VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Kenneth Stewart

Conducted Martin Willard Thomas

April 26, 2005

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library
In partnership with the Library of Congress

Part 1: Introduction

This interview is being conducted on April 25th, 2005 at the Indian Prairie Public Library. My name is Martin Willard Thomas. I'm speaking with Reverend Kenneth Linn Stewart. Reverend Stewart was born on November 1st, 1925 in Washington, Pennsylvania and now lives in Naperville, Illinois. With us is Ms. Debra Barrett who is also a volunteer in this project and will shortly be conducting interviews as well.

Reverend Stewart learned of the Veterans History Project through Ed Hemzy, who I interviewed previously, and he (Reverend Stewart) has kindly consented to be interviewed for the project. Here is his story.

Reverend Stewart, how would you prefer to be addressed during this interview?

I'm a Ken.

Ken, Ken is fine?

Ken's fine.

Thank you.

Part 2: Entering the Military

Thank you. Ken, when did you first enter the service?

It was in October of 1943.

Where were you living at that time?

I was living in Washington, Pennsylvania, at that time.

Were you living at home with your parents?

With my parents, yeah.

What were you doing then?

I had just graduated from high school, and I was about to be drafted, and I didn't think wanted to be drafted; I'd rather have my choice of…. I didn't want to be a foot soldier, so to speak. I had taken the Air Cadet exam hoping to be a flyer because I was interested

in that. I passed that, but then I flunked on my eyes. Then the recruiting officers in Pittsburg, they were all next to each other, so I just took my papers over to the Naval place and then joined the Navy at that point.

So, if I understand you correctly, the testing was all done while you were still in the civilian stages.

Yes.

No commitment on your part?

No commitment on my part.

Once you went through these exams … by the way were these examinations done by military personnel?

No, I think, I don't recall right… There was an Air Cadet exam given in the high school, and I don't recall whoever did it, but I do remember passing it and going in to be inducted, and I took a physical and all the things and the Air Cadets.

Did you have to go to another town to have the physical examination?

Yes, Pittsburg.

You went to Pittsburg.

Which is about twenty miles away.

What branch of the service did you select?

Then I chose the Navy.

What went into your decision making to join the Navy?

(Laughing) I didn't want to march.

(All laughing)

And interestingly enough when I got to boot camp, I became part of the drill team. (Laughing)

Where were you inducted?

In Pittsburg.

In Pittsburg.

What happened next after your induction?

Then they sent us to Sampson Naval Training Station in New York. It's upstate New York.

Was this your first time away from home?

Yeah.

What was that like?

Oh, kind of scary because I'm an only child. But there was another fellow from the town with me. So we sort of hung together. Then in some respects it was kind of nice to have the adventure of being on your own and not under mother's thumb.

Ken, I just realized, you were at least a month shy of your eighteenth birthday.

Yes.

Did you have to have parental permission to enlist?

Yeah, I did, yeah. I was a month shy of my birthday because I would have been drafted, you see, had I been eighteen.

Oh, then you wouldn't have had the option to choose?

I wouldn't have had the option; they would have put me where they wanted me to.

So you're saying as soon as you turned eighteen you would have been not just eligible for the draft but you would have been drafted?

Well, my guess is that I would have been eligible for the draft and it would have come shortly after that. But it was to avoid the draft, so to speak, that I enlisted.

Part 3: Training

So your first training was at the Sampson Naval Training?

Yeah, Sampson Base or station, I'm not sure what it was called.

What city was that?

It was the middle of New York State, I'm not sure.

It's ironic, it's not near the water.

No, no. I think it was maybe even Sampson, New York. I don't know.

This was a boot camp?

This was boot camp, entirely boot camp.

How many weeks was your boot camp?

I guess it was about six weeks.

What was that like?

Well, it was hurry up and wait, and do what you're told and don't ask any questions. That was kind of an interesting experience. One of my … We had to learn how to swim. I never had learned about swimming. So we had swim a hundred yards in order to get out of boot camp, and so I finally made my hundred yards. And the instructor said, "O.K. you can get out now," and I was so pooped, I couldn't get out. (Laughing) So I remember him reaching down and grabbing on my trunks and dragged me up on the …, and I just laid there for a while. He said, "Get up." I said, "I can't." (Laughing) That was my main remembrance of that.

The swimming proficiency test, did they have you practicing and training before that?

Yeah, you had to go in the pool and learn to do this. It was just part of the requirements as such.

What would happen to a sailor recruit that couldn't pass the swimming test?

I have no idea. I guess it was always based upon the fact that you were in there and you wanted to qualify. Part of that again, spirit of the time that by God you'd better measure up, regardless. I'm sure that's why I swam, and I died practically on the way in order to just qualify. It isn't like today. Today it's almost a kind of joy in flunking out, you know, or not measuring up. But there was that which I think was part of the culture of the day.

Your fellow recruits, were they primarily from your geographic area?

I don't really know. I do know they were all Anglo-Saxon or white. I don't think we had any African Americans in there.

Your fellow recruits that you became closest to, did any of them seem to talk differently than you did? I mean, did they seem to come from a different region of the country, use different words, different slang?

Probably not, really.

Not that you recall?

Not that I recall. We Pittsburgers had a particular slang, and people could seem to detect that we were from Pittsburg. Like we had certain language. Like a poke, you know what a poke is?

