

in speaking with

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FM: Yeah, and she was commissioned in 1945, in April of '45, and then her first cruise overseas was to Okinawa. They went to Hawaii and Okinawa. Of course I wasn't on it at that time but we have a brief history of it. I could probably send you a copy of that history if you'd like.

RF: Oh that would be wonderful!

FM: Okay, I'll do that. That'll tell you all about when it was commissioned. We have a reunion every year and there's still many of the original guys that were there on the commission that come to the reunion.

RF: Oh really? I didn't know that you had a reunion.

FM: Oh let me ask you something; how far are you from Irving, Texas?

RF: From Irving, Lubbock is about five or six hours away.

FM: Well we're having our reunion there this year.

RF: Are you really?

FM: It's going to be on the last weekend of September. It's going to be from Thursday to Sunday, so if you would like to and if you're free, that'll be a great time to talk to a lot of the guys.

RF: I would. Do you know who's in charge of that by chance?

FM: Yes, I am.

RF: Oh you are?

FM: I'm in charge of it.

RF: Oh, well then great. You're the person I would have to ask for permission to come.

FM: I'd love to have you as our guest. We have a banquet on Saturday night. I'll forward all of the information to you at a later date because we don't have the hotel cinched yet. Sometime in May we'll have everything done and I'll send you the information.

RF: That would be around the 27<sup>th</sup> of September?

FM: Something like that. I don't have my calendar here.

RF: That would be great. I'd love to be able to attend that.

FM: Good, you'll be able to talk to a lot of people there.

RF: Absolutely. That's wonderful.

FM: Our first trip overseas...I went aboard the Montague in June of '98...'51, and she was dry docked in Vallejo, you know Vallejo, California? After dry dock we went for our trials and what have you and we went overseas and we left overseas in October of '51 and we left Port [Ynemie], California. That's CB based. You know what CB? It's a Navy battalion construction.

RF: That's right.

FM: We took them, we took a group of CBs to [?] the Philippines and from there we proceeded to Japan and from Japan to Korea. We were there until July of '52 and all that time was spent between Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong and we made many trips to Korea usually to take supplies. That was...the designation of the ship is AKA 98 which means attack cargo. We're the type of ship that carried the landing barges on board and we took troops and then we got the small boats and hit the beach, you know. That's the type of ship we are. We carry a lot of tanks and gasoline and trucks and jeeps and all this kind of thing. So, we made several trips to Korea in the spring and early summer of '52 and then we came back to the States in July. We were on the west coast back and forth. We went to Hawaii in some exercises. We did a lot of exercises here in the Marine base in Oceanside, California, Camp Pendleton, because at that time it was the height of the Korean War. We were, of course, practicing for all this stuff. Then we went back in February of '53 we went to dry dock in Burmington, Washington, spent about three months out there. Then we ~~went~~ back out and then we loaded a whole Army division, and I don't remember...not alone, but it was about fifty ships and we went and loaded them in Hawaii for a practice in case we had to go in them in Korea. We came back to the States and then in September of '53 we left to go back overseas again. As you know, the French and the Vietnamese were fighting.

RF: That's right.

FM: Okay, that war lasted seven years, but it ended in May of '54 and that's when they split the country. At that time there was some agreement in their truce that the French had up to one year to evacuate anybody that wanted to come from the north to the south. This is when the French government called on the US for help, and we got our orders there. We were in Japan and we got our orders to proceed to Vietnam. I remember we went to the Philippines, and we had to reconstruct the ship and do a lot of

things to carry...we're equipped to carry troops but not civilians, so we have to modify a lot of things, build special ladders or escalators, you know, step ladders, for these people who were civilians.

RF: Civilian staircases.

FM: That's right. Then we had to build a whole bunch of portable toilets because we carried two thousand at a time. So, we proceeded then from the Philippines to the Gulf of Tonkin which is right there close to Hanoi and we couldn't go up the river there. They used to bring the refugees up in French...we called them French LSTs. They were smaller ships. Then they'd pull alongside our ship and then we'd load them. We'd take two thousand and then we'd proceed on to Saigon. There were...I don't remember the number of ships that were there but thirty-three rings a bell, there was that many American ships. We'd pass each other up on the ocean and then Saigon is inland so we'd have to go up the river, the Saigon river, about 40 miles. Then we'd dock there in Saigon and then load the refugees. The Red Cross would take them over and then we'd proceed back to the Gulf again, the Gulf of Tonkin and load another load. We made three trips, our ship the Montague did. The evacuation continued but we'd been overseas a year and it was time to rotate, so we came back to the States and another ship relieved us, and I don't remember which one but it was another AKA.

RF: Okay, another AKA?

