Interview of Robert Blegen

Interviewer: Give us your full name, and spell it if you would.

Robert Blegen: Full name. Robert Donald Blegen, pronounced as "pagan."

Crew: Can I ask you to put your water down? If you feel like using your hands to be descriptive and tell a story, feel free to use your hands.

Robert Blegen: Okay.

Crew: We need some life in this.

Interviewer: Be expressive as much as you want with your hands.

Robert Blegen: Okay.

Interviewer: Alright, begin by telling us about your role in "D-Day" and how you got to England, like we were just talking about.

Robert Blegen: Okay. I guess, first of all, I should tell you what an LCT is, or was. An LCT was a very slow, very clumsy looking vessel that was flat-bottomed and was built to carry all kinds of mechanized military hardware with a ramp at the bow. At the very stern on a Mark-5 LCT were the living quarters for a crew of 15 men and two officers -- very cramped. I arrived in England the middle of May of 1944, fresh from training in Chesapeake Bay and was assigned to LCT 149 as the second officer. The crew aboard and the officer in charge were veterans of the Mediterranean. They had done North Africa, Sicily, Salerno, and then were transferred to England for training for D-Day. I was sort of the fifth wheel, the spare tire aboard, and was regarded as a spare tire. I was regarded as almost useless. Fortunately, I was of some use.

Our D-Day load, our assault load, was an anti-aircraft unit attached to the 1st Division. There were nine half tracks, two jeeps, and a one-and-a-half ton truck loaded with dynamite. This unit's mission was to race inland immediately to attack and secure a little airfield. Our time of landing on D-Day was H plus 120 -- two hours after H-hour -- which means it was 8:30 in the morning. That was the plan, but that was before Steven Spielberg rewrote the script, because at 8:30 in the morning, we were not permitted to land. The beach was so crowded and so stalemated that the beach masters ashore were waving off any traffic other than infantry on foot. They were allowed to land, but none of us were. So we sat and idled away 500 yards or so off shore all morning long waiting for the signal to come in. It also happened that the Army captain in charge of the anti-aircraft unit and the skipper of my boat consulted and decided this was no place for his unit to land. There was absolutely nothing they could do on that crowded beach and we should wait until we got a signal that there was an opening for them to get off the beach. So that's what we did, and we milled around all morning and all afternoon, watching the show. We had ring side seats for this day-long show. We tried to go ashore several times during the day, and couldn't get in, or weren't allowed in. Finally, we got ashore, unloaded this load at 7:00 in the evening, by which time, yes, they could get off the beach. Then we returned to sea to get other loads. Now what can I tell you?

Interviewer: Tell us what it was like, what you were seeing on that beach. You described all sorts of things you were seeing. Tell us -- your eyes were there, and there is a general description, that is wonderful, but people want to know these vignettes, these things you saw that were so impressionable to you.

Robert Blegen: Well, I guess one of the most memorable things was watching a tank, which had gone ashore earlier, and it was motion less stationary on the beach for quite a long time. And

then it made a very small move. I would say it moved no more than three feet, and bang, it was hit by what I'm sure was a German 88 from a pillbox up the hill. We just sat there and watched smoke coming out and then counted the men as they came out of the tank, and they all came out and hid behind their tank. Nothing could move on that beach. If it moved, it was hit -- "Bang!" It was astonishing.

Interviewer: Tell us about the destroyer you watched and the exchange between the shore and those—

Robert Blegen: Because the German fire power so controlled any movement on the beach, the tanks could not take out those pillboxes. So, in mid-morning, several destroyers came in and cruised back and forth within, clearly within a thousand yards of the beach -- very shallow water, I would say -- and just fired away with their five-inch 38 guns, which is point blank for those guys. It was just marvelous to watch. It was a great show. In particular, there was one that moved down toward the eastern end of the beach. It was called "Fox Green," and there was a hill behind that beach. That destroyer turned its stern to that hill side and fired its twin 40 mm guns on the fantail at a little spot in the middle of the hill while the destroyer was bobbing up and down, which means that the stern was going like this. But those 40 mm guns stayed absolutely focused on that one spot on the hill side. It was an amazing piece of targetry.