Yes, what we would call a sack or a bag.

A sack or a bag. I never noticed anything that was different in people.

Just as an example, regionally we all call a soft drink by a different name.

Yeah.

I first leaned that some people would say "tonic." People from the area would call it a "soda" with that kind of inflection.

Yeah, we called it "Pop."

Oh, you called it "Pop" also?

Yeah.

We had a DI who called everything Coca-Cola.

Yeah.

"Y'all want a Coca-Cola?"
Yeah.
"What kind of Coca-Cola do you want?" Orange.

Is that right? Yeah.

In your experience in boot camp, were there any memorable experiences?

Not particularly. I just remember I learned to obey. I also learned, I guess, that this was important. They evidently did a fairly good job of impressing upon me of the fact that my life and the life of other people depended upon taking orders. And so that probably was what I remember most about it and probably has kind of stuck with me most of my time.

During your boot camp, Ken, somehow it was being determined what you were going to do after boot camp through testing or through …?

Yeah.

Did you have any choice in the matter?

(Laughing) They gave a whole raft of tests and so forth. I remember going in and the interviewer who was running the thing said, "Well, Ken, we don't know what we're going to do with you, but we're not going to allow you to touch anything electrical or mechanical." (Laughing) Then he showed me my test score and they were ???? Electrical, mechanical were ???? Then he said, "I think probably we're going to send you to Radio School." So, that was fine.

When he said, "We're not going to let you touch anything electrical," and they end up making you a Radio man, he meant just not repair?

Repair, I assume, anything of that nature.

So when you graduated boot camp and by that time you know that you're going to go to Radio School?

Yeah.

Did you have any leave after boot camp?

It seems to me that maybe they gave us a week or something.

Do you remember what you did with your leave?

I went home.

You went back to see your family?

Back to see my family, yeah. Then I went down to boot camp, or down to Radio School.

Where was the Radio School?

That was in Bedford, Pennsylvania. It was at the Bedford Springs Hotel which was a very, I guess, it would have been considered a lush resort at which, I guess, the Rockefellers would come to normally. Well, of course, they didn't come while we were there. But it was just a very beautiful place. It had lovely dining rooms. We lived in the rooms with bunks, of course.

So you're saying that there were more recruits in a room than normal guests.

Yeah, there were two of us in a room.

Just two of you in a room?

Just two of us in a room.

Ms. Barrett: And you had bunks?

And they were bunks, yeah. As a matter of fact, I remember the loud speaker. I was at then end of the hall and the loud speaker told you when to go home and when to get up and all that. It was right my, right out right out my bunk bed.

But you were saying there were only two seamen to a room?

Yeah.

And what about the dining facilities? You ate in a dining room?

We ate in the dining room, yeah.

What was the messing facilities? Was that civilian or was that Navy?

My guess is it was… Well, I don't know. I would suppose it was run by Navy, yeah.

If you recall, were you eating off Navy issue trays and plates or was this the hotel china?

We had plates.

The hotel plates?

Yeah. We ate well. Why that was I have not idea. Probably ate better than any other type 'cause they're Navy, you know.

Roughly, what was the size of your class?

I don't know; I would suppose thirty or forty.

Thirty in your class and how many at the training center, roughly, I mean how many classes?

That'd be one hundred, fifty, probably.

One hundred, fifty per …?

Total, yeah.

What did the training consist of?

It was mainly just learning how to listen to code and decode. I mean how to send code.

Other than Morse Code?

No, just Morse Code.

Just Morse Code.

Yeah.

Did you learn any other coding, I mean as far as to protect messages?

No, no. This was simply a mechanical thing. You learned how to hear and how to record and also how to send.

How long was the class?

My guess, I thought you were going to ask this. My guess is we were there probably a couple of months.

Mm, mm. (Affirmative)

Maybe three months.

If you recall, did learning Morse Code come easy to you?

Yeah, it came, I probably heard pretty well. I'm not sure where in the class I graduated, they'd always remind you, but I think I was in the upper tenth of the class probably.

The Radio Men duties at that time were strictly limited to Morse Code?

Yeah.

No other, no voice communications?

No. After you were a Radio Man, a graduate Radio Man, you got out on the field, sometimes they'd end up with voice code, sometimes they ended up being teletype people but that was all. I had an interesting thing, a customer and I, after he'd got out of the Pacific, I became a coding man, a cryptographer but that was it. It was kind of an interesting little development.

I'm going to ask you about that at whatever you think is the appropriate time. Did you have a special training for that?

No.

We'll just get it chronologically.

Yeah.

Ken, during your time at Bedford Springs, any other experiences stand out in your mind?

I'll never forget this fella. He was the Chief Petty Officer of the camp, probably had some officers, too. But, anyway, he was the guy that ran the show. I remember we all lined up trembling and all this and he said, "My name is Ziggy! And I don't have no friends, and I don't want no friends, so don't try to kiss my ass!" (Laughing)

(Laughing)
But you couldn't laugh then!

You didn't laugh at all! Ziggy ran the camp just that way. One of the little stories that got around was that somebody happened to walk past the telephone booth one night when Ziggy was on the phone, and he'd left the door open and evidently was talking to his wife and he kept saying, "Yes, dear." (Laughing)

(Laughing)

So we knew why Ziggy was the way he was.

