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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Susie Macayan
Conducted by Robert Tidwell
August 24, 2007
Transcribed by Jessica Fontenot**

1 Robert Tidwell: We will begin. This is Robert Tidwell conducting an interview,
2 an oral history interview, with Mrs. Susie Macayan, the wife of Chief Mike Macayan
3 who was a survivor of the collision between HMAS *Melbourne* and U.S.S. *Frank E.*
4 *Evans* on the third of June, 1969. The time is approximately fifteen after ten on the
5 twenty-fourth of August, 2007. So Mrs. Macayan, how are you this morning?

6 Susie Macayan: I'm fine. Thank you.

7 RT: Would you begin by telling me about yourself? Where were you born, where
8 you grew up? What was your childhood like, those sorts of things?

9 SM: I was born in the Philippines in 1935. During my childhood it was a fun
10 time, but then the Second World War started. We missed out on education. I was in first
11 grade at the time. We had to go in the evacuation from the city to the farm. That went on
12 for about four years and finally the war was over, the Second World War, that is.

13 RT: Okay.

14 SM: That life was hard after the Second World War. We managed. Then I went
15 to a nursing school in 1955. I was a student when I met Mike.

16 RT: Okay, while you were a student nurse.

17 SM: Yes. I was a freshman of the Baguio General Hospital School of Nursing.

18 RT: Okay. Where in the Philippines were you born?

19 SM: I was born in (unintelligible).

20 RT: How far is that from, say, some place like Luzon?

21 SM: That's in Luzon.

1 RT: Beg pardon.

2 SM: That is in Luzon.

3 RT: Oh, it is, okay. So how did you and your husband meet then?

4 SM: I was a student nurse and I was on vacation. Someone invited us to see

5 Camp John Hay. It was an American base. It was for—servicemen go for recreation. We

6 had to have the pass to go there. There were eight of us student nurses. The person that

7 invited us or sponsored us to get in was sort of—I think he was embarrassed to be with

8 eight girls. He invited Mike, who happened to be on furlough at the time, he wasn't really

9 in the Navy. He was with the U.S.S. DE *Chandler*, but he was home for just a few days

10 leave I believe. We were introduced to him while we were in Camp John Hay already

11 touring the place.

12 RT: Your husband was from the Philippines as well, wasn't he?

13 SM: Yes. He was born in the Philippines, also.

14 RT: Was he born very far away from where you were or not very far?

15 SM: Oh, he was born in another province. I think the province is La Union.

16 RT: Okay. So you met him whenever you were among a group of other student

17 nurses who—

18 SM: Yes, there were eight of us, eight student nurses. We were young. (Laughs)

19 RT: What year was this?

20 SM: 1955.

21 RT: 1955, okay. So how was it that the two of you got together?

22 SM: Well, he took some pictures. He said he wanted some souvenirs from our

23 meeting and he wanted to take some pictures and take it back to the ship with him and he

24 promised to send us some copies. He did. I ask him for—what happened was when we

25 went to Camp John Hay there was only one person invited to start with, but in the

26 Philippines it's a custom that when one is invited you can invite other people. That was a

27 custom. We would tag along. We just had to tag along. Then this person that was invited,

28 we told Mike to send the pictures to her. He did. He sent the pictures to this lady. Her

29 name is Christina. Mike took a picture of me by myself, the only picture that was a solo

30 picture. I ask Christina to give me that picture or send some of the pictures that Mike had

31 sent us. Christina would not give me any picture, but just said, "Why don't you just write

1 him and ask for the pictures and maybe he'll send you some?" So I did. I wrote him and I
2 asked him for just any copies he could send me. Then he said that he will look for the
3 negatives. Then he said, "Can I have a picture of yours?" He was asking for a picture
4 from me instead, instead of sending those pictures, he did not send me any. Anyway, just
5 to be friendly I said, "Okay." I had a picture of me taken just recently. It was a picture of
6 what they call a capping, a capping ceremony, a capping picture. It's my picture where I
7 had the nurse's cap, a special occasion for a student nurse.

