

Interview of Robert C. Lewis.

Interviewer: Okay, we have Robert C. Lewis, who was in the United States Navy and, uh, Robert, we are happy to have you right us today. We appreciate you coming up to KUED studio. Could you, uh, give us -- you were a lieutenant commander?

Robert Lewis: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: Is that correct?

Robert Lewis: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: And, uh, tell us a little about your -- where you were when Pearl Harbor happened and how you eventually got into the service.

Robert Lewis: Okay, well, I was going to college in New Mexico, New Mexico State College in Las Cruces. And me and my buddy had been to high school together and we had went to school there together and on December the 7th, 1941 was Pearl Harbor day and that was a real bad, dark day for us and everybody was really down on it because it was the beginning of the war. We knew that. And that was on Sunday and they had a thing in the administration building, and all the students got there and they talked to us about it and it seemed to me, and I don't remember dates and times that it was within a week or ten days, they the people from the government signing us up for a draft. I don't remember that point of when they said, and I'm sure they said it -- we could continue our college education till the end of that year. That was 1942, and so we had decided already in the beginning that we would not be drafted, but that we would join something and at that time, it was Army Air Force. It was Army Air Force, and said we'll just join that. I don't remember the full details of that, but I know he and I went

down to the Army Air Force to join that Air Force. Neither one of us knew anything about airplanes, but I had been in the -- well, the things that you join when I belong to those in the states. But anyhow, I had been in those for two years and the ROTC school and so I had -- I said, I told my mother, if they ever have a war -- and a war was going on then and I didn't know it -- I'm not going to go as a draftee. I'm not going to go fighting a war through the puddles. And so anyhow, as it went on, we did that and took the tests and they said, "Okay, now we'll call you when we want you. He lived in Española, New Mexico and I lived in Albuquerque and he called me one day and he said, "Bob, you gotta get up here right away because I got a much better deal than this thing we went through before. It's in the Navy." And I went to Santa Fe, and I spent another four, five, or six days up there going through that and that's when I got into the Navy as an aviation cadet. And so, same thing happened there. They said, "Okay, passed all this kind of stuff. We'll call you." And so, I don't know how long it was after that. They called us and we went to the Laramie Cutoff and got in the train and we went to -- we went to California. And I just wanted to hand you this picture because this is part of my life and my granddaughter got this, but this is where we went. And the Navy had just taken over that place and it was a real high-class hotel. And, c'mon Tory. What's the name of it?

Unknown Person: (Inaudible).

Interviewer: In California and so, Martel and I decided we were about two days early. We decided, well, we'll just go down and check into this place and then we'll go down and see -- we had never been out of the state before. And we went down to Carmel and we checked in to there, I think he was number one individual that got into the Navy, and I was number two that signed into that place as an aviation cadet. So we were the very, very first ones, but that is all there is to it because immediately they had us starting cleaning rooms and getting

the whole thing ready for the other people. So as a matter of several weeks, three, four weeks before the other cadets started returning. And probably a month before, they had an organized, to where -- I would say approximately three months going through the training. And I'll just say this because I had to write it down and at my age sometimes it's a little more difficult to remember everything that you did, and well, in my mind it was a very definite part of my life. And some of it was not good, and some of it was fine and I remember it. But --

Crew Member: Robert?

Robert Lewis: Yes?

Crew Member: Can I interrupt you for a moment?

Robert Lewis: Yes.

Crew Member: When you're talking, can you talk to Rick as though you're telling a friend a story?

Robert Lewis: All right.

Crew Member: Slow down a little bit, I don't know if you're nervous. But just slow down a little bit and relax and give him some eye contact because when you look at Rick, you're looking at a very large television audience.

Robert Lewis: Okay, all right. Thank you.

Interviewer: The camera is right behind me and so address your comments to me.

Robert Lewis: All righty.

Crew Member: It's good.

Interviewer: You're doing fine.

Robert Lewis: So, anyhow. That's where -- that's where we got our start.

That was really a physical thing see if you were actually in shape to do what they wanted us to do. That means that we did the same thing that all they do, you climb over these things and jump through ropes and run -- I was telling Tory that they had a race track, I'm sure it's not there anymore, but when the day was done, we'd always have to run that four horse race track at least five to ten times, which is a long ways around. But that was part of it. Physically, a lot of the people that were there didn't make it. And the Navy said, when we went to Los Angeles to sign up there, that they had about 150 of us there, and they said, "Now, remember one thing. We want you people to work very hard at what you're doing because only 10 percent of you are going to be naval aviators." So that means, if there's 150, then there was only about 15 or 20 of us who were going to be it. So, we were just dumb kids -- I was 19 years old and hadn't had slightest idea what was going on. We took the tests and we passed them and we started our deal. And, uh, after about three months or whatever, then we got our orders, and I went to Hutchinson, Kansas. Is it possible that I could show you pictures where I got my start, or is it necessary?

Crew Member: I'll show those pictures later. You don't need to hold them up.

Robert Lewis: Okay, right. Well anyhow.

Interviewer: She is just going to scan them.

Robert Lewis: Well, I've got pictures that we took here the other day in what we call the small aircraft -- you do all the stunts and the Immelmans and the turns and all that. That's when we got started. That's when they started eliminating a lot of the aviation cadets because my buddy got air sick, and at that time it was a very bad time for me because I was a loner then. I didn't really have a buddy or, and so one day he just said, well, "Bob I'm air sick

and I can't stay here." And I said, "Gee, Mike. Well, let's talk about this tomorrow." There wasn't any tomorrow, he was gone that day. So then I finished that part of my training. Incidentally, at that time, there was an accident. I had an accident at that time with these two little aircraft and it was basically my fault but if you will remember a 19 year old person, if I said to an instructor, "There's something wrong with this aircraft," because I had a hard time taxiing out to the Mat per se. So anyhow, I stayed right with and when I took off, it went in a great, big arc and there was another aircraft coming the other way, and we hit nose to nose. We demolished two of those aircraft at that time. Some other cadet told me they had found something to do with the wheel on the left side, that a boat had been broken, or something like that to cause this wheel not to turn. There's a big dark mark where I turned. But anyhow, at that time, they pulled us out of the -- the funny part of it is, as we crashed, we came together and we were sitting together side by side as close as we are together, or closer. And he looked to me and he said, "You got a cigarette?" And I said, "Yeah, I got one right here." That was kind of the funny part of it. It wasn't funny at all. They jerked us out of there, took us to Sick Bay, and the doctor said to me, "Now we are going to go back out there and you're going to fly again." And I said okay. But when I did that, that part of it sets in, you know, and you just can't do it. But I did it and then I passed that.