Interviewer: I also read in your account that you could see Germans on the cliffs, on the bluffs above.

Robert Blegen: Yes, not many, because most of them were under ground, I think. But yes, in mid-morning, we were quite close to the beach, and the gunners mate and I were standing next to our 20 millimeter gun. He said "Look," and it was one lone German running along the crest of

the hill. And the gunners mate said, “Can I fire at him?” And I said, “No, don't fire.” So we did not fire that 20 mm gun on a lone German on a hill side.

Interviewer: So, tell us, tell us about the weather. Was there aircraft around? Could you see all that? Could you see all the

Robert Blegen: No, during the day, there was no aircraft -- nothing going on. Of course, crossing the channel at night -- it was a 24-hour crossing for us, we were a very slow boat -- we had aircraft overhead all the time as one flight would disappear forward and another one would come right up behind. We were under wonderful air cover all the way across the channel, and it was very rough. It was very dark and very rough all the way across. We were in a very close convoy. As I remember, there were perhaps 300 yards between us and the boat in front of us and the boat behind us. So in the rough sea, we would rise up on a wave and the boat in front of us would disappear. And then the reverse would happen, and we would go down and we had vision coming up right underneath him, but of course it never happened. It was a long, rough, night.

Interviewer: So how were the soldiers on board you were carrying? Were they sick?

Robert Blegen: Some were sick, some of our crew were sick, yeah. I came very near sickness because at about 10:00 that night, we were instructed to gas-impregnate our shoes. We wore gas-impregnated clothing all day on D-Day, but we had to impregnate our shoes. So I went into the cabin and got out this gooey stuff and smeared it all over my boots, and it got to me. I felt a little woozy. I just went out on deck and cleared my head in the fresh air and I was fine, but there were others who weren't quite so lucky. There were a lot of sick guys on board

Interviewer: Explain to us what gas-impregnated clothing does. People may not understand the need for that.

Robert Blegen: I'm not sure, but I suppose it repelled whatever effects a gas attack would have on us.

Interviewer: So poison gas.

Robert Blegen: Oh yes, oh sure. Oh yeah, not gasoline. Poison gas, which was never used, to my knowledge.

Interviewer: So describe your duties, what you were doing personally during that time.

Robert Blegen: Well, as I said earlier, my, as a second officer of this, I was sort of the spare tire. I was assigned to the ramp end, and with me, I had one motor machinist mate, so there were two of us up there and at the ramp in a little cubicle. There was a little engine, a ramp engine that would lower the ramp to let the vehicles off, pull the ramp up again when the vehicles were gone, and that was the motor machinist mate job. My job was to stand there and make sure he did his job, you know. We crawled up -- he and I -- crawled up the ramp as we approached the beach and peered over the front edge, but not for long, because we suddenly found that canon fire and mortars are kind of impersonal, you know, you don't know where they're coming from and they just come and explode. But rifle fire and machine gun fire gets very personal, and when your head is above the ramp and you're looking out there and suddenly the bullets are whistling past your ears, it becomes very personal and we ducked down behind the ramp very quickly. And that's where I was during any approach to the beach when we were just milling around out there, I was back on the deck watching the show.

Interviewer: Tell us what “LCT” stands for.

Robert Blegen: Landing Craft Tank. It's 120 feet long, 32 feet wide, and as a tank carrying craft, I would guess the capacity would be four or five Sherman Tanks -- 150 tons was our capacity. As far as I know, we never carried tanks. We carried everything else.

Interviewer: So you modified your ramp?

