

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL CSONTOS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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SOUTH BOUND BROOK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Molly Graham: This is an oral history interview with Daniel Csonotos. This is our second session. Today is April 9, 2016, and we are in South Bound Brook, New Jersey. The interviewer is Molly Graham, and I am joined by his daughter, Debbie, and his grandson, Ron.

[TAPE PAUSED]

MG: Well, we talked very generally last time about your time in the Pacific, and I thought we would just go back in time a little bit and recover some of those things. I found a command chronology online, and I can ask you some more specific questions. Do you want to start with when you enlisted?

Daniel Csonotos: I had a hard time with my mother to let me enlist. Remember that. Did I tell you that?

MG: Yes, she had to sign for you.

DC: Yes, after two weeks, I didn't talk to her, she did sign finally. So, I went down to New Brunswick, got the ticket, went into New York on Broad Street. That's where we were sworn in. They told us to be back in the evening to ship out, got back there in the evening and got on the train. We didn't know where we were going until we got there, Newport, Rhode Island. That was my boots [boot camp]. We were there for six weeks, and you went through everything. Five o'clock in the morning, you go swimming in the pool and go outside and do some marching and stuff like that and then go in for breakfast.

Debbie Kwiatkowski: All before breakfast.

DC: You were hungry again by that time.

DK: I'm sure.

DC: Then, we went through all the getting in shape and all that stuff there, swimming, see if you can pass the test and swimming from one end of the pool to the other [end], a big pool. I passed that. After six weeks, we had a seven-day leave, and I came home for seven days. Then, from there, I went back up to Boston to wait for my ship because they were building a new ship in Bath, Maine.

MG: Tell me a little bit more about the training and what that entailed. Was it a big adjustment?

DC: What? From the boot camp?

MG: Yes.

DC: No, it was just actually waiting around. We were just waiting around in what they call the Fargo Building; it was a hotel the Navy took over.

Ron Kwiatkowski: That was after your training, wasn't it, Grandpa?

DC: South Boston.

RK: That was after your training, wasn't it?

DC: That was after boots, yes, after boots.

RK: What was your training like?

DC: Where, at the boots?

RK: At boot camp, yes.

DC: Oh, everything, marching, if you were able to be sharp in any kind of sports, nine times out of ten, they'd leave you there and play sports, but I didn't. I just went through whatever you had to do. [laughter] I did a lot of marching, a lot of swimming and calisthenics and all that stuff.

MG: Tell me a little bit about the other men that were at boot camp.

DC: What about the other men?

MG: Where were they from, and what were they like?

DC: They were all young, just like me. Most of them were from the East Coast, New York, and [New] Jersey and Pennsylvania. I got to know them little by little. Once we got in the Fargo Building, we were more closely associated because we waited about, I don't know, a couple of weeks before the ship came down from Bath, Maine. That's a brand new ship. That was it right there [pointing to a photograph of the destroyer USS *Braine*].

MG: Who was Braine?

DC: [What]?

MG: Who was Braine?

RK: He was a Civil War general. [Editor's Note: Admiral Daniel L. Braine lived from 1829 to 1898. He commanded the USS *Monticello* during the Civil War.]

DC: It's in that big book there. I'm having a hard time finding it. It goes way back, and that's when they named these destroyers for rear admirals, admirals, from way back. You never even heard of them unless you read about them. [laughter]

MG: Tell me about how you spent those seven days when you were back home in New Jersey.

DC: At home? I did a lot of work for Mom. She had me do this, do that, because my brother was married already. So, I did a lot of that and going around with the guys a little bit, and I was still too young to drink, but I got places where I could drink. [laughter] They didn't bother you. As long as you had the uniform on, it was all right.

I still was too young to, even when I was in Pearl Harbor at the time, we stopped there, every joint there, they had a shore patrol at the door. I went in this one place over there, and the shore patrol keeps looking at me, keeps looking at me. I said, "I know I look young." I looked at him. I said, "I better get out of here." [laughter] Of course, they'd take you in; they'd get the damn Marines to come over there and they raise hell with you a little bit and get you out of there. I went back to the ship. We didn't stay much long in there anyhow, because our skipper volunteered for escort duty of carriers there for the raid on Wake Island. Then, we escorted them there.

As a matter of fact, on the way back, we had to fuel at sea because it was a long trip. The destroyer could only hold so much fuel. They had a tanker out there. The tanker always went with you, so you fueled at sea while you're going and that's a tricky situation. The first thing they do is shoot the line over there, and pow. You duck your head; you don't know if that's going up or down. Then, they get that, and then they pull the main rope and they pull the hose over and they hook in the hose. Both ships got to be even going along. Otherwise, it'll break off, and if it breaks off, it's going to break off at the ship and then you have oil all over the place.

DK: Wow.

DC: They did a good job. I didn't have to do that, even though I was only a seaman.

MG: When you got to Boston, how did you pass the time waiting for the ship?

DC: There were a lot of good times there. [laughter] You had the Boston Commons there. You've heard of the Boston Commons. We used to go there all the time. We walked. Well, we did have a trolley that went from where we were stationed; it cost you a nickel or something. The guy says, "Get on, go ahead," and they take you right in town. We could walk at all times. As a matter of fact, on the way back, we always walked.

RK: Well, you had a job. Remember, you would help with the parking when you were there.

DC: You had duty there. Of course, we had prisoners in the back.

RK: You had what kind of prisoners? German prisoners?

DC: No, no, American, American, the ones that were bad.

RK: Oh, actual prisoners.

DC: They were fenced in in the back of Fargo Building. The sidewalk was along the fence, and that's where we had shore patrol. I had duty there one day, and that's all.

RK: You had a gun with no ammo in it, right?

DC: No.

RK: It was empty.

DC: Big shots pulled up there, and they were talking about parking. I said, "You can't park here, Sir." He said, "Why not?" "Because we have prisoners over there." Finally, I talked him into it. He gave me a dirty look, and they pulled out of there. He had the braids on.

RK: He was a commanding officer.

DC: Yes, and you had me with a rifle with nothing in it. [laughter]

RK: Two weeks into the Navy.

DK: At age seventeen.

DC: He probably said, "Look at this young brat." [laughter] He had the car loaded. He had a couple of women in there with him, too, two officers in the front and a couple women in the back.

DK: Oh, really?

DC: That was the Fargo Building. It wasn't bad, the Fargo Building. You ate good there and everything, and when the ship came in, that was it. I went onboard.

MG: Tell me about getting familiar with the ship and going aboard for the first time.

DC: First, they show you where you're sleeping and all that, and you get rid of all your clothing and all that stuff and put them in your lockers. They've got them underneath your sack. We had them three high. I had the top stack, back at the stern. I had the high one. That wasn't bad. As a matter of fact, heat rises, so it was warm up there. Actually, you get out to the Pacific, you didn't want any heat. That's the time we started sleeping underneath the torpedo tubes and alongside the radio shack, life jacket for a pillow, and that's it, sleeping on steel. [laughter]

MG: I read that the ship went up first to Portland, Maine, in Casco Bay.

DC: Yes, yes, we went up there with a battleship for practice, gunnery practice, up there. We never got to shore there. We were only there for a day and came back. I forget the battleship we were with, and they had practice too, same thing. They had a drone pulling the thing along, a

drone plane, and that was your target to shoot at that with the 20mm and 40mm. Sometimes, the five-inch too would be shooting at them. Boy, I'd be scared in that damn plane.

RK: Yes.

DC: It's long enough. It had a long enough line.

RK: Still, it would be a dangerous job if you're towing that sucker.

DC: Yes.

RK: I didn't know you had target practice, that you went up there.

DC: Yes, Casco Bay. We never got to shore though. Nobody got ashore. Nobody was allowed. [We were] always on the go, and then we turned around and come back to Boston. I don't know where the damn battleship went to. I don't know. Maybe he went to Europe; I don't know. We went back to Boston. After, we put it in commission.

MG: From there, you went to Bermuda.

DC: Yes.

MG: How was everybody faring on the sea? Were people getting sea sick?

DC: I felt woozy. I was coming back from a liberty there. The skipper was on the sidewalk, so I'm walking back with him. I said, "Skipper, we're going to be out to sea quite a lot, aren't we, Sir?" He said, "Oh, yes." I said, "Well, I'm not going to get sick no more." I never did.

DK: It's all in your mind.

MG: Yes.

DC: It was smooth going to Bermuda, no storms. The only time it was rough when [the ship] was going to the Pacific, going down past Cape Hatteras. That's when we hit that hurricane. Here I am, seventeen years old, I didn't even see the Japs. I'm going to die right here in the water. [laughter] That was something. It's amazing. You didn't see the cruiser we were escorting.

DK: Wow.

DC: They were up in the sky, and then we were down in the gulley, just vice versa. That's the way the water went. I've never seen water like that, never. It's just like standing on top of that roof over there and down there, it was the sea, and then all of a sudden, you're up there. In the meantime, the whole bow goes, water all over the whole ship, covering the whole ship. They said, "If you can get up to the galley to get something to eat, go ahead." I tried it. I got out of

this back over here, the second bow--there's a ladder under there. I opened the door when the ship is up, when it was down in the bow, open it up quick, go up, close the door, and go up to the next deck. By that time, the fantail would be down, and the water would be all over the fantail. If you were on the fantail, you were washing over board.

DK: Oh, scary.

DC: That was a hurricane. Just like that, the cruise ship there, same type, same type. I asked Apple Jack down there, "Remember that hurricane in '43?" He didn't remember it.

DK: Well, he probably wasn't born. He wasn't born yet. He's younger than I am.

DC: Yes?

DK: If it was in '43, yes.

RK: Yes, he's a young guy.

DC: Oh.

RK: You're better off asking his parents.

DC: Oh, that's right. I didn't think of that.

DK: Yes, he's younger than I am.

DC: I didn't think of that.

DK: That's somebody we know down in North Carolina.

DC: Oh, okay, that's right. [laughter]

DK: Yes.

RK: Did you guys take some damage?

DC: He was still in school then probably.

DK: Yes.

RK: I don't think he was born yet.

DK: No, he wasn't born yet.

DC: He wasn't born yet.

DK: No.

RK: He's younger than ...

DK: He's younger than I am.

DC: Oh, yes?

RK: Yes.

DK: A lot younger, probably younger.

DC: Oh, well, I asked the wrong guy then.

DK: Yes, yes. He's younger.

DC: Okay, where are we at now? Are we on our way to Panama and going through the canal?

MG: Not yet. When you left Boston Harbor, it was May of 1943.

DC: Yes, sometime around there, yes.

MG: You were in Bermuda for two weeks. Can you tell me about that?

DC: No, no, just one day.

MG: Oh, yes?

DC: Yes.

MG: What about outside of Bermuda?

DC: That's where we anchored. We anchored out. Actually, we didn't anchor; we kept going the whole time because we couldn't go in. They wouldn't let us in Bermuda. They didn't want any armored ships in the city. I don't blame them, a little island like that.

MG: You just stayed in the area for one day.

DC: Yes, just one day. Actually, the same day, we left in the afternoon, late in the afternoon, back to Boston. Actually, it was only a shakedown to see if everything's working right, that's all.

MG: Were you doing more training?

DC: In Boston?

MG: No, near Bermuda.

DC: No, no training at all. We didn't even get in.

MG: I read that someone fired a dummy torpedo into a sister ship near Bermuda.

DC: In Bermuda, yes? It could've been a sub, I don't know.

MG: Then, I read that the ship then came back to Casco Bay another time.

DC: Oh, that was before Bermuda, yes.

MG: Okay.

DC: No, no, that was after.

RK: Was that after Bermuda?

DC: Yes, that was after.

RK: I could imagine ...

