

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HENRY FATTON

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Nicholas Molnar: This begins an interview with Mr. Henry Fatton on July 22, 2013, in Flemington, New Jersey, with Nicholas Molnar. Thank you, Mr. Fatton, for having me here today.

Henry Fatton: My pleasure.

NM: Could you tell us where and when you were born?

HF: I was born on the Eastside of Manhattan on June the 2nd, 1922.

NM: Okay. Before we get into your background, I just want to learn a little bit about your family background. Could you tell us about your father and what you remember about him?

HF: My father and mother were both born in Rosebank, Staten Island. My father, I always thought his grandparents came from France, but, then, I found out later that it might have been from Switzerland. My mother's family came from Ireland. At one time, I visited Ireland, tried to find relatives, but I couldn't. Anyway, they were raised in Staten Island and, when they got married, they moved to Brooklyn, New York, or Manhattan, New York, where I was born. Then, they moved to Brooklyn, where I lived until I was thirteen.

NM: Do you have any siblings?

HF: No, I'm the only one.

NM: Okay.

HF: When they had me, they said they couldn't do any better, so, they quit. [laughter]

NM: Tell us about your earliest memories in New York City.

HF: Well, the earliest memory I have was in Manhattan, in New York, and I guess I was about five or six. We lived across the street from Bond Bakeries. I could smell them cooking bread or whatever it was. It was such a lasting impression. I've never forgotten that. Then, somehow or other, they moved to Brooklyn, or I moved to Brooklyn. I lived with my godmother for five or six years. My father and mother worked in New York. My father worked on the ferry boats. My mother was a change operator on the BMT [Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit] subway line. When they moved to Brooklyn, I didn't live with them. I attended the Catholic school, Our Lady of Lourdes, in Brooklyn until my mother had a discussion with the nuns about [how] I was out of the parish and she should be paying more and I guess she couldn't afford it. So, then, I moved back with them for four or five years. I don't remember too much about that, except I lived in Brooklyn. I played ball in the streets, like many kids did at that time. They played punchball and whatnot. Then, I got sick. I had stomach trouble and my mother sent me to live with some friends up in Higginsville, New Jersey. It's outside of Three Bridges. [Editor's Note: Three Bridges, New Jersey, is a community within Readington in Hunterdon County.] It's a small community. It's not a city or a town; it's just a community. I lived there and I stayed with my friends until I graduated from high school, when I joined the Navy. So, I really didn't live too

long with my mother and father. Of about thirteen years, maybe I lived with them, maybe, six or seven years at the most. So, I don't know too much about my mother and father, other than they came to visit once in a while. When I was in the Navy and the war broke out, I didn't know my mother had died until the month after. She died in January of 1942. At that time, I was in the South Pacific on a carrier and the mail was kind of slow getting to wherever we were. So, I didn't know about that. Anyway, I can remember going to school in Brooklyn, at a public school, and it was fun. I enjoyed my time in Brooklyn. Of course, in those days, it's a little different than it is today. That's about it, as far as I can remember.

NM: Did you have any aunts or uncles in the area?

HF: Not in that particular area. I had a few uncles in Washington State, four uncles in Staten Island. My father was one of five brothers, no sisters. My mother had a sister who lived with her for a while. Then, she moved to California. The uncles, I knew all of the uncles. I'd visit with them from time to time. So, I did know them. They're all dead now, of course. They all lived to be in the eighties, I guess, except the youngest one. He died young.

NM: When did you move from Brooklyn to Three Bridges, that community?

HF: Yes, when I was thirteen.

NM: Okay.

HF: So, it had to be in 1935.

NM: Okay.

HF: About that.

NM: Okay.

HF: So, I attended the Three Bridges grammar school, seventh and eighth grade. I graduated from there. I went to Flemington High School, which, after 1956, was no longer Flemington High School. It became Hunterdon Central Regional High School. [Editor's Note: Hunterdon Central Regional High School serves the towns of Delaware, East Amwell, Flemington, Raritan and Readington. It is located in Flemington.] The high school has a reunion every year in Florida for anybody that went from 1927, when it started, to 1956. However, I think this past February was the last year that we're going to have a reunion, mainly because so many of the people that did attend that school have since died or been too ill or too difficult for them to travel, although a lot of them do live in Florida, but it was a great time to go visit. I have children living in Florida and grandchildren, so, it was a two-way deal for me, to go visit my old classmates, plus, my children.

NM: What type of community was Three Bridges at the time?

HF: It was mostly a bedroom community. There was a farm next door to us. The farmer milked the cows and took care of cows. Other farms around were bigger farms that might have been wheat growing and some of them had--it was really a farming community with a few houses, where we lived. The house next door was a Hungarian boarding farm. People from the city would come out for the weekend or for the summer and stay there. They had a tennis court, which I used more than some of the people that are coming to visit. Another young fellow that came out there every weekend with his parents, I got to be quite friendly with. He was the oldest friend I had and, unfortunately, he died about a year ago, but he had since moved to outside of Three Bridges and lived there with his eight children. We kidded around, because I had seven children, he had eight. He outdid me, but he really didn't, because we had eight. One died in the sixth or seventh month. So, we were friendly for a good many years, Ted Skoults and his wife still lives in the same house in Three Bridges, but Higginsville was just a community. It was no real city of any kind, although the Jersey Central Railroad stopped there. There was a train stop there. When I was in school, I used to board that train and ride to Flemington to play ball and that was my way to get to Flemington, since I couldn't drive and I wasn't old enough to drive.

NM: As a teenager, growing up in that area, did you participate in any sports or Boy Scouts?

HF: Well, I tried out for a lot of things, but I didn't make the team. I tried out for basketball. Well, I lived in the country, in Higginsville--I'd never even seen a basketball until I got to the high school. I guess I didn't make the first cut. I tried out. I didn't try out for football. I only weighed 110 pounds. I was the waterboy for one year. I tried out for the baseball team. I didn't make that, but I did try out for the tennis team, which I was on the tennis team in my senior year, but I played a lot of, not varsity sports, but inter-class sports. After graduation, I played a lot of the softball. That was what I played mostly.

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: We can pause it.

HF: No, I'm fine.

NM: As a teenager, did you have any jobs?

HF: Well, I cut grass for some of the neighbors when I was growing up, of which I got twenty-five cents an hour, which was not a lot of money, but it was a lot of money to me, because I didn't have any other means of income. When I was in high school, or a senior, I was a commercial student and I was offered a job with a company in Flemington, if I'd come to work after school, which I agreed to do. On the first day I went down there, the owner says, well, he changed his mind. He'd wait until after I graduated from school. When I graduated, he changed his mind also. He didn't need any help. So, I didn't have a job. So, after graduation, I tried getting jobs locally, which there wasn't--it was still part of the recession at that time, or Depression. [Editor's Note: The Great Depression began with the stock market crash on October 29, 1929, and lasted up to the beginning of World War II.] I went to New York and stayed with my mother and father, where they still lived in Brooklyn, and went to different employment agencies looking for jobs. The height of everything was when, one day, my mother decided to

go with me looking for a job. If you knew how embarrassing that was--at the time, it didn't seem to have bothered me, but, as I looked at it, years later, I thought that would be the last thing I'd want to do with my children. Anyway, after that, another day, I went into New York, I said, "I think I'll join the Navy. I always wanted to join the Navy." So, I stopped in at 90 Church Street, which was where the Navy recruiting office was. I signed the letter of intent, but I had to get my mother's permission. I was eighteen, but, in those days, I guess you had to get your mother's permission. She had to sign away your [rights]. So, when I went home that night, she says, "Well, did you get a job today?" and I said, "Yes, I got a job, but you won't like it." She said, "What do you mean?" I says, "I joined the Navy." Well, she kind of blew her top a little bit. When my father came home, I could hear them talking about it all through the night. In the morning, she said, "We've talked it over and we agreed I'll sign the papers, if you do me one favor." I said, "What's that?" She says, "Don't get any tattoos." "Well, that's no problem. I won't get any tattoos." So, she signed the paper. I took the paper back to the recruiting office and they said they would call me. At that time, they would do any calls about every month or so. Two months later, in September, they called me and that's when I went to join the Navy. I was on active duty. I had signed up for six years, which is what the duty was at that time. So, I really had no work experience, other than cutting grass, which is not much of an experience.