Went to Corpus Christi, Texas and I did another phase of my training which was to fly with another several people, you know, in formation and stuff like learning all that. Then they sent me to twin engine part of that in Corpus Christi, where I flew twin engine aircraft. We call those -- we had the SNJ's and SNB's. And SNB's are 21 engine 450 horsepower, two engines. And learning how to do that. After that phase, then I was sent to Lake City Florida in

what I called, we called the PV School. That was the big aircraft which were -- the big aircraft were, the PV's were two engine bombers with 2,000 horsepower each, and they were getting up to the big stuff. So, we started training with that. Incidentally, as going to that, I had a very, very good occasion at that time because my real good sweetie and I got married on the 23 rd of January. So that started another era of my deal.

I went through that era -- and time, months, two months, three months, whatever it took to do that to fly that is a very, very fine aircraft. I thought it was easy to fly, but it was very extreme-to-high wind loading and, uh, that's the time that you didn't fly an aircraft by coming in and funneling down and landing it on a stall form. You flew it into the ground with power on all the time so that you were flying all the time until you hit the ground.

After that point, I went to several other schools because when you started getting too much on an aircraft, you go to Celestial Navigation School and you have to go to, we went to Florida and went into search lights with -- they had on, we called PB4Y's, which were B-24s. They put a big flash light on it and we trained there for awhile. If you were coming in on a submarine, you could light the light and then you could see the submarine. So, that was all in training and then, after we got through with that phase of it in South Carolina -- Buford, South Carolina -- my wife would go home and I'd go there and then they sent -- I went home. And at that time I think it was on something or other, I saw a paper about a B-24 in Hutchinson, Kansas where it went to (inaudible) training, they'd make it in to a PB4Y training area. That was in the B-24s and PB4Y's, four engines. And that excited me tremendously. I said, "Oh, man. If I could just do that, I would be so dang happy."

And as it was, it wasn't more than a week or 10 days later, I got orders from the Navy to go to Chincoteague, Virginia to PB4Y School, B-24s.

Interviewer: PB4Y, was that a water landing plane?

Robert Lewis: No, that's what we make -- PB2Y were consolidated flying boats. That was the big flying boat. PB4Y was a landing plane with wheels. So, yes, there's a differential. So we call -- the Navy, B-24, there will be a different things of what each plane was, what they're called. For instance, if I said to you, "The Army had a Texan, we called it an SNJ and it was a training plane," and so, each one -- the Navy and the Army has theirs. So when I say certain things, I'm talking about Navy identifications. So, we went to Chincoteague Virginia and that's where we started making our crew together and I have pictures of the crew. We have pictures of the crew and I noticed this morning that in Chincoteague Virginia, we have a picture of that and that's in July the 10th of 1944, and I'm sure within that month, we were sent overseas to England and into PB4Y squadron, VPB 103, and that's where I begin my working as antisubmarine warfare.

And I might indicate the Navy had an all together different idea of what their pilots would be in multi engine planes. There are large airplanes, they fly long, long distances, and so the Navy had a PPC, which is a Patrol Plane Commander, and a copilot and a third pilot navigator. And that was my job was a third pilot navigator. When I got overseas, and we had flown the PB4Y as pilots, but we never landed them or taken them off in our training to get our screws together. And the first thing that Dave Williams in our PPC did was to get me trained, and it was within weeks I had to be trained into the PB4Y as a four engine plane. And so I got, I

got trained into that right away and, it was within two to three weeks we had to start our patrol work, which means we were going out looking for submarines.

Interviewer: Now, what base were you in -- where were you stationed?

Robert Lewis: Dunswell, Devonshire in England.

Interviewer: And that's where you took off?

Robert Lewis: That's where we took off, yes. We had an air field there; the altitude is rough, probably 400 to 500 feet. Our air field was five thousand, eight hundred, and some odd feet for a B-24, which weighed 130,000 pounds. I might put it into perspective, the B-24 PB4Y aircraft fully loaded, which was a lot of cases, the Army didn't use that much. But fully loaded because we were going in long distances, fully loaded -- they carried 25 hundred and 50 gallons of fuel. It took 500 gallons to get them off the ground. We carried 2,000 pounds of depth charges and two Proctors, which are homing torpedoes. They weighed a thousand pounds each. We had probably 700 pounds of sonobuoys, which are devices that we dropped in the water if we had a contact or a submarine going under the water. So, we were carrying -- over loaded. So consequently, it was always a little bit scary, if you might say, to get them things off the ground at five thousand, eight hundred and some feet. So, you used every inch of power that you had, and I said, well, the best thing to do well, now days, planes are flown by electronic equipment. Back in them days, even that big airplane was flown by the seat of your pants, if I may say so, because the fact that if I may indicate so, you get in that plane with that much weight and you power all the power that you get to where they vibrated and let it go. And you just go and you have a yoke, and you're moving the yoke to see what it's doing. And when that thing takes and you feel it starting to lift, you lift the wheels right now. And that gets all that drag out of there because you have a tremendous amount of drag. You get in the air and, we used to have

a little fun where we always liked to go north because as we got it off the air, there was a little valley at the end of our run way. We'd always turn and go down this valley just so we had an extra 100, 200 feet just in case if you lost an engine at that altitude and that much power, it was all over, basically for that much weight. Once you got it in the air, then you cut them back to normal flying speed at 1800 RPM, and as low amount of fuel as you could possibly get. We used to call that leaning amount, get it down to 200, 200 degrees cylinder head temperature, which was just above detonation, and keep it right there. So you were on that all the time. 90 percent of flying in a PB4Y, B-24 was on instruments. We were always flying instruments; you were always looking at your gauges. You learned, we really learned to trust our instruments. When we got into night flying and taking off at night, it was all instrument flying. Uh, in the beginning, and as I say, Williamson checked me out and twice I had to take over the whole sortie, but I told him, I said, "Dave, I think what I'd like to do on this whole thing is be the navigator." To sit up on that front seat is no big deal. You sit up there for 16 hours, I was busy being a navigator out there. The British had a navigational aid, which they called GEE gear, which was the most fantastic thing in the world is an instrument where they put out radio stations all over the country and as they sent out their frequencies, which was on each one, and I can't tell you the whole thing how it functioned, but GEE gear, once you get them put together and where they cross, that's where you were. So, they was accurate as possibly, uh, 50 feet of where you were on the ground, if you were at 2,000 feet up, you were within 50 feet of where you were on the ground. Very, very accurate instruments. Only one time it didn't work, and I had to go on dead reckoning, which is a lot of work, believe me to know where you're at. We were under the bridge fleet air command and they demanded exactly where you were. If you had a submarine contract, which we did, they wanted to know exactly latitude or longitude or within feet or where

you were. And they were very sure about that, so my thing was to take a position deal within every 10 or 15 minutes all during the day so if we had a contact, it was a matter of saying yes, you could tell them exactly within feet where they were. And they wanted, even though you were 200 miles out to sea.

