

## Denny Rathbun

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**Question:** First thing if I could get your name, first and last, so I have that on videotape and the correct spelling of it. So if you can give...

**Answer:** Oh, spelled out?

**Question:** Yes please.

**Answer:** Okay. My name is Denny Rathbun, D-E-N-N-Y R-A-T-H-B-U-N.

**Question:** Great now you can just go ahead and chat with Adolph.

**Question:** Just start talking here. So were you in career Navy or?

**Answer:** Well I wasn't originally. I went in in last part of November 1942, fact I went to boot camp down here in Bremerton. And ah, got out in June of '45, no '46, went to the University of Washington for a while and I was disappointed in their teaching methods so I found out we were gonna have a Reserve training submarine come to Lake Union and they needed people to teach the Reservists so I volunteered to be an instructor down there and came back into the Navy at the same rate I went out which was first class. And ah, oh, let's see, right up until two days before the Korean War started then I decided to go regular Navy again. And that was the wrong place to be at the wrong time because I was in the receiving station there at Pier 91 and they gave flight orders to everybody to get 'em out to Japan where they would be available instantly. And that didn't really work out. I wound up riding an ammunition ship from Port Chicago out to Yokuska

**Answer:** Twelve-day trip was pretty swift, as fast as that vessel could go. So I've been career Navy ever since.

**Question:** You're from around here originally though?

**Answer:** Yeah I grew up over on Hood Canal. My dad was a power plant operator there for the City of Tacoma, up at Cushman. And ah, so we lived up there in a company house with free rent and electric heat for my first seven years, then we, dad got the bright idea we ought to go down and live in the Skokomish Valley so we bought a five acre farm down there and lived there for three years, three years? Let's see, second, third, fourth and fifth, yeah. Then we moved to Shelton, Mountain, down to Mountainview, that's where K-Mart is now. And ah, went there 'til my junior year of high school then dad decided he wanted ah, go to work for the Bureau of Reclamation at Coulee Dam 'cause they needed operators over there and they were, hadn't started the plant up yet. He wanted to be in on the ground floor so we moved over there, which I was not real eager to do being a senior you know. You get some benefits if you're a senior in high school. That you have a whole new class to become acquainted with and a whole new school was a bit much but it worked out alright.

**Question:** New girls, too, huh?

**Answer:** Oh yeah.

**Question:** So did you leave someone behind when you went to Grand Coulee?

**Answer:** Oh yes, you bet.

**Question:** That probably wasn't too popular.

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**Answer:** No that was a heartbreaker.

**Question:** So what year was that?

**Answer:** Oh goodness sakes that must have been between '40 and '41. I went over there in the summer of '41, we moved over there in the summer of '41. So I graduated in '42 and went to work on the dam, working for the bureau as an electrician's helper.

**Answer:** And of course the recruiters would come to town occasionally and a good buddy and I wanted to be airplane drivers so the Air Force came to town and we went up and took their physical and all their exams and they said, "Yeah, we want, we need you guys." And we were just about to sign on the dotted line and we went talking to this sergeant, told him we wanted to fly P-38's and he said, "Not likely. They'll put you, you guys are too big for a P-38 you'll have to go in a -- fly either a B-24 or a B-17." And that didn't appeal to us too much so we bided our time and pretty soon a Navy recruiter came to town and he gave us all the same tests to be an airplane driver and after he got all done he said, "Yeah we accept you and here's where you sign." He says, "Oh by the way we've got a special exam you can take called the Eddy test and it has to do with the electronics field. If you pass with a grade of 90 or above you can go in as a second class petty officer. And if you get between 70 and 90 you'll have to go in as third class." Well that was a difference between \$75 and \$92 a month. So we took the exam and made a pact that if -- if the results came back in about three weeks if we could both go into the Navy as second class that's what we would do. So we did. And that was November of '42 we came in.

**Question:** So that wasn't too long after Pearl Harbor then.

**Answer:** Not really.

**Question:** So you were in Grand Coulee during when Pearl Harbor happened, huh?

**Answer:** Yeah, yeah. Heard it on the radio on a Sunday morning. So anyhow, they -- like I said we went through boot camp down here in the shipyard. Got to march in that much snow out there on the grinder in front of the Marine barracks in February. And then we got sent to, had to go to Chicago for one month, got five weekends in Chicago which was very interesting. It was extremely cold. I can recall marching up and down the lakefront there. They had a park, ran it along the lake. We were stationed in the armory at the foot of Randolph Street which made it really accessible to the loop, and all it's attractions. It was some kind of cold there. We were staying in this hotel this one Sunday morning we woke up, called down asked the desk how cold it was out there they said 18 below. So we just pulled up the covers.