NM: You said that you were looking for jobs. What types of positions were you looking for?

HF: Oh, I was a commercial student and I was [taking] shorthand and bookkeeping. In the Navy, I was a yeoman, which was the secretarial and the administrative part. After I became second class, I would be called up for court-martials and would take testimonials at court-martials. That's what I did, but, when I got out of the Navy, I didn't pursue that. My father-in-law, I had gotten married during the Navy and the girl I married, her father owned a five-and-ten in Flemington. So, he asked me to come to work for him. So, I went to work for him, I guess fourteen years, when I decided I had enough. I wasn't making enough money to support seven children. So, I joined Equitable Life Assurance. They made me a life insurance and health insurance salesman, of which I worked for, like, thirty-five years.

NM: Okay. Was this September of 1941 when you joined the Navy?

HF: No, 1940.

NM: Tell me what happened after your mother signs these papers.

HF: Well, they weren't very happy, but I guess they eventually learned to live with it. My father never had much to say about it, so, I didn't really know how he felt. After I finished boot camp, I had maybe a few weeks' leave. I went home and visited with my parents and my uncles and aunts and whatnot. Then, I was transferred to California to go to school. In school, was a four-month school, the first month, you studied signaling, communications, radio, yeoman's duties. I was put in the radio class, which I didn't like to begin with. Before they assigned me to the class, they said, "Anybody doesn't like the assignment, raise their hand." Well, I was eighteen years old and in the Navy, away from home the first time--I wasn't going to stick my hand up and be an oddball. So, I accepted what they gave me. I graduated from radio school. I can remember, there was thirty-two guys in the class. I was twenty-eighth, so, I wasn't very bright as far as

being a good radioman, but I did graduate. When I graduated, they said, "You can request what kind of a ship you want." Well, in the harbor in San Diego, this aircraft carrier came in and out. It was the USS *Enterprise* and the rumor, or scuttlebutt, was that it was going back to the East Coast. So, I thought, "I'd like to have that, duty on that ship." So, I put in a request that I be assigned to an aircraft carrier, the *Enterprise*. [Editor's Note: The USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) was an aircraft carrier that was in service from 1936 to 1947.] Well, a week or so later, I was assigned to the USS *Lexington* (CV-2), an aircraft carrier. It wasn't going to the East Coast. It went to Pearl Harbor, and we lived there, but it was a ship that I loved and I had a great time on. It was wonderful. I was very happy to be aboard the ship. While I was on the *Lexington*, I told my division officer that I really didn't want to be a radioman. I did stand radio watches for a couple of weeks. So, he reassigned me as a yeoman, a yeoman's striker, in the Captain's office, which I did, and then, eventually, I was assigned to the communications office and, when the ship was sunk, I was in the gunnery office. [Editor's Note: The USS *Lexington* (CV-2) was launched in 1927. During the Battle of the Coral Sea, it was hit by two torpedoes and three bombs. The carrier was abandoned and sunk on May 8, 1942. It was the first American carrier sunk in World War II.] So, we stayed on that ship for fourteen months before it was sunk, but it was some of the happiest days of my life, pre-war. Pre-war, after inspection on Saturday morning, if you didn't have the duty for the weekend, we would go ashore to Pearl Harbor, or not Pearl, but to Honolulu, where I had a locker club. We kept civilian clothes in the locker club, and tennis clubs and whatnot, tennis. Then, we'd go to Waikiki and spend the weekend out at Waikiki. We went to dances at the YMCA in Honolulu. We had a great time. It was great to be young at that time--eighteen years old and you're living on Waikiki Beach for the weekend. You went to dances with all these gals that lived in Honolulu, some white, some Filipino, Japanese, some Chinese, didn't make any difference to me. They were women--that's all I cared about. They were very friendly and they were very nice. While I was in Honolulu, at one dance, I met two fellows that I knew from high school in Flemington. There were at Hickam Field in Pearl Harbor and they were in the Army. So, they invited me to come back to visit them at Hickam Field, which I did, the following Sunday. So, while I was leaving there, I told them, "How about come out onboard ship next Sunday and I'll show you around the ship?" They agreed to that. Unfortunately, we never got to that point, because I didn't know it, but the ship left on Friday. We were taking Marine fighters to Midway and, on Sunday, two days later, Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese. [Editor's Note: Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941.] So, they wouldn't have come anyway, because they were attacked at eight o'clock in the morning. So, that's where we were at that time, but Pearl Harbor, before the war, was wonderful. There was only two hotels on Waikiki Beach, the Halekulani and the Royal Hawaiian. My wife and I visited there about ten or fifteen years ago and there must've been thirty hotels on the beach. It wasn't the same, but Hawaii was still an ideal spot to visit. Have you ever been to visit?

NM: No.

HF: No? You should go. [laughter]

NM: Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, what was the scuttlebutt going around regarding the Japanese? Was there a concern?

HF: Yes, I think there was. Before the movies at night, we would have movies on the flight deck, on the hangar deck, and we would have pictures of Japanese aircraft, to identify the different types of planes they had. So, there must have been some kind of a feeling that you must learn how to identify these Japanese planes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

HF: Okay. So, with the exception of the planes that they were showing, there wasn't too much concern for the average sailor; I mean, what the officers knew and what they did, well, totally different.

NM: Okay. You were a yeoman striker at this point. What were ...

HF: My duties?

NM: Your duties, exactly.

HF: Well, my duties in the Captain's office was keeping all the records of the crew and preparing the plan of the day that would be sent out to all around the ship. When I was transferred to the communications, in the radio shop, you did the same thing, within that particular division; then, when I was transferred to the gunnery office, did the same thing there, keep a record of who was standing watch, who was doing [what], just regular clerical duties. In addition to that, you did your regular duties. While I was in the Captain's office, I manned the Captain's telephone on the bridge. That's where I was when the ship was attacked and we were sunk. I was on the bridge when the radioman came in with a radiogram to tell me, the Captain, that, "Hostilities with Japan started this morning. This is no drill." So, I was one of the first persons to know that, outside of the radioman, that we were attacked. It was generally just office work and whatever was required of somebody working in an office. It was not very glamorous, but your duties, like on the bridge or on the gunnery--when the ship was sunk, I was on a gun crew, a twenty-millimeter gun crew, on the rear of the stack. I could see what was happening all around me. I could see the torpedo planes and the bombers coming over and seeing them drop the bombs. I wondered, "What am I going to do if one comes down toward me? Am I going to be able to stand here or do I jump over the side?" I didn't do either one. I just stood there, manning the phones. I saw the torpedoes coming towards the ships and I knew that we were going to get hit. I could feel the blast of the torpedoes when it hit the ship. The official word was, there was two torpedoes, but I saw three torpedoes coming. Whether one was a dud or one went under the ship, I don't know, but there was three coming toward the ship. The rest of the torpedo planes were shot down. The bombing planes, they dropped the bomb on top of the stack, which is where I was. I was below the top. It killed all the people up on top of the stack, who were manning fifty-caliber machine guns. They were all killed, including a good friend of mine, worked in the gunnery office with me. The bomb that landed on the gun crew, on the portside, which was manned by Marines, killed all the Marines on that port[side]. We only lost about 140 men totally, which was unusual. I think that's what the official count was.