8 RT: So this was like a graduation photo.

9 SM: Yeah, but it's not a graduation photo. It's a capping and candlelight photo.
10 That's part of a student nurse. You see, when you enter the school of nursing you start
11 with just the plain uniform. Then after six months you have what you call a capping and
12 candlelight ceremony. They give you a cap. It's a white cap. That's special in a student
13 nurse life. I gave him the last copy I had. That's how it started. Then we started writing
14 each other. Every year he would come to the Philippines and then he would come and see
15 us, take us out, eight of us. We continued our correspondence through the years since
16 then.

17 RT: Okay. So how long was it from the time the two of you met and began your
18 romance to the time that you married?

19 SM: At first the letters were just friendly, but then it was the Christmas of 1957
20 and he finally told me that he had been in love with me from the first day we met. He
21 didn't want to be turned down so he just kept it a secret. We graduated in 1958. Before
22 graduation I told him I loved him, too. So we got engaged in 1959, gave me a diamond
23 ring and got married in 1960.

24 RT: So then when the two of you married, did you move from the Philippines or
25 did you stay there for a while?

26 SM: We got married in 1960 and I came to the United States in 1962.

27 RT: Okay. Where in the United States did y'all live at that time?

28 SM: Well, I came from Military Aid Transport and we arrived in California. He
29 was aboard USS *Coral Sea* and that's where his ship had its home port. Then we moved
30 to Washington state, Oak Harbor, Whidbey Island. He was on shore duty.

1 RT: Then whenever he was stationed aboard the *Evans*, when did he first go
2 aboard?

3 SM: He went to the *Evans* in 1968.

4 RT: 1968, okay. So y'all were, what, living in Long Beach at that time?

5 SM: Yes. We moved to Long Beach and we stayed in the Navy housing.

6 RT: So when did you start having children? Did you have children fairly shortly
7 after y'all got married or did you wait a couple of years?

8 SM: We had a child, the firstborn was in March of 1961. She was born in the
9 Philippines.

10 RT: Oh, okay. How many children did the two of you end up having?

11 SM: Four.

12 RT: Four children, okay. How many boys, how many girls?

13 SM: Three girls, one boy.

14 RT: So is the boy the, is he the oldest, the youngest or is he somewhere in the
15 middle?

16 SM: The youngest. He said he met you.

17 RT: Ah, yes, yes, I met him at the reunion here in Lubbock. So when was he
18 born?

19 SM: Mark was born on the twenty-ninth of May, 1970.

20 RT: Wow. So that's not a bad distribution there having your first child born in
21 '61 and then the last one born in, what'd you say, it was 1970, yes?

22 SM: Yes.

23 RT: Okay. Now, there's enough separation between the children there, especially
24 for the oldest to hassle the youngest.

25 SM: Yes, they were fond of him.

26 RT: Well, I imagine that since he was the only boy it was kind of interesting for
27 him, especially being the youngest child and the only boy out of the group.

28 SM: Yes, he was spoiled by my husband, but I treated them equally.

29 RT: So, at the time of the collision when it actually occurred, what kind of news
30 did you get? When was the first time that you had heard that there had actually been a
31 collision and how long did it take before you knew what had happened to your husband?

1 SM: I did not hear about collision from the news. I got it from a friend. She was
2 the wife of one of the chiefs aboard the *Evans*. Her name is Lay Malilay. I worked that
3 day and then I came home and when I got home the phone was ringing and it would not
4 stop. So I decided to answer it and it was Lay Malilay. She told me, "Where have you
5 been all day? I've been trying to get in touch with you." I said, "I was at work." She
6 asked me if I heard the news. I said, "What news?" She said, "It's about our ship." I said,
7 "What about it?" She said, "You better take a hold of yourself," she told me. She said,
8 "It's not good news. Our ship has been in a collision and there's some men missing." I
9 could not believe her. I said, "No, it can't be," because I had just received a letter and
10 Mike told me he was fine, they're fine. She said, "Yes, but you know, the accident
11 happened today and the letter you got was probably written last week." I was in denial.
12 Then she said that it's all over the news. It's on the radio. It's in the newspaper. She told
13 em to turn the television on because they were talking about it right there and then.