Interviewer: Let me ask you a couple questions. So they had three pilots on board?

Robert Lewis: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: Pilot, copilot, and the navigator was a pilot.

Interviewer: Yes, sir. Right.

Interviewer: And, uh, you didn't carry bombs, you carried depth charges.

Robert Lewis: Depth charges.

Interviewer: And did you have gunners like a regular --

Robert Lewis: Absolutely. We had a ball gunner, a top gunner, a tail gunner and two waist gunners. And we had and they're all 50 calibers. Probably carrying, I'm guessing probably 5,000 rounds of ammunition, I'm estimating. All of us pilots had to check ourselves out in each one of those positions. So, we had -- I can tell a little story about that. I got in that tail section one time and I was checking it out and going through the whole thing like that. All of a sudden, it went, "Boom!" And I was looking straight down to the water. I had that phobia at that altitude, it bothers me. I had nothing to catch a hold of, so I'm telling them, took them about five minutes to get me out of there. And I never went in there again, I can guarantee you that. But anyhow, I checked myself out all in the gun positions. And we did use -- we did fire the waist gunners. That means the targets, so we had an idea of what it was in case we had to use them. So, yes we had the full complement of all the same things.

Interviewer: And your missions were as long as sometimes 14, 15 hours?

Robert Lewis: Well, I don't think we had a mission less than 12 hours that I can remember. And that was only in the weather conditions if there's a possibility of a lot of other aircraft coming in. The other aircraft used our field as well. So in case the weather, which was all the time, we always had 16 hours. 16 hours in the air, and there was always an occasion that we would get diverted to another British air field at a lower altitude. We did do that one time, right after we got over there, we got diverted to a British air field and I didn't like that at all. It was very uncomfortable, conditions were very bad, so I told our PPC, Dave Stevenson, I said, "Dave, we're never going to do this again." With this gear, this navigational gear, I was so confident in it, yet, I could bring that aircraft into England while we were out to sea 200, 300, 400 miles. Bringing it in and get it into our air field within 50 feet of the runway. And I could do that with that instrument by navigating it. So, I -- we practiced that. And we never again did we get diverted. In fact, I'll tell you a story if you interested in it for a moment.

Interviewer: Go ahead.

Robert Lewis: We were coming in one time and as it were, the Navy did give us a patch because in 1944, the weather over there was terrible. And when you get out to sea, 200, 300, 400 miles, you're going through many, many fronts. And one time you're drifting to the right, one time you're drifting to the left, and sometimes you could -- and at 200, 300, 400 miles, you could be off your course by a hundred miles. So you keep your eye on the drift site so you know which way you're drifting. You're going to change, on that far, you're going to change your heading at least eight or ten times. But anyhow, coming into one night, and it was just terrible. And radar was giving me a sighting that I was, uh, there was a -- we came in within 15 miles of land. The Brits wanted us to do exactly their flight thing. Come in through the Irish

Sea, make a right turn and they give you 15 miles to make at 2,000 feet to cross the coastline as well. Well, I had that all set up and radar had given me that -- and I was 30 miles out away from the land fall, and he said I was 15. Well, I knew where I was. And he was not right. Well, there was a mound of clouds right there, and he giving me 15 miles was the worst he'd ever seen. And he was reading it as a land fall. But I stayed out there at 30 miles and got in and made my normal thing with GEE gear, which was making some headings, making a right turn, and heading for the air field, which was -- we were somewhere between some place 30 miles out from the field. As it were, I could, starting at 2,000 feet, I'm flying this aircraft through this navigational gear. I'm telling the pilot exactly what to do. So coming into it, there was a little rise above our air field that went up about 200 feet. When I would hit that rise, the radio altimeter would tell me exactly where it was. Then I'd tell the pilot, now your drop your wheels, you take 35 degree flap, and you've got two minutes to land. So every time we come in, I use that system of flying, as we used to say, "By instruments." So, uh, at that time, some buddies come told me and said, "Mr. Lewis, the skipper wants to see you." So, I knew who the skipper was. Jo Bettens was the full commander, and he wants to see you. Now, I never talked to the skipper before because I was just a lieutenant JG and a whatever. The PPC's would get together with them every once in awhile, have their things, and they never considered us. So anyhow, I went in and did the normal thing, "JG Robert Lewis reporting, sir." And the first thing he said, "Damn it, Lewis. What were you doing out to sea that for?" And I said, "My log shows that radar give me that indication, I kept the log all the time and I made an interest in it every 15 minutes or less unless something happened." So them logs are long after 16 hours. So anyhow, I said, "Yes sir, he give me that and sending me logs, sir." And he said, "Well, well and good. You did the right thing by staying out to sea rather than trying to move over to your normal 15

miles right off the coast." But he said, "Damn it, Lewis, how did you get in yesterday? You were the only plane that landed during that day in our unit." And I told him about the GEE gear, and how I used that as a landing facility. And he said, "From now on, you're the navigational officer." I always feel bad about it, and you talk about feelings because I tried to get as many -- but I didn't have the time to get 16 different crews out and show them how I did that. But he said, "You're a navigation officer," and as officer, I could. I'd get crews together and try to tell them how I did that so that they could use it, because they weren't doing that. I sit here and as a witness that I really feel very bad about Pantaneo's crew, Pantaneo. And there were 13 crew aboard and they hit a mountain. Only the co-pilot lived, and they still -- what does a young man at 22 years, what does he say to a guy that just died and lived through a crash in an aircraft like that? And all I could do -- he had a big, black mark on his head and whatever else, and to this day, I still feel real bad. All I could do was grab him by the shoulder and walk away, because I couldn't say anything to him. That's part of my experience as -- and there were not, we didn't get shot at, we didn't shoot at anybody. We just went out and tried to find submarines, and our people said, "Whatever we're doing, we want to keep them down."

