to Norfolk, Virginia, in the United States. Ships of every
28 imaginable type, American, British, Australian, one Free French I remember, but a total
29 of at least two hundred and fifty vessels. I remember three of our big battleships,
30 *Missouri* on which the surrender was signed, *Iowa*, and *South Dakota* were there. None
31 of the big carriers came in. They stayed out at sea so they could launch planes in case

1 any kind of treachery on the part of the Japanese was involved. Anyhow, we were there
2 two days, I guess.

3 LC: Do you know what date you arrived?

4 RTR: Let's see, let's see, I guess the thirtieth, we arrived on the thirtieth, I guess,
5 the twenty-ninth or thirtieth of August. Then we found that the United States submarine
6 tender *Proteus* had come in and also eight other submarines, so there was a total of
7 twelve submarines tied up alongside the submarine tender *Proteus*, there were six on the
8 starboard side and six on the portside. We were the outboard submarine on the portside,
9 the outside one. The *Proteus* was swinging at anchor and, of course, we swung around
10 with them, but also the submarine rescue vessel, *Greenlet*.

11 LC: *Greenlet*?

12 RTR: G-R-E-E-N-L-E-T. It was also there, but it was not connected to this
13 tender and her nest of submarines. Something of interest, as we looked toward the big
14 Japanese naval base, adjoining the naval base for surface ships, the big part of it was a
15 Japanese submarine base with some, a few Japanese submarines. At anchor lying
16 between where *Proteus* and her submarines were and submarine base onshore was this
17 big Japanese submarine, I-401. On September the first, our communications officer
18 managed to catch a ride on a boat over to the big Japanese submarine and to go through
19 it. He found a petty officer who could speak a little bit of English, as many Japanese
20 could. Underfoot in the living quarters were wooden planks. He wondered what was
21 going on and he learned that underneath these planks were jars of ashes of Japanese who
22 had been cremated at the island stronghold of Truk. What happened, our forces did not
23 invade Truk but they bombed it and the surface ships, battleships and such, shelled it to
24 where they pretty much destroyed it. But anyhow, it was bypassed, but then patrol ships
25 were set around it to where there could be no traffic to and from. The Japanese there on
26 Truk Island were starving to death. So this big submarine had taken a load of rice in bags
27 out to Truk, unloaded the rice and also had some rats onboard. Then they took onboard I
28 don't know how many, but a hundred or more of these small urns, ceramic urns with the
29 ashes of Japanese people who had been cremated there after being sick, wounded, or
30 whatever. Anyhow, they died. These ashes were then brought back to the home island,

1 but had not been unloaded and were still onboard when my fellow officer, Carl Hardigan,
2 our communications officer, went onboard and visited.

3 LC: That's a very interesting story.

4 RTR: Then on September the second, the day of surrender, the night before, one
5 of the officers, Jack Keller, he was an Annapolis graduate, he asked me what I thought
6 about trying to get onshore and see some of Japan. I was agreeable and enthusiastic. So
7 then at the evening meal on September first in the submarine, we contacted the other
8 officers and had ended up with a total of seven out of ten were willing to make this trip.

9 LC: Okay.

10 RTR: So the next morning, I was topside a little after 8:00AM. I looked over
11 toward the big submarine tender and I saw a party coming down off it and start crossing
12 from submarine to submarine on the gangways. When they got to *Haddo*, my boat, I saw
13 that the party included Adm. Charles Lockwood, V. Adm. Charles Lockwood, who was
14 commander of all submarine activities in the Pacific. With him were two or three, yeah,
15 at least three members of his staff. They went down into a launch, captain's launch.
16 They went over to the *Missouri* battleship to participate or observe the surrender
17 ceremonies of the Japanese.

18 LC: You obviously stayed on the *Haddo* at that time as they took off in the
19 launch.

20 RTR: Yes, it was nine o'clock, nearly an hour later when the rest of *Haddo*
21 officers who were agreeable to going ashore came up topside and we boarded a small, as
22 a landing craft, LCVP (landing craft, vehicle, personnel), and we rode over to and landed
23 at the Japanese submarine base. We looked around there and found out that it was
24 separated from the big naval base by a wall, masonry wall, concrete blocks or such, at
25 least eight feet tall. There was a gate between the two bases, but U.S. Marines on the
26 gate would not allow us to go through.