14 RT: Oh, wow.

15 SM: I turned the TV on and, sure enough, they were talking about the USS *Frank*
16 *E. Evans* having collided with an Australian aircraft carrier and there were helicopters
17 and TV screens that were looking for survivors. They said that some men were missing. I
18 was just stunned. I was numb. I did not know what to think or say or what. I just sat down
19 and just sat like I was limp. The kids were just playing around and then they noticed that
20 I was not reacting—my mind went blank. They said, "What happened, Mom?" because
21 they were looking at the TV, too. I said, "Daddy's ship was damaged or something
22 happened to Daddy's ship. I don't know." I tried calling the newspaper. I called the
23 newspaper. I called the base to find out what happened and if everybody was saved or
24 nobody died or whatever. But they didn't have that. There was no information. I could
25 not get any information other than some men were missing. That went on to the next day.
26 I can't remember now how many days before I finally found out if Mike was okay or
27 what. What I remember was they had the names of people missing, that's what they said.
28 The press telegram told me that they have the names of people missing, but they were not
29 really giving out any information. I asked them, "Is his name in the missing list?" They
30 said, "No." So that's all the information I got. At least when they said no I knew that he
31 was alive.

1 RT: I bet you were very, very relieved at that point.

2 SM: Yes.

3 RT: Then we were told that we were going to have anything at the house of the
4 XO's (executive officer) wife, I mean the executive officer. The wife was going to be
5 there, Mrs. McLemore was going to be there. Mrs. McMichael was the wife of the
6 executive officer. So we went to their house. They told us that Chief Reilly was going to
7 be calling. So we did get the chance to talk with Chief Reilly. I did get a chance to talk
8 with him and he told me that my husband was injured and he had to be taken to the
9 hospital in South Vietnam. I asked him how bad was he injured. He said that he suffered
10 some burns because he was on duty at the time in the engine room. That's where the
11 collision happened, or that's where the ship was cut in half. Then he also said that he was
12 also wounded and he had a hairline fracture in his neck. So we only had to talk briefly
13 because that was the only time for his skull was (unintelligible). So at least he was alive. I
14 knew he was alive. I knew he had some burns and that he was taken to the hospital.

15 RT: So what was your reaction when you discovered in this conversation that he
16 was injured? Were you pretty concerned?

17 SM: I was relieved because he was alive and yet I was worried because I didn't
18 know the extent of his injuries and how bad he was. Well, anyway, I thought I would get
19 some information later and I did. There was an officer that came to the house later on. I
20 think that it was three days after the collision. Then when he came in and when he came
21 knocking at the door I was scared because Mike had told me during our honeymoon that
22 if something happens to him, somebody would come and see me. I thought he had died. I
23 opened the door—he was in uniform. This officer was in uniform. I said, "No, no." I
24 thought he had died. I told him, "I was told he was alive, that he survived." I think I was
25 so nervous. He said, "Yes, it's not what you think." I think he knew that I was thinking
26 that he had died. "It's not what you think. Sit down," he says, because I think I was
27 already passing out. So we sat down and he said, "Your husband survived, but he had
28 serious injuries." I said, "How bad was his injury?" He said, "He had first- and second-
29 degree burns," and it was forty-two percent. I said, "Forty-two percent and first- and
30 second-degree burn. That's really serious."