NM: On the *Lexington*, when the officers were informed that Pearl Harbor had been attacked, you were on the bridge.

HF: On the bridge.

NM: Can you talk about that day? The *Lexington* was out in the Pacific.

HF: Yes, we were on our way to Midway, carrying these planes. When the Captain got the word of Pearl Harbor, he launched the planes; we were, like, five hundred miles from Midway at the time. We turned around, headed back toward Pearl Harbor, looking for the Japanese. We went to war duties then. Everybody had their official stations that they went to. It was not--you paid more attention to what was going on, I guess, than you would normally do. We came back in--we didn't find the Japs, by the way--we came back in to Pearl Harbor the following Saturday. The *Nevada* [(BB-36)] was in the channel, beached. A lot of the ships were burning and some were sunk. Most of the crew stood on the flight deck looking at everything. I was up with the rest of the crew, but I was crying, looking at what happened, and remember how many people were killed at that day. [Editor's Note: 2,403 Americans were killed during the attack on Pearl Harbor.] We tied up near Pearl Harbor, loaded up with ammunition and food and supplies. Then, we left the next morning out to sea. We left and I guess we went out, we're like fifty-seven days without coming back to port. At that time, it was the longest sea duty for a ship in the Navy without coming back to port. We did come back to Seattle, I guess sometime maybe in January, for a few days. Anyway, I think it was maybe January or February, back then. Anyway, we were back in the South Pacific, where we stayed most of the war. We made two or three different attacks on different islands that the Japanese held, by planes only. We never saw any Japanese. We never saw any Japanese. I never saw a real Japanese until long after the war. I guess, in the Navy, unless you're eyeball-to-eyeball, and our ships didn't see their ships. So, the day, May the 7th, I think it was, it was the start of the Coral Sea battle. We lost a couple of ships. One was an oil tanker and I forget what the other one was, but, on May the 8th, we launched our planes looking for the Japanese, which were two or three hundred miles away. In the meantime, they had sent their planes to attack us. So, neither one saw each other. We were, like, two hundred miles away. We damaged--I don't think we damaged or sunk one of their ships--but they sank us. We operated with the *Yorktown*, which was with us in our group. The *Yorktown* was sunk in Midway, the following month, but we had lots of ships working with us, so, when the ship was sunk, they say they didn't lose a man, even though a lot of the men jumped over the side when they were told to abandon the ship. I didn't jump over the side. I wasn't about to jump in the ocean. I climbed down a line to a destroyer, which was alongside fighting the fire. [Editor's Note: The USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) was an aircraft carrier that was launched in 1937. It was sunk after the Battle of Midway, which occurred from June 4 to 6, 1942.] From that ship, I was transferred to a cruiser, the USS *Portland* [(CA-33)]. It took me back to Tongatapu, an island where we loaded up on troop transports to come back to the United States. [Editor's Note: Tongatapu is an island that is part of the Kingdom of Tonga archipelago in the Pacific.] We got back to the United States at the time the Battle of Midway started.

NM: Okay. You mentioned that your battle station was a twenty-millimeter gun mount.

HF: Right.

NM: What were your duties at that battle station?



HF: Keep the guns supplied with the ammunition.

NM: Okay.

HF: We had spare ammunition near the gun station. So, as the gunners would empty their guns out, I would help them and take any orders that we got, because I manned the telephone.

NM: Okay.

HF: Direct contact where the gunnery officer was giving you orders. That was my job. It wasn't a big job, but I had to be there.

NM: Was that always your battle station?

HF: No, my battle station, originally, had been on the bridge, until I got transferred to this other department.

NM: Okay.

HF: On the bridge, coming in and out of port, I manned the engine room telegraph, where you flipped the "full speed ahead" or "engine stop." You gave the engine room the orders of what to do, or you're the Captain's talker and you talked to different parts of the ship. That was what my main duties were for, like, most of the fourteen months. It was only the last month or so that I was on the gun crew.

NM: Can you talk about your experience on the *Lexington* during the Battle of the Coral Sea? You mentioned that airplanes were attacking you.

HF: Right.

NM: I am assuming that since you are in an antiaircraft gun mount, you are probably shooting them down.

HF: Yes, that's right. I don't know, I suppose they hit some; I couldn't follow the ships once they flew over us there. We were in the rear of the stack, so, I didn't see what was going on up forward. I didn't even know that the bomb had landed on top of the stack, killing all these people up there. I didn't know that until later, but I could see these bombers dropping the bombs and my one thought was, "What'll I do next?" I guess the easiest thing to do was to do nothing, which I did, because I thought about jumping over the side, but that would not be too good. [laughter] Whether you'd ever get picked up by another ship, I don't know, but that was not one of my desires.

NM: Talk about when the ship was hit and what happened.

HR: Okay, when the ship was hit, it had a list of seven degrees. We could not take planes, take on any planes, because it wasn't level. Well, some of the planes were still attacking the Japanese, so, they weren't coming back yet. The men below decks were fighting, emptying the water out of the ship, trying to get it on an even keel, which they finally did after about an hour. An hour or so later, the planes started coming back and we started landing planes. With that, even though we were on an even keel, gasoline or something must have leaked out down in the central part of the ship, start an explosion, which started a fire. They'd fought the fire for, like, two, three or four hours before they decided that they couldn't do anymore. We had two destroyers, one on the portside and one on the starboard side, supplying hoses with water to fight the fires. Our fire crew fought the fire as well as they could, but the fire kept spreading until, eventually, they didn't have enough water. I guess the fire got too much, that they had to--that's when they decided to abandon ship. Before they gave the word to abandon ship, me and my buddy went down on the flight deck and we'd just sit around, hanging around the flight deck, until they told us what to do. In the meantime, we went down to the ship's steward and got cans of ice cream. We sat on the flight deck eating ice cream until they told us what to do. When they told us to abandon ship, I decided, "I'm not ready to jump over the side yet." The first group they took off the ship was the aircraft crews, and that was on the portside, the destroyer. Then, the starboard side, they started taking off crew and I was one of the last ones to climb down that line to the ship. I wasn't about to jump in the water, I know that. If I could climb down the ship--I read later that the Captain and the Executive Officer were the last ones to leave the ship. The Captain and the Executive Officer were picked up by a motor whaleboat, or a smaller vessel, and taken to a different ship. On the ship that I was on, the *Portland*, as a yeoman, I took testimony from all the different people on the ship, which they must have had thirty or forty pages of their impressions of what happened, the officers and the enlisted both. I turned that over to the *Lexington* Historical Society in San Diego. So, they have that. I should have kept it--it might have been worthwhile, I don't know--but, anyway, it was about thirty pages. When I've been to the reunion, we've talked about different parts of the things we did. I guess about four or five years ago, they ceased having reunions, because so many of the people have either died or become invalid and couldn't travel that much. We used to have reunions all over the country. I went to one in Ohio, I went to one in Galveston, I went to one in Texas--that was Galveston--and I was going to one in Salt Lake City when my wife got sick, when we were out in a timeshare in Colorado. We never did make it to the last one, which was at Salt Lake City. They had one, one year, in Philadelphia, which I didn't know about until later. I couldn't have gone anyway, because we had seven kids and I didn't see how I could get away that easily. So, I'd missed that one, but that's where we were.