I imagine that story got passed around pretty quick.

That got passed around a lot, yeah.

During the time that you were in Bedford, Pennsylvania, did you have any leave or passes then to get out and see the …?

I think we got home once or twice. And we would, Bedford was not far off the turnpike, and so we'd walk up to there and thumb our way back.

Hitchhiked home?

Yeah, hitchhiked and of course, we were sailors in uniform and everybody knew that you were wonderful, and so they picked you up.

I'd heard that hitchhiking was quite popular, and that people always felt that they'd want to pick up a serviceman. Did you have to wait long ever to get a ride when you were in uniform?

Well, no, not long. It would depend upon how many cars were coming along 'cause with gas rationing and so forth there wouldn't be that many cars. But one of the nice things about hitchhiking on the turnpike, was you knew they were going quite a distance. And then anybody else that was on it was also going a distance, so if they dumped you off, why you… And occasionally somebody would say, "Well, I'll just drop off and drop you off."

Actually when I asked if you had to wait long, what I should have asked you is did many cars pass you by before somebody stopped?

Probably not. I can't remember. My guess is, we did it, you did it because it worked.

It was a custom of the times.

Yeah.

Part 4: Going Overseas

Ken, when you graduated from Bedford, then what happened?

(Laughing) Well, this is an interesting story, too. I went out from there to Oakland, California to a Receiving Station and from there they shipped me out to Aiea Naval Barracks in Hawaii, in Oahu, Honolulu.

What was the name of the Naval Barracks there?

Aiea, A – I – E – A, I think. That was a kind of a transfer center. You were only supposed to be there like three or four days because they then shipped you. I was there a week and then I was there two weeks, three weeks and I thought, "What the …, what's

happening here." I got to know a yeoman who worked among the officers, and so he said to me, I said, "Why am I still here?" He said, "Well, let me find out." So, he looked and I was supposed to be on a destroyer called the "Thompson." So, I kept staying and staying and one day I saw him on the street and he said, "You're not going on the "Thompson." I said, "Why is that?" He said, "It was sunk." (Laughing) I guess there was, and then he explained something about it. Navy records are not kept on the base, but they're kept always in Washington, or were, in Washington at the time. It took them that length of time to discover that the "Thompson" had been sunk and that there was a little ol' Radio Man in Oahu, Hawaii, waiting to be assigned. By the time they got that back then the next thing you knew a couple of days later I was on a ship going down to Kwajalein in the Marshalls which is where I stayed for the remainder of my …

Well, going back to your transfer over to the Aiea Barracks, how did you get from Oakland to Hawaii?

It was on a troop ship.

Troop ship, strictly for sailors or were there soldiers as well?

No, (Laughing) as a matter of fact, part of the First Marine Division was going back. They were most of the ship, there were just a few of us sailors. They happened to be the toughest men I think I've ever been around in my whole life. Of course, they had good reason to be. I remember one time we were up on deck and there were some of these guys, Marines, playing cards. I was standing there watching them and this one guy reached over and he grabbed this other Marine by the collar, took his knife out and put it right up to his neck and you could see a little blood popping out. He said, "You can steal my gun, you can steal my wife, but leave my goddam Zuzus alone!" We got a ration of two little cookies, he had his Zuzus. I suppose they were like ???? Evidently this guy had reached up and taken one of his Zuzus. (Laughing)

I've never heard that term before. What do you call cookie?

It was called a Zuzu. What it was, I think probably it looked like, as if I recall, it was kind of like an Oreo.

Uh-huh (Affirmative)

And there were a little package of two cookies.

And you called it an Izuzu?

Ms. Barrett: Zuzu.

Zuzu.

Zuzu.

Just like Zuzu.

Zuzu, Z – U – Z – U.

Yeah, that's the way. (Laughing) As long as I … Every time I think of Marines or I think of what are tough guys, that was my … And he put that knife and you could see a little blood coming. There wasn't any question (Laughing) but what he was serious about it. Nobody moved, we just … (Laughing)

I know there's certainly some competition between Navy and the Marine Corps. Now here you're just a few sailors on a ship predominantly occupied by Marines. Did you get along with them?

Well it was fine. We were just passengers, that was all.

Were you quartered right with them or were you in a separate area?

My guess is we probably were in a separate area. I don't know.

But you mingled on ship if you saw the card game.

We moved around; we just walked around. And as I say, I'm sure they, being the tough, ol', seasoned guys, they looked at us as being kids and we were, of course, we were young.

Ms. Barrett: Did you get in any card games with them?

No. I didn't play.

Ms. Barrett: Did you kind of stay separate?

My guess is that we probably stayed separate. If for no other reason, I think than simply maturity. Most of us were young and they had been, they probably were seasoned veterans, so to speak.

Ms. Barrett: So you were like seventeen, eighteen, nineteen and they were like were probably in their twenties.

They were probably in their twenties, yeah and they had fought wars and they knew everything, you know.

Do you know, were these Marines all going as a unit?

They were going as a unit, yeah.

Do you know where the unit had been before?

No, they'd been at Guadalcanal.

I see.

And from Guadalcanal they came back to the States?