Robert Blegen: Yes, this is kind of technical detail, but ours was the oldest of the LCTs, a Mark-5. The newer ones were better suited, they were Mark-6. The leading surface of the ramp of the bow on a Mark-5 was kind of bulbous for whatever reason, maybe to make it more sea worthy, I don't know. But in effect, that meant that landing on a very shall low, gradient beach -- as we are in Normandy -- that if we landed that rounded ramp down, there would be maybe a two-foot drop off to the beach and it would be very difficult to run vehicles off. So in England, they devised some ramp extenders on hinges that extended the ramp out so that when the ramp went down, those things went down to the beach so they could get off. Under way, we would have those things folded back on the inside of the ramp, but as we approached the beach, we would go up and flop them out like so. That proved to be our undoing, I'm afraid, on my boat because it added considerable weight to the front end of that ramp, and as we retracted from the beach after unloading that load of anti-aircraft units, the ramp engine failed. It’s a little like your lawnmower engine, really -- a little four-cycle engine, I think. It failed, so we could not pull the ramp up. And it lay out there and we're being pulled off the beach by our anchor, which is a hundred yards or so behind us, and as we pull back, the ramp just floats on the surface of the water. At some point, the skipper ordered that when the anchor was up, he ordered the boat turned around and, and engines ahead, which forced the ramp down and under the boat and snapped the hinges that held it, so suddenly we were free of this thing out there, but we had no ramp. Therefore, we had water coming in the bow. Under way, we were still sea worthy

because we're floating on tanks of air, but it meant that water was ankle deep on the deck as we moved forward. Clumsy, but from then on, we were unable to carry any rolling stock -- anything on wheels. We could carry foot soldiers who would jump off the front end of this boat with wet feet, of course. And we could carry prisoners of war back out. We could carry wounded back out, which we did on D-Day in the evening.

Interviewer: When you saw the wounded, when you are loading them up, what was your impression? What was going through your head?

Robert Blegen: You really don't think very much. The whole experience is so busy, so new, that in our case, I don't think most of us felt anything. I don't think we felt fear, I don't think we felt any particular sympathy or anything. It was a very mechanical thing. Sitting on the beach for the 90 seconds that it took to unload our cargo, we were straddled by mortars and I was standing on the middle of the deck doing nothing, just counting these as they came down -- one off the starboard bow, the next one off the port bow and the next one off the starboard quarter, and the next one off the port quarter. I thought, “The next one's going to come right down here,” but it never came. It was a very impersonal kind of thing. Fragments and shrapnel were coming down like rain all over. There was no small arms fire at 7:00 that evening, so they kind of opposition had been cleared away. The Germans were back there firing mortars and they had the beach so well organized that they could place their mortars any place they wanted, but somehow, they fifth one never came down. As far as you asked about the wounded -- the wounded that we carried back were for the most part walking wounded. There may have been a few on stretchers, but for the most part, I think they were walking wounded, or we would have not been able to carry them. We took them out to an LST -- that's s Landing Ship Tank -- a 300 foot ship that had been outfitted as a medical evacuation ship. The tank deck was equipped with racks on both

bulkheads where they could hang stretchers. So we went out there and married to an LST, which is the only time I have done that maneuver, and that is where an LCT comes in toward the bow of the LST and crosses the bow in such a manner the LST drops it's ramp down on the deck of the LCT and then you can move things onto the LST. Tricky maneuver, but it worked.

Interviewer: What about the POWs, tell us about them.

Robert Blegen: I guess my favorite recollection of POWs is one of the first bunch that we took, and among them was with guy who spoke perfect American English, and he was so happy because he was going home to New Jersey. He was one who had been living in New Jersey as a German citizen, but was drafted and had to go back to Germany and serve in the Army, and now he was going home to New Jersey. He was very happy. During the next months, German prisoners of war were used as stevedores, and then our cycle of operation was different. We operated with the tides. We would come in with a load at high tide and dry out on the sand and they would bring trucks up the ramp and alongside and unload now bulk cargo, not rolling stock. Then we had Germans who did the stevedore work. Always with a German sergeant in charge who maintained very strict discipline. It was smart to watch.

Interviewer: You were there how long after d day?