27 LC: Oh, is that right?

28 RTR: So we went back and we found a spot where there was an old wooden
29 ladder lying on the ground against a building. The Marine guarding, watching his,
30 marching his post, he would pass around a corner behind a building where he could not
31 see us. So we took the ladder and put it up against that wall. All of them went over

1 except, well, four jumped off on the ground on the other side and two stayed astride on
2 top of the wall. I put the ladder back and then I jumped up and they grabbed my hands
3 and pulled me up. The three of us jumped down. That put all seven of us over on the big
4 naval base, which had tremendous destruction from U.S. bombs. We walked through
5 that, didn't see anything much except a lot of destruction. We did see a naval airstrip
6 where they could land planes and also a hanger for planes to cut back into the side of one
7 of those little mountains that were prolific, very many of them. Anyhow, we walked
8 through that base and had no problem walking right out on the street in Yokosuka, Japan.
9 I don't know what size town it was, but it was very much connected to and dependent
10 upon that big navy base. It was from there after we walked, I don't know how far, a mile
11 or two, we heard trains running. We came to a railroad station, which was very crude,
12 but we were just without having to pay any fare or anything. We just got onboard a train
13 and rode north through countryside in Yokohama and then into downtown Tokyo.

14 LC: Were there Japanese civilians around and about?

15 RTR: Oh, it was crowded. It was packed. We stood in the aisles and held onto
16 straps like you would on the subways in New York.

17 LC: Sure.

18 RTR: Every seat was packed and there were Japanese standing, crowded in all
19 around us. I was the hindmost man of the seven standing in the aisle. There were
20 Japanese packed in on three sides of me. When we went through a tunnel and it became
21 rather dark, except for one light bulb in the coach, I reached down. We were each of the
22 seven wearing side arms, Colt .45-caliber pistols and I reached down and pulled a hem,
23 the bottom of my jacket tight around my hips so no one could reach in and get my gun
24 without me realizing what was going on. But they didn't offer any antagonism of any
25 kind toward us.

26 LC: Obviously they were looking at you.

27 RTR: Oh, yes.

28 LC: But you didn't sense any—?

29 RTR: Well, on some that were evidently discharged servicemen, soldiers going
30 home, there were some hostile looks, but of the common people, they appeared to be poor
31 and with simple clothing and just desperate to get to home or to get somewhere, I don't

1 know where they were going. As we passed through Yokohama, a city equivalent to
2 Detroit, we saw tremendous damage from bombing, firebombs. Everything burned,
3 buildings blasted down and rusting machinery used in the war effort, construction of war
4 machines and so forth. The people seemed very somewhat just sad or discouraged or just
5 not interested in anything that would continue that what the people had been going
6 through, which was a lot of hardship.

7 LC: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. So the destruction was just, would you say, virtually
8 total?

9 RTR: Yes, in Yokohama. When I got into Tokyo, it was a mixed bag. We got
10 off at the downtown main railway station and the roof was gone off of that building, but
11 we looked across and saw a fairly large building to our left. We went over there and it
12 appeared to be the post office. This was on a Sunday, September the second. We went in
13 and there were young ladies at the windows, but when they saw us, they screamed and
14 ran away from their window. But a man came up then and one of our people asked him if
15 he could speak any English. He said, "Very poorly." So he directed us to go to another
16 building nearby across the way. When we did, we found out it was the Tokyo
17 headquarters of the Japan National Railway. We sat down in there and they brought us a
18 man, appeared to be maybe sixty or sixty-five. I couldn't judge the age of a Japanese.
19 But he was a railway guy, their employee. He said he would be able to help us and ask
20 what we wanted to do. We said we wanted to see some of downtown Tokyo. He agreed
21 to be our guide. So he then took us around and it was while we were en route up to
22 Tokyo that the Japanese were signing the surrender onboard USS *Missouri* battleship
23 down in the southern end of Tokyo Harbor just off Yokosuka.