And many many years ago, I saw on television that the last five months -- and antisubmarines work, we got 87 submarines. We found some that were under the water, and got land based ships out there. And some of them would get there, they'd take our latitude and longitude and probably later send several ships up, and they'd send us back on patrol. And the main thing was, at that time, most of the time, we had anywhere from 12 to 16 patrols out, and we were out just -- all our trips were anywhere from 150 to 300 miles in one distance, 40 to 60 miles across the (inaudible), and you were all within distance of radar one side or the other of 40

to 50 miles, so if we had to contact them -- during that time we were over there, we probably had about a dozen. Sometimes, we'd be snorkels, but I think four or five or six times, there were submarines under there. We'd put sonobuoys down there. That was my job to listen to them and tell that there were aircraft under the water, and you could hear them through the sonobuoys -- there were radio transmitters. We'd send -- if we'd go in and think it was there, we'd set a pattern, and the plane that we'd fly in there, I knew exactly where that contact was because I was, I had a distance from 12, 15, 20 miles from our plane to where that contact was, and when we dropped a sonobuoy, and if it hit the water with a smoke signal, then if there was -- and you could hear the props in the submarine and you could tell exactly how fast they were going because of the turning of the props, and they were usually anywhere from three to four knots.

Interviewer: What was the elevation of your flights on your mission?

Robert Lewis: Normally, about a thousand feet off the water. Under weather conditions, sometimes a little less. Under other conditions, 2,000 feet. The farther we got out, the more distance we'd have from our plane to how far we could see out there. So, 2,000 feet was the most, 1,000 feet and sometimes 500 off the water. So, at night --

Interviewer: Is it dangerous flying that low?

Robert Lewis: Well --

Interviewer: Is it more dangerous?

Robert Lewis: Yes, absolutely. But you go by instruments, you are absolutely on instruments. You have radio altimeters, and you're going to be -- your aircraft is on automatic pilot, but you're observing every time. Whenever I'm in there, I'm watching every gauge. I'm watching the cell head temperature on every motor, you're eyes are constantly focusing on all your instruments all the time. Your altimeters, your artificial horizon --

everything, believe me, you're watching everything on it. Because you can't see out, it's dark, and/or, once you're used to looking out at all that water, there's nothing you can see out there anyhow.

Interviewer: Explain what a sonobuoy is.

Robert Lewis: A sonobuoy's a radio.

Crew Member: Hold on, can we stop for a moment?

Interviewer: Yes.

Crew Member: Robert, can you just slow down a little bit? Just slow down a teeny bit. I think you naturally probably speak fast, don't you?

Robert Lewis: Yes, I always do.

Crew Member: Okay, just -- it might be painful, but just slow down a touch and look straight at Rick. What was it called? Sonobuoy?

Robert Lewis: Sonobuoy.

Crew Member: How do you spell that that?.

Robert Lewis: What is it?

Crew Member: How do you spell that?

Robert Lewis: S-o-n-o-b-o-u-y, or thereabouts. Sonobuoy. It was radio transmitter, and you usually dropped them in the water at about 100 feet so they didn't break it. You, you dropped it and in day time, you could always tell if there had been a submarine there by an oil slick, so we'd set a sonobuoy, and then we'd set a pattern, which the plane would fly over, drop it, and make a clover-leaf pattern. And each one of these sonobuoys had a color, and when I'd drop them, I would make a map and have the color of each one so that I would know which way, which one the submarine was going toward, whether it was blue or red. Submarines

would sometimes go to this direction, then they'd change direction. I could tell which way they were going, and if they were going towards yellow and they continued towards yellow, then we'd drop another pattern over there so we could pick them up.

Interviewer: So a sonobuoy had a radio frequency?

Robert Lewis: Yes.

Interviewer: To the airplane?

Robert Lewis: Right.

Interviewer: That could detect the propellers of submarines?

Robert Lewis: Yeah, it's just like listening to the radio. You're hearing fish quirks and things and stuff like that. But you can tell, yeah, the speed of the -- you could definitely tell the turning of a submarine's props. Yes, you could.

Interviewer: Okay, and then, after you discovered a submarine there, what was your procedure?

Robert Lewis: Well, the minute you had a contact from radar, you sent in a position report immediately where you were when you got the contact. And then soon as -- if it was, the contact was either way, whatever. 12, 25 miles from where we were, usually. The minute that you got to that point, you send another contact, a contact to the deal. They -- but they already know that we have a contact, so they already alerted service ships or whatever that this aircraft has a contact. So, then if there were ships available, where sometimes they were and sometimes I never seen them. But they would immediately alert them that there was a contact, and if the ship was in reason, stuff like that -- one time, we had a pretty live contact once, one time. And I -- we were on that for about two hours, on that contact. And I was following it through the sonobuoys and the colors and knowing exactly where I was going, taking latitude

and longitude -- sometimes we'd contact them 30 miles, and always have contact -- latitude, longitude, so you could send that right back to the ship that was coming. So, anyhow --

Crew Member: Does the sub know you're on top of them?

Robert Lewis: Did we know we're on top of them?

Interviewer: Did the submarine people know you were there next to them?

Robert Lewis: Yeah, I would say -- they knew there was an aircraft there.

They knew before we knew that we were coming, unless it was -- they were breathing out of the thing. If there's an oil slick, then yes, they were out in the water and they knew that we were there. And that's why sometimes they would go underneath and take different directions, but I could follow them with the sonobuoys, and know exactly where they were going and the latitude and the longitude and where they were heading even though you travel 30 miles.

Interviewer: Now, was this in the English Channel, or was it --

Robert Lewis: We were in the Atlantic.

Interviewer: In the Atlantic.

Robert Lewis: Mm-hmm, the Channel wasn't -- we never covered the Channel because, the only thing the Channel -- in the Channel Islands is submarines. The Germans had -- that's where the submarines actually were taken care of. The Germans had their submarine pens in the Channel Islands. But, they never tried to sink them or whatever because it's too small. But they would come out, and we were in the Atlantic. And each one was different all together, I mean as far as how far you went, where you went, and the whole thing.

Interviewer: So, what was -- after you discovered a submarine, did I hear you say that you found about 85 submarines?

Robert Lewis: During those five months of the war in Europe and before the Germans surrendered, the thing on the television said, the last five months of the war in Germany and all of us people out on submarine warfare, that we got 87 submarines. We, it must be us as well as everybody else, service ships. My opinion, if we had a contact of submarine, and they honed in a service ship, that service ship would get the credits for sinking it, and we were forgotten. That's for sure.

Interviewer: And that's how you discovered it?

Robert Lewis: How we discovered it --

Interviewer: The destroyers would come in and drop depth charges?

Crew Member: So, he finds them --

Interviewer: Can you make a full statement just like you just said?