FM: One ship that I remember that was there was the USS Mayfield, the APA 33, because the Mayfield was our command ship. The rest was all APAs and AKAs. We'd go up there, load up, and come back. I think I read the other day, I think it was around a million refugees that were evacuated but I don't think it quite reached the million.

RF: No, the Navy was about 300,000 and there was about 800,000 total.

FM: All together?

RF: Yeah.

FM: Well we made these trips up and down. It was about a two and a half day trip from the Haiphong...about to the Haiphong River to Saigon, and we fed these people. Of course we had to feed them. The only thing we fed them was sardines and rice, I never forgot that. We used to cook. We set up special pots to cook the rice and then we gave them cans of sardines and I remember that some of those younger people,

they had a heck of a time opening those cans and we were told, of course, not to mingle with these people because you don't know what kind of sickness they carry. But, when you see a kid come up to you with a can of sardines, heck, we'll open it for them, and the crew was mingling with them as much as we could. You might have heard of Doctor Tom Dooley? If you haven't, Dr. Tom Dooley was our doctor aboard ship.

RF: That's right. Actually, I have some questions about Dr. Dooley.

FM: Okay, and in the course of these trips there were many people...many babies born and many people died. We had people die aboard ship. I well remember one boy, one five year old boy, that passed away and we had to make a box and had no choice but to throw him over the side. We had a little ceremony. There were a lot of Catholics. Every trip we made had at least four or five priests and a bunch of nuns with them. A lot of Catholic people were in this evacuation. We buried that little boy, we threw him over the side, and Dr. Dooley had asked me to be one of the pallbearers and I was. Dr. Dooley was a great Catholic and of course I was Catholic and we wanted to get all Catholics to help with that thing. The parents, I still see the faces and the screams of those parents, and we threw their little boy over the side. We had no choice. But, there were many babies born there aboard ship. These people would come with all their possessions. We had one one time brought a chicken in the back of his...hanging on his back in this makeshift deal that he had over his shoulder and had the chicken, and the chicken, we couldn't let the chicken stay. They'd come with everything they had, you know. It was really something.

RF: All of what you're saying now, those are all the types of questions that I have. I mean, the Montague played a pretty pivotal role in all of this.

FM: In 1955 the Montague was decommissioned and finally in later years, I think in '69, it was sold for scrap and is no longer in the Navy.

RF: Let me ask you, let's go back actually if you don't mind to the beginning. Some of these questions will repeat a little bit of what you just said, if you'll allow me that. How familiar were you with the situation in French Indochina when you found out personally that you were going over there to help?

FM: Well, we...actually, until we went overseas and got close to going to Vietnam we knew very little about Indochina. Dr. Dooley spoke French fluently and he

had been to Vietnam in early years and he knew the history of Vietnam and he held a number of sessions aboard ship between the time we left Japan and got to Vietnam, he gave us a lot of history on Indochina and we were pretty familiar with it when we got there.

RF: That's actually very unusual. Most of the people I've talked to had really no knowledge of what was going on at all.

FM: By the time we got to Indochina we had a good picture because maybe we were the only crew that was fortunate enough to have somebody ~~that~~ <sup>who</sup> was familiar with Indochina.

RF: I think so, I think that's the case.

FM: Dr. Dooley was, and we held many sessions aboard ship where the whole crew was assembled in what we called our rec hall, our recreation hall, and Dr. Dooley would tell us all about it. We knew a little bit then. Prior to that, I knew very little about Indochina. I want to tell you, I was born in Europe, you know. You probably detect kind of an accent [?] and I couldn't speak English when I came to this country. I was 16 and at 18 I joined the Navy, and somehow I never lost a little touch of the accent.

RF: Right, absolutely. Actually, what were your responsibilities aboard the ship?

FM: What was I what?

RF: What was your primary responsibility?

FM: The boatsman's mate was in charge of the deck department. We're on the deck department of the ship. In other words, our job was those boats that I was telling you that [?], we were in charge of maintaining those boats under times of war or destructive things. We'd put the boats in water, we'd operate all the cranes, and we'd do all the loading and unloading of the ~~car~~ <sup>boats</sup>, but that's what boatsman's mates do, as well as manning those boats and ~~loading~~ <sup>launching</sup> them on the beach. See, every... [?] boats. We carried 24 boats aboard, and every AKA and APA carries that number. Those little boats have a crew of three. We have boats called LCMs, and they were bigger boats, and then LCVPs were smaller boats. The LCM could carry...could take 30 soldiers or Marines. That could carry a tank, and then we'd hit the beach and that would go. The LCVPs could carry a jeep or I believe it was 18 troops and then we'd hit the beach and let them go. It was always a crew of three. One was an engineer which had to be from the engineering

division, and then the other two crew members were from the deck. It had to be a coxswain, and what we called a bow hook. He's the one that took care of tying the...if you had to tie the boat up, he's the one that ~~peddled~~ <sup>hoisted</sup> the lines. The coxswain stayed at the controls. The engineer was there to see to it that the engine ran properly and if there was anything wrong, well he was the guy to do the engine.

