



Don Buswell

United States Navy

Lieutenant Commander

European Theater

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Interviewer:
Rick Randle

THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Rick: We're glad to have the honor of coming into your home today Don and we have Don Buswell with us. Would you say your name and spell it for us?

Don: Don Averett Buswell. D-O-N, A-V-E-R-E-T-T, B-U-S-W-E-L-L.

Rick: All right Don thank you so much. Tell us a little about your early life growing up in Utah, where you were born and through high school and college.

Don: I was born in my home at 3566 Washington Boulevard on January 12, 1921. I grew up in a family with an older brother, an older sister and a younger sister. We were a very happy family. We were in the depression time and my father always held a job; he had to work seven days a week. He worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad as a telegrapher and manager of the Telegraph Office for Southern Pacific here in Ogden. I grew up with an ordinary life, I went to Washington School and Washington Junior High School and I played football for Ogden High School. I was an Officer in the ROTC Unit in high school and I had a very exciting, great high school career. I guess the saddest day of my life was when we signed yearbooks and went home and I thought *'I'm not going to see these people again'*.

Rick: What year did you graduate?

Don: 1939. There was about 640 in my class, it was the only high school in Ogden and we were the first class to go in for two years in the new Ogden High School and it was a great class. But then we went down to Weber College the next year and there were about 540 of them there. The war was on and they all just went right down to college there so I renewed my friendships again for two years and added with it the kids from Davis County, from Morgan County, from Box Elder County. So I had another two great years there.

Rick: Well let me ask you, when you graduated from high school there was a war going on in Europe, was there thoughts that your graduating class might have to go in?

Don: Yes, that was just a common thing. We knew it was going to happen. The draft was on. My older brother had been to BYU in school and I knew it was a real struggle for my folks to support him in school down there so I decided it would be nice if I could go to a military school and get my education so I actually got an acceptance for Annapolis.

Rick: Was this before Pearl Harbor had happened?

Don: Lets see, this was in 1941 when I got this acceptance so it was just about that time.

Rick: Tell us what you remember about Pearl Harbor day and where you were.

Don: At that time I was in a lab at BYU, a chemistry lab downstairs. It was a smelly place and we got the word and I'll tell you it was a disaster and every one of us knew right then that we were going to go. Because I was in the reserve at that time.

Rick: So you knew you were going to go?

Don: Yeah, I knew right away. Since I was in the reserve they allowed us to stay in school until they needed us and it was in spring, in April of '43 when I was called to active duty and I hadn't finished my senior year but because we were close enough and we had to have a degree to go into midshipman's school so the school down there conferred and decided they could graduate us, you know there were about ten of us. I thought at that time they just didn't really care because they didn't know if we'd come back or not anyway so we wouldn't be too disastrous for the graduates of that class.

Rick: Tell us a little about basic training and going overseas and your early assignments.

Don: Well at BYU in the reserve program we had to do a rigorous physical program to be prepared. When we were called to active duty we went to Northwestern University in

Chicago and there we had three months of rigorous basic training. A lot of it was school classes and a lot of it was physical. We had to learn Morse Code and the flag signals and that sort of thing and after the three months we had examinations and if you passed you were commissioned and LauRene and my mother came back for that graduation. Then my assignment was to anti-submarine warfare in Florida so I went to Miami and there had another parade of training on anti-submarine activity. One of the most interesting things there was a huge glass table that had ships on it and submarines under it and we as officers would have to go into a little closed cabinet and guide our ship with what we found on our radar to find the submarine you know and that sort of thing. It was very interesting. Then we were assigned to ships where we patrolled up and down the coast of Florida and into the Caribbean. Earlier that had been a very terrible area for German submarines sinking our ships along the coast.

Rick: This was late in '43?

Don: Yes. Bell Telephone Laboratories developed a sonar torpedo, one that could be dropped from the air from an airplane and it would hone in on the sound of the submarine, so it had a large effect in destroying the submarine menace in that area. About that time we were reassigned to...

Rick: Let me ask you one question. Late in '43 did you contact any German submarines off of our coast?

Don: Our ship didn't but there were a few of them doing that. We were on sub chasers and destroyer escorts. We were assigned to Solomon's Maryland where it was amphibious training. I figured that in Solomon's Maryland I might as well have been in outer Siberia. You were close to Washington and Baltimore but you couldn't leave the base and we learned about these LCI's and practiced in the Chesapeake Bay. I had a lot of experiences there. After we had completed our training there a nucleus crew was sent to New York where our ship was being built and so when it was finally built and my Engineering Officer was Ralph Langenheim, my Geology Professor from the University

of Illinois. He was in charge mainly of seeing that our allowance list was complete, that everything was on the ship. I was in charge more of training and activities that went on on the ship.