NM: When you were aboard the *Lexington*, when the ship was hit, were you able to feel it?

HF: Oh, yes, I felt the jolt. You could hear it, because we had two torpedoes, plus, the bombs that were hitting the ship. You could feel it and it didn't knock me off my feet, because I was that far away from it, but had I been on the flight deck or closer to where the torpedoes hit, I might've been knocked off my feet.

NM: After you were evacuated from the *Lexington*, you went to Seattle.

HF: No.

NM: Oh, I am sorry.

HF: After I left, when we came back to the United States, they gave me seventeen days of survivor's leave, but, by then, you couldn't fly, because there were no airplanes. So, we rode on a train, which took five days across country. So, that meant ten days of traveling and you got seven days at home. When I was in New Jersey, I wrote back to San Diego, asking, "Could I be reassigned to the East Coast?" Well, I didn't get a reply, so, I may as well, "You'd better get back to where you were." So, after my leave, I went back to San Diego. I was there two days and they reassigned me to Philadelphia. So, in two, in a little over two weeks, I made cross-country three times by train. In those days, it wasn't a very glamorous ride in those trains, but it was the way to travel at that time. It was a lot cheaper than it is today, too.

NM: Talk about, since you were riding these trains, your experiences on them.

HF: Well, you were riding with different servicemen. The group that was going to the ship where I was on, there was about thirty guys going to that ship. Maybe ten or fifteen of them were yeomen and there's the other rates. So, I knew some of them from being aboard the carrier. So, you played cards or you read books or magazines, didn't have any TV, of course, nothing to do. If you had a radio, you were lucky if you had a radio. So, most of the time, you just talked and gabbed. There were some civilians on the train traveling, too. So, we'd get to talk to them. We were told not to tell anybody where we were going or where we had been. Onboard the *Lexington*, there was a newspaper reporter, name of Johnson, from the *Chicago Daily News*, or *Chicago Tribune*, I guess it was. He wrote a book called *The Fighting Lady* about the sinking of the ships and whatnot. I had a book, but, in our travels and in our moving, I guess I must have lost it. I don't know where it is now, but Stanley Johnson was his name. He worked for either the *Chicago Tribune* or the *Chicago Times* and he wrote a very interesting story. If you ever get a chance to look at it in some library, maybe you might find it. [Editor's Note: *Chicago Tribune* reporter Stanley Johnson wrote *Queen of the Flat-Tops: The U.S.S. Lexington and the Coral Sea Battle*, published in 1958.]

NM: When you were in San Diego, you were transferred back to Philadelphia.

HF: Yes.

NM: Could you talk about where you were transferred to?

HF: I was in the Philadelphia Navy Yard, put a ship in commission. It was called the USS *Monticello* (AP-61). [Editor's Note: The *Monticello* was originally the Italian passenger liner SS *Conte Grande* that was acquired by Brazil in 1940. It was then bought by the United States, converted to a troopship and used as a transport during the war from September 1942 forward. It was decommissioned and returned to Italy in 1947.] I was on the pre-commissioning detail. I was there when it was commissioned in May of '41. I was on the ship for fourteen months. We hauled troops all over the world almost. We'd go, made two or three trips to Africa, Casablanca--we were in the second wave in Casablanca--the Mediterranean, to Oran. One trip we made--we were stationed in Staten Island. My wife, who was not my wife at the time, she was my engaged

girlfriend, I suggested to her, "How about coming into New York and we'd do the town?" So, she came by train from Flemington to Pennsylvania Station and I told her I'd meet her at the information booth in Penn Station. I didn't know it, but we were leaving the next day and we couldn't get off the ship, had no way to communicate with her. Joan stood in front of that information booth all day. She was afraid to leave, because I might show up, and then, she wouldn't be there. Anyway, she took the last train home to Flemington and I never got in touch with her until we got to California. We went from Staten Island, through the Canal, to Los Angeles, where we loaded troops. We took the troops, without an escort, to New Zealand. We had a couple days in New Zealand, Wellington. Then, we went to Perth, Australia, and then, we went on to Bombay, India. Bombay is not Bombay now; I forget what it's called [Mumbai]. We unloaded our troops there. We were in Bombay about three or four days. While in Bombay, I went to Mass with the Bishop of Bombay, which was quite unusual for a bishop to come to a Mass, but it was very nice of him to do that. I don't even remember his name. I should have, but I didn't. We came back the same way; stopped at Australia, stopped at New Zealand, and, from New Zealand, we went through the Canal, back up to New York. I think the whole trip was three months, but I didn't get in touch with my wife until we were in Los Angeles. So, that was like two weeks later. So, she didn't know where I was or what happened to me, but I had no way of communicating with her. We had no cellphones at that time, which was unfortunate, or maybe it was fortunate, I don't know.

NM: When you were ferrying troops to North Africa, New Zealand and Bombay, it sounds like you would be in port for a couple of days.

HF: Yes, right.

NM: Okay.

HF: I did get ashore in Bombay and I did get ashore in New Zealand and we'd go to--well in those days, the first place you headed for was the bar. We'd have a few drinks and meet the women, if you could, meet the ladies, and try to be entertained. There wasn't much to do in sightseeing. There wasn't any sightseeing tours to take at that time. In India, India was a very crowded city in Bombay and there wasn't much to do in Bombay, either. It was good to get out of there. It was a dirty city. It really wasn't [nice], but it was during the war. So, a lot of the Air Force landed there and they would go on to "fly the Hump" [the Himalayas] from India. So, when I was in, one cruise we made to the Mediterranean to Oran, in Oran, the town is above the port. You had to climb the steps up to the city. We would do that and that's the only time I ever drank more than I knew [what] I was doing and, somehow or other, the guys got me back to the ship, but that was the only time I was ever "under the weather," shall we say. While I was there, we got orders on the ship for two first class yeomen to be reassigned, one to go to Officer Candidate School, one to go to sub chaser training school in Miami. Since I wanted to get married, I couldn't go to--I didn't want to go--to officers' training school. So, I said, "I'll go to sub chaser training school in Miami," which they reassigned me. Before I went there, I got married. So, my wife and I moved to Miami, where we lived on Miami Beach while I was going to school in Miami. Miami Beach, at that time, was loaded with Air Force and, every morning, as they would go to their breakfast, they would be walking underneath our window and waking

us up, which was good, because I couldn't depend on my clock to wake me up, and a couple times, I was late getting back to school.

NM: Did you have any interaction with the troops you were ferrying across to North Africa?

HF: Not really.

NM: Okay.

HF: No.

NM: Your duties aboard the *Monticello* were clerical.

HF: I was in the engineering office.

NM: Okay.

HF: I did the work and that's where I got promoted to first class. We did basically the same thing we did on the carrier, office duties, and, there, my duty station was in the engine room. I told you I manned the engine room telegraph on the bridge. Well, I manned the engine room telegraph in the engine room.

NM: Okay.

HF: So, they would send the signal down, "All ahead full," or, "Stop," whatever, and I would ring that up. That was my duty. One trip, going through the--well, two trips through the Canal, I never saw the Panama Canal. I was in the engine room; that was my duty station, although I did sneak up once, see where we were. We were in Gatun Lake. [Editor's Note: Gatun Lake is an artificial lake that was created to assist in the operations of the Panama Canal.] I could see the lake, but my ambition, one of my things I want to do one of these days before I die, hopefully, is take a trip through the Canal on a cruise ship. We had thought about it, my wife and I had thought about it. We never quite got around to doing anything about it. It's still on my bucket list. My bucket list, although, included going to Ireland, which I did go two years ago, to Ireland, and I kissed the Blarney Stone. So, that's why I have the gift of eloquence. [laughter]

NM: When were you transferred to this sub chaser school?