DC: Bermuda shakedown and then Casco after that, yes. That's where we came back from Boston from Bermuda, check the ship out. Then, we went up to Casco Bay, yes.

MG: I read that someone thought they spotted a German submarine, but it turned out to be a merchantman.

DC: We had a fake contact, [thought] we had a sub out there. They were testing us out, seeing if we were going to the right battle stations.

RK: They did that as a part of a training exercise.

DC: Not too far from Boston.

RK: They all went to battle stations.

DC: Because we had subs all along the East Coast, German subs, yes.

RK: Didn't you say you knew it was just a drill though?

DC: Oh, yes.

RK: You all knew it. They didn't tell you it was a drill, but you all knew it was a drill.

DC: Yes, we could tell it was, which is good, it's good. Everybody knew it. If you go forward and you lived aft, you go straight on the right hand side, starboard side, and just the opposite on the other side, on the way back down, so you wouldn't bump into each other. Of course, a lot of times, you're just able to grab your pants and get to your battle stations and put them on where you're at. I was lucky. At the beginning, I was on that five-inch mount over there. I was close by.

RK: That was your first job, right?

DC: Once I come out of that door, I got in that five-inch mount, that last one down. Then, after I got into radar, I had a further walk. I had to walk forward.

MG: I want to hear more about the hurricane and how everyone else did. They must have been getting sick.

DC: It was rough. Everybody stayed inside. I took a chance going up there, trying to go down for a sandwich or something. We had one kid they had to guard. He wanted to jump overboard. Oh, he was so sick.

DK: Wow.

DC: He got transferred in Trinidad, some shore duty over there. He didn't want to stay aboard ship.

DK: Probably scared.

DC: I could've got transferred there, but I went ashore there one time, forget it. What a mess that place is, hot.

MG: The hurricane was in August of 1943. Does that sound about right?

DC: Yes.

RK: That's what I was trying to remember.

DC: I don't know.

RK: Is there anything on the notes in there when he left Boston for the final time? I thought we touched on it briefly.

MG: Set sail for Bermuda and came back to Boston.

RK: I think that was May, right?

MG: Yes, May 11th was when it was commissioned.

RK: Yes.

MG: I had it in my notes that it was August 1943, when the hurricane took place, and from there, the ship went to Trinidad for repairs.

DC: Yes, the one gun mount was pushed in.

RK: Yes.

DC: Trinidad couldn't do it, so then we went through the Panama [Canal] and on the opposite side and went to the Pacific side, they couldn't do it. Then, we went up to California, Long Beach, and that's where we had it repaired.

MG: Not to San Francisco?

DC: No, Long Beach, below Los Angeles.

MG: Then, did you go to Pearl Harbor from there?

DC: From there, we went up to Washington to escort a cruiser to Pearl Harbor. We couldn't go ashore. We got there that day. That night, we pulled out. Nobody went ashore.

RK: Grandpa, didn't they have Marines guarding?

DC: Oh, yes, on the dock.

RK: Because they were afraid people would get off the ship.

DC: They told you, if anybody tried to get off there [in Seattle], the Marines were told to shoot. That's the way they were.

MG: In Hawaii?

RK: That was Seattle.

DC: We went out that night and went to Pearl, escorting that cruiser and then we waited there and we went down to Wake Island and then we moved down to Solomon Islands to join our group down there, our squadron. We were the last one of our squadron to get in there. There were six destroyers in our squadron.

MG: In Hawaii, did you see the damage from the attack on Pearl Harbor?

DC: Oh, yes, we saw the pictures in a lot of the stores and everything like that. It was a mess.

MG: Does it sink in with you then the reality of the war and what could happen and things like that?

DC: What?

MG: Seeing all the damage.

DC: Oh, I didn't know. The youngster, you know ...

DK: You weren't scared.

DC: Actually, [when] you see the pictures, you didn't sit down and cry about it. You were too young; you didn't realize. If you were older, maybe it affected you a little bit more, but to me, even being out there, I was scared but never showed it. You couldn't just go up the deck; something like that, they'd send you home. They'd say your cuckoo. [laughter]

MG: Was there anybody that eventually went cuckoo?

DC: No.

DK: Just that one guy that they let off the boat, because he got so sick.

DC: Oh, Brownie, that was in the Philippines, yes. He fell and broke his arm. That was before we went to Okinawa. He was lucky. He got off the ship because he was one of the stewards. They had six stewards. They had their little compartment. As you went down to go to the galley to eat, you had to go through their little compartment. This guy was the head of them. They served the officers only, that's all.

DK: Oh, okay.

DC: What else? Now, you got me going there.

DK: I kind of got you stirred off of that, sorry.

MG: The next stop was Wake Island.

DC: Wake Island, yes.

MG: How long were you there?

DC: I didn't even see the island.

MG: It's very small.

DC: We didn't even see the island. The planes went in there and bombarded and that was it.

MG: I heard that your ship rescued a pilot.

DC: That was on that Turkey Shoot. That was the Mariana Campaign. That was the next one. [Editor's Note: The Battle of the Philippine Sea, nicknamed the Marianas Turkey Shoot, occurred on June 19-20, 1944. Days earlier, on June 15, U.S. Army forces and Marines invaded Saipan in the Mariana Islands. While American ground forces fought against the Japanese to secure Saipan, the Japanese Navy counterattacked by launching its carrier planes. The U.S. Fifth Fleet counterattacked with its carrier planes. In the ensuing "Marianas Turkey Shoot," American planes shot down 346 Japanese planes at the cost of thirty American aircraft. The Battle of the Philippine Sea was a resounding naval victory for the Americans.]

After Wake Island, then we went down to the South Pacific, invasion of Bougainville. Bougainville's a big island. It's just as big as Guadalcanal, but it was on the northwestern side of the chain, the islands and how they are situated. Then, there was Green Island. That was another island right around Bougainville, invaded. Emirau, another one we invaded, we invaded that without a shot, and they only had about two Japanese radiomen on that island. The destroyers prayed as close as they can get to try and draw fire. There was no fire, so troops went ashore, and they found out there was only a radio thing there. It was a small island. Then, we went into Rabaul. That was the one there, that was scary, at night. You go in there quick, boom, boom, boom, blew up something, we don't even know what we blew up, turned around, got the hell out of there. We go back to Tulagi, that was our home port, right across from Guadalcanal, and then we come back to Tulagi. That was what you call a quick raid. [Editor's Note: U.S. forces invaded Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomon Islands in August 1942. The USS *Braine* participated in naval support for the U.S. invasion of Bougainville beginning in early November 1943. The Allies launched the Solomon Islands campaign to regain territories from the Japanese in the South Pacific. The Green Islands are a number of small islands near Bougainville. They were invaded by Americans in January 1944. Emirau Island is part of the Bismarck Archipelago. It was invaded by the Americans on March 20, 1944. Rabaul is a port city on the island of New Britain. It was taken by the Japanese in January 1942 and held until Japan officially surrendered in 1945.]

MG: Yes. Your ship was involved in the Battle of the Solomon Islands.

DC: Yes, well, yes, Bougainville is [in the] Solomon Islands.

MG: Okay.

DC: That's the other big island. Are you hot there, Debbie?

DK: Why? You want me to shut that thing off.

DC: Yes, shut it off.

DK: We got you going there, Pop. [laughter]

DC: Molly got me going there.

MG: You're all revved up.

RK: Do you have enough soda there?

DC: Oh, yes.

DK: Do you want water, Pop?

DC: No, I got it, I got it.

DK: Okay.

DC: I only have one more piece.

MG: Did you go through the pollywog initiation? [Editor's Note: In U.S. naval tradition, the line crossing ceremony, also called the pollywog initiation or the Order of Neptune, takes place when a ship crosses the Equator. Those who are crossing the Equator for the first time, called Pollywogs, are subject to hazing by the crew of Shellbacks, who have crossed the equator and undergone the initiation previously.]

DC: Oh, yes. Do you know how that works?

DK: No.

MG: I want to hear it from you.

DK: I don't know how it works.

DC: There'd be a bunch of sailors lined up on the deck, say about mid-ships, and there's a door going from this side to the bow. They had paddles and hoses. They'd paddle your rear end, and you know when you're wet, when you hit it with the paddle, that's worse than when it's dry. You'd go as fast as you can, get to that door, open it up fast as they're beating you, you get out there, you get out on the bow. You pass the test. Next thing, you get up there, and the guy cuts your hair. He goes this way, that way. Naturally, after that, you've got to get it all cut off. He puts something on your face, even our captain, our second captain, he wasn't a shellback either. I passed. As a matter of fact, I got the card.

DK: The card, that's so cool.

DC: I'll show it to her.

RK: Not the Shop Rite Plus card. [laughter]

DC: Shellback and also the 180th Meridian [International Date Line], that was another thing you got.

MG: What is that?

DC: That's separating the continent from North Pacific down to the South Pacific, right in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

MG: Was there a ceremony to commemorate that?

DC: Yes, but there was no beating up on that one there. It's just automatic. As you went south down there, you crossed over into that Meridian.

DK: I wonder if they still do that.

RK: I would hope so; it's tradition.

DC: In fact, I might have pictures in there.

RK: I think you did actually.

DC: It's underneath that Navy book.

RK: Yes, I think you did. I remember there being something about it. You've got plenty pictures of girls in here.

DC: Show us the captain getting grease all over his face and everything like that.

RK: Is that what they rubbed on your face, grease?

DC: Yes, yes.

MG: I've heard it was chocolate.

DC: The cook is the big guy with the big belly. You had to kiss his belly. [laughter] Honestly, I forget that one. I don't know what the hell we called him.

MG: The royal baby.

DC: Yes.

DK: That's what they called him, the royal baby. [laughter]

RK: Yes.

DK: They had to make sure they had somebody with a big belly. [laughter]

DC: I got Mama's social security thing here.

DK: Yes, I know.

MG: It is okay. I believe you're a Shellback. Later in your time in the Pacific, were you involved in initiating new Pollywogs as a Shellfish?

DC: No, no, because we never went back to the States to get new people. We did cross it a couple times there, as we were started working up to the Philippines and the Marianas, that's passed the equator already.

DK: Pop, you can look for it later.

RK: Yes, don't worry about it, Grandpa.

DC: I know I got a lot of my sister's pictures in there. She was sending me pictures like crazy.

RK: I don't see anything.

DC: No?

MG: That is okay.

DC: Oh, okay.

DK: Pop, that's okay, we'll look later for you.

DC: Later alligator. After a while crocodile.

MG: What was the story about the captain related to the pollywog initiation?

DC: He took it like a trooper. You see him over there, they're greasing his hair and everything like that. That was pretty good.

DK: One of the guys. [laughter]

RK: Nothing in there.

DC: No?

RK: No.

DK: Just a bunch of girls, right?

DC: Too many girls in there, right?

DK: Mom let you keep that?

DC: Oh, yes, she let me keep it.

MG: Then, the ship ended up in Guadalcanal for a little bit.

DC: No, never got over to Guadalcanal. Our station was right across from Guadalcanal, Tulagi, T-U-L-A-G-I. I think that's the way they spell it. That's where we anchored, a safe haven. As a matter of fact, that's where we went to shore a couple times. You were allowed to buy two beers, two bottles of beer, go ashore, and that's it. A couple hours, you're there on the beach. We weren't allowed to go in the jungle, just stay right there on the beach, and from there back to the ship. That's the one bit of recreation we had, run around a little bit.

MG: Is that where you saw the sunken Japanese barges?

DC: No, no barges. Only small boats used to come along side of us with bananas. One of our t-shirts, we made the girls take theirs off, so we could see their tops. Then, we'd throw it down to them. [laughter]

MG: Like Mardi Gras. [laughter]

DC: We got the bananas too.

RK: Was that the locals?

DC: Islanders, yes, islanders. There's a picture in there of that.