Rick: What does LCI stand for?

Don: Landing Craft Infantry. It was a ship about 160 feet long and about 24 feet on the beam wide. It carried between two and three hundred troops fully loaded. Our crew consisted of 30 enlisted men and four officers. Our Commanding Officer at the time was Fred Carridio, he had been a football star at Notre Dame, he was a great guy. We were all land lovers; we had never been to sea except for our training.

Rick: Did you have to go on a '*shake down cruise*'?

Don: After we finally commissioned the ship we went on a shake down cruise up and down the coast and finally ended up down at Norfolk Virginia where we got the rest of our crew aboard. Then we had another shake down cruise and at this point we had never had a soldier on the ship but we had to learn how to run the ramps and how to do all this stuff.

Rick: What was the capacity of soldiers? How many could you carry?

Don: It depended on the crew but between 200 and 300 troops, depending on the outfit that we had. I was telling Elizabeth that we had a number of different kinds of people, you know, soldiers and Brazilian troops and we had a great bunch of black soldiers from Naples.

Rick: So you left Norfolk and did you have an assignment then or did you head over to Britain?

Don: Well we were to join a flotilla to go join...but the one we joined was one that the larger ships were going into the Mediterranean to supply troops there. There were ammunition ships, supply ships (huge) and we as the LCI's were stationed along the outside either port or starboard and just before we got to the Azores we departed from the convoy and went to the Azores and the convoy went into the Mediterranean. That trip across was really a test. For about 12 days we were in a storm and all of these land-lover sailors that had never been out on water, most all of them got so seasick.

Rick: This was just the crew or were there soldiers?

Don: No, no soldiers, just our crew. We were light, we were the smallest ocean going vessel in the Navy – ton wise and everything, but we sit almost on top of the water. We were really a tin can. Fully loaded we were only about eight feet draft on the back and four or five feet in the front. But when we were unloaded we were just sitting on top there and these waves, I'll tell you, we'd climb a wave and you know some of these old cars that you want to shift down to a lower gear to climb up a hill? That's what we wanted to do but there was no shifting, we'd get on top of that wave and we heard the creaks of our welded joints on that ship and then we'd dive down the trough and then back up again and it was quite a thing. I often thought that one of these times we were going to land on the deck of one of those big ships, they'd just cut right through the waves.

Rick: Where was your first port then?

Don: The first port was in the Azores.

Rick: I know that you went on six or seven invasion is there any interesting experiences that you'd like to tell us about those before we get to D-Day?

Don: Well, in England after we had practiced invasion many times with troops onboard, we would take our troops on at night in the evening, have them aboard all night, but they

didn't know and we didn't know whether it was the real thing or not. But in the morning...sometime in the night that we were to land at such and such a beach, one of them was called '*Slapton Sands*' and when our soldiers saw it was Slapton Sands they cussed, they really wanted to get it over with, they didn't want this practice stuff anymore.

Rick: Did they sleep with their packs on all night?

Don: We had bunks in four troop compartments and we filled them up and they were in the bunks at night and take their pack off and sleep. And then in the morning we would go in and land our troops you know and ordinarily it would take us about 20 minutes to unload our troops. At Normandy it took us about an hour and 45 minutes. Other landings we had – after we had finished Normandy and D-Day, we were assigned to go into the Mediterranean for the invasion of Southern France.

Rick: So Normandy was your first one then?

Don: That was our first invasion.

Rick: Tell us what it was like leading up to it, I mean I'm amazed that these guys were so anxious to go. So go through that story about three or four days before in as much detail as you can and then the Utah Beach experience.

Don: Well, we loaded our troops on the fourth of June and we didn't know whether it was another practice or what. But we got out on the morning of the fifth that the storm was so bad in the English Channel. It was just raining and blowing and it was a hazard and so at that time General Eisenhower and his associates decided to call it off. They didn't know whether to wait for...it had been six or seven months to get the tides just right again. This was designed to hit a beach at a low tide where we could see the obstacles mainly so to get that tide right again it would be months and giving the Germans that much more time to be prepared for our invasion.

Rick: Were you aware of the significance of that D-Day invasion at that time?