31 RT: That's very serious, yes.

1 SM: Very, because I've taken care of burned patients before and that's a serious
2 injury. He said that he also suffered some cuts because they had to escape from the
3 engine room. Also since the ship was cut in half right where they were there was some
4 debris that they had to—it cut them somehow. He had someone that he was taken to Cam
5 Ranh Bay, an Air Force, U.S. Air Force hospital.

6 RT: Oh, okay, so he was taken to an Air Force hospital.

7 SM: They airlifted him. Then he said that they would keep me informed of his
8 condition, keep me updated on his condition as the days go on.

9 RT: So what did they do? Just on a daily basis just say, "Yes, he's still okay," or
10 if there was any kind of change then they would tell you?

11 SM: They sent me a cablegram. I think that's what they called it. They had the
12 cablegram. They sent me three, if I remember correctly. They sent me three cablegrams.
13 First, they informed me that he was on the *USS Kearsarge*, that he had survived. I also
14 received a cablegram from Mike that he said, "I'm okay." I think all the guys were
15 allowed to send cablegrams. Then another one I was told about the extent of his injuries.
16 Then later on he progressed to where he was more stable and then they said that his
17 condition is now stable and that I will not be hearing from them anymore. I think this
18 came from the Bureau of Naval Personnel.

19 RT: Okay. So how long was it before you were able to see your husband again?

20 SM: I believe it was over a month after the collision. They airlifted him from
21 Cam Ranh Bay to the Oakland Naval Hospital in the San Francisco area and I went to see
22 him there.

23 RT: So when you first saw him, what was your reaction?

24 SM: He was in therapy and I waited because they said that he was going to be
25 finished with his therapy shortly after I got there. So I waited. Then I waited outside and
26 then shortly after that I saw him coming, he was in a bathrobe. He was walking funny.
27 What I mean by that is he was not so stable in his walking like normal. He was walking
28 protectively. When he saw me he had a big smile on his face and I did, too, and we
29 hugged, embraced tightly and I was crying. We both did. At least he was alive. He was
30 undergoing physical therapy because of the burns and the contraction, the contractions in
31 the arms. Like I said, forty-two percent. From his legs to his face.

1 RT: So when the two of you were able to actually see each other again face to
2 face, how long was that meeting? Did they allow you just a few minutes to talk to him or
3 were y'all able to spend a good deal of time together?

4 SM: Oh, I spent the whole afternoon with him, afterwards.

5 RT: So what did y'all discuss then?

6 SM: He asked me about the children. We didn't really talk much about the
7 collision, just a little bit about the collision. He told me that some of the men did not
8 survive, that there was somebody in his section, the son of Chief Reilly, he had not
9 survived. He died. It seems like he was having a difficult time talking about the collision.

10 RT: I imagine so.

11 SM: Yeah, very difficult. So I did not push it at first. He told me later when he
12 finally got home, finally told me more about it.

13 RT: So how long was it before he was able to go back on duty and go back
14 home?

15 SM: I think he was off for—I think less than six months. They were going to
16 send him back to a ship, but I wrote the Bureau of Naval Personnel asking them not to
17 send him back to the boiler room because he had nightmares often when he was home. I
18 had to wake him up because he would be making noise like he's scared. I knew that he
19 was not ready to go back to the engine room, be assigned there. So they assigned him to
20 do quality assurance like he would go visit some of the Navy ships and evaluate the
21 situation, I guess. He did go back to a ship later on. I think, less than a year he was
22 stationed to the *USS Hector*.

23 RT: Okay. What kind of ship was that?

24 SM: The *USS Hector*? I don't remember.

25 RT: I was just curious if they'd sent him to another destroyer or if they'd sent
26 him to a larger ship. So a year later, they did place him back in a ship. Was he in the
27 boiler room again?

28 SM: Oh, yes. He was there again, but he told me that he was trying as much as
29 possible to only go there if he had to. It's a feeling.

30 RT: Sure. So how long did he stay in the Navy after the collision?

1 SM: The collision was in 1969. He was on the USS *Hector* until 1971, I think, or
2 '72. He went on shore duty after the *Hector*. He retired in 1974. He retired from the Navy
3 after twenty-one years.