RK: I saw.

DC: You saw it?

RK: Yes.

DC: They came out to the beach.

RK: I saw the straw boat out there.

DC: It was tricky, as a matter of fact. They told us, "You have to watch out. They might be one of the Japanese, might have a grenade." As a matter of fact, I forget where it was, these boxes, they put these boxes over their head and floating, and we had guys with 30-30s. "You see anything moving around, even a box, you shoot at it." They say the one Jap got in close on the fantail, he had a hand grenade, threw it right on there and he killed two sailors.

RK: You're kidding.

DC: Not on our ship, it was another one. They told us about it. Any time we were anchored, we always had somebody walking the decks because if you're anchored, especially when you're there after an invasion, they'd sneak out there on you.

MG: When was that?

DC: [What]?

MG: When was that? When did that happen?

DC: Oh, that was all over, whenever we anchored. You never know when the Japs were going to sneak out there somehow, and they tried a lot of things like that. I don't know how good they were at it. It never happened to us because we always had guys with the 30-30s. So, I think some of them shot a couple boxes but no heads in there.

RK: Itchy trigger fingers.

DC: A little practice.

RK: Of course.

MG: I read that during the Solomon Island campaign that a number of Japanese bombers had attacked your convoy.

DC: Oh, for the invasion of Bougainville.

MG: Yes.

DC: Oh, yes. Torpedo planes, it was at night, I mean dark, real dark, and we had the, let's see--how would you say--the southwest part of the *Conway*, patrolling alongside of it, and then we picked them up on radar. I was still wasn't radar yet. It was torpedo planes. They came so close. Like I say, when the fantail lifted up, it dropped it so close, it went right underneath the fantail. If the ship was even, it would've blow that fantail right off.

RK: You would have been in a million pieces.

DC: Then, on the starboard side, the chief of the boat, he always stays on deck all the time. That was his station. He says the same thing. They dropped it so close to midships between the stacks that it went right through it in the air.

DK: Wow.

DC: It landed on the other side.

RK: Like a football through the uprights.

DC: He saw that. He told us, the chief.

DK: Oh, my goodness.

DC: I said, "Holy Christ."

RK: Were you at battle stations when those torpedo planes came?

DC: Oh, yes, yes.

RK: You were on the 40mm.

DC: That's what I said, I would've been blown in the water, from that number five-inch mount.

RK: You were on the five-inch gun mount when that happened.

DC: Yes.

DK: Wow.

DC: That would've ended my career.

DK: You wouldn't be here.

RK: That was a lucky wave that picked up the fantail.

DC: I'm telling you, boy. They draw a lot of water, when they go down like this there, a destroyer. It's not like those bigger ships; they go cruise along smooth all the time. That's why we have to protect the big ships all the time. Then, [if] a torpedo [was going to] hit them from that way, if you were close to it, we were supposed to get over there and take that torpedo. Expendable, that's what they call us.

DK: Really?

RK: There to protect.

DC: That's why they call it a tin can. You could put your fist through it.

DK: Wow, I didn't know that.

MG: Your ship had hit the base at Rabaul pretty hard with a lot of ammunition and kind of set it on fire is what I read.

DC: What's that? When we were firing?

MG: Yes.

DC: Oh, from the five-inch round, it goes out back on the deck. So, you've got all those canisters that after it's all over, they just throw them over the side to clean up decks because it clutters it up quick.

MG: Yes.

DC: Only the powder keg, that holds the powder, that goes right out the back of the five-inch mount.

MG: Can you tell me a little more about attacking the enemy base at Rabaul?

DC: At Rabaul? Not much, we just quiet, just went up there quick, fired a few salvos, blew up something. We must have hit an ammunition dump or something and then turned around then, back to Tulagi. It was one of those quick raids. That's what they did, one destroyer at a time; they do that a lot of times down there. If you lose one, it isn't bad, instead of sending four and losing four. [laughter]

RK: Didn't you take shore battery fire from Rabaul or was that Bougainville, where you took shore battery fire?

DC: No, we shot at Rabaul. We snuck up on the enemy. It was about the size of the river here, for crying out loud. That's how dark it was, and that's it. We got up there, and they fired I don't know how many salvos they shot up there. We blew up something. It flared up. We turned around quick and got the hell out of there and went back to Tulagi. That was ours, all by ourselves.

RK: You were on your own.

DC: [What]?

RK: Was that a nighttime raid?

DC: That was night.

RK: That was middle of the night, right?

DC: Yes. Daytime, we'd have gotten blown out of there. It was a nighttime job. I don't know how they'd get up there. They're pretty good at navigation.

MG: I read that it was after that that you went to Australia for ten days to repair the ship.

DC: Well, there was nothing to repair. We just went down there for R&R [rest and relaxation].

MG: Okay.

DC: Eight days, we were down there.

MG: What was that like?

DC: Beautiful. They made good beer. The girls were good. [laughter] I'll tell you, they all wanted to get married and get back to the States. I don't think I was eighteen yet, I don't think.

RK: Maybe just.

DC: Almost eighteen.

RK: Yes.

DC: I said, "Get out of here, I'm only a kid." [laughter] They were good. They were good. I told you about the cabs they had. They burned charcoal. They pulled it in the place where they sell charcoal and fill up the charcoal. What the hell do you do with charcoal? The charcoal they mix with the gas and they get better mileage out of it.

DK: Really?

DC: I'd never seen that.

RK: All the gas is going to the war effort.

DK: That's true. That's true, yes.

DC: That was amazing. Then, the girl, she says, "I'd watch your money because these guys will cheat you." I said, "Okay." They went by the pound; it's like England.

DK: Oh, okay.

DC: Pounds and pence and all that stuff. As soon as we got on shore, we went to the bank. I had three hundred dollars. I exchanged it all over to Australian money because I'm not taking any money back. Who the hell knows if I'm going to get back home anyhow? I spent every penny of it. [laughter] I went ashore there a couple times when we weren't supposed to. The chief saw me there in town one time. I said, "Oh, God, hopefully, he don't say anything." He didn't say anything.

DK: You guys were working hard.

DC: Yes, we were tied up alongside the battleship *Pennsylvania*. We had to walk across their deck to go ashore. I had the tailor-made blues there, the nice flapped out tailor-made [uniform]. The officer said, "What ship you from, son?" "That tin can alongside of you." "Oh, okay." He talked rough; we talked rough because we had to walk across their deck to go ashore.

DK: Yes, that's funny.

DC: Milk, we had milk. You remember the farmers who used to put the cans of milk out, years ago, to pick up. They had it on the quarter deck. As soon as you come back, all loaded, tired, man, you'd suck that milk down, take a gulp. Eight o'clock, you're ready to go again. [laughter] Make sure we spend all our money. They're good people down there; they're good people.

DK: Australia.

DC: I always say that if the United States ever kicked me out of here, I'd move to Australia.

MG: That is a good backup plan.

DC: I was going to go try and find a Hungarian place, but it was on the outskirts over there. I said, "I'm not going to mess around. I wouldn't know anybody there anyhow."

RK: Was it a restaurant?

DC: No, people, they had a community, like you've got a bunch of Polish in Bound Brook, Irish here, and the Hungarians were over there, the same way. The different nationalities, they all stuck together. They didn't separate all the way around, all the towns. I figured they were about five years behind the United States. That's the way it reminded me of it. They were good, good people.

MG: Did the ship get a new captain after the R&R?

DC: That's where we changed commands, down in Australia. That's where we got the guy from the Aleutians, from the Aleutians down to the hot box. He was no good; he was no captain compared to what we had. He was a rough one, but he was good. He was the first guy to come aboard when we come back after we got hit by this kamikaze, he came aboard, he's sitting there. He comes by me, "How you doing, Csontos?" I didn't get up to salute him. He didn't say a word. "You're looking good," he said. "Thank you, Sir." He remembered me, Captain [John Francis] Newman. [Editor's Note: John Francis Newman, Jr. commanded the USS *Braine* from May 1943 to May 1944.]

MG: That was the first captain.

DC: Yes. Eventually, after the war, he joined one of the Merchant Marines and got his own ship and back. As a matter of fact, he died aboard the ship. You were buried at sea at that time. We found out what happened to him because he was an old timer when he was on our ship, a real old timer. The one that traded with him, he wasn't as old. He was younger; he was quiet. He [had] no personality at all. Not like the other officer. You could talk to him just like you're talking to you and me. Just because you're an officer, it doesn't mean anything.

RK: Did they do a ceremony when they changed?

DC: [What]?

RK: Was there any kind of ceremony when they changed captains?

DC: No.

RK: They didn't line you up or anything.

DC: Yes, we had to line up. We had to line up in our dress blues. That's the only thing. Just lined up and I don't know how it went.

MG: What was the new captain like, Fitts?

DC: Yes, he was quiet. He was very quiet. No personality, that guy, I don't know. I still think he made the wrong turn when we got hit. [Editor's Note: William Wilson Fitts commanded the USS *Braine* from May 1944 to August 1945.]

DK: That's the guy you were telling me about.

DC: I had him on the radar. I said, "We got him. We got him." He didn't kill the damn pilot, and the pilot was able to drive right into us. I said, "Okay, we've got another one on the starboard side coming in at about a hundred yards." So, they're plotting it in the CIC, Combined Information Center. I'm in the little dark room where the radar is; I've got the big scope in between my legs and the small one up on top. Then, by the time I said that, boom. I don't remember anymore. The first one had already hit.

DK: Oh, scary.

DC: Yes. I was lucky, I was lucky. If there wasn't a hole made out on the port side over there, I wouldn't have gotten out.

DK: Yes.

MG: According to my notes, it was after Australia that you were at Tinian, and I think that is where the ship took shore battery fire.

DC: Yes.

MG: I think three men were killed.

DC: Yes, that was the next invasion, the Marianas. That's what they called the Turkey Shoot. There were about three hundred Jap planes were shot down. Between our fighters and our warships, they calculated about three hundred. They called that the Turkey Shoot. That's the time when our carriers, the planes off our carriers, [were] going after the Jap Navy. They're heading back to Japan, and on the way back, I don't know if they did any damage or not, but on the way back they ran out of gas, a lot of them. The admiral in charge of the fleet there said, "Put on all your lights." I said, "Oh, God, this man's crazy." If a sub was out there, they could have had a ball. The pilots had to ditch because they didn't have enough gas to land on the carrier. They ditched. We would just go around and listen, listen, listen. We picked up seven fliers. As a matter of fact, one of them, I don't know if I told you about him, but when we transferred them the next day on the carrier that he was from, they said his name, "Captain Kane. Killer Kane just got aboard." They said, "Whoa." A big roar went up on the carrier. He must have been a hot-shot pilot.

DK: Wow.

RK: Actually, that was actually on a History Channel documentary. They touched on Killer Kane being rescued by a destroyer. I've looked it up, but never once did they mention the name of the destroyer.

DC: No?

RK: I looked it up online. They didn't mention it on the History Channel. They told the story, but they never mentioned your destroyer.

DC: I'll be damned.

RK: I can't find any documentation on it.

DC: Oh, yes? I'll be damned.

DK: Do you remember the guy being brought on to ...

DC: No, I didn't see him. They brought him into the captain's quarters to see if they're okay.

DK: Yes, that's true.

RK: Didn't you guys have to signal them with Morse Code with the lights because you guys were on blackout at that point or radio blackout?

DC: No, no, all the ships put their lights on.

RK: How did you signal the carrier that you had Kane?

DC: Oh, when we transferred him in the boatswain's chair, on the boatswain's chair, by rope, just like when you fuel, the same thing. If a person needed a doctor, you couldn't go in the water and swim over to him. They call it the boatswain's chair, the lines. [Editor's Note: A boatswain's chair is a wooden board slung by a rope and used to sit on while at work aloft or over the side of a ship.]

