

Arnold Randle Interview

Interviewer: Well, uh, we have Arnold Randle with us today and we are so honored to have you here and to hear about your experiences with World War II.

Arnold Randle: Thank you.

Interviewer: We thank you for coming and, uh, we want to start back with what you were doing on December 7th, 1941, and how you heard about -- how you got in the war and a little about basic training and that stuff.

Arnold Randle: Well, December 7th, 1941, I was probably just watching television or something. Um --

Interviewer: You weren't watching television in 1941 (laughter).

Arnold Randle: I guess not, no. Let me think. What was I doing in 1941?

Interviewer: You were in High School, probably, weren't you?

Arnold Randle: No, I was out of High School. I graduated High School in 1939, and, uh, in 1941, I was working for Cudahy Packing Company. And, we had a group of fellows we used to run around with, uh, and we heard about this war, and, uh, we just felt like we had to do something to get trained and, uh, so we discussed it, and we decided that none of us wanted to be drafted. So, uh, we decided to wait till somebody got a draft notice, and then we joined the Navy. So that is what we did. I was married in June of 1942, and enlisted in the Navy in October of 1942. So we were still newlyweds, and my wife wanted to be with me as much as she could, but I had to go back to training in Great Lakes, Illinois, and, uh, at that time we had four weeks of training. So that went over pretty fast. And then she came out to join me. I was

fortunate enough to be selected for a ships company in Great Lakes for a year. So she came out to join me there. And we had a great time. She didn't have any problem getting a job. She worked all the time that we were there, and she was a legal secretary. And, uh, so they were glad to see her.

From after a year's work at Great Lakes, why, they selected me to go to Yeoman School in Miami, Florida. So we both went down there, and, um, I went to school for six weeks and was assigned to a patrol craft escort vessel. A patrol craft was a group of ships much smaller than normal ships, and they were designed to detect and eliminate submarines. We only drew 12 feet of water, and, uh, we were really high on the ocean, and we had a lot of movement for submarines. We had depth charges and anti-aircraft guns and a five-inch gun on the forecastle. And, uh, if we were ever able to detect a submarine under water, why, he didn't stand a chance.

Interviewer: Arnie, let me go back to your wife, Lois, who traveled with you during basic. When did you realize you had to say goodbye and that you were going to be shipped out? Try to give us a little bit of that experience because most of the young guys were not married.

Arnold Randle: When I was assigned to the PCE 874, it was being built in Portland, Oregon. And so, by this time, my wife had realized that -- well, not realized -- she had made friends with other girls from some of the people aboard our ship. So they traveled together, and we went on a Navy train. So she came to Portland and she helped to put our ship into commission. We worked there for about 3 or 4 weeks, and they were doing all the paperwork, and everything that it took to get people trained and acquainted with the ship. And then, we just kind of felt that it was, she wanted to do as much as she could. And so when we got the ship ready to go, we took off and went down to, uh, San Diego, and that was our first entrance into the ocean. We went

down the river, the Willamette River, to where they have an ocean bar there. And that is where we loaded our ammunition, and we went over the bar, and this was the first time a lot of the people even had been on the ocean. And so we all had got sick, everybody was seasick except the Captain. And so when we go to work or go to one of our watches, we all carried a bucket with us. But we could never get out of a watch (laughter).

Interviewer: Did Lois go with you in San Diego, or did you say goodbye to her up there in Portland?

Arnold Randle: No, they followed us down to San Diego, and we were there for a shake-down cruise, and we were there for about – oh, I guess we were out there for about a month. And we went on several cruises and training people under combat conditions. So we rented a place down there in Long Beach, and then when we got word that we were going to be shipped out to Panama Canal, why, then the wives left and went home. But those two traveled together; one of them lived in Idaho and Lois lived in Utah. So, um --

Interviewer: And that was for the duration of the war, so that when she left she didn't know how long you were going to be gone, and if or when she was going to see you again.