HF: That was in, the heck was that? October 1943. That's when I got married.

NM: Okay.

HF: I was there until January, when they transferred me to a destroyer escort that they were building in Orange, Texas, on a pre-commissioning detail. It was aboard the USS *Gunason*.

NM: Okay.

HF: DE-795.

NM: I am assuming you got married in Flemington.

HF: Yes, I did.

NM: Okay.

HF: Well, I had leave before I got to Miami. So, they had given me a few days' leave, so, I got married. Of course, all the guys I knew, most of them, were in the service themselves. My cousin, from Staten Island, he was my best man. My father and stepmother came and Joan's father and mother and her sister and brother were there. Her sister's husband was in the Army. He wasn't there. So, the wedding party was rather small, but I guess the accomplishment was pretty good, because we stayed together sixty-three years. So, maybe we did something right. [laughter] So, anyway, when I was on the *Gunason*, I was on there from 19 January through June. While I was on there, I was promoted to chief and, as a chief, you slept up in the bow of the ship, which is like sleeping on a roller coaster. I would sleep on my bunk and wrap my arm around the chain that held the bunks, so [that] I wouldn't fall out. I was always seasick on the destroyer escort. As soon as I hit the outer buoy, I got sick. Anyway, I loved the duty, though. It was great. My office was up right next to the Captain's cabin. He'd come by, chat with you, and there was only three hundred men on the ship, so, you knew everybody. It was like a little, small city. It was, once again, like living in Higginsville, where you knew everybody. We ran troop convoys from Trinidad to Cuba. That was our duty. While at Cuba, we got to go ashore and drink Cuban libres. I didn't get drunk that time. [laughter] That's how, I stayed sober, but we did go to Guantanamo and went to the base there and went swimming in there. That was the one time I dove off a ten-foot board, will never do that again. I didn't make a very good dive, but I really must've had a belly flopper, because I said, "Darn, don't do that again. Stick to the three-foot boards."

NM: In sub chaser school, as a yeoman, what were they training you to do?

HF: Well, basically, they were teaching the same thing, how to take care of a smaller group of people, what your duties would be. Also, you learned how to do other things on the ship, in case you were needed. I didn't have anything to do with the shooting of any guns. I didn't man a gun. My duty on there was, I was the Captain's talker on the bridge. That was my main duty. Being the Captain's yeoman, wherever he went, I went. It was like being his aide. It was great duty, because you knew everybody and the Captain was a nice, easy-going guy. He didn't dictate; he wrote a lot of stuff out in his longhand and said, "Here's what I want you to write out." He was a Naval Academy graduate who'd resigned his commission and went into civilian life for a few years as a city engineer for Springfield, Massachusetts. I never did catch up with him after the war. I would like to. Anyway, he was a captain of a destroyer escort division in the Philippines and I wrote to him when I was in the Philippines. I can tell you about that later. I wrote to him, I said, "Can you get me out of this island?" I was with the Seventh Fleet administrative flag. So, he came ashore and he got me onboard his ship as his aide and we went to China, but that's later in life. When I was in Florida, we went through this school and, as I said, we went to the

*Gunason*, I lived on that, oh, until June of '44, when I was transferred to shore duty in the Third Naval District in New York.

NM: Okay.

HF: New York State, not New York City. I thought it'd be New York State and I liked that, New York City, rather, and it was assigned to Sampson Naval Training Station, up in Geneva, New York. [Editor's Note: Sampson Naval Training Base opened in 1942 and closed in 1946. It was used to train sailors and WAVES during World War II.] Talk about being in the boondocks--that was the boondocks. As a chief, I was in the naval [office], where they'd receive the recruits and you processed the recruits. I had twenty-some men working in my division and, as the chief, I would supervise what they were doing. We lived in Geneva, New York, my wife and I. We lived in an apartment and, one morning, she woke up with all bites on her arm and I said, "What's the matter?" She said, "I don't know." So, I flipped back the mattress and there was bedbugs all over the bed, and the bedbugs bit her, didn't bother me. Maybe she was sweeter than I was, I don't know. Anyway, we didn't waste much time getting out of there. In fact, we moved that day to Navy housing. We were going to go to Niagara Falls that weekend to visit. Instead, we moved to this apartment, the Navy housing at Niagara Street. The reason I remember that was because of the tie-in with Niagara Falls. We didn't get to Niagara Falls; however, come this September, I'm going to Niagara Falls on a bus trip for four days. My sons and daughters heard that I wanted to drive. They said, "You're not going to drive. We'll pay for the bus trip." So, they're paying for the bus trip, so, why not? So, eventually, I'll make Niagara Falls, hopefully, after all these years. So, that's in my bucket list, too.

NM: Okay.

HF: So, I was there.

NM: You were in Sampson, New York, for a while.

HF: For a year, and I couldn't take it. I just didn't like being in that type of an environment. The war was passing me by and I was not a part of it. I wanted to be like *Mister Roberts*. You ever heard of that movie? You never saw that? [Editor's Note: *Mister Roberts* is a 1955 film that stars Henry Fonda as Douglas Roberts, a Navy lieutenant aboard a supply ship during World War II who desperately wants to be on a combat ship and who clashes with the captain of the ship, played by James Cagney.]

NM: No.

HF: You ought to see that, Henry Fonda. He wanted to go to sea. He was on a bucket ship that was going back and forth, hauling supplies, and he wanted to go where the action was. Well, this was long before the movie came out and I wanted to get back into the war, because I felt, even though we had a son at that time, I wanted to go back to sea. I was in the Navy to see the world. I wanted to be in the fighting Navy, not the land sailors. Maybe it was dumb, I don't know. So, I wrote to the--I had the officer sign my letter, which I wrote to the Navy Department--asking for duty on the USS *Coral Sea*, an aircraft carrier that was being put in commission. As a survivor

of the Coral Sea, I thought that might be a way to get on the ship. [Editor's Note: The USS *Coral Sea* was an aircraft carrier that was commissioned in 1947 and was in service until 1990.] Anyway, within two or three days, I had a letter back. "The quota is filled up, report to San Francisco [in] the next five days." I had five days to pack up my family, move them back to New Jersey and get moving out to San Francisco for further assignment. While in San Francisco, they assigned me to the Seventh Fleet Headquarters in the Philippines, in Samar, I believe it was. I forget the name of the island. [Editor's Note: The US Seventh Fleet was created in 1943 and was commanded by Vice Admiral Thomas Kinkaid for the majority of the war. Samar is the third-largest island of the Philippines.] If I thought India was bad, the Philippines were worse. I was a chief yeoman--I was assigned to type radio messages up. They had so many chief yeomen, they didn't know what to do with them and that was one of the reasons I wanted to get out of there. I asked the Executive Officer, "You know I'm a yeoman--I do different things than type messages. Can I be reassigned?" "No, just stay there." "Okay." So, that's when I wrote to this Captain (White?), who had put this ship into commission, to come aboard, to come ashore to get me. So, when he came ashore the next day, he says, "Who's in charge here?" I told him the Executive Officer's name, which I forget. He says, "Oh, I know him. I went to school with him. I'll go see him." So, he went in to chat with him. He was a full captain by this time. In about a half an hour, he came out. "Pack your bag, you leave tomorrow." So, I said, "Oh, boy, I'm glad." He says, "I'll tell you one thing. We're not going home." I said, "I don't care where you go. Get me off this island," because the war was over then, but I had only been in the Philippines maybe a week or ten days when they dropped the atom bomb. [Editor's Note: The first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. On August 9, 1945, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, which brought the Japanese to surrender.] So, we went aboard the ship and we made [the voyage]. He was the division commander for four or five ships and I was part of his staff. I was the yeoman or his aide, we had the chief radioman, we had a chief pharmacist's mate, or the doctor, not a pharmacist's mate, and that was his staff. So, he says, "Well, we're going to China." I say, "I don't care. The war's over." So, we went to Iwo Jima and we're there for a while and the typhoon came up. So, we rushed out of the channel. It was during this storm that five destroyers turned over, were sunk. Fortunately, we didn't. In the next two weeks, we went through three typhoons and, believe it or not, I was sick in every one of them. The sea was so bad, but, anyway, the ship survived, and so did I, and we landed in Hong Kong, where we were until the following January or February, I guess it was. We didn't have much to do there except be stationed, sitting there. We played softball every day, which I was the captain of our softball team. The nights, we'd play movies. If you wanted to go ashore, there was nothing much to do ashore. The Japanese had pretty much gutted the island. They have a mountain in Hong Kong. You ever been to Hong Kong?