Came back ??? and then they were going back out to fight wherever it was. My guess is they probably were going to Marianas because I think that was where the next battle …

On your trip over, do you remember the name of the ship that you went over on?

No, I don't recall. It was a Liberty ship, though. And I do remember that the day before we left there was a Liberty ship that sunk just off of Oakland and we thought, "Ugh, that could have been us."

How did it sink?

It was in a storm.

O.K. It wasn't any action.

No.

That close to our shore.

No.

So you spent three weeks or more at the Aiea barracks in Hawaii before you finally got your assignment.

I probably was there for two or three months.

Oh, my.

Yeah.

What did you do during the day?

Well, they put us on garbage details and all that, just using us around. So then becoming the ol' timer, I ran, they made me in charge of the Gear Shack so that, which meant that essentially you cleaned up everything, the house was cleaned up and you passed out the mops and the buckets and they did the work.

What was your rating by that time?

I was still an Apprentice Seaman. Let's see, maybe I probably was still an Apprentice Seaman at that point. Although when we graduated from Radio School I could have been a Third Class Radioman, I don't know. First Class Seaman, I would have been First Class Seaman at that point.

You were there for three or four months, primarily, you're saying because of the …

The goof up.

The lack of records catching up with you.

Yeah. And we could never leave the base because, theoretically, you could always be called, your ship or your assignment would come. So, I never got a leave.

I was just about to ask you, I asked you what you did by day. What did you do by night? What did you do in your off duty time?

We'd go to the movies. They had movies.

On base?

On base. And they would have, occasionally, the USO shows would come through and so forth.

I was going to ask you about USO shows later but let's do it now. Let's first start with: What kind of USO shows did you have there, in Hawaii?

I can't really tell you.

Do you remember, did you see any famous entertainers?

Not there. I saw Bob Hope out in Kwajalein.

Let's just take it out of chronological order. Tell us about that show.

It was all outdoors. Of course, everything was outdoors. He brought his traveling troop. It was, of course, everybody was there that could be there. In fact, it's surprising the

Japanese didn't know we were watching the Bob Hope show because they could have attacked the place, you know. It was just a spectacular thing. I do remember, I don't remember much about him except that he was his usual self. But I remember he had a gal who came on his show, and he was talking with her and he said something like, "It's a lovely perfume that you have on. Is that Chanel No. 5?" And she said, "No, Seagram's 7." (All laugh) And we had, my guess is that we had lesser light. I mean on a grading USO shows were not famous entertainers. We got the one largely because Kwajalein was a small base and my guess is at Aiea Naval barracks, it was a small base and people weren't there that long, and so there wasn't a need to, you know, boost the morale, so to speak.

Now, during this period were you single, dating anybody?

No, I was single, yeah.

Part 5: Combat

And after you finally got your assignment from Aiea, where were you assigned?

I was there in Kwajalein.

Were you assigned to a ship or to a land base?

It was a land base. It was the, it was the, what the hell did they call it? Communications Center, Joint Communications Center of Kwajalein. It was an interesting thing in that it was largely an air base. The B-29's used that as a stopover, and there was also a fighter squadron of training for Marines and so forth. And we had some Army people there. So the Communications Center was called "Joint" because there were Army, Navy and Marines operating in the same radio shack. For some reason or another, the Marines and the Army used enlisted personnel to do the coding work. The Navy used only officers. But for some reason or another there weren't enough officers around to fill the Navy quotas so we, there were two of us Radiomen that arrived at the same time, and they made us cryptographers.

So you were filling an officer's slot.

So we were filling an officer's slot.

Now, at the beginning of the interview, you mentioned that you got into other coding.

Yeah.

Is this what you were referring to?

Yeah, this was cryptography, and it was not a matter of breaking other people's codes but a matter of coding our messages and sending them out and then decoding them when they came back, and then we passed them on.

Ken, I'm going to ask you as many questions as you're allowed to tell me about your cryptography.

Yeah.

But first, when you first got to Kwajalein, let's just get you from Aiea to Kwajalein. You went by what means of transportation?

It was probably on a troop ship.

Another troop ship?

Yeah.

Any interesting experiences on your transit over there?

No, I can't remember going there.

When you got to Kwajalein you were assigned immediately to the slot in cryptography?

Yeah. Well, I discovered that I was going to be a cryptographer. You know, they didn't ask if you wanted to be.

With no formal training?

No.

Just on the job training?

It was on the job training, yeah.

What did that job consist of different from being a regular Radioman?

Well, you simply worked on coding machines, and they looked like computers today. You typed on them, and they had a little box of stuff, and you learned when a message would come in the first things would tell you what date it was; what box of equipment. Then every place had a rating. We happened to have a … There were seven classifications of from one to seven depending upon the secrecy of the thing.

Which was the highest?

Seven.

Seven was the highest level of classification?

And we had a five on simply because the commander of the Marshall-Gilbert area was an Admiral, and he wanted every message coded so that when he went back to Hawaii he could talk and say he knew what was going on. So it was kind of exciting in that sense 'cause you knew what was all happening out there. But it was on the job training, you know. They first taught you to decode some of the say, first class messages and then eventually you'd get up to the point where you got to be doing some of the hot shot stuff.

Now, what would the Radioman's involvement be in classification? Just a matter of flipping a switch or pushing a button?