Robert Blegen: Six months.

Interviewer: So you were there during the storm.

Robert Blegen: Oh, the storm was only 10 days later, yes. The storm destroyed everything.

Interviewer: Tell us about the storm.

Robert Blegen: Oh dear. It was a rough night and we were at anchor inside the break water. But it was very rough. My bunk, an upper bunk, was just underneath the anchor winch (laughter). So as the storm rolled, the anchor cable would pound every time it was stressed. It would bang just over my head. There wasn't much sleep until finally the anchor cable broke and we were adrift. It was so sudden, I don't think we even had a chance to even get engines started and we were washed ashore along with hundreds of other craft who came in piled on top of us so that for the, what, five days of storm, we spent all of our low tide time stringing tires and fenders and everything we could get to protect us from the next tide, which would bring all of the other craft on top of us. It was a mess. So we were pretty broken up by the end of the storm. Incidentally during the storm, a stranger appeared -- a soldier in fatigues -- and he came aboard and asked if he could help and stay with us. We said, “Sure.” After we got a little better acquainted, we asked him where he came from. He came from a Section 8 hospital. Section 8 was for mental patients. He was a very quiet, subdued guy who was very helpful to us, ate with us, slept with us, and after a few days, he walked away -- disappeared. I’ve often wondered how he came about. It was weird.

Interviewer: You had, when we talked at your house, I was fascinated because you were showing me what the written accounts said versus what actually happened. You had really thought about this during the years about what's written down and what really happens, what you really saw and the contradiction between the two.

Crew: Hold on, Bob.

Robert Blegen: Good. I think there's a contradiction between what really happened and what people remember.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's what I wanted to get to, yes. This is great stuff.

Robert Blegen: And for that reason, I have been very, very skeptical about much of the so called oral histories that I read because most of them are not really supported by any historical reference. I question motives. Some people did it to achieve some kind of hero status. Some people remember wrong to protect themselves from criticism or reprimand or whatever. So I'm very, very skeptical of oral histories. Now it's true, there isn't one story, you know. There were 150,000 guys that crossed the beach that day, which means there were 150,000 stories, and there can be contradictions. But I don't trust memories of old men, including my own. And in recent days, since you first showed up, I have re-read a conversation that was done by the son of the skipper of my boat because I wrote much of my memory into a webpage for an LCT reunion group. This man contacted me, he'd read what I had written, and introduced himself of the son of Jules Galat, who was the skipper that day. Then he sent me pictures, photographs that his father had taken. He also sent me the transcript of an interview that he conducted with us father about this, just as you're doing here. The father got so many things wrong. The father simply did not remember that we lost a ramp, and I can said why he would not remember that, because losing the ramp as he did was not the right thing to do. So I question motives. There's another case of a skipper who re-wrote the action report of his boat a month later and embellished it considerably. He got a silver star. He got a silver star, I think, for good writing. Because I knew his second officer and his second officer told quite a different story.

Crew: That's really -- I've never heard anybody say that. That's so honest, that's great. I have never heard anyone, any vet in this whole series say anything like that.

Robert Blegen: Well, the truth is, the real heroes -- I'm now talking about the guys I knew in LCTs -- the real heroes among us were the ones who got killed that day. The ones that lived, I know of one who was a genuine hero and has not been recognized to this day. He did some really remarkable things that day to save others, and as far as I know, never any recognition for him.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about him, what you know and what this guy did?