NM: Yes.

HF: Have you?

NM: Yes, my wife is from Hong Kong.

HF: Oh, okay. You know the mountain that's there? The Peak, they call it. [Editor's Note: Victoria Peak is the tallest mountain on the island of Hong Kong.]



NM: Yes.

HF: We climbed up that mountain. They have a train, tramway, that wasn't working; they had burned all the buildings on the mountain. So, this chief signalman and I decided we're going to climb up the mountain and he was going to bring his signal flags to signal the ship when we got up to the top. So, we did and he got his flags out and signaled the ship and it was great fun. Anyway, it was great to talk about it, that you have. You must have ridden on that tram, haven't you?

NM: Yes.

HF: Yes, quite a view from there, huh?

NM: Yes.

HF: Well, it was interesting, because watching, seeing all the houses that had been burned, just part of the building standing, all the wood was taken out. There was no wood in the houses, but it was nice. It was a great town. Does your wife like the town? Did she like the town?

NM: Yes, she is from there.

HF: I know.

NM: Yes, she came when she was young.

HF: Oh.

NM: Her family is from there.

HF: All right.

NM: While you were in the Philippines, you mentioned that the atomic bomb was dropped.

HF: Yes.

NM: What was your reaction, and the reaction among the men in Samar?

HF: Well, I guess most of the men were happy and they started shooting off the guns, with all the ships, and it was like a Fourth of July celebration that night. Everybody was shooting off their guns and celebrating. I guess some of them were drinking a little too much, to help them celebrate, but, other than that, I can't remember much about it, just that, "Hey, the war's over," and, if you had enough points, you were eligible to get out of the service, to go home. Well, I was on an enlistment; I couldn't get out. I had more than enough points, but that didn't mean anything to me. I had signed up for six years and the six years, they were going to stick that to me, which is okay. I liked the Navy and I loved being [in it]. The only thing I didn't like was being away from my wife and my son. So, I guess the celebration went on for a couple of days,

but not the shooting, but they were figuring how many points each guy had. They were going home. The guys who were in the radio shack that I was working at, they were all getting ready to go home. They were all, mostly, Naval Reserve people and they had enough points to go home. When I went aboard this one ship, the chief, the first class yeoman of that ship, he couldn't get out unless he had a replacement. I said, "Well, I'm part of the flag. I'll take your place, if that'll help." So, that's how he got home. I took his place, even though I was part of the flag. I was a part of the ship, too. That was the USS *Douglas A. Munro*. [Editor's Note: The USS *Douglass A. Munro* was a destroyer escort in service from 1944 to 1960.]

NM: Okay.

HF: DE-422.

NM: You were in Hong Kong for quite a while. Did you ever get the chance to go into Hong Kong?

HF: Yes, I rode the ferry over to Kowloon. [Editor's Note: Kowloon is a section of Hong Kong that lies on mainland China, across from the island of Hong Kong.]

NM: Okay.

HF: Just to say I'd been in China.

NM: Okay. Could you talk about what it was like after the war? What did you see? Does anything stand out that you remember?

HF: Nothing, the part of China itself, because, as I said, we took the ferry over one day, just to say we were in China. I wasn't going to go any further and I don't know what we did. We just walked around in Kowloon. I went back to Hong Kong, where we stayed aboard ship, and I went ashore from time to time.

NM: Was there still Japanese in Hong Kong at that point?

HF: If they were, they were prisoners. I didn't see any.

NM: Okay.

HF: We had made one trip to Kowloon, to down south, some island, and, there, we saw some Japanese prisoners being taken aboard one ship, but that's the first Japanese that I actually saw. In the whole four years of war, I never saw a real live Japanese man, unlike, maybe, the Marines, who saw plenty.

NM: What were your plans for after your six years were up?

HF: Well, when I came home, as I said, my first reaction was, "I'd like to join the Naval Reserve in Trenton." I didn't have a car. The car we had when I was up in Geneva, my wife sold.

Another fellow and I, it's funny, because he and I went to Trenton to join the Naval Reserve. They took him. They wouldn't take me, because they had too many chiefs. Well, I could have joined the real Navy and said, "Well, you have to take me. I'm going to extend my enlistment." My enlistment wasn't up until November. This was in October that I went down there. So, I said, "Well." He was accepted and he stayed in twenty years. At one time, I thought about being a career man and staying twenty or thirty years, but I had another baby coming in November. We would have two children and traveling around, at that time, I just didn't think it was the thing to do. I thought, "Well, I ought to stay home and take care of the children. Since I went off to war with one, maybe I should take care of two of them," which I did well. So, I went to work for my father-in-law in the five-and-ten business for fourteen years. I could see that I wasn't making as much headway. He couldn't afford to pay me much and he wasn't making much money in the five-and-ten business. So, I applied for a sales position with the Equitable Life Assurance Society. I made three letters; I wrote to Prudential, Metropolitan and Equitable Life. I was accepted by all of them, but I decided to go with Equitable Life, mainly because they didn't have a debit, where you had to go up to see the same people and pick up their premiums every month. With Equitable, it was, more or less, you sold something, either life insurance, health insurance, or group insurance, you made one visit, and then, they did the rest by mail. So, I stayed with Equitable and I retired after twenty-five years. I didn't stop selling insurance for another thirteen years, but I retired with Equitable after twenty-five years. Equitable has [been] very good to me, as far as my health insurance, my pension, which I got from Equitable, and I still get. What it will mean next year, when Obamacare goes into effect, I don't know. There's no telling what happens to my secondary carrier, because they have Medicare, and then, my secondary health care. Working with Equitable, the first year was mostly on commission, although they did give you a small living wage, which wasn't very much to live on. It was interesting, because many of the people that I called on knew me from coming in and out of the five-and-ten and having grown up in the area. Everybody knew me from playing ball or from church. So, it isn't like being a stranger in a town, trying to sell something. So, on Saturday mornings, I would go out and go to parts of the county and just knock on doors and meet people and tell them, "I'm with the Equitable. I'd like to talk to you sometime. If you want to talk to me, fine. I'd like to have you and your husband home," and that's the way I built my business up. You can't do that today. I think they'd shoot you, when a stranger would come knocking on the door, but, in those days, the county was even more close than it is today. People of one part of the county knew each other, or knew of each other. Even though our five-and-ten was in Flemington, we had customers from Clinton and from Whitehouse and from Frenchtown. So, they knew; they might not know me personally, but they knew who I was. So, it was great living. I belonged to the American Legion and the VFW and the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic War Vets and Lion's Club. So, I was very active in the community as well as being seen as the local merchant. So, it had a lot to do with what I think was successful, because it helped raise my seven children and send them to college, or whatever they did. Not all of them went to college. My oldest son joined the Marines. He was in the Marines. My oldest daughter, Kathy, she went to beautician school. My next oldest daughter, she was a secretary, worked for Johnson and Johnson. My son went to Sienna College and Trenton College. My youngest son went to a college in [Boston], Boston University, on a scholarship for soccer. Then, he finished up at South Jersey College and my daughter went to Dayton University. My youngest daughter was married very young and she had five children, but she went to college at night and got a bachelor's degree and, later, a master's degree. It took her eleven years to do all that, which I'm very proud of her, and all the

children, but she did it by herself, with very little help from her husband. She has since divorced him, with five children and seven grandchildren.