Don: No, only that when we were on the fifth we were told to go in and tie up in Bournemouth Harbor and so apparently it was something more serious because we didn't land our troops, we took them in and kept them overnight on our ship. So then they decided the sixth would be the day we would invade. So on the morning of the sixth this huge mass of ships hit that English Channel. You can't imagine the number of ships that we were able to see. Then we headed for the beach and it was the real thing, it was a new beach, it was the Utah Beach.

Rick: How early in the morning did you leave?

Don: They started landing LCVP's; they're called the "*Higgins Boat*" early in the morning. So we were out in the harbor when it began to get a little bit light and we didn't have far to go across the channel but there were hundreds of ships and then overhead we could hear the bombers. But the weather was such that they really couldn't bomb like they had wanted to because the visibility was so poor. But they were flying over us and there was of course the paratroopers and those that had gone ahead over us. So we heard them above but we often couldn't see the planes at all but we could hear them. As we approached the beach, now these LCVP's, they're landing craft that carry about 35 to 50 troops and they were the ones that hit the beach first. They had come off transports and then they just had a short distance to go and then we were next. Our company that we had aboard was a communications company from, I think it was a National Guard Company from Kansas and their job was to set up that beach for subsequent landings. They had machine guns, they had communication equipment, they had their rifles and their ammunition and all that.

Rick: Well let me just ask you this, you were out waiting quite a ways while the first wave went in. Tell us in as much detail as you can about that first wave going in and what you could see.

Don: What we could see was our big ships, our battleships and cruisers pounding that beach and literally it's hard to believe but I saw that beach bounce. I could just see it vibrating and then as this first wave had gotten up into the protection of a seawall...the German's had built this wall along there about six feet thick I think and maybe 10 or 12 feet high to prevent tanks or anything from getting through there. As I pointed out to Elizabeth, we had a manual – *'Operation Overlord'* that we knew what the beach was like, we knew the grading of the beach, we knew the obstacles that were there, we knew the landscape, the buildings and all that were there and so we were aware of what there was on that beach. At low tide we could see a lot of the obstacles that were still there.

Rick: How did you get the signal that it was your time to go in after the first wave?

Don: I don't remember the detail. We couldn't open up on radio or anything like that but usually our lead ship in our group, there were five of us, gave us a signal of flags and away we went. As we approached, you know, we were able to see this pounding and as we approached the beach these German tanks (I don't know how many there were) but they would come up over this rise at the back of the seawall and take maybe two or three shots and then they'd back off and our destroyers and stuff out there would see them too and they were trying to hit them. They probably did hit some of them but others were able to come up and they were so accurate that they would hit these little LCVP's, you know, and with a couple of shots they'd be right on them.

Rick: And all 50 men?

Don: 50 or 35 whatever and there was a lot of that that went on. When an LCI operates with this many men you know the gradient of the beach and you approach and as quick as you land you get into the sand and just before that our officer on the fantail at the back of the ship had to let go of the anchor, it had a large one inch cable with this huge anchor we'd drop so that we could stay there so we could get off again. So as we grounded then we had this cable back with it that held the anchor and when it was time to leave they had

a big 12-cylinder diesel engine on the back that went the other way and it backed us off the beach.

Rick: When you landed those guys to get off how far were you away from the actual sand?

Don: I imagine our line we had out was probably two or three hundred feet and we had to have a man go ashore with this line and an anchor to dig it in and then quick as we had that then the soldiers could hold on to it. I had an experience some time ago, I heard a lecture and this fellow was saying that he was sort of blaming some of the Coxin of these LCVP's, these smaller ships, that they had let the men off in deep water and then backed off like maybe they were cowards, you know. I had to straighten him out on that. They did land and those men, if they walked the shore within 10 or 12 feet they could have dropped into ten foot holes of water. It didn't mean that Coxin had coward off and backed off before he should so I got off after this lecturer because he didn't know what he was talking about. With ours we knew there was going to be these holes so we had this line and anchor that the soldiers could hold on to and sure enough they'd go and they had water up to their waist and go another 10 or 12 feet and drop down in a hole ten foot deep. But holding on to this thing they were able to walk out.

Rick: How much did their packs weigh of those infantry guys?

Don: I imagine they were carrying 75 pounds and then they had a rifle and they had an ammunition pack on the side. Some of them were carrying ammunition, some of them were carrying a tripod for a machine gun, some were carrying the barrel of a machine gun and they were heavy. But that line saved a lot of men. I guess the bravest man I ever saw was the Commanding Officer of this group. When our men hit the beach they dug in, they just fell right down, you know, but not him. He didn't even get to one knee and he'd blow his whistle, give them the signal and they'd get up and go. He saved so many lives because they were able to get up into the protection of that seawall.