Arnold Randle: Yes, that is true. Nobody knew then at that time how long we were going to be gone. So we went down through the Panama Canal and we were assigned to escort Merchant Marine ships from Recife, Brazil to Trinidad. Or more of them come from Trinidad to Recife up along the coast of Africa and South America. Uh, on many of our trips, we didn't have any contact with subs, but we did have a couple of trips that were exciting. One particular ship that, uh, trip that comes to mind is where, uh, we had five Merchant Marine ships and ten escort vessels. And in our particular sector, we had contact with a submarine, and so we were making a

run on the sub, which we did. We covered him with depth charges and waited for him to surface--he never did--and all of a sudden we got a torpedo shot right at us. And I could see the wake, I was on the flying bridge, and I could see the wake of the torpedo coming right up mid-ship. And I expected to be blown right into the water. I had a big helmet on and ear phones, and I went over to the side of the ship and expected to be blown into the water, and I saw the wake of the torpedo come right out the other side. And that was a thrill. It missed; the torpedo missed all of the Merchant Marine ships we were escorting. So we went back and finished him off. And there was debris all over the place, oil slick and debris when we finally got 'em.

Interviewer: How, when a ship would shoot a torpedo, I guess the submarine would go to the bottom. How did you detect where they were?

Arnold Randle: Well, we had sound gear that would bounce off of the submarine and give us a depth location. So we could pinpoint a submarine. We blew up a couple of whales en route, too.

Interviewer: Tell us about the depth charges. What were they like?

Arnold Randle: Well, the depth charges, what would happen is when we detected where a sub was, we would steam right over the sub and drop depth charges, two of them off of the end of the ship. And then we had "Y-guns" - we had four Y-guns that shot 2 depth charges out. It would shoot them out about 60 feet, and then they would get down to a depth that they were set for--we had to pick the depth to set them for--and, uh, then they would explode. And when they exploded, the water would just come up like a geyser. And --

Interviewer: Were there many kinds of depth charges, or was there only that one kind?

Arnold Randle: We only had that one kind--

Interviewer: Okay.

Arnold Randle: --but we could alter the explosion depths. We could set the depth charges to explode at certain depths.

Interviewer: And then when you see some debris, you realized that the ship was sunk?

Arnold Randle: Well, usually, we saw an oil slick and some debris coming up and there was no more sound or no more motion from the sub from our sound gear. So, that was about the only evidence we had that one was sunk.

Interviewer: In all the movies we've seen about submarines, they try to foil the guy that is shooting the depth charges by sending out refuse and oil slicks. Could you determine that there was a difference between an actual kill and somebody just sending up stuff?

Arnold Randle: Well, the only way we could tell that they were trying to fool us is that the sub would surface or something, but no, we couldn't really tell. If we saw an oil slick, we'd assume we had a kill.

Interviewer: Alright, tell us a little about the ship, the life on board the ship, and what went on, the living conditions for the sailors, and that kind of stuff.

Arnold Randle: We had a crew of about 100 people, 95 to 100 people. And life on the ship was, when we were on duty, when we were escorting a sub, err, when we were escorting Merchant Marine ships, we all had watches we had to stand. Some of us -- I worked on the sound gear part of the time, worked as a helmsman, but when we spotted something, then they would call "general quarters," and everybody would go to battle stations. And my battle station was on the bridge with the Captain. I was acting as a captain's talker, where I had contact with all of the

stations on the ship, and then I would relay messages from them to him or him to them, and he was making all the decisions for the ship, deciding what they had to do.

Interviewer: And, uh, how about sleeping quarters for the 140 men?

Arnold Randle: Well, we had bunk beds, right down -- we had an engine room, and then the bunk beds were all just in front of the engine room. It was pretty well insulated, so we didn't hear the engine that much, but we were all right there in the bottom.

Interviewer: And how about liberty? Did you have a chance to go ashore at Recife and Trinidad?

Arnold Randle: Well, whenever we went into port, we had certain days that we could go on liberty, you know.

Interviewer: And tell us about the civilians.