NM: When you were working in the insurance business, did you have an office in Flemington?

HF: No.

NM: Okay.

HF: My office, originally was in Plainfield. Then, we moved to Edison. That's where it was, I guess, when I retired, but the office, I would put ads in the paper or people knew me, but there was no office in Flemington.

NM: Okay.

HF: My neighbor across the street worked in the home office of Equitable in New York and, in the wintertime, he would leave the house, catch the train at seven o'clock in the dark and he'd get home at night, seven o'clock at night in the dark. So, he never saw Flemington in the daytime during a work week, which I thought, "Boy, I'm glad I'm not working in New York."

NM: You mentioned that you worked at the five-and-dime store for quite a while.

HF: Fourteen years.

NM: Did you get into that right after you got out of the Navy?

HF: Yes.

NM: Okay.

HF: Yes.

NM: It sounds like you were recruited into the business.

HF: My father-in-law asked me to work, would I work for him.

NM: What was it like to work at a five-and-dime store?

HF: It was hell. Well, I shouldn't say that; I shouldn't say that, I'm sorry. [laughter] No, the one thing that disturbed me most of all was, in the Navy, if I didn't have the duty, I was free to go on the weekends. Working in the five-and-ten, Saturday, you didn't go off, because that was a busy day. Friday night and Saturday, you were working. I'd see these guys going to the football game on Saturdays and just how envious I was of them. Anyway, it wasn't that you were dependent on yourself so much, it was depending on what you had for sale. The customers that came into your store, you could go out and bring them in; with selling insurance, you could go before the people.

It's a little bit different, selling, and I was good at talking, so, I guess that helped. Well, I always thought I was good at selling and talking, anyway.

NM: You had seven children. I wondered if any of them were eligible for the draft during the Vietnam War.

HF: Yes, my second oldest son, Pat; not my oldest son. My oldest son was in the Marines, Pat; my next one, he was eligible for the draft, but he wasn't called. Maybe he was in college, I don't remember, but he went to Sienna, New York, Albany, went to college, but my other son was long after that. He wasn't eligible for the draft.

NM: After you retired, you actually moved outside of Flemington.

HF: No, we lived in Flemington. See, after I retired, we lived in Flemington until our children--well, let me see, no, I guess I was retired [when] we moved--the children had all been married and gone. We moved to Forked River, New Jersey, where we lived for, like, seven years.

NM: Okay.

HF: I bought a house in Forked River and we had a house in the lot, which, later, we sold, and we bought a modular home in Barnegat. For the first time in my life, I didn't have a mortgage. I made enough money on the sale of the house in Forked River to buy the mortgage. It was a double-wide house and a nice little lot. It was like living in a house, except that it was a modular home, in a regular community of modular homes. It was 250 homes on Route 72. Are you familiar with [Route] 72, going to Long Beach Island?

NM: Yes, I am.

HF: Well, if you happen to pass there, it's about ten miles from Long Beach Island.

NM: Okay.

HF: It was wonderful. I worked at a golf course in Little Egg Harbor, as a starter. I played golf three or four times a week. The kids were all on their own. My wife was very active in the community. We worked for St. Vincent de Paul, with the church. We were active in the church and with the community. It was wonderful. Then, my wife and I both got--well, she was sick before I was--but I had a stroke, a minor stroke. While I was in the hospital, they were looking to release me and another doctor came along and said, "No, you're not going to get released, because you have Lyme disease." So, they kept me another week or two. When I got out, the kids kind of thought, well, we were both sick, they would like to have us closer to them, in case we needed them. One son lives outside of Flemington on the Old Croton Road, Patrick. My daughter Kathleen lives in Three Bridges. That's only four miles away. My other daughter, Eileen, lives in Whitehouse Station. So, those three convinced me, convinced us, to move back to Flemington and they have been very helpful from time to time. It wasn't too long ago, about a month or two ago, I called my son up at nine o'clock at night, I said, "We'd better go to the ER." So, he came over and picked me up, we went there. I was there from quarter to nine at night

until four-thirty in the morning. I was bleeding from my mouth from a tooth extraction, couldn't stop the bleeding. So, they were very handy. What would I have done if I'd been down in--who knows? Anyway, they have been very helpful and, as I said, they're paying for my bus trip to Niagara Falls.

NM: Since you have lived in Flemington for a long time, can you talk about how the community has changed? I know that Flemington has grown in terms of population.

HF: The town of Flemington itself has not grown that much.

NM: Okay.

HF: The outskirts have grown considerably.

NM: Could you talk about how it has changed from when you first came here to now?

HF: Well, it used to be, in years ago, people would come into Flemington to shop. There were many shops, including two five-and-tens in Flemington. There was a food store, two food stores. There was shoe stores. It was a great shopping area, but, gradually, the developments outside the town were built up and the town itself, the Main Street, kind of died. They're hoping to reestablish something, but the biggest problem with most people in Flemington itself is the parking areas. There's not too much parking, even though they keep talking about, "Park the next block away," but people don't want to do that. They'd rather park three hundred yards away in the parking lot, but they have lots of stores to visit. That's the main difference. The town itself is a wonderful town to have your children grow up. Years ago, everybody knew everybody. If your kids did something, half an hour later, you knew about it. Some neighbor would [say], "Hey, I just saw your boy or your daughter doing something." Well, I guess it's still that way, if they know you. It was nice knowing that you could count on a neighbor. I guess you can too today, although, it's a little different. They built this big apartment house, which I now live in, which most of the people living in the apartment are not from the area. There's one couple from Long Island, a couple from Jersey City, a couple from all over. So, it isn't as they were born [here]. They know very little about the area and some of them seem to not care. They live in the apartment house and that's where they stay, where some of them can't care, too, because, as you saw, walking in with the lady with the pushcart, a lot of people are like that. They're not really well enough to do too much and this is very comfortable for them to be here, which we didn't have years ago. We used to have a mailman deliver mail. He knew everybody and [told] everybody what's happening. He knew the lines of communication, always had a joke for you, and it was pretty [nice]. Growing up in the town, it was a friendly town, I always thought, and it was nice to grow up in. It was nice to say, "Yes, I lived in Flemington." I still live in Flemington.

NM: In relation to the town center, where did you and your family live in Flemington?