24 LC: Yes, sir.

25 RTR: Onboard this *Missouri*. So while we had gotten off the train, we noticed
26 though that flights of aircraft, U.S. aircraft were flying overhead. I don't know why they
27 wanted to put on a demonstration of U.S. or Allied power, but they did. Several scores of
28 our planes flew overhead.

29 LC: Now when you say you don't really know why they wanted to do that, was it
30 sort of overkill in a way?

1 RTR: There were no attacks made, nothing that would justify that the surrender
2 was not genuine. I assume it was just a show of U.S. or Allied power, that they flew
3 those planes overhead.

4 LC: When you were going about with this gentleman from the Japanese railway,
5 did he walk you around or did you have some kind of conveyance?

6 RTR: No transportation, he walked us around. One of the first places we went,
7 walk of maybe three quarters of a mile was to the Imperial Palace where the emperor
8 lived. We were not allowed to go on the palace grounds, but we went up to the moat
9 surrounding the palace. There was an iron bridge over the moat. The building was snow
10 white. I don't know how high it was, maybe forty feet with pagoda roof style. We
11 noticed when we approached the bridge across the moat into the palace that there were
12 Japanese soldiers guarding this bridge. They did have side arms. As we approached,
13 they unsnapped the flap over their pistols and placed the flap in behind the gun so they
14 could draw the gun quickly if they decided to do so. But then when we saw that, we
15 turned away so as not to create a situation.

16 LC: Was that kind of a scary moment?

17 RTR: No, just a careful moment.

18 LC: I see.

19 RTR: From there, we went through some kind of a, I guess you'd call it a garden
20 area. It had many of these trees that had been very much manicured, trees that were very
21 old, but were still small because they had been pruned and shaped and so forth.

22 LC: Yes.

23 RTR: On the way to the palace, we passed a big Japanese bank building that
24 didn't show bomb damage. We did see some bomb damage in downtown Tokyo, but not
25 as much as you might think. General MacArthur had made sure that there were no
26 bombs dropped on the Imperial Palace. He realized the fact that the emperor was
27 somewhat of a god to the Japanese. He decided that it would be wise not to harm him in
28 any way.

29 LC: Was the gentleman that you were touring with trying to talk a little bit as you
30 went along?

1 RTR: Answered questions mainly. His name was Shirato. I would guess it was
2 spelled S-H-I-R-A-T-O.

3 LC: Okay.

4 RTR: He expressed—one of our group, Jack Keller, gave him cigarettes, which
5 pleased him. He said that he was interested in baseball. He said, “I know Lou Gehrig,”
6 which meant he knew who he was. He said, “I saw Babe Ruth,” Babe Ruth, the famous
7 American baseball player back in the '30s. He may have. Babe Ruth may have made a
8 tour to Japan, exhibition tour of some kind. Anyhow, he said he had seen him. So he
9 was much interested in baseball. Finally it was noontime. We mentioned something
10 about food. So he took us to this big imperial hotel, which was designed as an
11 earthquake proof building by Frank Lloyd Wright, the American architect. It was built
12 back in the '30s and it was a pyramid style of architecture. When we got there and went
13 in, we found people, waiters, whatever could speak some English. We also found a U.S.
14 Army staff sergeant named Johnson who said he had driven up from Yokosuka the day
15 before in a jeep. He said he had a terrible time getting through Yokohama and into
16 Tokyo, Japan, but he had finally made it and he was very (coughs), excuse me, he was
17 very proud of himself. He said he had been present with the U.S. Airborne troops that
18 were first into Berlin when the European war ended. Anyhow, he had nothing but
19 photographic equipment. He had no arms. We found there at the imperial hotel some
20 Red Cross people and news people, but we also found that we were the first armed or
21 combatant people of the Allied forces to be in Tokyo at the end of the war.

22 LC: Did you have a chance to speak with the Red Cross people or any
23 journalists?

24 RTR: Not very much. We spoke very little to them.

25 LC: Did you get something to eat?

26 RTR: Yes, we did. I don't know if I can remember. I have it written down what
27 we had. One was some kind of soup, I think. I don't know if it was barley soup or what.
28 It was thin soup. We had some rice and a small piece of octopus tentacle with the suction
29 cups on it. We had tea. We couldn't manage to eat some of that stuff. It was just too
30 different from what we were accustomed to.