Oh, yeah. No, it's primarily… Actually it was bright for the Navy, I think. I shouldn't say that. But anyway.

But you did.

Actually, what it amounted to is that a message would come through and you maybe heard a letter wrong, and so the Radioman would type a wrong letter. Or, it could be that in typing, you know, you transfer and so as a cryptographer, your ability, really your skills as a cryptographer, was determined by how you could, what you could do with a garbled message. Otherwise it would be simply a mechanical thing of simply typing what you see and it all coming out.

[Dead space on tape – End of Side A]

At the end of the tape, Ken, you were talking about, and we just switched the tape to the other side. You were talking about the duties of cryptographer Radioman. Would you continue, please?

Yeah. It was all really kind of mechanical. If you put the right box in and you typed correctly, and if the Radioman had written on everything, then a letter would trans(late). It was just purely mechanical, routinish. But, however, if you got a, in typing, you discovered that the word didn't make any sense, this meant that 1, the Radioman had not copied the right word, letter, or somebody had made a typographical error. So, being a Radioman and, of course, knowing how to type, you then could then determine by playing around as to what the exact word would have been. So then when you submitted this to … when you decoded the message and you provided it to the Petty Officer or

Officer … you would then have to say, "O.K. This is what I did; this is how it turns out." And in most cases they'd say, "Hell, it makes sense." So, you'd be done with it.

I have some other question on your specific duties but, right before we switched over the tape, Deb, I think you had a question you wanted to ask.

Ms. Barrett: You said that you started out with the level 1 messages.

Mm, mm. (Affirmative)

Ms. Barrett: And there were seven levels, seven being the most secure. How long did it take you to really progress until you were considered competent to handle higher level messages?

I don't know, it was because I was there a long time. My guess is that it didn't take very long because it was simply a matter of you proving your capacity to use your head and because I had the typing ability, and the machines were there and you just did whatever. And then, of course, somebody, an officer, was always looking over your shoulder, too.

Ken, did you say that in this message center there were the other branches of service represented as well?

Yeah.

The traffic that you handled, was it strictly Navy traffic or could you handle …?

No, we handled all traffic.

I see.

And then it was any information that came into the base regardless of who was going to … And eventually, the Navy and, I mean the Marines and the Army, pulled their forces out and so we, it became strictly a Navy operation.

Even though you were all handling each others' traffic, did each branch of the service have its own frequencies that it operated on?

No, not that I know of. No, it was all just, came in to a radio station, that was all. And then there was, we also had teletype, radio teletype. And so we had as probably as many radio teletype messages as we had radio messages.

Typically, what kind of traffic would come in? What would be the subject of the traffic?

Oh, troop and ship movements and planes. We had, as I say, B-29's, they were there. They handled a great deal, the Air Force handled, probably, most of their own stuff. That was theirs up there because they were up on the … Well, Kwajalein was a small island; we were about, I think we were three miles long and about three eighths of a mile wide. So, it was pretty small, mainly air strip. We down at one other one corner of it, you know.

And planes from the various branches of service would all use the same air strip?

Yeah, there was a, there was a Marine fighter group that'd come out. And they would, it was evidently a training station section because they would go out and bomb some of their little islands (laughing) that were nearby that still had Japanese on them. In fact, I think, Rongelap and a number of the other little ones, they had maybe ten thousand Japanese on them.

What island was that?

I think one of them was Rongelap.

How do you spell that, do you know?

R-O-N-G-E-L-A-P

Rongelap.

Yeah. And I remember, because I could, I remember messages while we went out and made so many strikes and every once in a while they would say, "We were shot at!" And they figured out how they were shot at. But then, I guess, some (submarines) would come in and supply the little bases with anti-aircraft shells so that [they] would keep everybody honest. (Laughing)

(Laughing.) Sounds like a good reason to have anti-submarine patrols.

Yeah. Well and we had …And of course, we would get submarines and we would be showing them. And every once in a while we'd have an alert because we were in a vital communications system. Then we'd end up going down, sitting on the beach watching for Japs to come in you know, but they never came, of course. And we'd have been scared if they had.

Your duty at that time, was it strictly working out at the cryptography center?

Yeah.

Roughly, how long would a duty day be?

Oh, we had at least eight to ten hours.

Eight to ten hours a day?

One time we had a, we made our own water. Well, it had to be made out there, of course. And something went wrong with the system, and so we had a diarrhea epidemic within our little ol' radio group. As it turns out, for two days I was the only, I was one of three or four or five of us who didn't get diarrhea, and so we ran the whole (laughing) darn Communications Center. We had messages out to everybody telling them that, you know, it has to be really strict, because we're in trouble. So, they had a little ceremony one time to congratulate us, and they said they were going to give us a medal for it, but they didn't know how to word it. (All laugh)

What words would you put on that certificate? (Laughing)

No, I think, probably, I think we ended up with about ten hours duty.

How many days a week?

Seven days a week.

So, up to ten hours a day, seven days a week.

Yeah, because you didn't have any place to go, you know, or anything to do.

I was going to ask you, what was life for you off duty?

Oh, we'd play a little basketball, and we had movies.

What were your quarters like? I take it they weren't like Bedford Springs.