**Question:** Was that at A school here back in Chicago?

**Answer:** No, that was just a refresher, almost purely math, and getting ready to send us to a three month school. At that time we had to make a decision whether we wanted to go to Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma or stay in Chicago, or go to Houston, Texas or Texas A and M for this three month school that we're gonna go to. And I chose the University of Houston and that buddy of mine chose Texas A and M. So we had a kind of parting of the ways there but we wound up going to Treasure Island for six months to get the real electronic school. Where we learned about radar and sonar and ah, got out of there in December of '43, went back to New London for more detailed training on the equipment we were gonna be working on like the sonar and the radar specific to submarines. Up until then it had all been general. And ah, unfortunately we got back there to New London on the 22nd of December and it's just -- it's cold back there too. (laughs)

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**Answer:** So let's see we were there, we left there in the middle of March, went to Treasure Island temporarily and then got transportation via a tanker from San Francisco out to Pearl. Got there first of April, '44. I got assigned to the Bushnell which had two relief crews on it. I got assigned to submarine division 141 I guess it was. And the purpose of a relief crew, when a submarine comes off patrol they get off for a month, well not really for a month, they get off for two weeks of R&R and then the following two weeks is spent indoctrinating the new crew members 'cause theoretically you're supposed to send one-third of your crew off to go back to new construction submarines. Well we didn't quite send a third, I think we sent seven or eight when I finally got assigned to a submarine. But at any rate we, the sub base would repair submarines, and the tenders would repair submarines so we would usually have at least three submarines along side to get in our practical factors, to become more familiar with this equipment which up 'til now had all been mostly on paper. And ah, so we left there and arrived down in Majura Atoll, must have been hm, either May or June I can't recall. And the Sperry had gone down, that submarine tender had gone down there first and they, there were some Seabees that came along and they built Quonset huts over on this atoll for the relief crews, I mean for the submarine crews that were in there for R&R. And we would get to go ashore from one o'clock until five and have this 2% beer that had brown foam on it. It had formaldehyde in it to keep it from deteriorating I guess. I don't think it was all that good for us.

**Question:** Is that about all that was on the atoll was Quonset huts?

**Answer:** Yeah. And over on, well, this atoll was probably 15 miles in diameter. Just a coral reef that ran around except for the one entrance. And while we, just before I left there, got assigned to the Queenfish, the whole of Task Force 58 came through that notch in the atoll. They wanted to come in there for three or four days R&R before they went up to attack Saipan and this ship started coming through that notch in the atoll at six o'clock in the morning and the last one came through at six o'clock at night. They were carriers, battle wagons, destroyers, cruisers, you name it. It's the biggest collection of ships I've ever seen.

**Question:** That must have sort of filled the island up.

**Answer:** Well they had their own separate part of the atoll that they went ashore on and played softball and practiced drinking beer and we had a, they allowed us to go in there after the Task force 58 pulled out and collect all the beer cans and put 'em in these amphibious craft and then the amphibious craft took 'em outside the atoll and dumped 'em into the ocean. There was a, oh, there was a mountain full of beer cans we got to collect.

**Answer:** So anyhow, depending on how long you'd been in the relief crew determined when you left. When you worked way up to the top of the list then you got assigned to a submarine. Well, I guess I must have got to work on maybe 15 or 20 different submarines before I ever got assigned to one. And we had a area, a room up on the top of the ship that was air-conditioned. And when the submarines would come alongside the first thing they did was shut down the air conditioning system. Well then it would get up to 100 degrees during the daytime and the humidity to match, it was not very comfortable on that tender 'cause it wasn't air-conditioned except for this shop we had up there. So we'd go down to the submarine and take these individual cabinets out of the radar installation. The biggest one was probably this wide and maybe that tall and weighed about oh, 120 pounds, the transmitter. And they'd fit up the hatches and we'd use a crane to get 'em up on the top deck and then put 'em in this air-conditioned space where we could plug 'em into prewired cabinets so we could tune the system up and get it up to top, peak performance before we took it back down, reinstalled it in the submarine, which made it pretty nice.

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**Question:** Was that pretty new, radar in submarines or --?