Robert Lewis: Absolutely. Yes, a full report is made of every contact of whatever we thought it was. Some of them were fish, you know. Some of them -- I mean, I would say probably, in every, if I may call it a (inaudible), we would have maybe one or two or three or four contacts every time. But a lot of times, it would be a whale. A lot of times it would be a fish, whatever. But we investigated every contact. In other words, if radar picked up a contact, immediately he would give us an indication of what heading it would be to, and I would track that heading. I would turn to it right away. He's already told the pilot what the heading is, and I pick it up. And so then I follow it and I know how far it is and I know exactly what time we're going to get to where that exact was. So, we would -- we would follow up every exact. And I would say more than 90 percent of the time, it would be something else other than a submarine. But we followed every contact, and so, as it says a lot of times, it was a long, hard, thing that never got anywhere. You know?

Interviewer: What I want you to do Robert now, is go through the procedure of when you actually found an enemy submarine.

Robert Lewis: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: And, uh, talk as though you're talking to people -- well, you are talking to people -- who don't know anything about it.

Robert Lewis: Right.

Interviewer: And, go right from the start of discovering the submarine, either by an oil slick, or sonobuoy, or what have you.

Robert Lewis: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: And then, calling in the destroyers. When would you drop depth charges, versus when a destroyer or some other submarines?

Robert Lewis: We would never drop depth charges. See, in other words, our whole thing is -- if we found a submarine on the surface, which they knew -- they knew before that we were an aircraft before we knew they were a submarine. In other words, they would probably dive before we could ever get there. Uh, so basically, our whole thing is, if they were on the surface, and we got a contact, and we did find if they were physically a submarine that was on the surface. If the thing had stayed on the surface, we would have made -- dropped nine depth charges and a proctor, which is a homing torpedo. It weighed 1,000 pounds. That, we were always equipped to do that. Now, I'm going to change that in just a second. I used to think that if you had one on the surface, boy, we could drop a whole new torpedo and whatever hit it, it could do. Because the minute it hit the water, it would pick up the noise of that submarine.

Interviewer: Now, a homing torpedo is when you dropped, and it would turn around?

Robert Lewis: Turn around, yes, right. And there was an occasion, hopefully if you were coming in on a submarine, you would be coming in from his stern, and you drop nine or ten depth charges, and it was always on an angle. You know, so that maybe you'd only have two depth charges on an angle of a submarine, and you're coming in this way, this is a submarine, and you're coming this way and you start dropping depth charges, maybe this one here would blow one up and this one here. And you would get one or two of them that would hit -- then, at the end of it, we would drop the homing torpedo. That is the very end. So if he's going this way, and the torpedo is dropped this way, he turns around and comes back into it. Sometimes, the torpedo would have a maximum of about seven knots. If the submarine was only doing three or four knots, it could catch up to it. So, that was the plan every single time. I was always just hoping and praying that we would find one. We did have one of our pilots do that, and he sank a sub while we were there. Another found one that was damaged out of Land's End, hiding in the coves, and we kept to that one. But, that was the purpose of us being out there, if and when we could get it. The submarines were really alerted to anything that ever moved out in the water, and they would stay down, but they couldn't stay down very long because they had snorkels, but eventually they had to come up and do whatever -- snorkeling was taking in air and releasing bad air in the submarine. And that was half way through the war that the Germans designed that, and it was a big tube, if I may say so, that had two things -- one for outgoing air, and one for incoming air. In the beginning, you could find it because it was sticking out of the water, and that radar would pick that right up. After awhile, they had a big fan over the top of it so as it went through the water, it would go over the top of it to cover it up. And that's why sometimes we know if it was a snorkel we'd picked up because of the fact you'd get the blip on radar, and then you wouldn't get it, and then you would get it again. So, you would have an idea

that that's what it was. And when you drop on it, they wouldn't know that -- wouldn't know that you were there.

Interviewer: How often did they have to surface to re-charge their batteries?

Robert Lewis: I don't know that. They could re-charge battery with the snorkel, too, as well, by doing that. But, the submarine pictures that I have is the one that we picked up after (inaudible), that was -- I don't know how those people lived in that thing. It was the most horrible experience I ever had. They called us into Port (inaudible) twice to go through it all and we even talked to some of, a couple of the prisoners that we got -- they weren't prisoners, the war was over so they were people aboard. I think there was 40-some of them in that little submarine.

Interviewer: Well, let's, I want to go through that in detail.

Robert Lewis: Right.

Interviewer: That's probably toward the end of your experience?

Robert Lewis: That's right, yes sir.

Interviewer: How many missions did you fly?

Robert Lewis: 29.

Interviewer: 29 missions.

Crew Member: Can I interrupt? Can you have him continue that process of talking about -- then the destroyers come in -- if he can say that on one pass, try to focus him on getting to do that.

Interviewer: If the submarine you found was under water, then what was your procedure?

Robert Lewis: Drop a sonobuoy.

Interviewer: But, what I want you to say is, "As we searching for submarines, and we found one, this is what we did."

Robert Lewis: When we were searching for submarines, the first thing we were, on the (inaudible) patrol. That's what we were there for, were searching for submarines. And there was generally going to be a radar contact. We really quite knew that. Well, either way. If we got a contact, the first thing we did is to go towards that contact, whatever distance it was, and if it were not something else, and we figured it was a contact, we would drop the sonobuoys in a pattern. And then, we would try to establish the fact that it was a submarine, it was going. I would say that 90 percent of the time it wasn't, but the 10 percent, that's why we were there. We would then -- remember that when the radar gives a contact, the navigator, which was me, would pick that right up immediately. May I say one thing, we were very good at what we did, exceptionally well. I would pick that up immediately, and then the radio radar operator would send that contact, that latitude and longitude of where the airplane was at the time of the contact. And send that to headquarters, the latitude and longitude. Then, I would follow -- I would follow that, go at where ever distance it was to where that contact was, and at that moment, we would sent another latitude and longitude of where that contact was where we said the submarine was. And then, if there was a contact there, we knew what it was and we would follow it and continue to send every so often a contact deal. And again, like I said, whatever they did on that end, I have no idea. But they would notify the service ship people that we had a contact. And, as I said, I'm going to say again. We did have one, just one. And we made a contact, and we stayed on it for a couple hours, and then pretty soon here, out of the horizon, there was the biggest smoke thing you ever seen in your life. That was black smoke, and here comes this vessel, and that one was there for fighting submarines. And that guy, that