RF: Did you find as a boatsman's mate, did your area of responsibility change at all during the operation? Certainly as the refugees came aboard, did you have any difficulties?

FM: No, we had...yes, it changed in a way. Let me tell you why. When we went to Vietnam all the ships left their boats in the Philippines or some in Japan because we had no use for the boats. This thing was going to be loading and loading alongside of docks. Well, we loaded them alongside of a ship, the French LSMs would bring the troops and put alongside to load them. Then at loading we docked; we had no use for those boats. They were left, and one reason they were left is because those boats sat on a ship over the hatch, what we called the hatch is the hole where the cargo goes, and when the boats are there you can't get down there and we needed to have these hatches open because that's where we put these people. They rode in a cargo compartment because we had...no way we had the bunks for them.

RF: That was their ventilation as it were?

FM: That's right. We had to...that's why we had to build special ladders or stairways to put them there so that they could go up and down these stairways. When we load cargo we had the cranes and booms that load and unload this cargo. Individuals, you had man holes that you could go down but you couldn't do this with people and kids and what have you. We had to have the hatches open and we built these special ladders for them to go and they would go down there. Our duties were to...we had to stand guard. There were restricted areas for them. They couldn't go into the crew's compartment or into our mess halls or into the area where the office of the ships ~~were~~ <sup>was</sup> or none of those kinds of things. They were restricted to that particular area, so we had to stand...there was a 24 hour guard all the time.

RF: Were there any cases where that ever became a problem?

FM: Never, not on our ship. Not on our ship.

RF: I don't think I've ever heard of any case where it ever became a problem.

FM: To my knowledge there were none. I do have a recollection of reading a news release at that time that the USS Mayfield had a baby born aboard and they want to name him Mayfield USA. But, the guy that was in charge of that group, the Vietnamese, didn't want to do it until he <sup>had</sup> got permission from the President of the United States. So, this is a letter that circulated at all the ships. So, the executive officer says, "You can do it. You go ahead and name him." He says, "No, I got to have a letter from the president," which was President Eisenhower at the time. So, he decided to go up to the radio shack and makeshift a message coming from the president and he signed it Dwight D. Eisenhower and then the guy said, "Well, now we will name him Mayfield USA." I recall that part, but we had several babies born aboard ~~that~~ <sup>the</sup> ship but there was to my knowledge no inquiry how they could name the baby.

RF: Yeah, I guess aboard the Montrose there was a baby born.

FM: Okay, the Montrose was another ship that was there, and I think the Menard.

RF: Yeah, the Menard.

FM: The Menard was there and I think the Matthews.

RF: I'm not familiar with that one.

FM: How about the Mereck?

RF: Mereck? Matthews?

FM: Warrick?

RF: I know the Estes was there.

FM: The Estes?

RF: Yeah.

FM: Well the Estes was a communication ship.

RF: That's right.

FM: Yeah, I had two friends that served on that ship. That was AGC-12. I remember the number.

RF: That's right, that's right. So the Matthews?

FM: The Matthews was AKA-96. She either was there or she was the one that relieved us, I'm not sure, but the Matthews was there in that area.

RF: I can check on that.

FM: I took the Union, AKA-106 if I'm not mistaken and maybe the Wyandot.

RF: Wyandot? Okay.

FM: That's the AKA-92. This is 50 years ago.

RF: I'm actually very impressed.

FM: I'm trying to remember some of these things but you know, I try to keep up with the Navy, too.

RF: Well I've identified about 50 ships so far but that includes...

FM: Carriers?

RF: Everything, LSTs, LSDs, you name it.

FM: We had carriers, we had cruisers, because we had the support battle group because at that time you didn't know whether the Russians were going to be up there trying torpedoes or what. So, we had a good support group there.

RF: Oh absolutely. You mentioned a little bit about the preparations with the ladders and the [?] and things. If you can, could you give me a little more detail about those types because I think the Montague, again, was one of the first ships to...

FM: We were one of the first ships there, right.

RF: But to actually make preparations in advance of arriving.