DK: That's scary.

DC: That's how they got him over. Can you imagine, a destroyer and a carrier like that here. Actually, he's going uphill to get on the top deck. You had to get off on the deck, on the top deck, where the planes take off from. That's where they announced it over there, and then they had the big roar for him. I couldn't believe it.

DK: Yes.

DC: I never saw any of them. They took them right away to their quarters, officer's quarters, to see if they're all good, in [good] shape.

DK: Sure, yes.

DC: Because when you ditch ...

DK: What do you mean by ditch? They jumped out of their plane.

DC: A plane will go in like this here when they ditch. It's just like on the land. They'll keep the bow up as much as they can, so the tail end hits the water first. That sort of slows it down, and then it goes down there. Still, they could get hurt when it goes down. The water, the glass, whatever they got in front of them can blow right out.

DK: Sure, wow.

DC: The ones that ditched, they did a good job out of it. Now, Jessie's in-law said ...

DK: Grandfather.

DC: Grandfather. He was on a plane. He had to ditch one time.

DK: He did?

DC: Yes.

DK: Wow.

DC: He came in a later part of the war.

DK: That's my daughter's husband's grandfather.

DC: Yes.

MG: Oh, wow.

DC: Yes.

DK: He was in the Air Force, right?

DC: Yes, Navy.

DK: They met each other at their engagement party.

DC: Yes.

DK: They sat in the corner talking. It was really neat. He's still alive.

DC: He had to ditch. I don't know the circumstances on it, but if he wanted to tell me, he'd tell me. I didn't ask him about it.

DK: Yes, yes. That's interesting.

MG: What happened to Kane after that?

DC: Oh, I don't know. He stayed on the carrier. He still had a lot of battles after that. After the Marianas, the next thing was the Philippines, and that was the big one too. When we got hit with Tinian, we went back to California, to San Diego, and then from there, they gave us a fourteen-day leave. Remember I told you I had a fourteen-day leave. I grabbed the train and got all the way, seventy, eighty dollars round trip by train. It was in the seventies. I know it was that. So, I had six days at home and eight days travelling. I wasn't going to go because it was such a short time. Of course, as soon as I got to Grand Central, I told them, "Look, I have to be back at a certain time." So, they told me how to do it, what time I have to pick up the train at Grand Central because they always change in Chicago. They change over to the Santa Fe Trail. That takes you into LA. So, I got there the night before about eight o'clock, so it wasn't that bad. I fooled around a little bit, and then I went back to the ship because I now had to be back by eight o'clock anyhow. I was tired out.

MG: Is there anything else you remember about the Marianas campaign? Because that was a real turning point in the Pacific.

DC: When we first got there, Saipan, we bombarded. Of course, we had that whole island covered by ships, and if you start on the other side of the island, you couldn't see the island from all the smoke and fire.

DK: Wow.

DC: I didn't realize it, the 102nd Engineers, my cousin from the Bronx was in that landing, and I didn't know it until I came home from that fourteen-day leave. That's when I found out that he was down in New Hebrides. They said he got hit right on the beach, right there on that beach. He was in the 102nd Engineers from the Bronx; that's where he's from.

MG: Your leave must have been in the spring or summer in 1944. Does that sound about right?

DC: What was that?

MG: When was it that you took this fourteen-day leave?

DC: Oh, Tinian. Yes, well, that was the invasion of the Marianas. We were told to go inspect the harbor. They think a Jap ship is coming out. We went over there, went too damn close, and the beach opened up and hit us. Once they hit us, the old skipper turned the boat around--the boat, I call it the ship--turned it, the shell was there, turned that way, shell was there, he turned that way, he got it far enough away. In the meantime, our five-inch kept shooting. They had to holler, "Stop shooting, stop shooting." Those guys were just loading up the shells. They finally stopped. I don't know if we hit anything over there or not. [Editor's Note: On June 14, 1944, the USS *Braine* partook in the bombardment of Tinian in the Mariana Islands and sustained minor damage.]

RK: But it was giving away your position, right?

DC: We lost three guys.

RK: Where on the ship did it hit? Do you remember?

DC: I wasn't in radar yet. When the hell did I get into the radar? When we came back from the leave, Tinian, I went up to go see the executive officer, little guy. He was real Navy. I said, I told him, "I'd like to strike as a radarman." He says, "Yes?" I said, "Yes." He says, "Well, you better be a good one." I said, "I will, Sir." That's how I got in, right after Marianas.

DK: You asked for it.

DC: Yes. I think I was a pretty good radarman.

DK: Sounds like it, yes.

DC: When I stopped the fleet from seeing the movies, that was it. [laughter]

DK: Yes, you did.

DC: As soon as I gave the bearing and range, everybody else picked it up, and all the lights went out. All the movies were down, no more movies. What's that, Ron?

RK: No, that was a cool story. Do you remember where that was? You guys were anchored up then, right?

DC: Yes, at the Admiralty Islands.

RK: Which islands?

DC: Admiralty Group. They called it the Admiralty Group; it's below the Philippines.

RK: Okay.

DC: Yes, we're anchored off there, sort of a safe haven.

RK: Was that after the Marianas Campaign? Was that after?

DC: Yes, that was after.

RK: Because you had the Marianas down there and then you went to the Philippines, right?

DC: Yes, we went down to New Guinea, picked up troops.

RK: That's right.

DC: Then escorted troopships to Leyte.

RK: Yes.

DC: Admiralty was before that.

RK: We're just trying to get the timeline established, how that went. You just kept going south pretty much.

DC: Well, you couldn't go further than the Solomons.

RK: Yes.

DC: The only thing farther south was Australia.

RK: Yes, that's true.

DC: I would've liked to stay there. [laughter]

RK: I'm sure.

MG: Do you remember when it was that you went to the Philippines?

DC: Ron, have you got that date, the invasion [of the] Philippines?

RK: You were part of the invasion fleet there, weren't you?

DC: Oh, yes.

RK: When the Japanese fleet split, didn't you chase them?

DC: No, no. We took the troop transports in. We escorted the troop transports from New Guinea.

RK: That's right.

MG: I am reading that the ship left Seattle in August of 1944 and maybe got to the Philippines by October.

RK: October '44. [Editor's Note: The invasion of the Philippines began on October 20, 1944 when Allied beach landings occurred on the island of Leyte, followed by the naval battle between the U.S. and Japanese navies, the Battle of Leyte Gulf.]

DC: No, no, that was after. The Philippines was the last--well, the last campaign was Okinawa. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Okinawa occurred from April 1 to June 22, 1945, during which time American forces invaded Japanese-held Okinawa and American naval forces engaged in simultaneous operations.]

RK: Well, October is pretty late in '44, so that was pretty close to '45. It says here, October 20th to the 21st, 1944, you provided fire support for ground troops as they landed and repelled several air attacks.

RC: Where was that at?

RK: That was the Philippines.

DC: Philippines.

MG: General MacArthur was there.

DC: Yes, yes, he came ashore. [MacArthur said], "I have returned," instead of, "We have returned." That was the worst word to say, "I have returned." He was down in Australia having a ball down there, for crying out loud. They rescued him from Corregidor, him and his family, at night, on a small boat. That's how he got out of there. [Editor's Note: On October 20, 1944, General Douglas MacArthur waded ashore onto the island of Leyte in the Philippines. He made a radio broadcast and stated, "People of the Philippines, I have returned." In March 1942, he and his family had escaped the Philippines from the island of Corregidor, after the Japanese invasion. Over 90,000 American and Filipino soldiers became prisoners of the Japanese. Two-thirds of them died by the end of the war.]

DK: Wow.

DC: They took him down to Australia and stayed down there.

MG: You saw him make that speech.

DC: I didn't hear it. It's the first thing [MacArthur did once] he got on the beach there on the old mic they said.

RK: The famous video of him wading through the surf. You were close to him, weren't you?

DC: No, no. I was onboard ship.

RK: You were onboard the ship.

DC: Yes, we were making smoke.

RK: It said that you were close, though, to MacArthur.

DC: No.

RK: Maybe not close enough to see him but in the vicinity of him.

DC: We had to make smoke. That whole day, we were making smoke, so the Jap planes, they couldn't make out who's who down there.

RK: That was in the daytime, right?

DC: Yes, yes. Then, we snuck out at nighttime to go back down to New Guinea and pick up more troops. We went out at nighttime.

MG: You were making the screen cover at the invasion of--was it Mindanao?

DC: Where?

MG: Mindanao. Does that sound familiar to you?

DC: Oh, Mindanao.

MG: Yes.

DC: Yes.

MG: It was attacked by a few kamikaze pilots there.

DC: No, no, we didn't get any there. Actually, the *Columbia*, my buddy I grew up with--I told you I met him on the island of Tulagi--they got hit with a kamikaze out there, just before Mindoro, and he was on a cruiser, the *Columbia*. That was the first time the Japs decided they can hit better by taking the plane in instead of dropping a bomb because their bomb sights were not as good as ours. That's what happened. They all volunteered. They want to die. They'd give them a plane, "We'll take you down there. You just pick out the ship that you want, and you go." They had their own funeral in Japan. That's the kind of people we had to fight. At least the Germans weren't like that. When they were cornered, they gave up. Not the Japanese; they said, "Banzai, let's go." Do or die. The poor guys on the beach, that's what I'm talking about, the Marines and the Army. They had it rough. They had it rough. [Editor's Note: On January 6, 1945, a Japanese kamikaze crashed into the USS *Columbia*, killing thirteen. This occurred during naval support operations for the landings in Lingayen Gulf during the Philippines campaign.]

DK: Wow.

MG: Did that sort of intensify the mood out there that now there were kamikaze pilots, suicide pilots?

DC: It was scary up there at Okinawa. You didn't know when they were coming. Sometimes, they came with threes, fives, sometimes ten, and you've got that many and you've only got two destroyers in the picket station. You could never shoot your way out. One of them was going to get in there and get you. Two of them got us, so that ended us, almost.

MG: It sounds like there is a lot of action at the end of 1944. Were you able to celebrate Thanksgiving or Christmas in any way that year?

DC: Yes, well, those holidays we always were in Tulagi. We ate good boy. We had our turkeys from Australia. We had all our food from Australia, horse meat. [laughter]

DK: Horse meat.

DC: Horse meat was good.

RK: Yes, you said you liked horse meat.

DC: They didn't tell us for about a month after that. Hell, it was sweet. It was very good meat.

DK: They told them until after they ate it. [laughter]

MG: Would you have eaten it if you knew it was horse meat?

DC: I don't know. It don't matter. It didn't matter. You're hungry, you ate. Sometimes, if you're lucky to get seconds, you went and got seconds. You could only store so much at three hundred men in a destroyer like that. The freezer is just a normal-sized freezer. I'd never been in the doggone thing. You'd go down those steps, go down below there, and coffee there would be hanging up and it's swaying with the ship. You couldn't put it down on the table because it will fall off, so they had it hanging up. [laughter]

MG: From the Philippines, did you head to Okinawa?

DC: Yes. We had trials there to see if we can go up to thirty-five, thirty-six knots, practice. You needed speed up there. We passed all the tests. That's where I told you, the colored guy broke his arm. He transferred off. Otherwise, he wouldn't be here today. Well, I don't know. He was older than I was, Old Brownie, "Leave no survivors." He was the number one handler on the number one mount when we were shooting at the Jap ship coming out of Manila Harbor, and he was the first loader. Every time he put a projectile in there, he said, "Leave no survivors. Leave no survivors."

DK: What's the point in saying that? [laughter]

DC: He made us laugh all the time. He was a comedian.

RK: Was that when you caught the Japanese cruiser? Was that a cruiser that you guys caught?

DC: No, a destroyer. It was a destroyer.