Robert Blegen: What I know is all second hand from action reports. But, uh, he beached in the morning alongside another boat that was struck, and the skipper of the second boat that was struck was injured in the blast. John Rock, who was the skipper of 195, went over to this other boat and took charge of that other boat and left his second officer in charge of his boat and he managed the retraction of the two boats from there and got them all out to safety. I happen to think that is one of the most heroic acts I know of on that day. There's another funny story, and that is, and I think it was LCT 29 which has been written about, and it was hit. I'm not sure whether it was hit by a shell, I think it was hit by a mine. The problem was that we were propelled by three engines and three propellers. As we go into the beach and grind our way onto the beach in shall low water, those propellers roll the sands and pull mines up. The mines explode right through the cabin and right up through the pilot house. It’s a disaster, and that happened to a number of our boats. Only nine of our 36 boats were in operation on D plus 1, the rest of them were disabled one way or another. In this case, the funny story, the skipper happened to be jumping from the upper deck to the tank deck, about 12 feet down, at the moment this explosion occurred, so he was uninjured. He somehow made it ashore with the surviving members of his crew and was evacuated to England, put on a plane, flown to America and the next we knew, Tony Flinn, our operations officer received a letter from him, from his home in

North or South Carolina, with a newspaper clipping in which he described his activities on D-Day. Our flotilla commander saw this and said, “Don't let that son of a bitch go home. He's a God damn liar!” That's the funniest story I know, but he was safely at home (laughter).

Crew: Can I ask you a question on this D-Day beach? I watched a BBC documentary about the Germans who were in the pillboxes -- this is a current documentary -- and they were talking about how almost sad they became, it was almost pathetic. This was first wave, second wave -- everybody seeing the footage and it has been replayed and rewritten into films -- the ramps go down, gunned down. Ramps go down, gunned down.

Robert Blegen: That's Steven Spielberg’s script.

Crew: So you never saw that?

Robert Blegen: Sure, I saw it, but--

Interviewer: You need to look at me.

Crew: Yeah, Jeff, just asked that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Robert Blegen: Certainly, that happened.

Crew: Can you start over and say, "Certainly, that happened."? I'm sorry.

Robert Blegen: Certainly, that happened, but I was not at the water's edge when these guys dropped the ramps. So I'm sure it happened, but the scale, the Spielberg scale, is so exaggerated. We have read and heard that the water ran red with blood. That's non-sense. In the first place, there's an awful lot of water, and the tide is running very fast. I can't imagine that, that the water

is blood soaked. I can't imagine it. That's a literary license, I think. So there's an awful lot of exaggeration, and we all do it. We do it to enlarge ourselves, I guess. But, anyway, it was a horrendous day and there were lots of casualties. There are a lot of people who think that the 10,000 graves up on the bluff today are D-Day deaths. They're not. They were, I believe, 1,200 deaths on Omaha Beach. There were half that many at Utah Beach. And I understand that the British beaches suffered even lighter casualties -- they got in pretty easily. Omaha was the toughest and there were 1,200 deaths. There are 10,000 graves up on the bluff, but they are graves from deaths from the whole Normandy campaign, all the way to the Seine. So that has become an exaggeration, and the cemetery serves to exaggerate it. But, again, 150,000 stories, there are, I'm sure, 5,000 guys who saw it just the way Steven Spielberg did, and a lot of them. Now, I didn't see the blood run in the water, but I did see arms and legs and that's a pretty awful sight. It’s hard to know what to say after that.

Crew: Yeah, thank you.

Interviewer: So, what other questions?

Crew: Do you want me to ask the other questions?

Interviewer: Sure, and then we'll be done here.

Crew: This is great. This is great because you are just so articulate about everything.

Interviewer: Yes, it’s been wonderful, Bob.

Robert Blegen: Can I have a glass of water? Thanks.

Crew: We have a few questions here--

Interviewer: That we ask all the vets.

Crew: --yes, that we ask all the vets.

Robert Blegen: I see.

Crew: Um, look at Jeff when you answer this, but describe the spirit and the uniting force that bonds all vets together as a generation. What do you think that is?

Robert Blegen: Repeat that question.

Crew: Sorry.

Interviewer: Is there a bonding force in the World War II vet that you guys have an understanding with each other, or there is some kind of bond that you have that is there that maybe you can describe? I don't know if it's there for you.