Rick: And there was rifle fire and machine gun fire and those tanks?

Don: Yeah.

*** Tape Interrupt ***

Rick: You were talking about these deep holes and go back and tell us what the beach looked like and just take it from there.

Don: Well the beach began to be a little bit cluttered. Some places along the line there had been some vehicles that got ashore and they were burning and had been hit on the beach. This Commanding Officer by giving that signal and getting those men up off of that sand and driving them in was, well like I say, he was so brave to do that. He didn't get down in that sand, they weren't safe in the sand and he knew it. I had another little experience, as our ships came in we had what were called '*barrage balloons*' on long cables that went up in the air two or three hundred feet or higher and as we came in those balloons – the idea was that they would prevent strafing from low-flying aircraft. I had two fellows on the ship that that was their job. They weren't attached to the other group but each ship had two men that were assigned to control that balloon and as we came they were way up high in the air and the coil was really heavy, you know, it was something that took the two men to lift it. So when we came to land and I was unloading my troops a small boat was to come along side and take that spindle of wire and the two men and take them ashore. Well these two guys saw what was going on and they felt safer on the ship and they didn't want to get off. The only time I ever had to take my 45 out in any kind of anger was when I told them that they had to get off that ship and they did. I don't know what would have happened if they didn't get off but I'm sure I wouldn't have shot them but they thought I might, so they got off and they took that '*barrage balloon*' ashore and then they would go up on the beach and run it up just as high as they could to protect against strafing. So that was a little side incident there.

Rick: So you saw guys getting killed in the water as well as on the beach.

Don: That was one of the saddest things about it. We would see these soldiers floating in the water after we had landed and the following day we were assigned to stay on the beach and patrol and when we'd see these dead soldiers we would notify someone to come pick them up. Then we did pick up some soldiers, paratroopers that got really fouled up and they headed for the beach and we picked some of them up and took them back to England.

Rick: Would they swim out to your boat or would you have little boats to go get them?

Don: No they would have to wade out to where we were.

Rick: As I understand there were five ships like yours and four of them all had damage.

Don: Yes, in that wave. I don't know how severe, there was only one man that was killed or seriously injured but the other four ships went back to England and they had some damage but not severe enough that they were stuck on the beach.

Rick: But it was still a dangerous spot with those tanks throwing shells.

Don: Oh yeah. But we were assigned to stay on the beach and we were also assigned that we should not open fire. We had five 20-mm guns on our ship but we were assigned not to open up with them. They had tracer bullets and all we would do is make a good target for somebody else to see us. At night when we were anchored we just had to sit there and couldn't do anything about it but we couldn't hit anything anyway, we'd had only a couple of practices with those guns.

Rick: At night were you still 300 yards away the next few days or did you go back out?

Don: We went back out a ways and anchored out there.

Rick: Out where the battleships were?

Don: We didn't go that far, no. Just a few hundred yards off the beach.

Rick: And so you observed everything that went on. How far were you from Omaha Beach?

Don: Omaha was next to us to the north of us. They were the next beach and then Sword and Juno; the British beaches were further up the coast.

Rick: Did you see those guys climbing up the rocks at Pointe Du Hoc?

Don: No, we saw where it happened later but we weren't there and that was a feudal operation when they got up in there they found the gun was already gone. They didn't know that and in our journal we knew exactly where those gun emplacements were. A few years later LauRene and I went back to Normandy and I had been at a Rotary convention and we went to Normandy on the way home.

Rick: When exactly?

Don: It must have been about 1980. Thirty years later and I went to Utah Beach and I had a little trouble finding the place and they had a little museum there, a little information center and when they found out I'd been there boy they laid out the red carpet and we went in. They took us out a tunnel from there out to this pillbox. Now I thought when I saw that pounding of that beach that nothing could be standing or alive or anything but the way they had built those pillboxes – round domed and so thick and reinforced, it hadn't even been marred. Then we could get up in there and we could see the little slits in there where the German's were able to watch us when we came in. Then I went down and sat on the remaining of that wall and it was a very touching time to see from the other angle, you know, what they saw as we were coming in.

Rick: You unloaded 300 troops and do you have an approximate guess as to how many survived of that 300?

Don: No, I'd like to know. I know some didn't but I think most of them finally made it up to that wall. From there on I don't know what happened because we were off. Those soldiers were happy to get off that ship, they thought we were sitting ducks out there and they thought they'd rather be on the beach. They were happy to get ashore, all but these two balloonists; they didn't want to go ashore.