thing came in. The fastest they could go was maybe 35 knots on the water. The minute he got to where that contact was, he started -- they started shooting out their depth charges, and at that moment, we were put back on control. And he was taking control and we did get out of there. And so, I really feel bad about that because I'd like to see what happened. But, as it was, that minute they wanted us to get back on and find another one, if you will. So, it was an experience. And it was, hopefully we could have done more, but we did our job. We felt that we were doing an exceptionally well job there because of the fact that, if and when we weren't there to get rid of these submarines, we never would have had a war. Because in the beginning of the war, the German submarines were sinking every ship we ever sent over to England with supplies. They'd send 10 or 12, and 10 to 12 would get sunk. So, I'm not -- I don't have any real idea basically of how many submarines, but I was told the Germans had anywhere from 5,000 to 15,000 submarines. They didn't have a real big, other than big, big surface ships. Big, you know. But they didn't have any small cruisers and stuff like that; they just had submarines. They would have won the war with submarines because they could have sunk every ship that we had. In the Pacific, they didn't have that kind of submarine deal. They had a lot of surface ships, and our people, and Tory gave me all the information -- our people out there in VPB's, which was the same thing we were doing, were sinking anything that floated. They were bombing out 50 to 150 feet off the water, sinking any ship, including cruisers. We lost a lot of people out in the Pacific, in our VP numbers, they were, and getting close to (inaudible), PB4Y's, B-24s -- they were sending these people in the Pacific out as far as a thousand miles (inaudible) and looking for anything that might be out there, but I never read too much and haven't yet about their navigational aids on the Pacific. They didn't have the good ones that we had in the Atlantic, so we knew where we were, so they're, matter of fact, by reading the history of that, a lot of times

they sink ships and our people at headquarters never knew where the ship was sunk, you know, because they couldn't tell them exactly. I never read about having a navigator, and I think that that was very necessary in our work is to have that navigator

Interviewer: You know, in 1942, we had submarines just off the Atlantic Coast of the United States.

Robert Lewis: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: And in the Gulf of Mexico.

Robert Lewis: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: Did they send planes like yours out?

Robert Lewis: Yes, they did.

Interviewer: Right around the United States?

Robert Lewis: Yes, they did. And they still do, they still have that same submarine patrol. I have my younger brother's wife, his second wife has two boys that were in the navy, one of them is on antisubmarine, been doing antisubmarine patrol now for over 20 years. So, they still do have that, yes, they do. And we continue to have that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Crew Member: Can you talk about his relationship with the crew and if he stayed with the same crew through the 29 missions?

Interviewer: All right, tell us a little bit about your crew mates. If you had the same crew mates on every mission, and did you keep in touch with them after the war and that kind of thing.

Robert Lewis: We were, in our crew -- now, I was the third pilot, and if you will, the third man in charge. I was in charge of the crew, basically. Whatever the crew did, I

was the commanding officer, per se. We had the same crew all the time we were there. They were very, very, exceptionally good. Uh, everyone -- every man knew exactly what his job was. I never asked him what their job was. But every one of them knew, and we had 11 men in the crew, and they had to spell off the guys in the turrets because I don't think any one man could sit in that turret for 16 hours. I know that the pilots and myself -- 16 hours is a long time just sitting there, your legs would go numb and, I'm not trying to say it was difficult. You compensated for it by doing whatever you had to do. But, most times, I don't know. You can blip this if you wish, but I was telling a lady the other day that come out and got some stuff from me, I said, "My problem was aboard PB4Y whether I was the navigator or a pilot out on a long deal --" and, excuse my language, "I had a terrible time using the pee tube." You know, and everybody had it. But I couldn't use it. So every so often, I had to get up out of the seat and do my chores, you follow me? So, that's just one thing that I did. But going back to the crew again, I was in charge of them. I knew everything about them, you know, and I just took care of them as best as I can. And lot of times, we had another crew member that would come aboard. My job was, each time we were going to go out on a trip, my job was to go be sure that the plane was ready to go the day before or if it's night, that day before. That was my job, the pilot, the PPC and the co-pilot never did that. I did that, I'd go out and check the plane out in every way with the crew, all the crew. Each one of their guns they'd check. I'd check all the engines, I'd check the navigational aides; that was my job. I did all that. And, but I was very well with them. I was thinking about that the other day. When, it was all over, they surrendered, the commissioned officers, we marched down to the water and got on a seaplane tender, which was 170 feet long. Then the enlisted men got on a great, big ship to come back to Norfolk, Virginia. I never seen my crew members after that, never did. I think I got a couple letters from some of them, the only one I

kept track of was the co-pilot. His name is Sikkich, and he was -- when I went on a trip back east, I'd stop and seen him. But, he died about 20 years ago of a heart attack. I don't think anybody that, like me in my squadron, I'm an old man now and most of them are dead. You know? But I haven't had contact with any of the crew at all during that time from after that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Crew Member: Can I, I'm sorry, Rick. I just want to stick with the crew for a second.

Robert Lewis: Yes?

Crew Member: I've asked other pilots and other guys who were on the crew who the crew people are. Can you just name their first name and where they're from?

There's "Joe from Alabama" and "Tom from blah blah blah."

Robert Lewis: Well, you know -- I haven't written it down.

Crew Member: Okay.

Robert Lewis: And it's difficult. I was looking at that picture the other day, trying to identify them. And you know, when I'm sitting here, I'm trying to remember somebody's name. At this moment, I can't remember your name. If I walk out that door, I can remember your name. I don't know why that is, but at this minute, I can tell you three or four names of that crew member, yes. But I can't remember it right at the moment. But they were all friends. We took care of them. We were -- our crew, our people in our squadron had beer. Our crew people could have beer. The officers always had alcohol muster type things. We had, I think, four to six bottles of bourbon or whatever a month. We also had a candy allotment. That's when we'd go ashore, I'd take all the candy I got and give it to the little kids out on shore. But, I wasn't very much of a drinker back in them days. So, I would take my alcohol muster, and I

would dole out one bottle at a time to the crew so that they wouldn't -- but they'd have their beer muster. So they enjoy that because they could sit around and have a togetherness over a bottle, if you will.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Robert Lewis: And, I have a really good feeling about all those crew members even at this moment after that many years because they were -- we were together. They knew what they were doing, I knew what I was doing, and we did get home safely. And that was an accomplishment. We lost people --

Interviewer: Go ahead.

Robert Lewis: We lost people, people did get to the point where they couldn't take any more of this, you know. And I couldn't remember any of those names, but I do remember sometime, even officers would say, well, "What happened to Joe?" And the Navy would never let you know whether he died or, I don't know. That was the same thing during training. I would say that possibly during our military training as naval aviators and stuff like that, we've lost far more people in training than we ever lost once we got in squadron because they made mistakes. And you never got to know everybody in training very well because you knew you're not going to see them all the time, but once we got in the crew, you took care of those crew people, and for that length of time, a year, or whatever -- yes, I knew where they're all from. I knew what all their names were. But at the moment, I can't recollect that. I would like to do that.