FM: All I can remember is that when the word came that we had to proceed to this evacuation, and of course we were notified by the commanding officer that we were going to Vietnam and these were the things that we had to do, we didn't have the supplies to build these special ladders and things that we had to do. In other words, we had to build a stairway, staircases, like you would have in a...well, like you have in a department store; not escalators, but just wide ladders because getting down to the holes for the cargo holes was probably 15 feet. So, we had to build them real wide so that's why we went to the Philippines, get the supplies there. Everything was built aboard ship; you've got carpenters, we got a little bit of everything, and then these ladders were pretty heavy so then we hoisted them. This was our department's responsibility to hoist them with the [?] and set them in there. The toilets were built, I'll tell you what the toilets looked like. It was like a water trough, and we anchored them...we welded them to the decks of the ship and then we pumped salt water to run all the time in these troughs, and

these people would...we put canvases around them to make a little privacy but it was not a good thing. But, what else could you do?

RF: Were these on the fantail?

FM: No, we had them several places on the deck, not on the fantail. In fact, we had them in both sides of the [?] side of the ship, four [?] super structure.

RF: Actually, I've heard...I think it was on the Montrose where I was talking to someone and they did the same thing where they took the 50 gallon drums, cut them in half, and then they put them on the fantail.

FM: No, we didn't have any on the fantail. On our ship we didn't.

RF: But yours were on the port side?

FM: On the port side, the port side for sure and I'm not sure in the [?] but I think we had them on both sides, but I know the port side for sure.

RF: Definitely on the port side?

FM: Port side is the left side.

RF: One of the things that I was told, too, is that there was a hard time translating what the use of these toilet facilities were for.

FM: One thing is a good many...we didn't seem to have any problems because most of the leaders of each group...each group had some kind of leaders. It might be a priest, but they spoke French as well as Vietnamese.

RF: And you had Tom Dooley to translate.

FM: Oh, we had Tom Dooley and then we had a number of crew members that were of French decent. I remember one guy from Louisiana, his parents...he spoke French as well as he did English so he was always speaking to these people, too. They'd get in the PA system and tell them what to do. They would speak to their leaders in French and then the leaders would get on the PA system and translate for them in Vietnamese. As far as the language barrier, well, maybe individual cases. I recall an incident when I was standing guard one night and the guy came to me all excited. He wanted to get through and our orders were not to let him through but the guy was so excited talking to me in Vietnamese which I didn't understand, so I told him, "Wait here," and I went and got Dr. Dooley. Dr. Dooley was in sick bay at the time. What it was, his wife was about to have a baby! I didn't know it so Dr. Dooley came out and

they took the wife in and delivered the baby there in sick bay. This was isolated cases because these people were warned not to mingle with the crew, not to bother the crew. We never had any problems aboard our ship.

RF: No, I think there weren't really any problems overall.

FM: No.

RF: Except cases where I guess an anxious father to be would want some help?

FM: Oh yeah.

RF: That seems awfully reasonable to me.

FM: Yeah, sure.

RF: Now when you arrived in Haiphong, did you personally ever get to go ashore?

FM: No, not in Haiphong.

RF: Not in Haiphong?

FM: No.

RF: Okay, because I know that Dr. Dooley spent quite a bit of time there.

FM: I don't know if Dr. Dooley did or not, I really couldn't answer. I do recall that Dr. Dooley was always at the top of the gang way talking to these people. You know, we have to...we sprayed them with DDT dust. In fact, the other day a friend of mine gave me a book for Christmas called, "The Navy..." something, I've got it somewhere in here because I should have had it out.

RF: Is that the Navy history?

FM: It's got the history of the whole Navy.

RF: Right, yeah, I'm familiar with that.

FM: You're familiar with that?

RF: Yeah.

FM: Well if it's the same book look on page 156 of that book has a picture of the Montague loading refugees aboard. I was [?] thinking when I saw that, I let out a scream! I said, "Here I am!" My wife said, "Jeez!" and we all looked at it and after I read the caption it says, "USS Montague," but I recognized...I said, "This is us!" I recognized the picture before I read the caption. I've got a call coming in. Don't worry, they'll call back.

RF: Actually we have a few pictures of the Montague here.

FM: Oh you do?

RF: Yeah, and I'm always looking for more for the book, too.

FM: Okay, well I could give you a picture of the Montague itself if you like.

RF: What I'm able to do, I've got a scanner and then a CD burner. I can scan photos and then return them to you.

FM: I see, okay.

RF: Or anyone else that served on the Montague. I'll bring that to the reunion.

FM: I'll keep you informed and we'll look forward to seeing you then in September.

RF: Oh yeah, absolutely. Do you still have more time to talk?

FM: Oh sure! I'm a farmer, and it's raining today and I can't do much.

RF: That's kind of fortunate for me. [laughs]. Now you mention that the refugees boarded through the French LCMs?

FM: The same thing. They boarded through the same gang plank that we did. Yeah, out in the middle of the ocean you had no choice. We were out in a bay.

RF: Right, right out...

FM: And that bay has a name for it but I don't recall the name of that bay.