31 LC: Sure.

1 RTR: Of course, the people of Japan and Tokyo were in starvation
2 circumstances, so the food that we didn't touch was taken away and I'm sure that
3 someone else ate it. Anyhow, all we had to do to pay for it was just they—a senior
4 officer in our group was the executive officer, Jim Calvert, and he just wrote on little
5 slips of paper, U.S. Navy and they called them chits, C-H-I-T-S, chits in the Navy. So he
6 signed for them and we walked out and started down through the main section of Tokyo,
7 what is called the Ginza, somewhat similar to Broadway in New York, U.S.A. That's
8 when we attracted more attention than we had before. Children began to follow us.
9 Soldiers would not be carrying any arms, but still wearing their uniforms, would look at
10 us with looks of animosity and hatred. They would hiss at our guide to show their
11 contempt for him. We went by one or two movie theaters. He asked us if we wanted to
12 go in, but we certainly didn't want to get in there in the dark. Finally we came back. We
13 had told him that we wanted to leave not later than 4:00PM to go back to our base and
14 our sub. So we got back to the railway office about 9:00, excuse me, about 2:30. We
15 were sitting there. These young Japanese boys came in, didn't look to be more than nine
16 years old, they served us cups of tea. It was pale in color, very hot, and in beautiful little
17 cups, China cups that had Mount Fujiyama picture, not a picture, but you know, an—

18 LC: An image of that.

19 RTR: Yes. So then after a short wait, our guide said it's time to go to the depot
20 railway station and get on the train to go back down to where we had come from
21 originally. We had ridden on the lowest classed coaches coming up north into Tokyo.
22 That's where we saw so many pathetic-looking people. Everything was very crude and
23 all. But the coach that we were put on to come back was the first class. It was very nice.

24 LC: How were they different, Robert?

25 RTR: Oh, the seats and everything. The upholstery, the seating, everything about
26 it was much nicer. On the way down to Yokohama, two young Japanese Naval officers
27 got on the same coach we were on and came and stood by the seat where I was sitting
28 with my friends. That's where I saw real hatred in the eyes of another person is those
29 young men. I assume they were about the same rank I was, an ensign. As they stood
30 there in the aisle and looked at us and looked at me, they certainly had a hostile look in
31 their eyes.

1 LC: What would you say the message was that they were probably getting from
2 your group? Were you guys calm? Were you—?

3 RTR: Yes, we were calm. We each had on a jacket that had a cartoon insignia on
4 the back that was our ship, our submarine, that is. It was an insignia that showed a
5 submarine and a man leaning out of it with an umbrella and a firecracker or something.
6 But anyhow, those children that followed us down the Ginza thought it was very funny,
7 this insignia on the back of our boat, our jackets, our boat insignia.

8 LC: Sure.

9 RTR: We got back down to Yokosuka and got off the train and headed back over
10 to the base, the Navy base. We encountered a jeep with a Marine lieutenant colonel and
11 his driver. He was hostile. He wanted to know what we were doing out there. We said,
12 “Just looking around.” We certainly didn’t tell him we’d been to Tokyo. He said, “How
13 did you get out?” He wondered how’d we gotten past his guard.

14 LC: Sure.

15 RTR: We said, “We just walked out.” Well, he said, “Walk back in now.” So
16 we got back over to the base and we had a little trouble getting back in from the Marine
17 guard on the gate, but we finally made it. When we got into the submarines base of the
18 Japanese there, we found out that they were having a victory party at the Japanese
19 officers club with the admiral, COMSUBPAC (Commander, Submarine Force U.S.
20 Pacific Fleet) and several ranking officers and submarine captains and so forth. Two of
21 our party dropped off at that victory party. The others of us caught a boat and went back
22 to our submarine and found out that we were having turkey dinner with all the trimmings
23 that night, which was very nice.