Interviewer: Of those 29 missions, talk about the most dangerous time -- was there ever a time when you lost an engine or you got shot at or anything like that --

Robert Lewis: No.

Interviewer: -- that was more dangerous than others?

Robert Lewis: I would say the most dangerous for any naval aviator regardless of whatever, whatever they were aboard ship or whatever is weather. That is the worst thing you can possibly accommodate. And I actually, and I will not do that because there were times that under weather conditions, I had a worry something. I wasn't really too sure. When you got into hail storms as big as baseballs, you really get considerate. So, I would think that possibly that would be something that you get shot at -- in the Channel Islands, the Channel Islands, two times we got over in that area and they had anti aircraft guns on the top of the Channel Islands to protect them. And twice, we got over there and I guarantee, they weren't very good gunners because they were 200 yards behind us trying to catch up with their guns. We could see the flares coming up. Twice, we had ME 109s come out and join us, per se. You know, they would come out and they were protecting the Channel Islands, but that was a friendly sort of thing. They would fly alongside us and we would wave at each other and stuff like that. They -- even though there were two of them, I guarantee you, they would never try to contact or do anything at all with a B-24. They didn't have a chance, you know.

Interviewer: So ME 109s would fly along and you'd wave?

Robert Lewis: We'd wave at each other, yes we would. And then they'd go, the same thing. And then they'd peel off. So, that's why it happened twice. And I felt good about that, you know. We were buddies, you know. And they didn't want to fight us, and we didn't fight them, and Germany never knew that they waved at us, and we tell about that because they were just good people. Can I tell you one story? I was not very liked in the fact -- we were under the British Air Fleet Command. So, we were not under the Naval, our command. We were not under it, even though we were under the command of Norfolk, Virginia, (inaudible).

But the British was our people and told us what to do. And I was out there one time, and I kept a very, very good log. And, we were on -- just cruising around there. Now, at a thousand feet, you say that's not a possibility. But I sighted an orange peel. Now, that's a bright orange thing on blue water. And you could see that, even as a thousand feet. So I made a thing in my log that I found an orange peel. And these people that are interrogating got on that orange peel. Well, it was an indicator there was a submarine there some place at some time, I understand that. That's why I put it down, but anyhow, as you go out 100 miles, make your circle, come on back and there's that orange peel again. So I put it in my log again. Latitude, longitude, and an orange peel. Now, that seems like a silly thing to be put down on a log. Well, that happened about five times, and each time, I would put down the latitude and the longitude of orange peel. Well, you know, that was probably the worst thing that I ever did in the in the time that I was over there. These interrogators -- now remember folks, when we got ready to go out on one of these trips, that was at least a 24-hour ordeal. We were out there 16-hours. You had to prepare for it, you had to go to the meetings at the beginning of it. And so I was there 24 hours, even though I was only 22 years old, I would get pretty tired. Well, on this one, we got back and they would send a Jeep out there with a WAV or one of the ladies to pick up the navigator. They didn't want anything else to do with anybody in that plane but the navigator. So then, they'd take me in and have all my logs and I'd go in there and they started interrogating me. Well, I'd been up there 16 hours and whatever hours. We had little sandwiches and stuff like that along the way, but it wasn't a very good food up there. So, for 16 hours, you didn't eat very much. So anyhow, they interrogated me. And they interrogated me. Well, and I was getting to the point where -- and the crew had already went down to the chow hall and got food and stuff like that, and they interrogated me, and I have no idea how long it was. And finally, they let me go. The chow hall

was closed when I got there, and there was some guys there and they fed me. And by the time that I got back to my bunk and I have no idea how many hours it was, my buddies, they were in bed sleeping and I was still working. And at that moment, and may I say so, I never had much good feelings about the interrogation. And always, they were always at two hour interrogations after each flight. So, I was 18 hours on each one of those flights, and even though, again, I was in shape and stuff like that, that was long, long days. Long days, and there was no overtime. But that was my story about the orange peel and I've told it many times and people listen to it and a lot of them don't listen to it and it gets tiring to even hear about it. But, that's my story. The other ones were just kind of normal, just normal things every time. 19 times. Incidentally --

Crew Member: Let me just interrupt for two seconds, do you know about that? Can you ask him about that?

Interviewer: Yeah, this is -- we're going to get to that.

Crew Member: I just wanted to make sure you knew about that.

Interviewer: Yeah, I know about that.

Robert Lewis: Yeah, but yeah, it was a boring situation. But I was very interested in it. I was glad that I was there and that maybe we could do a thing, maybe we helped, maybe we didn't. I have no idea, but at least some of us were there doing whatever we were supposed to do, and that's what we were told to do.

Interviewer: All right, Robert, now, I want you to give as much detail as you can on when the war ended, and you guys captured that submarine.

Robert Lewis: Right.

Interviewer: German submarine. Tell us about that.

Robert Lewis: Well, it was -- if I may say so, at the war ending, this -- we pretty well knew it was happening because when I say we had 29 missions, getting closer to the end of the whole thing, we flew a lot. We just flew all the time. I kind of think maybe, in the Battle of the Bulge, and we kept track of that all the time because that was a concern even with our people and the fact that maybe the Navy thought that Germany was going to try to make that crossing of the Channel again to England, I think that because there was a week there that nobody did anything because of the weather, and the weather was horrible. But we were flying all the time. And my opinion was, maybe if they attempted that, maybe they would load our airplanes up with big bombs if they attempted to go that, we would be loaded with bombs. We were doing that. But we were flying everywhere. We were not on patrols. Just flying around. In fact, we went up -- and I don't remember where it was, but we went up and somebody, we got notification to go to some port, and I didn't get that because it wasn't given to me. We went up there to this port, and the German submarines were laying out in the water shooting torpedoes into the port, into the ships and dock. Well, we got out of there. There was nothing we could do because there was so many ships and so many torpedoes -- it was just chaos and we got out of there. And then we start flying around the normal deal and looking for anything that might have to come up. The war was not over, and there was no indications that anything was going to do anything. And again, as I say, I'm the navigator. I'm keeping track of where we're at, the pilot is out there flying around any place like that, and I'm keeping track of where we are so I know how to get back. Anyhow, as we were out there, we saw this ship, and you say it's under way. And it was going probably six or eight knots. It was under way. Made a contact with port on that one. We flew the black flag, as you notice on there. Flew the black flag and we knew that it had surfaced because of the flag and I was tickled to death because we finally found something we'd

been looking for a year. So anyhow, we stayed with that until, I guess, probably, I'm guessing a half an hour, an hour we stayed with that contact until, as you see in the end of them, there's a boat coming up to take them over and the people are on the deck. We stayed with that, and then they took them back to Portsmouth and decked it and then a week later, they asked us to come and we did. We went down and went aboard the submarine and met all the high British officers and they commended us and stuff like that, and we met couple of the crew on that submarine. And then, another while -- week, maybe four, five, six days; they had us come back again and they interviewed us, like you're doing and talked to us how we did it and how we found it. Well, if you're just flying around, you see a lot of things. And so, we just said, "Well, it just happened to be -- whether they just popped up and were going, or whether -- whatever. We just found them and we stayed with them until they took it in port." But that was the very first submarine that popped up after Hitler.