4 RT: Oh, wow. Okay. You said that after some time had passed after the collision
5 that he was able to open up a bit more and talk about it. So what were the things he said
6 about it? How did he start talking about it to you?

7 SM: Well, I asked him what happened. He said that he was on duty the night of
8 the collision. He was in the forward engine room. It was still steaming fast. Then all of a
9 sudden he said there was an order from the bridge to full back down. That's one of the
10 words I did not understand at first, but I found out later on full back down is you go fast
11 in reverse. He was saying that you just don't get that type of order. You're going fast and
12 then right away you have to full back down. Then shortly after that there was a crash. It
13 was just moments he said when they received that order. But when they received that
14 order he thought there was something wrong. "Why would they order something like
15 that?" in his mind. I think they tried to do the order, to carry out the order, but shortly
16 after that there was a big crash and it was like metal grinding metal, he said. It was right
17 through the engine room. It went right through that space. He was thrown into the
18 bulkhead. Something fell on him.

19 RT: Oh, something fell on him?

20 SM: Yes. It pinned him down on the neck area.

21 RT: So he received a lot of injuries, then. One, being burn and then being thrown
22 against the bulkhead and then something falling upon him.

23 SM: Yes. He tried to free himself, he said, but that thing that fell on him, it would
24 not move. Meanwhile there were overhead, the steam pipes they got broken and it was
25 releasing superheated and steam. He felt himself being burned, but then when the water
26 from the sea started rushing in, it relieved him from the burning sensation that he
27 suffered. But then the water kept rising. Pretty soon he was underwater.

28 RT: Oh, wow.

29 SM: He thought he was going to die because he was drowning. That's when he
30 talked to God and prayed. He said he prayed, "God, please, if I'm not going to make it
31 take care of my family," he said. Shortly thereafter the position of the ship shifted. It

1 went back to upright, went back to its normal position because it seems like when the
2 accident happened the ship got turned to its side. He got up. When the ship went back to
3 its right position he was able to get himself free from that heavy object that had pinned
4 him down. Then he told me that the first thing that came to his mind after he got himself
5 free was the boilers are going to explode because of the water hitting the boilers. He said
6 something about going to secure the boilers. I did not know what that meant. A lieutenant
7 came to see me later on and said that he had to secure the boilers. Anyway, after he did
8 that he looked for an escape hatch. He saw a light coming from somewhere. When he saw
9 that he knew it was the way out from the engine room. He yelled and said, "If you can
10 hear me follow my voice because I think I've found the hatch." He had a loud voice.
11 Mike had a loud voice. So he kept saying, "Over here," as he followed the light. Then
12 when he got to where the light was coming from, there were a few men out there also. He
13 noticed that there were three guys who tried to get out, but they were having problem
14 getting out. So he had to push them out, too, so he could also go out he said. He wanted
15 to make sure that they get out. There was another guy that was there. He was not injured.
16 He said, "I made him stay to help out the evacuation." He did not give me any names, but
17 the three guys that were badly injured he noticed. I don't know if he had some help, but
18 anyway I pushed them out through that opening. Then when the three of them got out, he
19 also got out. But the other guy who was not injured, there's one that was not injured and I
20 guess he helped get them out, too. Mike said he wanted to make sure that this guy was
21 not injured, is not going to go ahead of the others. So he had to make him do it, make him
22 help out in the evacuation process. When they got to the deck outside of the engine room,
23 he was so stunned to see that the forward section of the ship was gone or half of the
24 *Evans* was no longer there. On their side was the *Melbourne*, but he was suffering at the
25 time. That's when he first noticed how bad the pain was and he could not stand it
26 anymore. He laid down. People offered to help him, but he said no because just a mere
27 touch of his skin was excruciating pain. While he was laying down there he saw some
28 ladder that was thrown to the *Evans* deck from the *Melbourne*. He was still thinking that
29 the other half of the *Evans* was going to sink. So he darted for the ladder and climbed up
30 to the *Melbourne*. When he reached the *Melbourne* deck, he collapsed he said. They gave
31 him pain shots, but none relieved him at all. So they airlifted him to the USS *Kearsarge*

1 and then at the USS *Kearsarge* they could not help him either. They airlifted him farther
2 to Cam Ranh Bay, South Vietnam, U.S. Air Force Hospital.