24 LC: Now that must’ve already all been on the ship.

25 RTR: That’s after we got back on the submarine.

26 LC: Robert, how long did you stay there in Tokyo Harbor?

27 RTR: We left the very next morning on September the third. We had refueled
28 and when the captain announced early in the morning, I guess it was at breakfast time.
29 Now ordinarily a submarine makes on patrol, makes a trim dive every morning to make
30 sure that the submarine is in neutral trim. In other words, it doesn’t try to sink or it
31 doesn’t try to surface, it’s in perfect trim. So the captain announced, he said, “There’s an

1 element of risk in every dive and these men have been through enough risk. So we're not
2 going to make another dive 'til we get back to the United States. Each day we'll turn on
3 the low pressure blowers to get the balance tanks as near empty as we can to provide the
4 shallowest draft and the maximum speed." So that's exactly what we did. We set sail for
5 Pearl Harbor and that's where we ended up in how many days, I can't remember, five or
6 something like that.

7 LC: What was the mood on the ship as you were steaming away from conquered
8 Japan?

9 RTR: Well, I think I better go back to when we got the message that the Japanese
10 has asked for surrender terms.

11 LC: Sure.

12 RTR: That message came in a little after midnight. I was on watch in the radio
13 shack as a decoding officer. There was also always an enlisted radioman. But the Navy
14 regulations required that if a message came through that was coded either "secret" or "top
15 secret," that only a commissioned officer, not an enlisted man was allowed to read it. So
16 that meant there had to be a commissioned officer in the radio shack with the enlisted
17 radioman whenever these messages were decoded. We had the best decoding system,
18 coding and decoding system in the world.

19 LC: Yes, sir.

20 RTR: So I was not able to type. I hadn't taken typing in school. So the radioman
21 that I stood watches with was named Emo Hordesky. He was from Pennsylvania. Pity
22 for me, when the message came through coded "secret," he would put up a piece of
23 cardboard to where he could not read that tape as it came out of the machine, but he'd
24 pass it on to me. But anyhow—

25 LC: Wow.

26 RTR: But to continue with my story, when that word came through that the
27 Japanese had asked for surrender terms, I went and gave the message to the executive
28 officer, Jim Calvert. He in turn woke the skipper, Frank Lynch. The skipper got on the
29 sound system, which went into every part of the submarine. The submarine was a little
30 over three hundred feet long. When he announced that, you would think that there'd be
31 great cheering and celebrating. We had two men in the crew who had lost brothers

1 during the war, but when that word was announced that the war was over, I didn't hear a
2 sound. The men were very serious. We later saw the pictures from *Time* and *Life* and
3 *Look* magazine of the celebrations at New York and San Francisco and wherever with
4 these soldiers and sailors grabbing all the women and girls and kissing them and so forth.
5 But on the submarine, it was absolutely quiet.

6 LC: Very somber.

7 RTR: Yes, very somber. When we departed from Tokyo to go to Pearl Harbor,
8 there was just a quiet spirit of gratitude and thankfulness to have survived the war, that
9 the war was over. Everybody had a good attitude. It was only after the war ended and I
10 got back to the States that we decommissioned the submarine *Haddo* and I was
11 transferred to a surface ship, that was in December, no, February of 1946, that I found
12 servicemen who were, very bad attitude. They didn't, all they wanted was to get out of
13 the service. They didn't want to do their duty. They didn't want to do anything right, but
14 there was none of that on the submarine, which I was proud. The submarine service is a
15 superior service.

16 LC: Those guys on the surface ships, what were their complaints? I mean, were
17 they legitimate or were they just fed up?

18 RTR: No, they didn't want to work. They didn't want to do their duty. They
19 didn't want to do anything but get out and go home.

20 LC: Now how long did you stay on active service, Robert?

21 RTR: I served on that surface ship, let's see, three months. Then I was released
22 from service around the first of June of 1946.

23 LC: I understand from your daughter that you ended up here in the Lubbock area.

24 RTR: Yes, I stayed at—Father and Mother had a small farm. I stayed and
25 worked on it and on my mother's or grandmother's or otherwise, it was my mother's
26 home place you might say, which was another farm in another county, for the nineteen,
27 latter part of '46 and part of '47. Then I moved to Lubbock County in late 1947.