RF: I think it's Haiphong Harbor.

FM: It could be Haiphong Harbor, yeah.

RF: I believe so, yeah. Now if you can, again, give me an idea about the appearance and the health and the welfare and emotions of the refugees, the first group.

FM: Well there was a Red Cross personnel receiving them. Once we unloaded them there was all kinds of people there with busses and with different things to take them. That was the last...we never saw them again once we put them ashore.

RF: But when they actually arrived on the ship, you mentioned the gentleman that had the chicken and that really was all he had. Was that sort of...was that the general trend of those people?

FM: Well some of them would bring a little bag of clothes on their back, hanging on a piece of wood, a stick that they carried over their shoulder. Some would bring some food, different things like that, but very minimal. There's nobody that brought a suitcase

to my knowledge. I can't remember ~~of~~ ever seeing anybody with a suitcase. They came with what they had on and very little more.

RF: Right, and that was...they were truly refugees.

FM: That's right, they were refugees.

RF: How about their...I guess maybe your situation was different because you had a good group of people who could communicate, but did you get a sense in your own personal mind of the emotional state of fear or maybe anxiety?

FM: Of course, yeah. I think that those people were very suspicious of us in most cases. They didn't know who we were, they didn't know what we were up to, they'd just been out of a war, they were going someplace they didn't know where they were going. I felt sorry for those people; we all did. ~~You~~<sup>you</sup>ll see some of them crying, ~~you~~<sup>you</sup>ll see them hugging their children, it was very emotional.

RF: One of the things that I've read, in Dr. Dooley's book Deliver Us From Evil as well as other people confirm that the Viet Minh, the communist, sent a lot of propaganda out.

FM: Right, but see, Dr. Dooley left the Navy and then went to Laos and he wrote five or six books.

RF: That's right. Deliver Us From Evil was the one on [?].

FM: Deliver Us From Evil, The Night They Burnt the Mountain, something else. I know I've read them all, but I can't remember them now.

RF: The Edge of Tomorrow was the third one. Those are really the three big books he wrote. Yeah, those are all very interesting.

FM: Yeah, they are. You know, Dr. Dooley left the ship in '54 when we went back to Japan. He got off in Japan and then I don't know how much longer he stayed in the Navy, I guess until his enlistment expired, but he didn't come back to the States ~~because~~<sup>when we</sup> we came back in September of '54. We had been overseas a year, I believe a year, and that's why we only made...when we got to Vietnam it was like in July of '54 and all I could recall is making three trips back and forth and it was time for us to come home, but it was 2,000 at a time that we used to bring so we evacuated 6,000 people anyhow; I mean, our ship.

RF: Did you find that the...after that first trip, that the refugees maybe had a little more understanding of what was going on, or pretty much all three trips were the same?

FM: Oh, I think it was pretty much the same all the way. It was always new people and I think once you got a group of refugees to Saigon they had no communication with the people left back. So, each time I think they all felt the same way; they were fearful. One thing I do recall though at that time, when we went to Vietnam we did have a Catholic priest aboard. His name was Father Fitzpatrick if I'm not mistaken and I think he was from St. Louis. He communicated a great deal with the other priests, and most of how they communicated was in Latin, because at that time everything was Latin in the Catholic church and worldwide today, I don't know how familiar you are, but we say masses in the old language. But in fact...so the communication...another thing that I recall, and I saw this happen, one priest on one of the trips had all the money of all the refugees and he wanted to put her in a safe place, and he was talking to Dr. Dooley about it and Dr. Dooley went to the priest to make him feel that they were both priests, you know, that they would be comfortable, and they took the money and put it in the ship's safe until they got to Saigon. Even the priest was scared that he would lose it, but he was also scared to turn it over to anybody. But, with the priest's assurance he felt comfortable and I saw all this happen because I happened to be there at that time.

RF: How were you able to ease some of these fears? I mean, certainly in talking and then I guess in just experiences...

FM: The first thing I remember is looking up to heaven and saying, "Thank God that I'm an American," and then the other one is, "Thank God that we are able to help those less fortunate than we are." It was kind of emotional. I still get that way when I look back and see how these people lived and how fortunate we are.

RF: I've been to Vietnam twice in '99 and one of the things I've always said when I came back ~~is that~~ every young person should go to a country like that and see how fortunate they are.

FM: That's right. Of course I knew some by experience because I was born in Portugal in the [Azor Islands]. Are you familiar with the [Azor] Islands?

RF: Oh yes sir.

FM: That's where I was born, and while we had means of living it was nothing like here, but it was no misery either, you know what I mean? Life was different, but we didn't have the things that we have in this blessed land. Then going back over there and seeing the poverty and how those people lived and giving up everything they had to go somewhere that they didn't know they were going. It's something else.