3 RT: He must've been a fairly tough individual to survive all of that and then also
4 to climb up the rope ladder on the side of the *Melbourne* to get himself up to the deck.
5 Either that or maybe his mind blocked some of the pain so that he could do that, but
6 that's amazing.

7 SM: Yes. It was amazing, but I think it's the way of survival, I think, that God
8 gives us that in situations like that. He had some strength to go after to survive. It's an
9 unusual strength.

10 RT: So, you'd mentioned earlier that when he returned home that he would have
11 nightmares. Did he have nightmares like that for the rest of his life or was that just for a
12 few years?

13 SM: Just a few years.

14 RT: Okay, okay. Did they stop once he had retired from the Navy or did they
15 even stop before then?

16 SM: Before.

17 RT: Before then, okay. So did he talk about it much? Did he talk about the
18 collision much after that point? For example, if any of your children asked about it,
19 would he talk about it, or if other people asked him about it would he talk about it?

20 SM: No, he would not talk about it unless somebody asked.

21 RT: Then when people did ask him, did he go into a lot of detail or was it fairly
22 short?

23 SM: Fairly short.

24 RT: Okay. So he still had some difficulty talking about it, then?

25 SM: Yes.

26 RT: At any time after the collision did he try to get therapy or any kind of
27 counseling?

28 SM: There was none. They didn't give him any. I mean, he was not given any
29 psychological counseling that I know of. It was just physical therapy and he also had ear
30 surgery because he had the perforated ear drum. It was done at the Oakland Naval

1 Hospital. He had hearing loss from that accident. They did surgery, but it was not very
2 effective.

3 RT: So he could only really hear out of one ear, then?

4 SM: Yes.

5 RT: Oh, wow. So with all the burns on his body, did those heal fairly well?

6 SM: They healed, but it changed the color of his skin and some scars.

7 RT: But he was able to walk again normally. As far as doing everyday chores or
8 tasks, he was back to normal.

9 SM: Yeah, but I also think that the things that he had inhaled had affected his
10 lungs, although having worked in the boiler room he was diagnosed later on with
11 asbestosis As far as the collision is concerned I think that the things he had inhaled had
12 also affected the lining of the respiratory system.

13 RT: Oh, I imagine so. I mean, superheated steam and if you inhale that, I would
14 imagine it would do damage. So after he retired from the Navy, then what did he do?

15 SM: Well, he stayed home for one year, rest. Then he went back to work and this
16 time he worked as a civilian. He went to El Toro Marine Corps Air Station, Marine Corps
17 in El Toro Air Station.

18 RT: That's in the Los Angeles area.

19 SM: No, it was in Orange County.

20 RT: Oh, Orange County, okay. So what did he do out at El Toro?

21 SM: He worked as a boiler mechanic.

22 RT: Oh, okay. Imagine that.

23 SM: For ten years.

24 RT: So how long did he work there?

25 SM: He worked there for ten years. Then he started having problems.

26 RT: Uh-oh. What kind of problems?

27 SM: He had breathing difficulty and then he also had some chest pains. So he
28 went on somewhat disability.

29 RT: Okay. So did he do anything to kind of occupy his time?

30 SM: Yes. He enjoyed gardening. He would grow vegetables and flowers in the
31 backyard. It was relaxing for him he said.

1 RT: I imagine so, especially considering the sort of things that he had endured
2 and experienced that that was probably therapeutic for him, then.