No, they were tents; we lived in tents. There were, I think there were four of us in a tent. We lived on, we slept on cots. And we had a kind of communal shower, and we had a Mess Hall. As it turns out …, I worked the night shift most of the time because I eventually got to be, well I was sort of the in charge of the radio shack or the cryptography shack because I'd been the first one there. But anyway, some of my friends became, were cooks or bakers. So, in the middle of the night we would go for or they would send us goodies over. So we had that. No, I liked the night shift; it was better.

How did you communicate with family back home?

I was, I forget what they call that.

V mail?

V mail and then there were letters as such but it was mainly V mail, I think.

Who did you correspond with?

My parents and I had a girlfriend for a little bit and that was it.

Wrote back and forth with them?

Yeah. And then that's where it broke off.

When you were in Kwajalein?

Yeah, so it was just my parents. And I had an aunt and uncle, some relatives, you know, but mainly them.

While you were there, was your base ever under attack?

Never, well, a couple of nights there was supposedly an attack coming, but it never ever showed, and as I say, we went down there with all our guns and hell, (laughing) I didn't know how to use my gun. So they could have come ashore as far as I was concerned.

During your time over there, did you witness any combat off out in the ocean or in the air?

No, I didn't see any combat at all.

How long, when did you finally come back from Kwajalein?

Well, let's see, I was discharged in '46, so I came back on a, I came back on a cruiser as a matter of fact, the USS Oakland.

So you were in Kwajalein until well after the end of the war?

The end of the war.

Well, first of all, you were in Kwajalein when the Nazis surrendered?

Yes.

Do you remember what that was like there? I mean, what was the mood?

I don't think there was much because there was still the war on our end.

So that didn't make much of an impact?

I don't think it made much impact.

How about the days leading up to Japan's surrender?

I do remember us getting, of course, we got a lot of stuff in there on the bomb or the bombs, I should say. And nobody could believe it; I just thought somebody was screwing up someplace. This couldn't really be true.

So, you actually saw on the radio traffic what these devices were? Did you know that they were nuclear?

Well, no. Well, we knew that there were nuclear bombs and had been bombing. But it wasn't any, I mean it wasn't any secret, it was just …

Oh, after the fact, but before the fact, did you know that they were going to drop "THE BOMB?"

No, no, no, we knew nothing about that. This was all after the fact. So, none of us could believe, of course, that you could drop a bomb and it would do that because we'd seen some other stuff that they do. So then we heard about the …and some public service radio or whatever it would be at the time and we had, of course, the surrender and then, of course, President Roosevelt, no it was Truman at that point.

Yeah, you mentioned Roosevelt, what was the mood like when Roosevelt died?

That was a very sad time. I'm not sure that it … I was a Republican but there was something about this was "THE PRESIDENT" dying.

Well, supposedly, the Japanese hoped that that would affect the war. The Germans hoped that we'd lose our resolve.

Yeah.

Was there any concern that the war effort would change?

No, I don't think there was anything of that. It was just that we'd lost our leader, you know, that kind of thing.

Now, going back to the Japan Surrender. Did you celebrate?

We could have.

But you don't remember any big party?

There was no great big party as such. I guess, if for no other reason, you still had to go out and do your job, you know.

Now, you had to go out and do your job until some time in '46. When was it they actually rotated you back to the States?

I forget. When did I say? April something is when I …

1946.

Yeah, O.K. I probably came back probably about January of '46.

What did you do between the time that the hostility ceased and the time you were actually brought back home?

Just did the normal thing.

Radio traffic?

Yeah. Then they put us on a and we came back on the "Oakland" and into, strangely enough, into Oakland, California.

On the ship Oakland coming back to Oakland.

To Oakland. And then I, I think I maybe had a month's leave at that point. And then I had to go back, I still, my number wasn't up for discharge so I went back. I was stationed at the San Diego Naval Air Base.

The Mermont?

It could have been Mermont.

How long were you there, Ken?

Oh, a couple of months, that's all.

What was your assignment there?

Oh, just a Radioman. And of course that presented all kinds of problems because on the way back, on the Oakland, there was this Radioman so they put me on radio duty and I couldn't ??? beans because I was out of… I said, "I'm a cryptographer." "Well, you

can't be a cryptographer because you have to be a (officer) (All laughing) It kind of got exciting because the same thing happened in San Diego, and then when it was time, my time was up, they put on the (**ATTV)** which was a small carrier, and it was going down through, I went from San Diego down through the Canal and up to Newport News. So there, again, I was a Radioman but a cryptographer except for the fact that on the (ATTV) they were just delighted that I could do cryp work because then officers could take their time off and let me do their job. (All laughing)

You were doing the officers' work. First of all, are there any interesting experiences you want to relate about your time at the San Diego Naval Air Base?

Oh, nothing much particularly. No, I don't think.

No interesting experiences on leave in San Diego?

No, no.

When you took the (ATTV), what was your route?

We went down through the Canal.

The Canal could accommodate a small aircraft carrier?

Yeah. It was one, what'd they call them, CVE's? But it was a small one.

O.K.

I guess what it amounted to was that they were one of those Liberty Ships that they put a top on.

Oooh. I've heard of those.

And so we went through the Canal. It was quite a nice experience to be able to say, you know, you went through the Canal.

Just roughly, if you can recall, how many planes would be on one of those CVE's?