Robert Blegen: I really don't know, because there's been very little bonding since, except during the early years after the war, everybody, virtually everybody had served. We didn't talk about it at all. Our neighbors, we didn't talk about the war or our experiences at all. We had lives to live and were wrapped up in them. However, 50 years later -- and I want to say 50 years, the 50th anniversary of D-Day, or somehow did something. It suddenly made war veterans get together in reunions, tell stories, write their reminiscences, recite their oral histories, and it all came out, I say, beginning about 50 years after the war. But prior to that, see, I didn't join the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I didn't go to meetings. I went to a reunion of a national LCT group in Las Vegas in 1996. I think that's the first time I sat down with, I guess old buddies. At that time, I met a charming guy from Emmitsburg, Maryland, who had assumed the job as historian for the reunion group. He was such a nice guy and he asked me if I would

undertake to research and report on LCT flotilla 18 for the record. I said, “Sure, I'll do that.” He told me, because he lived in Emmitsburg, which is close to Washington, he was very familiar with the National Archives. He told me how to contact the National Archives and what to ask for and so on and by telephone and by e mail and so on. From the National Archives, I collected the action reports for almost all the boats in the flotilla that filed them, and I wrote up a pretty good record of our flotilla’s activities there. But as to bonding -- no, I bond with Ralph.

Crew: Let me ask you another question. Has your World War II experienced defined who you are today?

Interviewer: Has your World War II experience defined you as you are today?

Robert Blegen: That's difficult. I'm sure it has, because it was an education. It was a concentrated education. Not just the experience of D-Day, but the whole military experience. You know, I learned how to make a bed. I learned how to do a lot of things that I wouldn't have otherwise. I am certain it was probably -- the military experience -- was probably the strongest influence on my adult life.

Crew: Because--

Interviewer: Because--

Robert Blegen: I don't know that there is a “because.” It's a strong influence.

Crew: Discipline?

Robert Blegen: Well, discipline. I happen to think I was very, very lucky. I came out of college and went to midshipman school at Columbia University. Almost immediately, within two or three months of commissioning, I was in Europe. But I didn't report aboard a battleship or a

cruiser or a destroyer. I went aboard an LCT, which is not a commissioned vessel. They were commissioned in groups of six. That's why the officer in charge is not a commanding officer. He is an officer in charge of a boat, not a ship. But, I happen to think it was the best duty I could have had in the Navy because we were self-disciplined. We didn't have to salute everybody every morning. We didn't have officers' mess protocol. We ate with the crew. We were a very intimate group, and our disciplines were very, very relaxed. We were the bottom end of the Navy. By official channels, we were given nothing. Whatever we got, and we attained some comforts, we got of our own initiative. Some people call it the midnight requisition. One day for instance, because we operated with the tides, not by day, we were very often unloading in the middle of the night on a beach. I mentioned to my crew one day that it sure would help the job out here if we could find a flood light for our deck. The next night, we had a flood light on our deck. We didn't get it by some official recognition, but an Army crane down the beach was missing one flood light.

And another time, I think I told you this story a week ago, Jeff. We were in La Havre in the spring of 1945, operating from ship to shore. Our LCTs didn't command very much respect anywhere. They were rusty, they looked pretty junky. It was very difficult to come in to a dock or alongside a ship and get anybody to come out and take our mooring lines. I went to the Navy supply shop, and I said, "Do you have a siren? I would like a siren." The store keeper said, "Yes, we have sirens, but an LCT is not authorized to have a siren." I said, "Just tell me, do you have sirens in stock?" He said, "Yes sir, we do." I said, "You're either going to give me one today, or we're going to come in and steal it from you tonight." He gave me the siren. And we mounted it on our pilot house, and we never had any difficulty getting attention when we came

alongside a dock or another ship. It was a very crude, elementary sort of life we led. But in a way, it was a very independent and very free life we led, and I enjoyed every minute of it.

Crew: I have one last question. After the war, when you returned home, you were saying that everybody was too busy building their lives to really exchange stories and talk about the war?

Robert Blegen: I don't know if it was because we were too busy or because we just didn't want to talk about it.