3 SM: Yes. So he was fifty-five when he went on disability.

4 RT: Now, at this time I imagine that you were working as a nurse, as well.

5 SM: Yes.

6 RT: Now, when you worked as a nurse, were you working for the Navy or were
7 you a civilian nurse?

8 SM: Civilian.

9 RT: What hospital did you work in?

10 SM: When the accident happened I was working at the El Cerrito Hospital in
11 Long Beach. I later on went to the Long Beach VA Medical Center in 1972. I worked at
12 the Long Beach VA Medical Center until 1997. I was there for twenty-four years.

13 RT: Oh, wow. I imagine working at the VA center, you saw a lot of people who
14 had injuries like your husband's and some that were even worse.

15 SM: At the VA, at the section that I worked, we did not have any burn cases. It
16 was just mostly—I worked in different areas in the hospital. I worked with heart patients,
17 pre-heart patients, physical patients, heart patients.

18 RT: Well, having a husband who was in the service and who had been injured, I
19 imagine you had kind of a different perspective when it came to working with servicemen
20 in the hospital.

21 SM: Well, I loved the VA patients because my husband was a veteran. I did my
22 best. I wanted to have them the best of care. They're veterans.

23 RT: Sure. Out of your children, what did they end up doing?

24 SM: Well, my oldest is an RN (registered nurse). My second graduated from Cal
25 State-Northridge Telecommunications, worked for Disney as a director in something, she
26 was a promotion director for movies. That's Disney movies. My third one went into hotel
27 management and she was a director, and later on assistant manager of the Double Tree
28 Hotel. She worked mostly for the Hilton. Then the third one, that's Mark, the youngest
29 boy, he graduated from DeVry University and is in computers.

30 RT: So the oldest one followed in your footsteps.

31 SM: Yes.

1 RT: And went into nursing.

2 SM: Yeah.

3 RT: So did he ever talk about the collision with the children? Did he wait until
4 they were much older? Did they even ever really ask him about it?

5 SM: Well, the children heard about it, the first three, because they were old
6 enough to understand, I believe, or at least know what was going on after the accident.
7 He talked to them about it, all of us. The youngest one, Mark, he did not know anything
8 about the collision, but we had this plant that was given by the city of Long Beach which
9 tells about seventy-four that were missing. I have that up on the wall for many years,
10 together with some retirement pictures of Mike that was taken at the naval station in
11 Long Beach when he retired. So it was like sort of a record. Then when Mark was at the
12 University of San Diego, he had a friend who had a friend that was home, that had come
13 home for vacation from the Naval Academy. He talked about the Naval Academy and
14 how the training was and he mentioned something about the *Frank E. Evans* collision.
15 They have that as a training video. Mark was listening to this guy and he said, “*Frank E.*
16 *Evans*? That sounds familiar.” He was trying to think where he had seen that name before
17 or heard that name before and then he said, “I think it was one of the plaques that was a
18 décor in my house, in our house.” So when he came home on the weekend he asked us
19 about the *Frank E. Evans*. He said that there’s a guy from the Naval Academy that was
20 talking about the *Frank E. Evans* collision with an aircraft carrier, the *Melbourne*. Then
21 he asked us all if we know something about it. I said, “Yeah, your dad was on that ship,
22 the *USS Frank E. Evans*.” Then he asked Mike what was it or what happened. That’s
23 when Mike told him. That was the time that Mark learned about it and he was already in
24 college at the time.

25 RT: Oh, wow. So he was much older before he heard about it.

26 SM: Yes, because Mark was born after the collision, a year after the collision.

27 RT: That’s amazing that he would spend all of his life and not really hear about it
28 from his father. Then he gets that information from a friend of his.

29 SM: Yes, and I was surprised when he told us about it. I told him, “Yeah, Daddy
30 was on that ship when it collided.” Like he was surprised, it was a big surprise for him.