RK: That was at night, wasn't it?

DC: Yes, first shot blasted them right out.

RK: Did you send a torpedo at him?

DC: No.

DC: We were told to send up the flare to light up the sky because they didn't know for sure whether it was a bigger ship at night. [The radar] doesn't tell you what kind of ship; it only tells you a blip. It's like a blip on the screen. That's all it is. Like today, it's all TV now; you can see what kind of ship it is. We put the flare up, lit up the area, and then they found out it was a

smaller ship. We fired, and then after that, we fired a few shots. Another destroyer was with us. We were on our way to Lingayen Gulf, to invade Lingayen Gulf. That's north of Manila.

RK: Okay.

DC: It's north of Manila. They sunk it, and they were told to pick up one survivor.

RK: Just one, right?

DC: Yes. Maybe the other destroyer picked it up, I don't know. We didn't pick it up. Then, we went back in convoy and went back up to Lingayen Gulf for the invasion of Lingayen Gulf. That was up north of Luzon, north of Luzon, yes, the big island. That's where our Mexican boy there from New Mexico, he got off. His brother was a prisoner. There was a Japanese prisoner camp up there.

DK: Really?

DC: So, they let him go ashore to see his brother. Can you imagine?

DK: Oh, wow.

DC: Four years he was a prisoner up there.

RK: That was someone from your ship, his brother?

DC: Yes. Well, his brother was on our ship. He was from New Mexico.

RK: Wow.

DC: His brother was captured there at the beginning of the war, when the Japs took over the Philippines and he was in that prison. Then, they found out, so they let him go ashore. They were bombarding the shore. They let him go ashore. [laughter]

RK: That's a nice gesture.

DC: That was something.

DK: He got to see his brother.

MG: Then, at Okinawa, your ship came under quite a bit of attack.

DC: Oh, yes

MG: Was it eventually hit there?

DC: Yes. As a matter of fact, the next day, we were supposed to go back in to fuel, but we never did make it. At the beginning, those destroyers that were up there at the beginning, they got pattered. We lost a lot of Navy personnel, just on that island alone, between the ships. You could sink a ship like that with one of those little planes if they're loaded with gas and everything and I don't know if they have a shell underneath them or not, but they make a hell of a hit. A battleship, they could land on top of the damn battleship, they wouldn't even scar it. Even a bomb, those battleships, they were strong. [Editor's Note: While the USS *Braine* partook in Okinawa operations as a radar picket ship, the destroyer was struck by two Japanese kamikaze planes on May 27, 1945, sustaining major damage.]

DK: Wow.

DC: There was one lucky guy there. His name was Diamond. He got transferred. Guess where we saw him after we had the burial for the sailors that got killed on Tinian on shore battery? He was on the battleship watching us do the burial, and he hollered over, Diamond. [I thought], "How'd he get on there?" Every time Neil Diamond has a song, I always wonder if he was related to him. You remember Neil Diamond?

DK: Oh, yes.

DC: I just wondered if he was ever related to him.

DK: You never know.

DC: He was a smoothie. He got off our ship for a big battleship, a lot of protection there. I don't think they sunk any of our battleships. Carriers, they did. The carriers are the bigger prize, especially because of all those planes they could put on there. They can invade with the planes first, then the troops.

DK: Yes.

MG: Can you say a little bit more about what happened at Okinawa? There were a number of close calls and then eventually the *Braine* was hit.

DC: No, that actually. No, it was just that one time, just that one time. We had a couple scares, like they were coming but never did come. This one here that came, that was the only one. No other scares or anything like that, until the time we got hit.

MG: What happened? What was that like, and what was the damage done?

DC: Show her the pictures. I got the pictures.

RK: Do you see the pictures on there?

MG: I am looking through them.

RK: There's two or three pictures.

DK: Is that from you?

RK: Yes, there's a couple zoomed in ones on the front where he was, where the kamikaze hit on the front of the ship. It's from a downward angle looking at the front of the ship, and then they have an overview picture that's zoomed out and you can kind of see the totality of the damage.

MG: Yes.

RK: The first one hit you midship, right?

DC: No, the second did. Port side. If he'd had made a hard left, we would have missed it.

RK: Well, what was the first one that hit because you got hit by two?

DC: Yes. See this mount here?

RK: The second or first?

DC: The first one, right here.

RK: Yes.

DC: Port side. Now, if he had made a quick left, that plane would've skimmed us on the other side, and the other plane would've went between the two stacks.

RK: He turned right into it.

DC: But he turned right, like a dummy.

RK: So, he opened it up.

DC: So, that opened it up more, and that was able to hit that. By turning, he might have skimmed the first one over there, but all this was all burned out, right here. Everything was burned out right here.

RK: Do you have that picture?

MG: Yes, I can see that.

DC: All that's left up there is the bridge up there, like that. Then, the other one was on the other side. It hit the stack on the other side.

MG: This is where he got the Purple Heart, after the first hit.

RK: Yes.

DC: That blew a lot of guys into the water, the second one there.

RK: He got second-degree burns.

DC: Well, you had 40mm on that side there; there were about six guys on there. It blew them right in.

RK: The mounts, were both these mounts gone? Did they take out both mounts? I know they got the number two. Did they get the number one?

DC: Not much.

RK: Not much?

DC: No. The full plane, it hit right underneath that. You see, by making a right turn, that's why it gave him a perfect shot to go in there in that way and he did the damage and all that stuff came right back to us, underneath the bridge.

RK: You were underneath here, right?

DC: Yes, right there, yes.

DK: That's where you were when this hit.

RK: So, everything carried right towards you.

DC: Yes, yes, that's where it created a hole over here on the port side. There was no hole there. That was the bulkhead there, and the crash itself opened up a hole there. That's how I crawled out.

RK: Where was the hole, on the starboard or port?

DC: On the port side; there was nothing on the starboard.

RK: How many guys were in that?

DC: Oh, we had ten guys in there. Three of us got out.

DK: That's it?

DC: Me and my relief guy and I think one of the officers. They had new officers. They had transferred on our ship in Pearl Harbor on the way out, our second time on the way out.

RK: Lucky them.

DC: Yes, they weren't lucky. They both got killed.

RK: They were forward of you.

DC: Yes, well, there's the CIC.

RK: That's the first room.

DC: Just like the toilet here, that's the radar shack, and where the captain does his duty in that room, that was the CIC. You had charts, all charts all over, and the guys are all lined up around him doing their job.

RK: So, that was officers that were in that room.

DC: Oh, yes, yes.

RK: Now, didn't you say that your relief guy was in front of you? Did you say he got a lot of it?

DC: Who?

RK: Didn't you say the guy that you were with was in front of you, so when it came through and it hit him first?

DC: Oh, I don't know.

RK: Your relief guy survived, both of you guys in the radar room.

DC: Yes, yes. He sat down alongside of me. I don't know how he got out, unless he was able to get in by the board room, get out on the starboard side, but I don't know. I never did find out how he got out, because I got transferred, once they picked us up there on the LST and then got on a destroyer and then they sent us on a big transport.

RK: That was after.

DC: Then, I stayed there until they flew us back down there, Guam, find out it [the *Braine*] wasn't there. Then they flew us back up to Saipan, and that's where the ship was. From there, I went home.

RK: Did you tell Molly about how you abandoned the ship?

DC: Oh, I don't know.

MG: No, not yet.

DC: No? This is the port side, on the other side.

MG: It must have been so chaotic.

DC: Yes, port side. That was the starboard side.

RK: Grandpa, tell us what happened after you got out of the ship, after you got out of the hole.

DC: After I got out of the hole right here.

RK: Yes.

DC: That's someone I met, (Mizeli?), from Michigan. I had no life jacket. I left it where I was on the radar. I forgot all about it. So, he found one, gave it to me and we went around on the starboard side.

RK: So, you went to the other side of the ship.

DC: Yes. See this boat, like this here?

RK: Yes.

DC: There was another one on the other side. We got in there, lowered the boat, and we loaded on the other side.

RK: So, you got in the boat?

DC: Yes.

RK: Who was lowering you down?

DC: Well, the guys on deck. They had to release the lines. As a matter of fact, the guy in the back, he released his first. Now, we're on the other side. Here, we're going like this here, and the guy on the bow, he didn't [do it], so we're going like this. I said, "Holy Christ. Let go of that line up there."

RK: You were holding on for dear life in the back.

DC: I was in the back part. Once we got out of there, we were out in the open. We got hit by this darn skirt over here. As we came down this way, we got hit with the skirt. There was a skirt down here to protect the propeller.

RK: Oh, wow.

DC: Once you got beyond there, I'm over here, I'm doing the steering. I don't know how the hell I did it. I just got up there and started steering, looking around and looking around.

RK: Was the other guy rowing?

DC: No, there was no rowing. It was a motor.

RK: Oh, there was a motor on it.

DC: Yes, oh, yes. As a matter of fact, there's a plug, and good thing we had a guy that worked in the engine room because he knew where the hole was. Water was coming in, where the hell is the water coming from? So, he knew where the plug was. We're throwing all the boxes with the rations in just in case we had to be out there a while, you throw it out, but he put the plug in and it was all right then. [laughter]

RK: The plug that let the rain water out, right?

DC: Yes, you raise up and take the plug out. Nobody knew that. Good thing he did. There was a hole down there in the engine room on the other side, he was sticking out there, and he jumped up and got in there with us. It was a good thing he did because he was the only one who knew it. So, he got the motor running, and then I'm steering around.

DK: After all that, they could have drowned.

DC: We picked up Lieutenant Johnson. He was blowing the whistle, the life jacket. I turned this boat over there, picked him up, he got in. Finally, we got to the two gunships, LCIs [Landing Craft Infantry] they called them, and they picked us up. I don't know what they did with the boat. I stayed on the LCIs until they transferred me to another destroyer.

DK: Was this at night, Pop, when this happened, all at night?

DC: No, that was eight o'clock in the morning.

DK: Really?

RK: On a Sunday, right?

DC: Eight o'clock in the morning.

DK: How was the water? Was it rough or was it calm?

DC: It wasn't bad.

DK: It wasn't bad.

DC: We never had rough water. We never hit any storms at all there. We were ahead of a typhoon one time, but we outran it.

DK: Was the water pretty warm? Was it warm outside?

DC: The Pacific was much calmer, even though it's bigger than the Atlantic. The Atlantic is rougher, especially the North Atlantic. I thought it we were going to be in the North Atlantic escorting those supply ships over to England and all that. That was rough for them guys over there. The only rough part, like I say, was just Cape Hatteras. That was the only rough water we ever had. Otherwise, it was nice.

DK: Yes, there are a lot of bad storms out of Cape Hatteras.

DC: Yes.

MG: Were you aware of your injury at that point? Did you know how badly burned you were?

DC: No, I didn't know. I put the life jacket on. That must have covered it, and I kept that on all the way. I didn't even know until I got into the bay there and they put me on the big transport, way down below in there. I said, "Geez, that must be ten stories high, that sucker." [laughter] That's how they brought me on--what the hell you call it? To take you up to the deck.

DK: Elevator?

DC: No, outside, with the ropes.

RK: Did you crawl up the rope ladder?

DC: No, no, I didn't. They pulled the whole thing up, the whole boat right up.

RK: The LST?

DC: No, not boat. I got there. Down there they had--the Coast Guard dropped the thing down there for you to get in.

RK: Oh, yes, and then they raise you up.

DC: Yes.

RK: With a basket.

DK: Like a basket.

DC: Yes, yes, and then they take you up there with the basket. I said, "I can walk. What are you doing?" "No, no, get in there, get in there." I was able to walk, but they made me lay down in there. I said, "If the damn rope breaks, I'm done." That thing was about ten stories high, that sucker.

DK: After all that.