HF: We lived down by the Presbyterian church, two doors down from there. We bought a house. It was 150 years old. It was the only house for sale in Flemington at the time. When I got out of the Navy, we lived with my mother and father-in-law on Spring Street. They had a

son and daughter live with them and, when we were there with two children, it was kind of crowded, with one bathroom. So, we bought this house on East Main Street, which was an old house, didn't have central heating. We bought it for sixty-five hundred dollars. We lived there fourteen years. I put over ten thousand dollars in repairing it and fixing it up, putting in central heat, tearing down some of the out buildings, and I sold it. It took three years to sell it for seventy-five hundred dollars. Today, it sells for three hundred thousand dollars. We built a house on West Road, near the Catholic cemetery. It's on the outskirts of town, the last street in town. We lived there almost seventeen years, when all the kids grew up. They went to school there, they got married. That's when we decided to move to the Shore, but, again, we lived up on West Road, which was almost a dead-end street. The kids could play in the graveyard, which I'd used to hit my golf ball up in the graveyard. They had baseball fields in behind our house. All the people on that street--it was called, originally, Veterans Street--all the people that had built houses, and many of them built their own house, were veterans. A lot of them are dead now. They were all, mostly, World War II veterans, and, now, they made that street a dead-end street. You can't travel through to the cemetery on that street. The fellow that bought our house for sixty-two hundred dollars, I guess; today, it would sell for, like, 300,000 dollars. It was a five-bedroom ranch, split-level. There was only one other house in the county built like it. My wife used to work for the real estate agent and she had this friend that also sold real estate who knew of this builder that wanted to build in the Flemington area. He had built one house, on over behind Three Bridges somewhere. We went over to look at it. We liked it and we had a contract with him to build it. In the meantime, we had to sell our rickety, old house that, as I said, it took three years to sell it. We finally sold it, with about a month to go with our contract, and he built it for us. It had five bedrooms, two-and-a-half baths. The only part about it was the front part of it, the lawn, didn't go down to the street very evenly. It came to like a cliff. We had to have that adjusted. The driveway washed out the day or two before we moved in, because of the big storm we had. We were able to--we bought the property from the church--I asked the pastor, "Could I park in the cemetery?" while they got around to building a driveway. So, we did that for about two or three years, until we got enough money together to have it paved, which we did eventually. In those days, with seven kids, I didn't have a lot of money, so, we didn't. We didn't go heavily into debt, like some people do today. If you can't pay for it, you wait, seemed to wait. Anyway, we loved it and it was a great place. When the kids all grew up and moved out and got married, my wife said she didn't want to spend the whole part of her life cleaning house and I didn't want to spend all my time cutting grass. So, that's when we decided to move, but we couldn't find a place to, that was small enough that we could afford in Flemington or nearby. That's when we looked to the Shore, which had the cheaper housing, or less costly, plus less income tax. Forked River was the home of a place called the nuclear power station and taxes were very low at that time because of that. A couple years later, the Governor decided that they should take those taxes and redistribute them to Jersey City, Newark, Trenton, people that needed it. So, we spread our taxes around and the taxes went up, or something like what's happening with the President in the White House today.

NM: I want to give you the opportunity to add anything that you would like to add to the record, either about your early life or your time in the service.

HF: Well, my early life, really, my one disappointment was, I never really knew my parents that well, since I didn't live with them very much. When I got out of the service, my mother had been

dead. She died while I was in the South Pacific. The lady my father married later, I'd met her a few times. I knew her, but not well, even though they came to babysit a couple times for us. My father retired and moved to Arizona to be near his wife's family. They lived in Phoenix. We visited them one time. I didn't know them very well. When my stepmother died a few years later, I went out to Phoenix to help my father bury her and I brought him back to live with us on West Road. The things I should have asked him, I'm disappointed that I didn't; whether he would have told me, because he wasn't much of a talker. He didn't talk, hardly at all. He didn't understand living with seven children and the ins and outs of kids bringing kids in. That was a whole new thing for him, because even when I lived with him, I was an only child. So, to live with these circumstances was kind of hard on him. All his peers were dead, all his brothers were dead. So, it was kind of hard on him, but I thought it best for him to come live with us, since I was the only relative he had, which he never complained. My greatest mistake, my greatest disappointment, not a mistake I guess, is that I didn't question him about his early life, his grandfather, because both of my grandparents or all of my grandparents were dead when I was born and why I didn't find out more about them. You go through this Ancestor.com, you find out a lot, but it's not like talking to a human being who knows more than Ancestor.com does. So, that's my biggest disappointment in growing up. Another thing that I did, I really hurt my father. When I came back from the ship being sunk, for some [reason] or another, I had some resentment against my father over where he buried my mother, or how he buried her or where he buried her. I don't know to this day where she's buried. She was cremated, I knew that, but I don't know where. I don't know what they did with the body. So, when I came back from the ship being sunk, I didn't go home. I came to Higginsville and stayed in Higginsville, which, looking back over the years, it was a very bad thing to have done to my father. I wouldn't want it done to me and I never really made up to him for that. I've often thought at night, "What a jerk you were, that you didn't do that, that he was only your father. Maybe he had other reasons for what he did." So, that's the one part of my life that I really regret, hurting his [feelings], and he never said a word about it, never brought it up. As I said, he didn't talk much. Whether he kept it all within himself--I don't think he ever talked to my kids about it. My daughter Eileen used to play her instrument in the high school band. She'd come home and practice. He said to her, "That's very nice. You keep practicing, you might amount to something." She keeps talking about that from time to time. [laughter] I think the biggest problem he had was putting up with all of those kids.

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: Since you were in the Navy for six years, did that have an impact on you moving through life at all?

HF: No, I don't think so. I still root for the Navy, except when they play Notre Dame. [laughter] I root for the Navy in anything they do. I belong to the Navy Admiral Nimitz Naval Reserve, something; it's in California.

NM: Is there anything else you would like to add, either about your time in the Navy or your career afterwards, before we conclude?



HF: No. I guess you keep looking back and think you should've done this or you should've done that, but it doesn't help to look back and say, "I should have done that." Look forward to what you're going to do in the future and enjoy what you have today; I'm still alive and well. I'm more well than most people I see in this building. I have a lady friend that keeps me company. We go to different places together. She's a widow. She's been a widow for twenty-two years. She has no children. We've done a lot together. We went on a cruise, which was wonderful, up to Canada. I've never been in Canada. I wanted to go to Canada. We're going up to Niagara Falls in Canada. My bucket list contains a trip through the Canal, but that might be a long way away. I don't know. I also want to go back to Ireland and do some more hunting and fishing for the [ancestors], find out where the family comes from. My mother's name was Vaughn, V-A-U-G-H-N. When I got to Ireland, I couldn't find any Vaughn. All I found was V-A-U-G-H-A-N. So, whether that's changed when they came to America, like so many people's names, they did change. When they came to Ellis Island, they were being interviewed, like you're interviewing me now. The interviewer would write what he thought they said--that's why so many people changed their names. Anyway, I'm very happy with my life. I'm sorry that my wife didn't live longer. We had a great time together, growing up with the kids. Maybe she didn't think it was so great--I'm only kidding about that. She was more than helpful and she was a great person. If there's ever a saint in heaven, it was her. The 31st of this month, she will have died six years ago and I can't help but think of her often.

NM: Mr. Fatton, thank you for having me here today for our oral history interview. It sounds like you have an extensive bucket list and I hope you fulfill as much as you can.

HF: I hope so, too.

NM: I hope you get to do it all.

HF: Yes.

NM: Thank you again for having me here.

HF: If I win the lottery, I can do a lot of things. [laughter]

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Jesse Braddell 11/6/2014  
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/13/2014  
Reviewed by Henry Fatton 1/30/2015