31 RT: That was his reaction was just kind of stunned?

1 SM: Yeah. He just stopped like he had to stop and think.

2 RT: So at that time did his dad fill him in on the details?

3 SM: Yes, he told him about the seventy-four that died and, of course, one of them
4 was in the engine room, the son of Chief Reilly. He told us he really felt guilty a little bit
5 about Chief Reilly's son, because I think Larry Junior was in one section and then Mike
6 said that he had to move him to the other section because somebody was on emergency
7 leave and he needed somebody that had the knowledge to take care of that section. It was
8 Larry Junior that knew, he had the knowledge to be in that section. So he assigned him
9 there. Then I think that was the part of the—it was part of the area that was also affected
10 by the collision. He perished. He was saying, "If I didn't put him there he may not have
11 died." He felt pretty guilty. I kept telling him, "It's an accident. You didn't know that this
12 was going to happen."

13 RT: Well, no, he couldn't know.

14 SM: Yeah.

15 RT: Did he ever talk to Chief Reilly about it after the collision?

16 SM: Oh, yes, he did. He said, "I'm sorry, but accidents happen." He did not
17 know.

18 RT: Sure. I understand that your husband died in 2000?

19 SM: Yes.

20 RT: What had happened?

21 SM: He died of respiratory failure. He had been diagnosed with having asbestosis
22 later on after he got out of the Navy. He was always having this breathing difficulty and
23 he would go to the doctor and go to the doctor. Then his lungs would collapse. Yeah.
24 Then they tried to put him with medications and so forth. He even had a tracheostomy
25 done. They had to open up his throat in order for him to be given breathing treatments. So
26 he the tracheostomy. His lungs kept on collapsing and he had to have surgery done, also.
27 Six months before his death he had a thoracotomy done, which is they remove some of
28 the asbestotic plugs from his lungs. He lived for six more months after the surgery. Then
29 one morning sometime in February, I think February first, he had a fever. He was having
30 difficulty breathing. He was taken by ambulance to the hospital and they did what they

1 could. Anyway, he died of respiratory failure and it's related to the asbestosis that he had
2 from when he was in the Navy.

3 RT: I imagine that all that superheated steam that he inhaled didn't help things,
4 either.

5 SM: Yeah. I'm sure that it was also—it had aggravated asbestosis problem.

6 RT: Golly, I'm sorry to hear that.

7 SM: He had breathing difficulty.

8 RT: Wow. Well, I thank you very much. I thank you very much for taking the
9 time to talk with me.

10 SM: You're welcome.

11 RT: I'm glad to know that your son has also taken an interest in not only his
12 father's service in the Navy, but also the *Evans* itself.

13 SM: Yes. He has been to the reunion I think a couple of times. He went to
14 Lubbock, Texas, that year. They had it over there and he had gone to the archives.

15 RT: Wow. Your daughters, have they taken any kind of interest in it?

16 SM: Oh, yes, yeah. They all did eventually, especially Valerie, the youngest girl.
17 She was the one that gave me that scrapbook that I put my collection. She gave it to my
18 husband on Father's Day in 1997, I think. That's where I eventually put all of the
19 newspaper clippings about the *Evans* that ended up in the archive. Valerie was the one
20 that kept really more interested in the collections.

21 RT: Okay. Oh, wow. Well, it's good that they are able to do that because it helps
22 keep their father's memory alive. Well, I thank you again for taking time out of your
23 morning to talk to me. I wish you all the best.

24 SM: Oh, thank you, Mr. Tidwell. It was nice talking with you.

25 RT: It was a pleasure to talk to you, as well.

26 SM: Thank you.

27 RT: Well, have a good morning.

28 SM: Well, you have a good day, too. I hope to see you sometime at one of these
29 reunions.

30 RT: Same here, same here.

31 SM: Okay.

1 RT: Have a good one.

2 SM: Okay.

3 RT: Bye.

4 SM: Bye-bye.