DC: Then, they put me inside there, checked me out and started giving me penicillin and shots and the whole thing.

RK: Who first told you that you were burned and injured? Who told you?

DC: Right there when he got me up on top there.

RK: Was it a nurse or a doctor who told you?

DC: No, the guy that strikes for being a doctor on the ship.

DK: A medic.

DC: Yes, a medic, yes. From there, they put me on a hospital ship and too me down to Guam, me and a buddy of mine, a red-headed guy. I can never remember his name, never remember his name. We're going on the hospital ship, all lit up. Man, I was scared as all hell. Those damn Japs, they didn't care. They'd shoot them out too.

DK: Yes, that's true.

DC: They had a little tug follow us out so far, and that's it. I told the nurse there, I said, "Boy, you guys get under attack, we're going to all have to jump overboard."

DK: Oh, yes.

DC: By that time, the Japs didn't have anything left. It's near the end. They took us down to Guam, and then we stayed on Guam for fourteen days. That's when I saw my first open-air theater. The Seabees made them out there. Then, when we came back, they were starting to put them up all around here. That's where they got it from, the Seabees.

DK: Now, they're all gone pretty much, yes.

DC: I almost joined the Seabees. I was tempted to go. You picked up a trade there in the Seabees. The guy that was the postmaster down there, he got in as a Seabee, "Why don't you try to get Seabees? You'll learn something," like bulldozers and stuff like that, but that was dangerous, too. You're in there with the Army. You're doing the airfields and they're pop

shooting at you from the forest and everything like that. I don't know if I made the right move or not.

MG: Did you ever see the *Braine* again after that?

DC: Oh, yes, in Boston. That's where I got discharged, right there in Boston. As a matter of fact, I was still sleeping down below, back aft. See, everything was up forward.

MG: So, it was repaired.

DC: Yes, they were going to repair it. I was surprised that they were going to repair it. I thought they were going to sell it for junk, but they did, they did. [Editor's Note: The USS *Braine* was commissioned in 1943. In 1971, it was sold to Argentina. It was then sunk for target practice in 1983.]

DK: They sold it to another country, you said, didn't they?

DC: Oh, yes, that was later on.

RK: Argentina.

DC: After they got it fixed, they had nice cruises over to Italy, over to the Mediterranean, good will tours.

DK: Yes.

DC: They had it made there. Then, after that, they sold it to Argentina.

RK: Well, Grandpa, you sailed home on your ship, didn't you?

DC: [What]?

RK: You guys sailed home, didn't you, under your own power? You guys sailed home.

DC: Oh, yes.

RK: You were on the ship on the way back to Boston, weren't you?

DC: Yes, yes.

RK: You said it was slow because you were only on one boiler.

DC: One boiler, yes.

RK: With no escort. It was you by yourself.

DC: All by ourself, yes.

DK: Wow.

RK: You picked that up, where? Guam, did you catch the ship?

DC: No, no.

RK: Did you miss the ship?

DC: Saipan.

RK: Saipan is where you got it.

DC: Guam was the hospital.

RK: They flew you to Saipan, right?

DC: No, they flew us to Guam.

RK: They flew you to Guam.

DC: Yes, and I was there for two weeks, and then from there, they found out the ship wasn't there, after the two weeks, and it was in Saipan, so they flew us up to Saipan on a rickety-rack plane.

RK: You said the stewardess gave you sandwiches on the plane.

DC: Oh, that was on the way down.

RK: Oh, on the way down.

DC: The other time. [laughter] Tuna fish, I didn't even know what the hell it was. I never had a tuna fish sandwich. Me and that red-headed buddy of min, "Yes, we'll take it." Spoiled pilots. She was a WAC, an Army WAC [Women's Army Corps]. I guess they had one on each one of those planes for service.

MG: Was it a tense voyage home? The ship had been damaged, and fuel was probably running low.

DC: No, we never ran out of fuel coming home. We did all right going home. We stopped at San Diego. Three days we stayed there, and then from there, we went south through the canal and then back up to Boston.

MG: Where were you when the first atomic bomb was dropped? [Editor's Note: The United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and Nagasaki on August 9, 1945.]

DC: You mean the suicide planes?

MG: No, the atomic bomb, the a-bomb.

DC: I don't know where the heck we were at. I don't know if we got any word on that.

RK: Were you in Boston already at that point?

DC: No.

RK: Were you still out in the Pacific at that point?

DC: I think we were on our way back or somewhere. I don't remember being told about the atomic bomb.

RK: Really?

DC: It was so secret even before, and they kept it a secret after.

RK: What's the timeline on that?

MG: It is August 6th and 9th.

RK: So, August 6th and 9th in 1945, and Okinawa happened when? When does that happen when your ship got hit?

MG: That was May in 1945.

DC: Yes, we got hit May the 27th.

RK: About two months later, the atomic bombs got dropped. So, I would imagine that the probably still out there. That's way too quick of a turn around to go all the way back home. I would imagine you were somewhere in the Pacific when they dropped the bombs.

DC: Yes.

RK: Does it say when they got back to Boston?

DK: It does.

MG: [Editor's Note: Molly Graham reads from her notes.] "San Diego, July 19, 1945." So, you were in the States.

RK: Oh, he was in the States.

DC: I was?

MG: "The trip through the Canal was uneventful and the *Braine* arrived at South Boston Navy Yard on August 6th, the same day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima."

DC: Oh, okay, I was in the States then.

RK: Same day, wow.

DK: Wow, it was on the same day.

DC: I thought it was. I'm not sure. I wasn't sure, yes.

MG: How did you feel when the war finally ended?

DC: Well, I had duty onboard ship when the war ended, and I couldn't go ashore. [laughter]

DK: Oh, you couldn't go party.

MG: You couldn't celebrate.

DC: They say the girls were all over the other sailors. [laughter]

MG: What was your duty that kept you on ship?

DC: Just to be aboard. That's all.

DK: Oh, you just had to stay aboard.

DC: Most of the time, the welders were around, we had to stay on fire watch, just in case they had a fire. That's about it, but the next day I was able to go ashore, so it was all right.

DK: Then, he partied.

MG: What was the mood in the country now that the war was finally over?

DC: It seemed all right. You walked downtown in Boston around the Commons or we went to our favorite bar and we claimed it for the USS *Braine*. It was a small bar, and we used to all go in there. Then, I got to go home on weekends while I was still up there, and then I'd go back. Then, I got discharged in November right from Boston. Oh, they sent me up to the hospital up

there. There they evaluate you up there, and that's where they found out after I was home for a couple of months and then they're going to send me fifty dollars a month. [laughter] I said, "For what?" They actually increased it years ago. I ended up getting about one hundred dollars a month, but now I went back for more tests for hearing and everything and I get a little bit more for a loss of hearing.

MG: Well, I want to ask you more about your homecoming, but I think I need a break first.
[laughter]

DK: Do you know where the bathroom is?

MG: Yes.

DK: Okay.

MG: I will just pause this real quick.

[TAPE PAUSED]

DC: You're done?

MG: No, not yet. I still have some more questions.

DC: Uh, oh.

MH: We are only in 1945. We've got to get to today.

DC: Oh, from the time I got discharged?

MG: Yes, I want to hear about coming home and what it was like.

DC: Well, they had [for us] twenty dollars a week for a year, the guys that got out, and I never took a penny. I got discharged on a Wednesday. Monday, I went right to work. I worked in a little clothing factory over there in Middlesex.

MG: What was that called?

DC: Where I used to [work]. They used to call it Warrick's. They had these long tables and then they put these things that hold the collars down like this here and the guy would go down like this here and it'll come out. Then, they'll move it over to the next one, and the guy in between gets another one in between. By that time the whole thirty yards or so is done, you let it dry and then we had to wash it and steam it and then roll it up and they sell it like that. All kinds of cloth. I worked there for a while, and then I quit there. I went in the foundry. That was the worst thing. I got pneumonia there. After that, I said, "Oh, hell." I always said, "I'm going to

Bakelite for last, because I can always walk to work." So, that's what I did. I went over to Bakelite and got a job right off the bat.

DK: That's Union Carbide.

DC: I stayed there for forty years.

MG: You skipped over meeting your wife.

DC: Oh, I met her, let's see, when I got home.

DK: What did they call it, (Meale's?) [pizza place in South Bound Brook] or something?

DC: Yes, the pizza parlor there.

DK: Right now, it's a restaurant.

DC: She was there with my sister. That's where I met her there. As a matter of fact, her cousin was there, and she had to go to work. She worked as a telephone operator in New Brunswick. I took her down, and then I came back. That was the last time I took her anywhere. [laughter] I stayed with my wife and then dated her for the rest of the time.

MG: When were you married?

DC: Oh, let's see ...

DK: Tax Day, April 15th. What was the year?

DC: Oh, '46, yes, April the 15th.

MG: It was a short courtship.

DC: Yes, she said, "If it was up to me, we would've been married in December, the day we met." [laughter]

MG: Tell me a little bit more about her. What was her name and what was her background?

DC: Oh, she was Hungarian. She was from the soft coal region below Pittsburgh. She had a cousin out here. She worked at Ruberoid because he was a foreman there in maintenance. That's where she got a job because there was no work out there where she lived. You either worked in the coal mine or store if you can get a job. There were no jobs at all, southwestern Pennsylvania.

RK: What was the town named, Grandpa? Do you remember?

DC: Clarksville.

DK: Yes, that's where she grew up.

DC: Clarksville. It's not far from the West Virginia border. It's in the southwest corner of Pennsylvania.

RK: What was Grandma's maiden name?

DK: Simko.

DC: Simko.

RK: Simko.

DK: Yes, Simko.

DC: Simko.

RK: Ethel Simko.

MG: Well, tell me about your wedding day. How did you celebrate?

DC: My mom didn't like the idea. She wanted me to stay home because my brother was married, my sister was married, and I had a younger sister. She was sort of against it, so we took off to Maryland and got married. [laughter] We didn't tell anybody. We got married down there, and then I had an old Hudson. If you sat in the back, you needed a radio to talk to the guy in the front. That's how big [it was]. We went to her hometown in Clarksville. As a matter of fact, we had to borrow twenty dollars to come home, from her mother. [laughter]

RK: Didn't you guys break down?

DC: Oh, yes, on our way out. On our way out, we broke down. It was steaming over the whole time. I stopped by a brook and I got water and put it in the radiator, so it was able to go.

RK: He climbed down a hill to a brook. [laughter]

DC: That was some trip, but we were married already. On the way back, we got back okay. Then, I moved in with my brother, because Mom wouldn't take me in there. I wouldn't dare to go there. As a matter of fact, I went in there to get my clothes and she started to hit me a little bit but not much, on the shoulder and everything else. I got my clothes and got out.

DK: She hit you?

DC: My brother was living up here in Franklin Township, and they had a little room there, not much. So, we were there for a while, and the people that owned the house, they told us we had

to get out because there's too many in there, my brother, his wife, he already had one kid, I'm not sure.

DK: He had one kid.

DC: We had to get out. Guess where we went? We went to the hotel in Bound Brook. Right across the street was Dr. (Goble?). Do you know that corner by Chi Chi's? Right there, there used to be a hotel there.

DK: Oh, okay.

DC: We were there for a couple weeks, and I got pneumonia again. I was working in the foundry. I was sick. (Goble?), he used to come down from there, cross the street, go up to the hotel and take care of me.

DK: Yes, the old-fashioned doctors used to go to the houses.

DC: I had pneumonia. Where did I go from there? Oh, that's when Mom took us back.

DK: Oh, she took you in.

DC: When I got sick.

DK: You wore her down.

DC: Yes, she took us in, and then we had that house built across the street, that little house.

DK: Grandma built that house.