Rick: Were you able to talk to any of these guys before and get their feelings or did they all realize they were almost dead? Or what was their attitude?

Don: That's hard to say. I guess like me and our crew – we just wanted to get this over with and we had been practicing and working so long and we were prepared and I think it was finally the climax, you had come to the job which you were destined to do and they went willingly ashore, you know. They could see what was going on and they knew there was danger and I don't know if I had any close conversations about asking them how they felt or anything like that, I don't think so. We were just there to do a job.

Rick: Now give us what it was like the day after, the two or three days after that you were an eyewitness to what went on on those beaches.

Don: That was the most magnificent thing to see after we had secured that beach how these big ammunition ships or supply ships could come in and unload and the Navy had built some (not exactly ports) but they had built some things that they could come up beside and land and unload and in just two days things were loaded on that beach that you wouldn't believe from those ships that had been waiting out beyond...

Rick: So you saw them build the piers and get everything unloaded?

Don: Oh yeah, they just unloaded that in a hurry and that was one of the amazing things how that thing had been planned as far as supplying those troops. You know a few months ago we had a program at Weber State honoring the World War II Veterans and they had a speaker in the afternoon and I went to go hear his talk and I'll tell you it made me so mad. He was talking about now in Iraq how we need to get out, pull our troops out, get out of there, you know, and I went to the microphone and I told him off. I said, *"We could have been in the same situation in Normandy. We had a tough time on that Peninsula. We could have turned and ran and we'd have been there and unloaded our troops and taken off. But we didn't and what if we had? Hitler would have owned all of Europe and England and everywhere else."* Well he was to be the speaker that night for all of the veterans and I was on that committee and I told them *"if he gets in that line of talk tonight in his talk, I'm going to leave and I'll take every veteran with me"*. They did talk to him and he gave a pretty good talk that night. But if he would have been on that other tangent we would have left there because it could have been the same kind of thing in Normandy – we could have got off and left.

Rick: You know today's generation doesn't understand the amount of sacrifice that went in to World War II, you know they still don't get how significant that was.

Don: And I've been reading about the last days of the war and the counter attacks the German's had made and the thousands and thousands of men that were lost on both sides of that.

Rick: I'm sure when you went back 30 some odd years later, you walked through the Omaha Beach Cemetery. Can you give me your thoughts about that?

Don: Well we didn't get over to that beach but I've seen pictures of it and talking about sacrifice – those men were willing to do it that's the thing, they were going to be there.

Rick: We appreciate that insight and that information. So you waited there for two or three days picking up paratroopers and other people.

Don: Yeah and later on took them back to England and we had to have a little repair and get stores of water and oil and stuff and we weren't very long in England before we headed for the Mediterranean.

Rick: Did you have to go through the Suez Canal?

Don: No, Gibraltar and we first landed in Oran and then loaded troops and headed for Southern France. We landed in Oran (North Africa) but we went to Italy near Naples – Solerno I think it was and from there we picked up our troops for the invasions of France. Now these were seasoned fighters...

*** Tape Interrupt ***

Rick: You were talking about being assigned to that Southern France invasion, continue from there.

Don: Like I said we landed in Oran then we went over to Solerno in Italy where we picked up these troops for the invasion of Southern France. Now these were seasoned fighters, they had gone through North Africa and Sicily and they were the seasoned soldiers for this invasion. The men we had landed in Normandy, they were just as green as we were as far as any of us were concerned but this group, they knew what was going on. Now after we loaded them we went through the Mediterranean and landed them in Southern France. Now here Southern France had really been bombarded and there really was the action there had been in Normandy. We were able to get our troops unloaded quickly and they proceeded up...the strategy was to have these top troops coming from the south and the troops from Normandy to sort of box off Germany out of Austria and some of those places. So after we landed them there we had a little experience – we anchored off the coast of France and we noticed on shore what looked like a grape vineyard and we hadn't had any fresh fruit for awhile and it was August and I noticed one of these other ships lowered their small boat and went ashore. Finally our ship did the

same thing and we were going to get some fresh grapes. Luckily some of our troops were a little bit slow getting into that vineyard because the German's had booby trapped it and the first man in there got his leg blown off and we immediately got out of that vineyard but we didn't get any grapes.

Rick: Tell us about where you were and what your thoughts were when you learned that Germany had surrendered.

Don: I must have been back here at that time. What was the date of that surrender?

Rick: April of '45. Were you still in the service?