Interviewer: Now, at that time, were you aware that the war was over?

Robert Lewis: Yes, we did.

Interviewer: And that Hitler had told everybody, all those submarines to surface --

Robert Lewis: Surface and fly a black flag.

Interviewer: Fly a black flag.

Robert Lewis: Well, because, whatever, I don't know. But they it says, "Fly a black flag if you soak it in oil." I think that was the indications, that they would not have a black flag unless, I don't know. But to fly a black flag, that's what they did. If you'll notice on that little picture, that flag doesn't look all black.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Robert Lewis: It looks like it was soaked in oil.

Interviewer: Do you know, this is one of the first German submarines that surfaced?

Robert Lewis: That was one of the first ones that surfaced, yes.

Interviewer: And then they were told to go to certain port?

Robert Lewis: No, they were, actually -- if you'll notice that ship, there's a row boat coming up towards them. They take over, and then they were the ones that actually take that ship to the port. They're not towed -- our people take it to the port.

Interviewer: And then you went on board and interviewed or met some of the crew?

Robert Lewis: Yeah, we met a couple of them.

Interviewer: What was that like?

Robert Lewis: You know, I'm always a people person, and those guys were just like we were. They were just people. We were not enemies, in fact, the matter is -- back in them days, we didn't then, per se, but we could almost give them a hug. "Oh boy, are we glad this is over with." You know? And that's how I felt about it. You're my buddies and I'm sure glad you're alive and -- that's the way I felt about those people. They didn't have anything to do with the war, they were just told to do what they were supposed to do, as we did. We would have killed them if we had the opportunity, just like all our people did. So, I don't know. I was just glad it was all over with, and forgot about it.

Interviewer: Like these ME 109s that waved at you?

Robert Lewis: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: You were both airman.

Robert Lewis: Both airmen.

Interviewer: And doing what you were supposed to do.

Robert Lewis: We were supposed to do, but I don't wanna hurt you, and you don't wanna hurt me. You were protecting those Channel Islands and I'm not out there to shoot you down. And we could have taken them out right then and there. We had a top turret that could have blown them away. But we didn't do that, you know? Because they were friendly, and we were friendly. That was just an attitude. And, I think that's a way -- I'm sure that that's a way most wars are done. Most of the guys didn't want to get out there and do harm to anybody, but I will take care of it if you're going to hurt me. I have a very bad feeling about any war as I do at the present time. I can't buy what we're doing now, but that's a necessity. But that was five or six years out of my life, and I have a very bad feeling about anything going on now, and especially now where we're taking people that are 40's and 50 years old with families at home. Remember that in World War II, nobody that was married or had a child went to war. It was always a draft, and it was always a young man that had nothing else to do. Just like me, I was 19 years old. And, I tell the story to people. Isn't it amazing that I was 19 years old, and went through all the training, flew one of the largest aircraft in the world, and then the war ended, and at that time, when the total war ended, I was only 23 years old? August 14th, 1945, I was 23 years old. And there's a lot of guys out there like me that flew airplanes, many, many of them flew airplanes and fought wars that are not here today. Many of them that didn't lose their lives for that, and that's the thing that I really think that was really encouraging, you know, that it was really something that we had to do, and we were forced into it, in a way. I believed in World War II because that was a necessity. I have, since then, never believed in any of the skirmishes

of wars that we have had since then, my personal opinion. And I keep telling everybody, I'm entitled to a personal opinion because of my age. So --

Interviewer: Well, and your service.

Robert Lewis: Yes, I'm entitled to that, and I'm glad that, and again, like I said, it's been along time that I've had the opportunity to sit and talk with you and to people about what it was all about, you know? And I'm sure that there's a lot of them that you've interviewed that maybe had the same feelings, maybe some of them have bad feelings about the enemy, personally, I think, individually, there were no enemies on the one-on-one position. We just had higher-ups that indicated what we were supposed to do. So, that's just my personal opinion, and I -- I was glad I was in it. And then I did stay, I stayed in reserve for 41 years just in case. I was a qualified pilot in anti aircraft, I could fly anywhere in the world until they got jets, and I possibly could have -- and I would have. I would have loved to flown a jet aircraft. Uh, anything that flies, anybody can control. I flew the largest aircraft that the Navy had. I could have flown any plane that they had, any one of them, I was qualified to fly. After the war, I had the opportunity to go down to Echo, California to an area called Crow's Landing out of Modesto or where ever on targets. They had targets out all where gunners could sit on targets and shoot at a plane, and for about a month, month and a half, I was down there and they had one plane, and they had two of us pilots go down there and we took turns about three hours a day, flying over this and this and these turrets would follow us, but that was an SDB. An SDB was the bombers that the Navy used to win the war, and that was a fine aircraft. I never could figure out how we ever won the war with it because of its power rating, it didn't have a lot of power. I would say about 800 horsepower, but it was a beautifully operated aircraft. That was one of the easiest planes I've ever flew.

Interviewer: If you were to have a message for future generations, what would you say to them?

Robert Lewis: You know, that really is a difficult thing to say. What do you do? Well, I would just tell them -- live. Just get up in the morning and live really and truly a very, very clean life. You're a human being, you have a wonderful thing going ahead of you, and just love your family -- absolutely love your family and all your friends. And just be buddies with each other because the fact that that is the one thing in my mind, whether it be Army, Air Force, whatever -- the thing that won the war was the buddy system. Because any time you're in a unit of any kind, irregardless of where you were, you were all buddies and you were trying to take care of each other and you lived with each other. That's my thing to say. Just be sure that you're a buddy with anybody that you live with, your family, and that's the only thing I can say. Just live your life really, really not complicated, but have fun.

Interviewer: Robert, thank you so much for coming in.

Robert Lewis: Thank you for inviting me.

Interviewer: You did a great job.

Robert Lewis: I feel good about coming up here.

Interviewer: We've interviewed a lot of veterans, but we've never had a submarine chaser.

Robert Lewis: Yeah, right.

Interviewer: That flew a B-24.

Robert Lewis: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: So, thank you again for your contributions for our --

End of recording.