Arnold Randle: Well, the civilians - in Recife, Brazil, the civilians were all very accommodating. They liked to see us and would do anything for you. In negotiating when buying presents and things, why, we would negotiate with a salesman a little bit and he would try to help us all he could. So they were very friendly, yes.

Interviewer: And Trinidad too?

Arnold Randle: Yeah, well, Trinidad was a different thing. We didn't go on liberty in Trinidad. We just went there and picked up our ships we were going to escort, and then started back. It took us about three weeks to go from Trinidad to Recife.

Interviewer: And then you would stay there two or three days and then --

Arnold Randle: Stay? Oh, no. We would say in Recife?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Arnold Randle: We would stay a week or a week and a half before the next run, and we would have to supply the ship and fuel it. We were tied up with about 25 ships just like ours.

Interviewer: Uh, tell us, then, some other experiences that you had while you were making those runs in the Caribbean.

Arnold Randle: Well, one time we were out during the night looking for submarines. We had some indications that there should be one in the area. And we had a radar – a blimp radar -- that showed us a ship was coming toward us at about five miles an hour, and um, so we put everybody at their battle stations, and we were going to go see what it was. And after we sent several, we picked up the ship that we were about 2,500 yards apart, and um, we thought it might be a sub, and we were prepared to ram it and had a 5-inch gun crew that could shoot it right out of the water, but as we got closer, we signaled them and had no response from the ship at all. So we shot a flare with a 5-inch gun right over the ship, and we could see that it wasn't a sub. It was, uh, as soon as we shot that flare, why they got on the signal gear and was telling us right now what they were, and they were a ship from Argentina, a supply ship for carrying fruit and vegetables.

Interviewer: Did you ever, would you go on board a vessel like that to check it out?

Arnold Randle: No, we didn't board it. We were after subs and that was all we were after. The Germans didn't have any other ships in the area at all.

Interviewer: Tell us about, you shot a couple whales by accident, you say?

Arnold Randle: (Laughter). Well, yeah, we think we did. We are not sure of that. But we got sound on the sound gear, we'd pick up a whale, and then we were not sure what it was. If it acted like a sub and it was slow speed, we would drop a couple of depth charges on it. When we had a sub, I should tell you about this "Hedgehog" gun that we had up on the forecastle, and it shot 24 projectiles at one time.

Interviewer: What's a forecastle?

Arnold Randle: The front of the ship.

Interviewer: Okay.

Arnold Randle: And it shot these 24 projectiles, and if one went off, why, they all went off. So, if we had a sub in the range there at all, one of those would go off and I think we blew a whale up with that one time. But we didn't know for sure what went off. We didn't have a sub on the sound gear. We couldn't tell if we had a sub or not.

Interviewer: How about getting letters from home? Would they arrive at Recife, and how would you get your mail?

Arnold Randle: Oh, what do they call it – "liberty mail" or something?

Interviewer: "V-mail?"

Arnold Randle: Yeah, "V-mail." We'd get a delivery about once a month. Whenever, after we had been on an escort duty--it would take us about three weeks--we would get the mail delivery when we got to port. And we were all glad to get into port because we didn't have any water aboard the ship that we could shower with. All the fresh water that we had was used for cooking and eating. So we all bathed with salt water. And that gets a little sticky after awhile.

Interviewer: I bet it does. What happened after you were making these runs in the Caribbean? Did you get assigned somewhere else?

Arnold Randle: Well, after the submarine menace was handled, why, we had another assignment to go to the Pacific. And we went into South Carolina for a retro-fit job. And what they did was put additional anti-aircraft guns on our ship. And we still had the submarine gear and everything and the sound equipment and a little better radar, and, uh, so when we did that, they sent everybody home on leave for a couple weeks while they retrofitted the ship. And we later went back through the Panama Canal and over to the Pacific. Just as we got in to the Pacific, we picked up a couple of Japanese sailors that were floating in the ocean. And we took them aboard and kept 'em up - put them in jail. We didn't have a jail, but we put them up under watch, and kept them alive till we got to Borneo. And when we got to Borneo, we turned them over to the soldiers there, and I don't think those soldiers kept them five minutes. They were out fighting 'em every day out there, fighting the Japanese, and they just took them out and shot them, I think. But I don't know that for sure, either.