RF: Right, it's amazing.

FM: You can't help but get emotional about it and say, "Thank God," for the opportunity to be in America.

RF: Absolutely, and that's one of the reasons I'm working on this book is just because no one really knows about this operation.

FM: That's right. It's kind of a forgotten thing, yeah. Have you been able to get in touch with anybody else that was there?

RF: No sir, actually you're the only one on your ship.

FM: But you got in touch with somebody from other ships?

RF: Oh yeah, absolutely. I probably have had contact with about 70 or so participants.

FM: I was amazed when I got this letter. I said, "Well, I'm going to call."

RF: Well actually there's a few reunions going on. The Bunston Hall I'm going to...

FM: Oh I know that ship, that was an LSD.

RF: LSD, right.

FM: I remember that ship.

RF: And the Menard.

FM: Menard was an APA.

RF: APA-201, right. I'm going to their reunion, and the Telfar, the APA-[2]

FM: I remember that one, too.

RF: Then yours, I really look forward to going to Irving as well because I think that'll just be fantastic.

FM: Okay, well real good. I will keep you informed of everything, and we can have a long visit there and you can have the opportunity to talk to other people who were there.

RF: Anyone who's willing to talk to me I will talk to. If someone's not willing to, that's okay.

FM: I don't think that there's anybody who won't be willing to. I don't see any reason why not.

RF: Well, you never know. I want to go back a second. The gentleman when you were standing guard who was trying to [?], how did you actually communicate? You said you asked him to wait.

FM: Well the guy was so desperate that I finally told him, "Wait here." I mean, I motioned him to stay there until I got somebody else. I went to sick bay because I knew Dr. Dooley was in sick bay, and the place where I was standing guard was the entrance into the super structure of the ship which you have to go through there to get to sick bay, so I went and got Dr. Dooley and he <sup>came out of</sup> went up and talked to him and then he says, "Well, his wife's about to have a baby," so they took off together, Dr. Dooley. They brought her into sick bay, they put her in the stretcher, the corpsmen did, and brought her into sick bay and delivered <sup>the</sup> a baby. But, I have no way of understanding what he was saying.

RF: It was sort of using hand signals?

FM: Hand signals, that's all.

RF: The international language.

FM: That's right.

RF: Now the refugees, they were disembarked in Saigon?

FM: Saigon, right.

RF: Did you have a chance to have any shore leave in Saigon?

FM: No, sir. We just let them out and it was a matter of picking up some supplies and [?] and take off again. The only thing I went ashore in Saigon, I had shore patrol there one night but I never had the opportunity to really get downtown Saigon.

RF: Oh really?

FM: I had shore patrol and where I was assigned to that night was not too far from the ship, so I never got to see the city of Saigon.

RF: That's interesting.

FM: We used to stop in the trip a place that we stopped kind of halfway between Haiphong and Saigon was called Tourane at the time.

RF: Yeah, Tourane.

FM: It's now called Danang?

RF: Danang, that's correct.

FM: I know we refueled there one time and we picked up mail there. We always stopped there on every trip to pick up mail.

RF: Now I know the Consellation was there.

FM: Oh, the hospital ship?

RF: The hospital ship.

FM: Could be. I don't ~~remember~~ remember that one.

RF: They were there in September of '54 and a lot of them remember Dr. Dooley and him coming aboard to get medicine and supplies.

FM: See, September '54 is when we left there, so Dr. Dooley might have already been on his own, out of the Navy or something else.

RF: At that point, yeah. Do you remember any times where there was a threat of the Viet Minh in thwarting the operation, threatening the...

FM: I remember there being some talk about it that we had to be on the lookout, but any eminent threats, I did not.

RF: How did the ship prepare for possible threats?

FM: I think we relied a great deal on the battle group that was out...you know, there were carriers, destroyers, cruisers, all within sight of us, so we were always seeing the ships that would be out there to protect. We would have very little chance because we have guns, but all we had was we had one five inch gun on our ship, and all AKAs had that, and one five inch gun, ~~that's~~ four doubles, .40 millimeters, and then a lot of .20 millimeters scattered all over the ship. But, if we were to get attacked, gosh, by ourselves we'd have very little chance.

RF: I guess the advantage is the Viet Minh didn't really have a Navy.

FM: No, they don't. No, they did not.

RF: Was there any worry about passengers who might have been infiltrators?

FM: Well, yes, yes. We always wondered. We talked about these things. That's why we had to stand guard over these people; how many of these are communists? We didn't know that. I remember one time ~~two~~...I don't know if it was on purpose, or what

happened, but we thought that one guy tried to set a fire in the hole, we called them the hole, the cargo hole. But, whether he was trying to set a fire or trying to build a fire to do some cooking we never found out what it was, but we had to put the fire out.