DC: Yes, yes. We bought it up on 22. They put up the whole frame with a coat of paint on it, the roof and everything, but the inside was empty. So, you had to do that. It was kind of cheap at that time, and (Charlie Houzel?)--do you know (Charlie Houzel?)--he separated the rooms and I helped him out, put in the furnace and the electric and everything like that.

DK: Yes.

DC: A little house like that. We stayed there for a while.

DK: Until I was older.

DC: Her mother died while we were down there. We had to go to Pennsylvania for that. After that, her father, he came out here for a while and he was still drinking, so they didn't get along together because Mom used to holler at him about drinking. He hopped on a train, went back home, and then he died. Then, she was left the house out there. It wasn't much, I think a little over three thousand dollars, the house, coal miners.

RK: Well, you guys sold it, when you went out there after he died.

DC: Yes, well, I didn't sell it. We had the neighbors, Helen Hritz, his mother, she was the executor and she sold it for us, because we couldn't--it's good travel. It's an eight-hour drive out there. She sold it for us. (Zebber?), she had known other people that lived up here that builds houses, so we talked to them and built this house.

RK: With the money you got from Grandma's?

DC: Not much, not much, we got about three thousand dollars, that's it.

DK: How much did this house cost?

DC: This house? Eleven thousand.

RK: How much did you put down? Do you remember?

DC: Well, I had to borrow eight thousand.

RK: You took a mortgage out for eight thousand.

DC: Yes.

RK: You put the three thousand down from the house you guys sold.

DK: Pretty much, yes.

DC: Yes, well, I had to buy the lot. That was five hundred dollars. [laughter]

RK: You own the lot behind here too, right?

DK: On the side you did, yes.

DC: Next door.

RK: Next door.

DC: Yes, that house there.

RK: You had a double lot.

DC: Like a dummy, I sold that for five hundred. I should've kept it, but it had a lot of woods on it. At that time, they were starting to make it look good around the area, so I had to keep it clean. I'm working shift work. I can't do that, so that's when I sold it to Kathy Felix.

DK: Felix, yes. That's my friend.

DC: Yes, they bought it, and then they had a house built on it. The guy that built it, he was from Franklin Township, (Stayshak?), I think he was. We've lived here since '52.

MG: Did you make use of any GI Bill benefits?

DC: No, I should have, but I met her and that was it.

MG: That was enough of a benefit.

DC: I couldn't go back to school. I had only a year and a half of high school.

DK: They were married almost sixty-nine years.

MG: Wow. Well, tell me about starting a family. When were your children born?

DC: Oh, let's see. Don was born in '48, I think, right, Deb?

DK: Probably because I was in '51.

DC: You were in '51.

DK: Right, I was '51. I think maybe '49, '49 or '48.

MG: I have '48 on my survey.

DK: Yes, then it would be '48.

DC: '48, yes.

DK: Because he was three-and-a-half years older than I was.

DC: Yes.

DK: Yes.

MG: Well, tell me about that. Tell me about starting a family and what it was like to have children.

DC: Well, she was a pretty good with them, right, Deb?

DK: Mom, oh, yes.

DC: Yes, she was a pretty good with them.

DK: She worked though.

DC: She worked, too. It was rough.

DK: Back then, for her to work and to still have the family, it was hard.

RK: Did Grandma take any time off after she had Don?

DK: I don't think she worked. She didn't work when Don was born, did she?

DC: In '46, we were married.

DK: Did Mom work when Don was born? Did she continue to work?

DC: I don't know.

RK: Did she stay home with him?

DC: I think she was going to school to be a beautician, I think.

DK: No, I was already older. I was born already.

DC: You were already?

DK: Yes, I was older. I was in grammar school when she was doing that.

DC: She had about another hundred hours to go; she would've had it completed.

DK: Yes.

DC: It was too much. She was working, going to school, and now she's taking care of the kids when she had the time. The midnight shift, I'd get off at midnight. When they were old enough, I used to take the girls over to Bound Brook ...

DK: To drop them off, at the high school.

DC: ... To go to the high school at the time. Then, four to twelve, that was a bad one. I hated that shift. That was the best part of the day between four and midnight, especially when it's ninety-five out there and they're all in the pool out there and I'm going to work at four o'clock. I don't even look at the guys in the pool. It made me feel bad. Once I got away from there, I was all right, once I got into the shop.

DK: Pop, you did shift work how many years when you worked there? At least thirty years.

DC: Forty years.

DK: No.

DC: Oh, thirty years of shift work.

DK: The last ten years, you did get a steady day job.

DC: I finally got a steady day job, yes.

DK: Yes.

MG: What were you doing there?

DC: I was working where they made polystyrene. Do you know what polystyrene is?

DK: Little beads, like plastic beads almost.

DC: Do you know knives and forks you get that are made out of plastic? That's polystyrene. We made that. It's a continuous operation. That's why it never shut down. The only time it shutdown was once a year, that's all. That's why I worked around the clock, all seven days. You were on a four-shift schedule. When you were working, the other three were off; that's the way it works. Your days off kept going backwards all the time. After the four to twelve, you had one day off. Day shift, you had two days off and then after midnight shift you had two days off. That's how it worked. Every third week, he gave you a six-day week. That was time and a half. That was a good paycheck that week.

DK: That was hard.

DC: Yes. Then, the holidays, I used to work the holidays, double shifts all the time because a lot of the guys, especially the real, like the one guy there, he was real religious. He wouldn't work Easter. Hell, I'll work a double, a double shift; that would make a nice check that way. Christmas Eve a double, Christmas Day a double.

DK: We would either have an early dinner together or a later dinner, depending what shift he was on. I know Mom always worked around that. Yes, it was nice.

MG: How would you spend your days off?

DC: How? Work around the house mostly. I can't remember.

DK: He wasn't into any groups.

DC: I'd always take care of the pool.

DK: It was just work and home with family.

DC: I had a clean pool there all the time, right, Deb?

DK: Yes, you did. You kept the pool really good.

DC: Nice and clean. That was a job too, yes.

MG: You were married a very long time, sixty-nine years?

DC: Eight.

DK: Yes, it would have been sixty-nine.

DC: This April would have been sixty-nine.

DK: No, last April would have been sixty-nine.

DC: It was?

DK: Yes.

RK: Just shy of sixty-nine.

DK: Mom passed in February, and then that April, they would have been sixty-nine.

DC: Oh, yes, yes. That's right.

DK: Yes. It's almost a year ago, March, that Mom [passed away].

DC: It's over a year.

DK: Yes.

MG: What's the key to a long and happy marriage?

DC: I don't know. By working, I guess. [laughter] I'm working, she's off, like that. That was the bad part about four to twelve because if I was working days, I had to go to work and it was just vice versa.

DK: You'd barely see each other.

DC: Well, once I get past that four to twelve shift, that five days, then it was better. Days and midnights, it wasn't bad. I'd get off at midnights, especially the summer, I'd go down cellar. I

used to sleep down the cellar; it was nice and cool down there. One time, I slept until about six o'clock. She comes down, "Aren't you going to get up?" I said, "What time it is?" "Six o'clock." "Holy cow." Boy, I slept like a log down there. Then, I come up, see the day light out there.

DK: Actually, they did more retired together than they did their whole married life because when they retired, they travelled. They had a blast, right, Pop?

DC: Yes.

DK: You were young when you retired.

DC: I was ...

DK: Shy of sixty-five?

DC: Sixty-one. Yes, I was going to work until sixty-two. She says, "No, you're not." She retired at sixty-one. "You're going to retire now, too." So, I did. I asked the guy, "What's the difference if I retire now at sixty-one or sixty-two?" "Only a couple dollars." "Okay, the hell with it. I'm going to retire." So, I retired at sixty-one.

DK: That was great. They got involved with the senior citizen group. Like I said, they had more together time.

RK: That's when they bought the boat.

DK: No, they had the boat when they had jobs.

DC: Yes, we had it before that.

RK: Oh, you did?

DC: Yes, oh, yes.

DK: Mom was still working, and you were still working, right?

DC: Yes.

DK: They had bought a boat, and we had fun times on that boat.

MG: Well, tell me more about that.

DC: Sure, the boat.

RK: Which ones? You had three, didn't you?

DK: Yes, oh, it was fun.

MG: Some of the trips you took, where did you guys go?

DC: Just around Raritan Bay.

DK: No, the trips that you and Mom took.

DC: Oh, oh. We went to ...

DK: The big one was Alaska.

DC: Bermuda. A couple times, we went to Bermuda. I wouldn't go there again.

DK: You went to Bermuda? Mom flew? Oh, you went by cruise.

DC: Cruise, yes.

DK: She didn't like flying.

RK: That was the last one. That was their big one. [Editor's Note: Ron Kwiatkowski is showing Molly Graham a photograph of the boat.]

DK: Oh, we had so much fun.

RK: They named it the *Roebuck*, which was his ship's code name ...

MG: Oh, cool.

RK: ... In World War II.

DK: The *Roebuck*, yes.

RK: The *Braine* was named the *Roebuck* and there's a wartime photo of the ship, too.

MG: Oh, wow.

DK: Yes, that is cool.

MG: That really gives you a sense of the size.

RK: Yes, it does, it's a good one. It's an actual real picture of it.

DK: Yes, yes.

MG: That's incredible.

RK: Yes.

DC: The officer that was in CIC, he was the guy that orders the food and stuff, like the commissary. I used to like the charts, working on the charts. He says, "You know, when you get out of here, you're probably going to get a boat and sail around the world."

DK: You got a boat.

DC: He was right, too.

DK: We had fun on the boats.

DC: He was something. No, he wasn't in there when we got hit. Otherwise, he would've been killed.

DK: Mom and you were still working when you had the boat, or were you retired at that time?

RK: Well, you bought the first one, you were still working, weren't you?

DC: No, I was still working.

DK: You were still working.

RK: You bought the small one, you used to bring up to Lake Wallenpaupack, right?

DC: Oh, yes, that eighteen-footer.

DK: Yes, yes.

RK: The tri-hull.

DC: The tri-hull, yes.

RK: Made of wood or fiber glass?

DK: It was fiber glass, I believe.

DC: Fiber, yes.

DK: Yes, it was fiber glass. It was fun.

DC: I sold it to the judge's son in Somerville. [laughter] I'm out here in the yard. He comes over there. He says, "Where's all the accessories?" Because I had it in the paper. I said, "Well,

you've got this, you've got that." You have to put that in, make it look good. He bought it anyhow, right there in Somerville.

DK: It was fun.

DC: Then, when I got the other wooden boat, the twenty-eight-footer, that was a lemon, that sucker.

DK: That was wood, too.

DC: The pump would stop pumping. I sometimes had to throw the anchor out. Otherwise, you'd drift away until you repaired it. Then, I finally get rid of it. Tony bought it back for a thousand dollars, and then I bought this other one that you saw in this picture there.

DK: That was the fun one.

DC: I paid ten for that one.

DK: That was ten?

DC: Yes.

RK: What a boat, too.

DC: Now, we took that down from Jersey City. The people we bought it from, they came with us all the way down, and Donald took them all the way back home by the car, because they wanted to get their last ride on it, him and his father.

DK: You got rid of that last boat around thirty-two years ago because Jessie was born, and that's about when you got rid of the boat.

DC: Oh, yes, yes.

DK: So, they had it for quite a while.

DC: That was too much, too much. They were both working. Donald was in business. I only had it mostly for them. Very rare they went out. Donald went out a couple times. He lost it one time ... [laughter]

DK: I was working.

DC: ... In the fog. They found Big Bertha, remember Big Bertha?

DK: Yes.

DC: They tied it up to there. They didn't know where it was at. I said, "Donald, you had the charts over there. The inlet was not too far from there."

DK: Oh, yes, Big Bertha.

DC: It was a little southwest corridor, but he didn't look at it until it cleared up and then he was able to see where he was at.