Interviewer: Were they victims of a ship wreck?

Arnold Randle: Yeah, they were victims of a ship that sunk.

Interviewer: Any other experiences that you had heading towards the Philippines?

Arnold Randle: Heading towards the Philippines? Well, no. Not heading toward the Philippines. We escorted vessels all through the Philippines, we never did have any sub problems, and we had a couple Japanese planes fly over us. They were looking for something to drop a bomb on, but they didn't dare come down close enough where our guns could reach them. So they dropped a bomb real high and we could watch it come down and just maneuver out from under it. But we

didn't see that very often, either. And by the - when the war ended, we were all -- all the ships were sent to Leyte Harbor.

Interviewer: What was your duty in the Philippines? You were in the Philippine Sea or Leyte Gulf, or whatever? You were still patrolling for subs?

Arnold Randle: Well, yeah. We were patrolling - we were escorting ships all through the Philippines.

Interviewer: Okay. And where were you when you heard that "V-E Day" had occurred?

Arnold Randle: Oh, we were out there doing our job (laughter).

Interviewer: And was there a big celebration on board ship at V-E Day?

Arnold Randle: V-E Day, we were all overjoyed to hear that happen, yes, because we knew that meant we were close to the end of the war. But it did not alter our operation at all.

Interviewer: You kept doing what you were doing?

Arnold Randle: Yeah, we kept escorting ships all through the Philippines.

Interviewer: Did you witness Kamikaze planes attacking American vessels?

Arnold Randle: No. We were too small for Kamikaze and we were too fast. They couldn't have hit us very handily. We didn't get into any air battles with the Japanese except for those attempts to bomb us.

Interviewer: Did you dock at any ports and get off in the Philippines?

Arnold Randle: Oh, yeah. We did. We docked - I think it was Mindanao, and from our dock we could see the firing back and forth in the hills between the soldiers and the Japanese soldiers. And some of the soldiers that were in port at the time, they were sleeping in bombed-out buildings, and trying to eat cave rations, and didn't have anything to cook. And, uh, they had a rough life, let me tell you. The guys on our ship, why, we had meals prepared for us and had a dry bed. And we had much better living quarters than the soldiers did.

Interviewer: You were mighty glad you chose the Navy then--

Arnold Randle: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: -- when you saw how those guys had to live. Well, tell us about "V-J Day," or when you heard that the war was over?

Arnold Randle: Well, when we steamed in to Leyte Harbor, there had to be two or three thousand ships there of every size you could imagine. Aircraft Carriers, Battle Ships, Cruisers, everything there was. Mine Sweepers. A ship our size, why, we looked like a little row-boat compared to some of those big ships. And we were there anchored with all of them. And V-E day, all of the ships let their pyrotechnics go in the air. All their flares and everything they had. It looked like - talk about the Fourth of July! That was it.

Interviewer: That must have been quite a sight.

Arnold Randle: Yes it was, from all the ships.

Interviewer: And you guys had some pyrotechnics on board, too?

Arnold Randle: Oh yeah, we shot a few of them.

Interviewer: Well, tell us what happened after that.

Arnold Randle: Well, after that was over, why, they assigned us to weather duty. And we made a couple of weather balloons and things to go out there and release, and we did that a couple of weeks. And then we had orders for all the reserve people to send them home. And that was my category. So then they shipped us -- sent us over on one of the islands, and I can't even remember now which one, and we boarded a big vessel that was designed to carry soldiers and troops during the war carrier. And boy, we had enough people on that, we were sleeping all over the deck and down below and everything. That was the worst trip I ever had. And we finally got into port, and, let's see, where we --

Interviewer: In San Francisco? You are talking about port coming home?

Arnold Randle: Yeah, it wasn't San Francisco. It was north of that. North of San Francisco, but I can't --

Interviewer: Portland, or Seattle?