Crew: Okay, so, socially, it wasn't discussed.

Robert Blegen: Right.

Crew: But in your own mind, in your own world, in your own "Private Idaho," what were the thoughts that went through your head, you know, in the quiet moments when you returned?

Robert Blegen: Was I ever tormented? No.

Crew: No, just what your thoughts were, like, "Oh we should have done this differently."

Robert Blegen: No, never had any misgivings. No second thoughts, no regrets, no. Oh, I had one, I guess. There was such a panic to get out of the service when suddenly they were releasing people. By this time, I was in the Pacific, and I had command of an LCI from the fall of '45 through the spring of '46. I brought that LCI -- and this was a very proud achievement for me. I was now 22 years old, commander of a respectable ship now: 160 feet long, 300 tons. I navigated that ship from Okinawa to San Diego -- 7,000 miles, 35 days at sea -- and before we set sail from Okinawa, I had never touched a sextant in my life. I brought that ship in to San Diego, and I was so proud of the trip -- and the trip was such a pleasure -- it was just great that when I checked in at the destroyer base in San Diego, I was asked, "What's the condition of your

ship?" And I said, "It's very, very good. We had a wonderful ride." And he said, "Well that's good to hear because we're looking for ships of your description that we can send around through the Panama Canal to the east coast to serve as training ships." Well, I had to panic to get out of the Navy at the time. I told this guy, before I would undertake a trip like that, I would like to go back and check with my engineering officer and see what he wants done to that ship before we take it on. He said "Fine." I went back to my engineering officer and I said, "John, what do we need for a trip to the east coast?" And he said, "I'll make a list." (Laughter). He made the list, and I took the list back to the operations office. They took one look at the list and they said, "We'll decommission it here." So I was free to go. I was in Los Angeles and out of the Navy within three or four days after that. To this day, I regret, after having brought the ship across the Pacific, that I didn't take another 21 days and take that ship through the Panama Canal. I would have loved to take a ship through the Panama Canal -- my one great regret. That's a long way from D-Day.

Interviewer: Thank you, I think that's great.

Robert Blegen: Great.

Interviewer: I think that's all we need.

Robert Blegen: Good.

Crew: Wonderful.

Robert Blegen: Ralph, any corrections?

Interviewer: We've had a lot of people tell us that there was a great sense of relief and unity at the end of the war, and some people had a dramatic arrival, like at the Statue of Liberty and things like that.

Robert Blegen: Well, there are moments, you know? It's true, when I came back from Europe -- now this was a year before, this was June of 1945 -- I was sitting in the wardroom room playing cribbage with a correspondent from the Chicago Daily News who had a pipe that I really admired. But we were playing cribbage--

Interviewer: Over to me.

Crew: Sorry, we're listening.

Robert Blegen: Oh dear. Playing cribbage in the wardroom as we entered New York Harbor. As the game progressed, suddenly this guy, this war correspondent realized that he had been pegging backwards, and I hadn't told him (laughter). He was about to be skunked. When he recognized this, he suggested we go out on deck and see the Statue of Liberty, which we did. We dropped the game and went out on deck and admired the Statue of Liberty. But, I can say, that when I left California for Japan and Okinawa, it happened to be -- we had engine trouble out of San Francisco. We put in at Point Waneemi and it happened to be Navy Day of 1945. We're at a dock at Port Waneemi, and right next to us in an aircraft carrier. At the moment, I don't remember the name, but it was Navy Day and it was open to visitors. It was jammed with civilians, girls, women, all over this great, big, beautiful, aircraft carrier right next to us and we're absolutely restricted to our ship because we're sealed. We're on our way overseas, and we couldn't do anything. Now, that was an emotion, but I don't know that, I don't know that I was ever overcome with any great spiritual, patriotic feeling. I was happy to get out.

Interviewer: Okay, Bob, thank you. It still fits you perfectly.

Crew: And Bob, how should I? What was his title?

Interviewer: Uh, he was an officer--

End of recording.