Don: Yeah I was still in the service but after we had completed our Southern France we took troops up into Northern Italy, they were still fighting the Germans on that peninsula and we carried several different kinds of soldiers. We carried Brazilian troops, one group of black soldiers and then Italian prisoners that worked behind the lines so we had a variety of different people that we carried. After we had completed that we were working out of a place in Bizerte in Tunisia and that's where we were picking up our troops and carrying them over. As we were working up that coast these bombers that came from North Africa that bombed up in the area of Romania, they went over us as they were going into those bombings into Germany. After we had completed our work there then we were headed for the United States again and we were going to the Pacific. We went to Charleston South Carolina where we got our ship repaired and our supplies and went through the Panama Canal up to San Diego where we got half a new crew and trained them on the islands out west of San Diego. Then rather than get assigned to the Pacific for the invasion of Japan we were assigned to go to Seattle where we loaded up again with supplies and went up to Alaska – way out on the Aleutian Peninsula, a place called “Cold Bay” where we met these Russians. We got a whole crew of Russians aboard our ship and the Commanding Officer was named Lev Vasilovich Alexanoff. I remember that and so we trained them in amphibious warfare out on the Aleutian chain and the idea was they were going to take our ship and they were going to go invade Japan from the

north and that was a very interesting experience. I have lots of stories about that experience. Finally we took down our flag and their flag, put on some Shindley's whiskey for them and they took off for Valdivostock(sp?) and we went back to Seattle.

Rick: What about VJ-Day, where were you then?

Don: This is the thing, right between that time on my way for an assignment for the Pacific where I would have been in the Japanese invasion they dropped the bomb. I wouldn't be here today if they hadn't dropped that bomb I'm sure. Because my experience in invasions and the type of fighters the Japanese were – the Kamikaze pilots and that sort of thing, I'm just sure it would have been a slaughter like we had never seen before. So I was assigned, because of my railroad experience, I was assigned to Bremerton Washington to a Separation Center to get men as they came back from the Pacific and get them home. From there I was released and I came home.

Rick: Tell us about the early days before you went in what the Ogden Railroad Depot was like and some experiences in '42 and '43 before you went in.

Don: As I got out of high school I got a job for the railroad as a messenger. So I worked at that depot all summer and one train after the other full of soldiers in both directions. It was the busiest place you could imagine going both ways – some going to the Pacific, but that Ogden Depot is really a going concern.

Rick: I heard that ladies would come there and pass out food and stuff through the windows to the troops?

Don: Yes. That happened all the time. They wouldn't have a very long stop over you know and Ogden was a place where they supplied food and linen and stuff like that for them and the dispatcher was there for these trains. It was a very, very busy time.

Elizabeth: Do you remember the Ogden POW camps?

Don: I don't remember but my mother worked out at 2nd Street during the war and she got acquainted with these Italian and German prisoners and she really liked them. They were in that camp out there so I guess they were happy to be where they were I think. But that's the only contact I had was through my mother.

*** Tape Interrupt ***

...Interview in progress

Don: One of my jobs on the ship was to be the censor of any mail that went off the ship. Our ship consisted of a lot of young men that ordinarily maybe would not ever had gotten in the service because of their education – two or three years in school – from the Appalachian Mountains. They were great kids, they knew how to make a still but that's about all. Often they wanted to write but I'd have to write their letters for them and when their letters came for them often I had to read them for them. But any mail that went out I had to read. Most of the men were very careful about what they said. They were instructed, they couldn't tell them where we were, what we were doing, any of our plans and anything about that. They could write a homey letter, you know, but no military advice at all. I had this one fellow Robert Swartzbach and he would try me with every letter. In his stuff he knew that I was censoring them and it wouldn't get through but he exposed every secret that he knew about on ship and I'd have to send them back to him and have him write them again but he had a little fun with me, you know, writing these things that he knew would never get through.

Rick: So did you do this every day? Was this part of a daily routine?

Don: We couldn't get mail off everyday. Sometimes it would be two or three weeks or longer before we would ever get to a place that we could post mail. I probably had a few letters a week that I had to go over but when we got mail that was different, sometimes we'd get two or three bags of mail because we hadn't had mail on the ship for a month,

you know, and these fellows would get pretty discouraged when they didn't get anything from mom. But they were real happy when they finally did get some mail. Then right after that they'd be writing a little bit more.

Rick: Did the whole crew know that you were the censor?

Don: Yes. And it was interesting. I got to know some of their families pretty well.

Rick: Thanks very much.