DK: Well, I didn't know that.

DC: Then, I took him out at nighttime one time, over there by Staten Island, Joe Ponti, took them all out there, dark out there. We're out there and fishing a little bit. Now, it's dark. I go back in. I'm going back in. Joe says, "How the hell do you know where you're going?" "Well, look at all the lights there when we came out. I'm going by those lights there. I'm just about to get there." You don't have to use the compass.

DK: Yes, he was good.

DC: Easy.

DK: He was good with that.

DC: I was just watching those buoys that were low in that channel there. They have buoys there. You don't want to hit them things.

DK: Yes, you have some low ground there, too.

DC: We had a pretty good time. A lot of drinking on that thing. [laughter]

DK: We had a good time on that boat.

DC: Debbie, the one time, she says, "You know, I drank a six-pack."

DK: You didn't know it, when you're out there. You don't even know. You're just having a good time and drinking. When you hit land, that's when it hits you. [laughter] That's our younger days.

MG: That does sound fun. What other memories from family life stand out to you?

DC: Baseball, softball.

DK: Yes, my kids, Ronnie and my daughter, they were very much into sports, and my daughter played softball away games. You'd go away for the weekends, and my mom and dad would come with me. We'd share a room, and she'd be with the girls. The whole weekend, we'd be going out and watching her games.

DC: Tell her where we used to go, New York State.

DK: New York State. Oh, yes, we went everywhere.

DC: We were in Florida, was it?

DK: Florida? Did you go to Florida with us?

DC: I'm pretty sure.

DK: No, we did. Me and Jessie did; you didn't go to Florida.

DC: Oh, there's another one that was pretty far away, too.

DK: Oh, yes, New York, Pennsylvania, tournaments in Pennsylvania. It was fun.

DC: Yes, yes.

DK: Then, when they weren't doing it, then you'd go watch Ronnie play soccer.

DC: I'd seen you play soccer and baseball.

DK: They did that a lot.

DC: He was a good baseball [player]. He's a catcher all the way. The guy hit the ball. He'd be down to first base before the guy that hit the ball because he's supposed to follow him, just in case they overthrow, so he can get it. Man, he was down there with all that stuff on him.

DK: Rip off that thing and go running down there.

DC: You hit a good, long home run. I missed that sucker.

RK: Was that the one up in North Warren?

DC: No, the one where you live, around there.

RK: Oh, in Branchburg?

DK: Branchburg.

DC: Yes, you hit a long one there. You told me, remember?

RK: I think so, yes.

DC: Yes.

RK: Yes.

DC: I wasn't there.

RK: I connected on a few.

DK: When they were retired, they came to a lot of the kid's activities.

RK: They were very much a part of our lives.

DC: Yes.

RK: We were very, very close with them growing up.

MG: That's good. That makes a real difference.

DK: Oh, it does, it does.

DC: I enjoyed that. Then, she started playing field hockey.

DK: Yes, field hockey, yes. In fact, she's playing softball again. Pop's thinking about going to watch her.

RK: Oh, you should.

DK: Slow pitch. You know how Jessie is with slow pitch.

DC: Oh, yes.

DK: He'd laugh at her because she used to do fast pitch and if you pitch it slow to her, she would just be swinging out there. We'd laugh at her.

DC: I'd always say to her, "Who're you waving at, Jess?" [laughter]

DK: I know. That was fun.

DC: She had an arm. She had a hell of an arm.

DK: Oh, did she.

DC: The poor girls on first base didn't like her at short. She almost knocked the glove out of their hand.

RK: Yes, she had a hell of an arm.

DK: She did, she did.

DC: Like a bullet. She must have got that from Donald. Donald had a hell of an arm, from when he used to play softball, center field, all the way to home plate.

DK: Yes, I remember Don had a good arm.

DC: I never had a good arm.

MG: Did Donald have a family? Did he have children?

DC: Yes, he had one boy. He'd be living today if he listened to me.

DK: Yes, he would be.

DC: Damn.

DK: We miss him. He died. He was only sixty.

MG: Yes, that's too young.

DK: Yes, it is.

DC: Sixty-one.

MG: Did you get involved in veterans organizations?

DC: No, I just belong to them. I don't go.

DK: You did for a little while there, Pop.

RK: You used to go to the reunions, remember, Grandpa?

DC: Oh, the reunions, yes.

DK: He would go to the Navy reunions.

RK: Do you remember how many reunions you went to?

DC: Well, let's see. The first one was our home port of Boston. That was our first one.

MG: When was that?

DK: After you retired, you and Mom would go to those.

DC: Yes, after.

DK: Yes, you would go to those, when he was in his sixties, seventies.

DC: A friend of mine had a van. He had all kinds of equipment inside, radios and all kinds of things, and he's parked at the motel or hotel that we [were] at. The next morning, it was gone. They stole it. It was only two blocks away from the ...

DK: Where was this? Who was that?

DC: In Boston.

DK: Who was the guy?

DC: The people from Florida.

DK: Really?

DC: Yes.

DK: I didn't know that.

DC: We didn't know until the next morning it was gone. They stole it, and it was only two blocks away when he stripped it down. Finally, they caught him. He was lucky he had friends over there; they stayed over and he was able to get home to Florida. I don't know what happened.

DK: Oh, that's terrible.

DC: Yes, I guess insurance probably paid for most of it because he had everything in that thing.

DK: Oh, that's a bummer.

DC: It's a damn shame.

DK: Yes.

DC: That's the only bad thing about that part in Boston, that first reunion.

RK: Grandpa, didn't someone come up to Grandma and thank her because you pulled him out of the water out there, at a reunion? Grandma always told a story of someone's wife coming up and thanking her because of what you did during the war.

DK: Did you pull somebody out of the water?

RK: Do you remember that story, Grandpa? Grandma used to tell it.

RK: Does that ring a bell at all?

DK: Maybe Mom was telling stories.

RK: She could've been. [laughter]

MG: It's a good one. Let's go with it.

DC: The only time we swam off the ship is when we were down in Bermuda because we couldn't go ashore. We dove off the ship.

RK: We tried to get him to do some more VA stuff. He's never really wanted to.

MG: Yes.

DK: Like I said, he's gotten more social after he got done working. Because of the shift work, he couldn't really get involved with too much social stuff.

MG: Yes.

DK: Mom was into the kids.

DC: I could see why my brother didn't want to go over there. I told him, "Come on over." I said, "Good job, you don't have to work hard." Because the shift work, he wouldn't take it.

DK: No.

DC: Maybe Dee [Dorothy Csontos] wouldn't let him.

DK: That's tough. You missed a lot.

DC: Although she didn't work. It wouldn't have been that bad.

DK: Yes, but Mom worked.

DC: Dee never worked. She had it made there.

DK: You always had a vacation. They always took us on a vacation in the summertime. We knew somebody who had a little bungalow down the shore, and we rented from Anne MacNeer, right?

DC: Across the street.

DK: Right.

DC: I painted a house for them, and she gave us the rent free.

DK: Yes, so they always created memories for us. They weren't elaborate vacations, but they were fun, family oriented.

MG: The simple ones are usually the most fun.

DK: It is.

DC: The time we picked you guys up at Cape Hatteras and went to Florida, remember?

DK: My husband and I, and the kids, we rented a house down in Cape Hatteras for two weeks. The first two weeks, it was just my family, and at the end of the second week, my mom and dad came down. Well, then my husband took the dog and he went home, and we got in the car with my mom and dad and we drove to Florida and then drove back.

MG: Well, that's fun.

DK: Wow, was that fun. That was such a great memory, you and Mom and me and the kids.

DC: We had quite a place for the price.

DK: Yes.

RK: Yes, we had a great place. It was fun.

DK: It was a lot of fun.

DC: A big place, I mean, the kitchen was big.

RK: A nice pool.

DK: A pool.

DC: It had two bedrooms, I think.

DK: They were advertising it was near where all the activities were.

DC: In Orlando.

DK: They were renting out the condo weekly, so we got a condo thing and had access to the pool.

RK: Yes, it was a good deal.

DK: We didn't cook or anything, but we had a nice place. We used to freeze water and take it into the park, so we could drink water while we were going on those hot rides. It was in the summertime.

DC: Then, I let you guys take the car and go back to Orlando.

DK: Then, we went to Epcot. Remember Ron came down.

DC: Yes, I didn't like Epcot.

DK: My husband came down that weekend in between. He flew down and spent it with us.

DC: I said, "Take the car. You guys go. Me and Mom will stay here."

DK: You loved it because you needed to rest. The little ones were keeping you going. They were only like, Ronnie was about five and Jessie was about seven. So, they were little.

MG: Yes.

DK: That was a great memory.

DC: We got on every ride though when we went.

DK: Well, because of Mom. My mom always had, at that point, she was having a lot of arthritis and walking problems.

DC: I rented a scooter for her.

MG: That's nice.

DK: Yes, in the park. She's standing, we're in line, going on a ride, and she's under a tree and somebody went up to her and said, "Hey, don't you want to go on the ride?" She said, "I can't. I got this ..." [referring to the scooter]. "Well, you know, you just go right up in the front. You just drive in the front and they let you in the front of the line." She goes, "My family is back here." "They go with you." This was summertime, big crowds, and we would just drive right up to the thing.

DC: I'll tell you, for one day, we practically got every ride they had there, where it would take you four days if you didn't, all those lines they had.

DK: That was great. We had a good time.

DC: Jessie got on the back, standing up on the back while Mom was driving.

DK: Yes, that was fun.

DC: We were there a couple times, weren't we, in Orlando?

DK: You went a couple times. I only went once with you guys and once with Ron and the kids.

DC: Yes, yes. The airport was right there.

MG: Well, what have I forgotten to ask you about? What am I missing? Are there any more questions?

DK: That's pretty much everything. My mom and dad, they were inseparable. They did everything together because I'd even say to my Mom, because sometimes she'd be saying, "Oh, he drives me ..." I said, "Mom, you and Pop have to do something on your own sometimes. Why don't you go out with one of the ladies?" She'd be complaining. She'd go, "No, that's all right. I don't want to go out."

DC: She went down to Freehold with me a couple times and Monmouth Park.

DK: Yes, they did everything together.

DC: She went down to Monmouth Park with me and we went to the Philadelphia Race Track a couple times.

DK: You guys did everything together.

DC: Bensalem, we always used to like to go there; it was nice.

DK: Then, when she wasn't feeling well, he would take care of Mom. She had to get toes amputated, and he would clean out the sores and keep it good. They were like inseparable.

MG: That's amazing.

DK: Taking care of each other is probably one of the things that made it happen so long.

MG: Yes.

DK: You had your up and down. Mom threw you out that one night when you were younger. She threw her suitcase out, threw it out there, "Go, old man." She would call him old man. [laughter] Then, she wouldn't talk to him, whenever they would have an argument, and she'd go,

"Debbie, go and tell your father dinner is ready." She wouldn't talk to you for about a week.
[laughter] She was funny.

DC: You bad boy. You bad boy.

MG: Do you have any other questions or anything I forgot to ask?

RK: Very thorough.

DK: Very thorough.

MG: Well, this has really been a treat to get to meet you, and if you think of something else, it is really easy for me to come back here and get more on the record.

DC: Okay.

DK: I think you've pretty much covered everything though.

RK: If there's anything else you want to try to piece in, I can always email you.

MG: Okay.

DK: Okay.

DC: There you go.

DK: Do you want his email?

RK: Do you have a business card?

MG: Not with me, but I will write your email address down. Well, I really want to thank you so much for sharing all of these stories with me and spending all the time and missing some of the golf to talk to me. [laughter]

DK: That's all right.

RK: That's all right. You've got four and a half more hours of it, you're fine.

DC: Oh, yes, until seven o'clock.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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