28 LC: What brought you out here, Robert?

29 RTR: Say again?

30 LC: What made you come out to Lubbock?

31 RTR: Well, I had several relatives in the area.

1 LC: Oh, okay.

2 RTR: Because my grandfather Rhea and his wife and their eleven children had
3 moved to the area, the South Plains area in 1908 and stayed a few years and then moved
4 back to Tennessee. So I had many relatives that were in the Lubbock area, some that
5 stayed out of the eleven children. I don't know why, with an engineering degree, but I
6 decided I'd like to work out of doors and alone. Anyhow, my uncle, husband of one my
7 father's nine sisters at Lubbock, he owned three farms. He invited me to come out and
8 operate those farms, one in Lubbock County and two in Hockley County. So I came out
9 in the late 1947 and I lived on the same farm then for fifty-five years. But after having
10 colon cancer surgery in October of 2002, it was necessary that we move down to this area
11 northeast of Ft. Worth where our daughter lived so she could care for my wife, a victim
12 of Multiple Sclerosis for twenty plus years. She could care for my wife while I received
13 eight months of chemotherapy. I had the colon cancer surgery at Lubbock. Then I had
14 the eight months of chemotherapy, bought a house down here a half a mile from where
15 my daughter lived. I lost my wife in October of 2003 from Multiple Sclerosis. In April
16 preceding her death, she began to lose the ability to swallow or to cough. That finally
17 ended up with somehow she ingested some kind of foreign particle, I don't know if it was
18 medicine or what, it got in her lung, caused an infection, which caused her death.

19 LC: Now what was your wife's name and where did you marry her?

20 RTR: My wife's name was Billie Anne, A-N-N-E. She was a native of El
21 Dorado, Arkansas, and she was a graduate of Texas Women's University.

22 LC: Is that right?

23 RTR: She was serving at First Baptist Church Lubbock as director of youth
24 ministry when I met her. Then we were married in 1961.

25 LC: Here in Lubbock then?

26 RTR: Yes, in Lubbock.

27 LC: I know that Marge Anne, your daughter told me she had attended Texas
28 Tech.

29 RTR: Yes, both of our children. Our first child was our son, and he graduated
30 from Texas Tech as an honor graduate in Agricultural Engineering.

31 LC: Yes, sir.

1 RTR: Then he decided that what he needed to do was to go to volunteer for
2 service with the Baptist student ministries. He was sent to the University of
3 Saskatchewan in Canada where he stayed about a year and a half. He realized while he
4 was up there that he needed more training, so he came back to Texas and he applied for
5 and was accepted at Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Ft. Worth.

6 LC: Yes, sir.

7 RTR: Where he studied for three years and was graduated. Our daughter, two
8 years younger, she got an undergraduate and Master's degree at Texas Tech. She became
9 a schoolteacher. But she then met and married her husband who was a graduate of Texas
10 Tech in Petroleum Engineering, but he also was attending Southwestern Baptist Seminary
11 at the same time our son was.

12 LC: I see.

13 RTR: So after he graduated from seminary, they stayed in this area and he did
14 some teaching at the seminary as adjunct professor of ethics. His degree, his doctoral
15 degree was in ethics. He got both a Master of Divinity and doctor's degree in Ethics
16 from the seminary. He taught some at the seminary, but he also had a sideline job at
17 remodeling homes, of which he was very, very much skilled at that. He was first
18 employed by a remodeling contractor. Then he became self-employed. Then the job at
19 the seminary was terminated when they ran short on money, funds.

20 LC: Well, you I'm sure are and quite rightfully so proud of both of those—

21 RTR: Yes, I'm very proud of both of my children.

22 LC: Robert, do I have your permission to make this oral history recording
23 available to researchers?

24 RTR: Yes.

25 LC: Okay. I want to thank you very much for participating in this oral history
26 project and for giving us, you know, first hand account of your own experiences on the
27 submarine and men that you served with and the service that you gave to the country.
28 Thank you for doing this.

29 RTR: Yes.