RF: They had that same problem on the Estes, ~~where they~~ <sup>Someone</sup> tried to build a fire and all the smoke went through.

FM: Well, this is what...I recall that incident.

RF: They [<sup>Summed</sup>summed] general quarters, and it just turned out...

FM: I don't think we [<sup>Summed</sup>summed] the general quarters, but I don't remember. I don't think we did.

RF: The Estes did. It just turned out it was just someone trying. <sup>for a while</sup>

FM: Did the Estes evacuate refugees?

RF: No, they served as a command ship.

FM: Yeah, because they were a communications ship. They wouldn't have the facilities to hold them.

RF: Yeah, I guess Admiral [Savan] was on in the task force...

FM: Oh, could be, yeah, on the Estes.

RF: Well, I know the general attitude of the crew I think would you characterize that as...

FM: Well, I would say that on our ship I can't say that anybody was unhappy with what we were doing. They knew we had a job to do, and they were glad to do it. I can't remember any resentment.

RF: A lot of people I've talked to have said <sup>it's</sup> ~~it's~~ just a job.

FM: That's the way we felt.

RF: Do you think there was anything even more to that?

FM: Well, I think that kind of in a way we felt that we were doing some good. I did. I certainly felt that we're taking these people from slavery to freedom, although it didn't last, but I thought we were doing one heck of a good job. I mean, doing one heck of an outstanding humanitarian thing there.

RF: Actually, I think that leads right into the next question I had was really your own personal feelings and emotions which I think you've articulated pretty well about the operation and your participation. I mean, its...

FM: The best way that I can describe them. I'll look for that history of the ship and then make a copy and mail it to you.

RF: That would be wonderful.

FM: Let me tell you again, go back to the ship again a little bit. In 1950 the Montague was in the Mediterranean on a cruise. They left to go for a six month cruise and come back and while they were in the Med the Korean War broke out and they were ordered from the Mediterranean to Korea, but I was not on that trip. When they made the invasion in Pusan in 19...I think it was September 15<sup>th</sup> of 1950, the Montague was part of that. But, I was not on the ship at that time.

RF: You were...

FM: Well, I didn't go in the Navy until '51.

RF: Right, '51, June of '51.

FM: So, they were there and then in 19...I think it was in December of '50 when the Chinese pushed our troops back?

RF: Right, Thanksgiving.

FM: They had to evacuate them in [Hang Nam]. The Montague was part of that, too. As a matter of fact, we have an Army colonel that comes to our reunion every year, at that time he was a captain, but he was one of the last guys to leave [Hang Nam] because they had to blow up an ammunition depot they had there. He jumped in the water and we picked him up, one of our boats picked him up and brought him aboard ship on Christmas day of 1950 and he was so grateful for that that when he found out about the reunions he wanted to come, and he comes every year.

RF: Boy, that's a very different way to spend Christmas.

FM: The other good thing about that is that the guy that picked him up comes to the reunions, too.

RF: That's wonderful.

FM: Yeah, it's really a good relationship. We have wonderful reunions.

RF: Let me ask you a question that I already know the answer, but I've asked everyone the same question, and it is basically that if you could turn back the clock and were given a chance to do it all over again, would you?

FM: No question in my mind that I would.

RF: Yeah, it seems...

FM: Yes, sir, I would.

RF: Did you find after the Montague left and your role in Passage to Freedom was over, did you have a heightened sense of awareness of South Vietnam in the 1950s and what was going on? Did you follow the politics at all?

FM: Yes, I did. I follow these things and I followed the politics of Vietnam and I thought there was a lot of things done wrong but I was saddened by the attitude of the people here at home. I was in full support of our servicemen. I thought we should have moved ~~then~~<sup>there</sup> there with a force that we were not here to get defeated. This was not America; we don't lose. We come in there and we win. I go back to the philosophy of Patton and Macarthur; when you go, you fight, and you fight with everything you have.

RF: If you're going to do it, you need to do it right.

FM: That's right, and if it wasn't the politics, we could have won that war, and we could have won it in a few days. Everybody was scared that Russia would jump in, so if they did we were prepared to go after them. I never will forget that Patton ~~says~~<sup>said</sup>, "We got to fight them now because the day's coming when we're going to have to fight them." One of my heroes of the Army is John Patton, and of course this is before Vietnam, I think President Truman, one of the greatest presidents we had, I think that was a big mistake when he fired John Macarthur. I totally disagreed with that, but he was the Commander in Chief, although General Macarthur should have been a little more respectful to Commander in Chief.

RF: I guess they both had some...

FM: Yeah, they both had some...

RF: ...personality issues, we shall say.