They didn't have any planes.

They didn't have any. It was just transporting from one point to another?

Transporting people, yeah. Now, I don't know what those CVE's had; I have no idea.

So you came through the Canal on the (ATTV) and then where did it port?

It eventually ended up in Newport News.

Oh, you said Newport News.

Yeah.

And then, what did you do at that point?

Then I was discharged at Bainbridge which, I don't know, it was a training center or something. There was, probably, at that point, it was mainly a discharge center.

What were your emotions at that time? Having been through what you were through and now you're getting out of the service?

I don't know. It's a matter of just it was one chapter of your life and it was done. And, of course, the question is what are you going to do with yourself from then on?

So that was what was going through your mind, what do I do next?

Yeah.

Ken, did you receive any medals or citations from your time in the service?

You know, you get those usual ribbons from whatever, but I didn't do anything, no medals.

Before we talk about your days after getting out of the service, is there anything concerning what we've covered so far that you'd like to elaborate on, maybe started to mention and didn't get to?

No, I think probably I've covered most everything. It was a … I look back at it as being a kind of good experience for me if for no other reason than it being an only child and going from there to having to be on my own and to understand that I could function as an individual. I learned discipline. I learned how to work with other people. And I think, probably, as I think of it now, I think, maybe, one of the little benefits I learned was I learned something about people. Because in the service, you all wore the same uniform and somebody could say, "Well, I own half of the Empire State Building, and I graduated from college Cum Laude, whatever." But the only way you'd know whether that was true or not, you were able to judge who that person was by how he acted, by what he did with his life and how honest, how open. So, I think I learned about people in a very general way, and it was all taking place probably when at a time I didn't, never registered and probably, later on, its come in and been useful.

Ms. Barrett: So, sort of like, you learned how to read people just because you did it on the job all the time?

Yeah. You just didn't have a, you had no choice except to judge somebody by what they said and what they did, you know.

The uniform was kind of an equalizer?

It was an equalizer, yeah.

Part 6: Life After the Service

You were an old man of twenty and a half years old when you got out, right?

I was, yes.

Twenty and half years old. (All laughing) So, I could gather what you're saying is that it really did matured you during that time you were in the service. What did you do during the days and weeks after you got out of the service?

Well, the GI Bill of Rights was, I knew, was in operation. And they had sort of informed us of that, it seems to me, at the discharge center. So, I determined that, by golly, I was going to go to college.

Did you come home first?

Yeah.

Back to Pennsylvania?

Yeah, I came back to Pennsylvania. Then my uncle had graduated from Westminster College in Wilmington, Pennsylvania, and so I thought, by God, that's where I want to go to school. There was a school in Washington, Washington-Jefferson College, but I didn't want to go to school in Washington. So, I went up to Westminster and saw what was necessary to get in. And as it turns out, I had taken a commercial course when I was in high school because I never thought I'd ever go to college because we were a really poor family. So, as it turns out, all I needed was a course in mathematics to have met my qualifications to go to college. So, I had the summer, so I tutored a course in math, algebra during the summer, so I was all ready to go in September at Westminster.

So, September, '46, you entered college on the GI Bill?

Yeah.

And, did you finish?

Yeah. I finished there. I went through, because I was an old man, you know, when you get to be twenty, you know you're really old. So, I decided that I'd wasted all this time in my life, so I went through college in three years instead of four by going to summer school.

By going in the summer.

Yeah.

Were there a lot of other veterans in school at Westminster?

Mainly.

Mainly?

It was largely. There were a few kids. (Laughing)

I've heard that the character of colleges were different in those immediate post war years. Do you have any comment on that?

One of, probably, one of the classic examples of that was that they had a very, very popular president of the college who retired just before I got there. And they had a new president, and he had been a high school superintendent in Pittsburgh. And he was old school, and he then put, you went up one stair and down the other stairs. That sort of rule and here a guy's been fighting a war and maybe thirty, forty years old and this went over like a lead balloon. So, he lasted about two years. But it was interesting. Most of the guys wore their uniforms to class. I mean, not uniforms as such, but a portion of their uniforms.

Because that's what they had.

That's what they had, yeah.

So you graduated in three years, you said. What was your degree?

I had a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Bachelor of Arts.

I was a History Major.

And what did you do after you graduated from Westminster?

Well, I had gone into Westminster, my uncle was a minister. So, I thought I would… I told them when I went in to register, I want to be a minister. And I left there, and I thought, what the hell did I say, you know. So then, they put me in a ministerial group. Well, you volunteered. It was a ministerial society sort of thing. So, I wasn't very comfortable with these people, and one night they had a prayer meeting for one of the fellows who was smoking. (All laughing)

They were praying for him to quit smoking?

Praying for him to quit smoking, because God did not want him to do that. And so I thought, "Hell with this." (All laughing) If that's the kind of people I'm going to be around, no thank you. So, I then switched my major from ministerial to sociology, and I was a Sociology Major and had a Psych minor the rest of my time there. I was all set to go to Social Work School; I had a Masters degree or a Masters program at Western Reserve, but my real buddy was a Sociology Professor, and he kept taking me around to these different places, and I became aware of the fact that when you want to talk about these places, this was case number 221 and this was a woman with two children and so forth. And I said, "Where are the people?" Well, this is … And I thought, "No, way."