Arnold Randle: Seattle, Washington, that's where it was. We ported in Seattle, Washington. They mustered us out of the Navy within two days and we flew home.

Interviewer: You flew home in a Navy airplane?

Arnold Randle: No, we flew home on, uh -- they gave us travel money to get home with.

Interviewer: Were there any welcoming signs up there in Seattle? Like in San Francisco, they had "Welcome Home" and "Well Done?"

Arnold Randle: I'm sure there were when the war ended.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Arnold Randle: But by the time we got there, why, there wasn't any celebration that we knew about. Yeah. Bremerton, Washington -- that's where we went into.

Interviewer: Oh, Bremerton. That's outside of Seattle.

Arnold Randle: That is a naval base just north of Seattle.

Interviewer: And what was it like seeing your family again and your sweet wife?

Arnold Randle: Oh, wow. The second thing I did was set down my suitcase. And I was glad to be home. We couldn't get enough of each other then.

Interviewer: That's great. Elizabeth, have you got any questions?

Elizabeth: I am wondering if any of those subs that you chased.

Arnold Randle: That we saw. We didn't lose a single ship.

Elizabeth: Talk to him, not to me.

Arnold Randle: No, not that we saw. We didn't lose a single ship in all of our runs.

Interviewer: Make that in a sentence. Say, "The merchant ships that we saw were all safe," or something.

Arnold Randle: All the merchant ships that we escorted, we didn't lose a single one.

Interviewer: And any other interesting experiences on board ship, or during your stay that you can --

Arnold Randle: Well, yeah. As I mentioned before, we floated like a cork in the ocean. And we were really high and we had a big list. In heavy seas, we had about a 40 degree list. And one time out there, we had a heavy storm coming, and we had waves 25 feet high. They come clear up to the flying bridge almost. So the Captain closed off the forecastle, the front of the ship, and nobody was allowed up there. But we had a couple young sailors, three of them got together who decided it would be real fun to go up there and have these waves come over 'em. And it washed them overboard, and we were able to see one, and we threw him a life jacket -- not a life jacket, a life preserver. And we never did find the other two, but we did save the one. But that was, that was quite a thing to do. Trying to find a body, a swimmer, in a rough ocean like that, it is just almost impossible. We looked for 'em for about an hour and a half, two hours, and we couldn't -- we were under escort duty so we couldn't spend any more time at it. But, uh, that was the bad part about the light ship that we were on. In heavy seas, we would try to climb up a wave, and it sounded like the ship was going to break right in half. And we would just get down the other side and survived (laughter).

Interviewer: So you were even quite a bit smaller than a Destroyer, weren't you?

Arnold Randle: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah. A lot smaller than a Destroyer. We were a hundred feet long was all. A Destroyer is about 300 to 400 feet.

Interviewer: And a little larger than a PT Boat?

Arnold Randle: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well, that's interesting.

Arnold Randle: I think a PT boat had a crew of about nine people, didn't it?

Interviewer: I think so. And you had about how many on board?

Arnold Randle: 100.

Interviewer: 100, yeah. Well, that's interesting. We are aware of the damage that submarines caused our shipping in 1942 and 1943.

Arnold Randle: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Any other questions, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: The big picture, the war effort.

Interviewer: Yeah, if you were going to talk to future generations, Arnie, what would your message be to younger generations that knew nothing of World War II or experienced any of it?

Arnold Randle: Well, I would say that you need to be -- to be aware. What I am trying to say is, we had a lot of people run off to Canada to get out of a war. And, all the people I knew when during when we were attacked and during World War II, they wouldn't go to Canada. They wanted to serve and be trained. And, uh, I guess the main thing about for young people is to make them aware of war. A lot of them don't even know what a submarine is. And I think the more the work that you are doing, Dick, is to help them a lot in understanding. We've got to have people that can defend our country.

Interviewer: Well, Arnie, we appreciate your service. Natalie, have you got a question?

Howard, have you got a question that I haven't covered?

Howard: No, I don't think so.