FM: That's right, that's right! So you know, I ~~wish~~<sup>wish</sup>...I was already in the Navy when Macarthur got fired, so I remember all of these things and then I remember the politics of the Johnson administration, and General Westmoreland, and there were accusations of one lying to the other. I don't know what the heck was going on, but they were all scared to escalate the war when they should have. You know, if we'd have mined that Haiphong Harbor right off the bat where they couldn't get supplies we would have stopped that thing in no time.

RF: Well that's...you know, a lot of participants in '54 when they were in Henrietta Pass, that's what the French called it, into Haiphong, everyone has said that; all you need to do is mine it or even sink a ship in there and you would have stopped it.

FM: But they didn't have the guts to do it, and then of course you remember how...I don't know how old of a man you are, but if you were around then you will remember the politics of those days. It was marching and ~~leading~~ burning. It was terrible. *leading*

RF: I actually...I was born in 1967.

FM: Oh, you're a young man.

RF: I'm a young guy, but this is what I study.

FM: I was 69 yesterday.

RF: Oh really? Well happy birthday.

FM: Thank you. I was 19 when I went in.

RF: 19? Yeah, just a couple years ago.

FM: I went to Korea this year...not this year, in 2000, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Korean War, and I had a chance to go to the US Navy Memorial. The US Navy Memorial puts on a lot of trips and I got a flier on that and by God I told my wife, "We're going to go!"

RF: That's fantastic! How was it?

FM: Oh, I'll tell you, it's just totally unbelievable. I was in Enchon in 1952 ~~and~~ *but* there was nothing left of that city; even the streets weren't paved. It was a mess. I saw kids eating off of the garbage can which tore my heart apart, and I was in Pusan as well but this trip didn't take us to Pusan. But, when I got to Enchon I could not believe how that city's been rebuilt and what a ~~polished~~ *polished* area it is today.

RF: It's amazing. *polished area*

FM: It's amazing.

RF: Then how big Seoul is.

FM: Of course we were interviewed by a lot of people by every newspaper in the world I guess, especially those who were there, and I made the statement, "Those Americans who lost their lives here, they didn't die in vain because look what they did."

Look at the freedom that we have over here. If it hadn't been for us, South Korea would be no different than North Korea is today."

RF: Right, with all the troubles and problems and troubles they're having in the North.

FM: The city of Seoul is totally unbelievable, of course I was never in Seoul during the war, I never got that far because Seoul is inland, but what a city!

RF: I've never been in Seoul but I flew into Seoul when I went to Vietnam and just looking...

FM: Oh, you went to Vietnam, just on a trip?

RF: Yeah, part for the university, I taught some courses and did some things. Yeah, but it's quite a spectacle.

FM: Well I guess I could tell you more but that's...all this is what I'm thinking and what I recall.

RF: Well the last question I had was really if there's any memories or stories or history that you would want to include that I've forgotten or I have not addressed.

FM: Right now I can't think of anything else. But if I do come up with something I'll call you, and if not at the time of the reunion when you're there, between the group of us reminiscing together, we'll come up with ideas that I'm not aware of right now, that I can't remember now.

RF: I think that'll be one of the great advantages. Also, between now and then I'll be able to go to Washington D.C., to the Navy Yard and to the archives.

FM: Are you familiar with the Navy Memorial?

RF: Absolutely.

FM: You go in then and boy, there's history there that you can't believe. In fact, the picture of our ship is there recorded there at the Navy memorial as well as my picture when I was a young man.

RF: Oh, is that right?

FM: There at the Memorial, uh-huh.

RF: I'll look for that. Yeah, the National Archives...

FM: My name, if you want to look for it, you'll have to print...my name is Fernando, Fernando is my first name. Everybody knows me as Fred, but the legal name is Fernando and that's the name that's in there, Fernando C. Machado.

RF: Okay, I'll do that, too.

FM: It's there. In fact, you can bring it to your computer right there in your office by dialing [www.lonesailor.org](http://www.lonesailor.org) . That's the US Memorial address and then they give you a number of things to research. You research Navy Log and then it'll tell you how to...you'll know how to do it.

RF: That's great.

FM: Thank you.

RF: I look forward to hearing more about this reunion. Please let me know.

FM: As soon as we get all the information I'll mail it to you and I'll mail you what we have but you won't worry about the prices because you're going to be my guest at the banquet.

RF: Sir, the university will pay for it all.

FM: Oh, is that right?

RF: Yeah, they'll take care of all that. It's an honor for me to be able to be there and have a chance to talk to you guys.

FM: Alright, well thank you very much.

RF: Okay, I look forward to all that.

FM: Nice talking to you.

RF: I'll talk to you soon.

FM: Bye.

RF: Bye-bye. [ends interview]