So what career did you finally choose?

So that was why I finally decided, "Hell, I think I'll be a minister."

Mm, mm. (Affirmative)

So I went to seminary. I get kind of choked up about all this. Of course, there was this ministerial crew, "Who is this that's coming." But I went, and as it turned out there were a few other mavericks in the seminary.

Where was the seminary? What was the name of it?

It was called Pittsburgh-Xenia. P, Pittsburgh and then dash X-E-N-I-A.

Like Xenia, Ohio?

Yeah, like Xenia, Ohio, yeah.

How long was that?

That was three years.

Was that also covered by the GI Bill?

I got a first year of it on the GI Bill. And then my second and third years they ship you out and work where there's little churches where you can't do any harm, you know.

I asked that question because I'm just wondering, you know, separation of church and state, would the GI Bill pay for seminary school and the answer's yes.

Yeah, yeah. It was paid, simply because it was school, you know.

Then subsequent to your two years where you couldn't go ????, you became a minister, with your own congregation?

Yeah. That was in York, Pennsylvania.

What church was that?

The First Pres…, well it was called The First United Presbyterian Church. And then I was there for four years. And I went from there to Canton, Ohio, and I started a new church there. Then I went from there to Downers Grove, and I was there twenty-two years.

What church was that in Downers Grove?

St. Luke Presbyterian Church.

And you were there twenty-two years?

Yeah.

And you're married?

Yeah. I've been married three times as a matter of fact.

Children?

I have one daughter.

Ken, since the war, have you had any contact with any of your wartime buddies?

No.

Not at all?

Not ever. 'Cause, you know, that's different than, Navy was different than, unless you were on a ship, you never really had much contact with anybody.

…co-workers?

Yeah. Like, I have a couple of classes I teach over at the church and one is a men's class, Bible class. And some of those guys would go and meet with their old… One was a flyer and he meets with, they have their group gets together, yearly, you know. But we missed out on that.

So you've never attended any reunions or joined any groups?

No, I don't think they've ever had any reunions or whatever.

Ken, I don't have any other specific questions to ask you. Before I wrap it up though, I'll ask Deborah, do you have any questions?

Ms. Barrett: No, I don't have any questions right now.

O.K.

Part 7: Conclusion

In wrapping it up, we talked about a lot of your life today in the service. Is there anything else that you can think of that you'd like to add to the record?

No, I don't know. I think probably it was a unique period in our history. I suppose in today's world, I'd have to say, I don't believe in war. But I think that was, if there had to be a war that probably was as justified as any. I'm really a pacifist today. I don't think we belong over in Iraq. I don't think we should have been a lot of places. I have come to believe that when you use violence to solve problems, all you do is promote it; it increases.

Perpetuate the cycle, huh?

Yeah, yeah. And I think that we need to learn, and I think it is a matter of learning, other ways to solve problems besides shooting people. As I say, the war provided me with a chance to go to school, to learn something, to go to school and to be, to give me what I am today. But that didn't justify the thing. I think that was… I don't know that there's… There are different wars, but that certainly was a different war. I think just because I was in it, doesn't make it that way, but I think it probably was. We were attacked, but that's different. I read just the other day, someone said, "He who attacks first is always wrong."

(Chuckle)

I kind of like that, but I think that's probably true. So, that's about it. I appreciate your honesty with me.

Ken, I thank you very much for participating in the interview. It certainly added things to my body of knowledge that I had never heard before. Certainly, as I say, we want to find individual's reactions and experiences. And, in fact, that was going to be my wrap up question. Did your time in the military affect your feelings on life and on war in general? That is one of the questions you answered. So, not only do I thank you for participating in the interview today and for all the information you gave us. I want to again thank Ed Hemzy for referring you to us. And certainly, in your position, the pulpit, and you know a lot of people in your congregation, if you think you have any likely candidates to participate in this project, from any conflict, it doesn't have to be World War II, although that's my preferred coverage, we'd love to hear from you or hear from them.

Alright, good. You have to understand, I'm not the head honcho over there at the church.

I understand.

Yeah. I'm… Our church participates in a program called Keep Retired Ministers Off the Street (All laugh) and out of the pool hall. So, I'm what is known as a Parish Associate. They give me little things to do that they can always cover up in case I do anything wrong. I teach a few classes; I preach.

You do teach classes, so you speak to the groups.

I preach occasionally. I have a service every Wednesday night called, we call it a "Wholeness Service." It's actually a healing service.

Wholeness?

Wholeness.

W-H-O-L-E-N-E-S-S?

Yeah. We … I've been doing it for probably about twelve years now. We started out thinking of calling it a "Healing Service" but healing in our day often times means curing and you can be healed without necessarily being cured. So that's why we chose the word "wholeness." It's about a half hour service; I preach about five minutes. Then we have a sacrament, then we have an anointing, and I anoint with three words: Shalom, Shalom, Shalom. Shalom meaning peace; shalem is a word healing; it's a derivation of a word. Then Shalom also means wholeness. So, those are…, that's the way I anoint people. That's probably… Well, it's an important thing. We maybe have twenty, twenty-five people come to that service.

Well, if any of them are veterans that you talk to, we'd love to hear from them. I think we're ready to go off record.

O.K. We're done.