**Answer:** Yeah it was.

**Question:** When did they start really using them?

**Answer:** Oh, I think right around, sometime in '42.

**Question:** Was it like the conventional radar, it has a spinning transmitter and receiver.

**Answer:** Well, at first, at first they didn't. They just had an "A" scope which is a, looks like a carpet of grass about that wide and the normal height of the grass is about that high. (gestures) If you had a target it would stand up above the rest of the grass and you'd know you had a target and you could stop the antenna and zero in on it and when you got close enough to fire they had a lobing motor up in the antenna that would give you in affect two beams and when those two beams were the same height on this "A" scope that said you were right on the bearing and that was significant, I mean sufficient accuracy that you could shoot using that bearing on your torpedo to data computer.

**Question:** So was this a um, this was radar right?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** Was it also good for air?

**Answer:** We had a separate radar for air and the antenna was on a mast that we could raise just like a periscope before we surfaced and make sure there were no aircraft up there. If you didn't see 'em through the periscope it didn't mean they weren't there. They could just been out there ten miles away just over the horizon. So with the radar you could detect them.

**Question:** Was that the same type of display on that?

**Answer:** Yeah. We didn't get a P-B-I until oh, I think it was middle of '43 or early part of '44 they started putting this orange scope on there that, where you've got a circular display. (gestures)

**Question:** And then you also maintained sonar on board.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** That was active sonar, was it?

**Answer:** We didn't use it as an active sonar. We used it mostly to try to detect torpedos.

**Question:** Can you explain what active sonar is because I know what it is but some people might not know.

**Answer:** Well active sonar, you put energy out into the water as a beam and then you measure the time it takes that blast of energy to go out and ricochet, reflect off of a ship for example and get back to your sound head which is down below the keel and that gives you the range to the target but being it's a submarine as opposed to a destroyer we would use a single ping method 'cause if there were other Japanese ships in the area they'd be able to hear that

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ping or pings if you put out more than one. The chances of them hearing one was kind of slim so we only used a single ping method to get a final range before we shot. If we didn't have, if we weren't using the radar. Like if we were submerged and -- I don't ever recall firing on the basis of a sonar bearing or range alone. It was just something to confirm what you thought you already had in the solution.

**Question:** So after repairing and tuning radars and sonars, you did that for a while until you raised to the status that you were put on a sub crew then.

**Answer:** Yep. I'll never forget the day. The tender was just anchored in the bow so it would swing around when the tide came in or the tide came out and the atoll ran over like this and it was kind of pointed like my leg here and the bow here and two submarines on this side and probably two on the other side. This boat came in through the notch in the atoll and came zooming around the back end and came up along these two submarines and stopped. Threw their lines over. I thought that was the greatest display of ship handling I've ever seen cause normally they come in wide and throw these heaving lines and then you pull the lines with the heaving lines. But they didn't do that, they just put that thing right where it was supposed to be. And I said to myself, I need to get on that submarine. Turned out I got on it about two weeks later, and I never regretted it. It was, well I guess it was the greatest experience of my life being on that boat. It's a different -- different atmosphere on a submarine. It's hard to explain. It's a -- it's the epitome of a team 'cause theres 78 people on there, probably eight or ten officers and the rest are enlisted folk and you know everybody by their first name. You might not see them for three or four days at a time because the only time you might see them is when you gather in the crew's mess, the dinette, for breakfast, lunch or dinner. But ... yeah, it was something else. Very exciting and it all ended before I was 21 (laughs). The war ended middle of August of '45 and I wasn't 21 till the fifth of September. Bunch of youths out there. But you go board one of these Trident submarines it's the same thing. They are young.

**Question:** What was the name of the sub you were on?

**Answer:** Queen Fish, SS393, it was, see it was launched in October of '43 and commissioned in June of '44 up at Portsmouth. I think they launched three boats that day. They were really turning them out there during the war. I didn't make the first patrol on it but like I said I got it down at Majura

**Answer:**

**Question:** So how long were you on it from that point until the end of the war?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** How many patrols was that?

**Answer:** Four. We ah, we were fortunate we got assigned great areas, I mean, where the likelihood of seeing a ships to shoot at was higher than a lot of the rest of the part of the ocean. And ah, so we made short patrols. I think we left there -- Majura, in first or second week of October and we were back in Guam the second of December where by now they moved the Sperry from Majura up to Guam.

**Question:** When you um, up until the point that you got stationed on the Queen Fish you, had you ever seen any conflict at all?

**Answer:** Uh uh.

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**Question:** So you were going into it with whatever preconceptions you had about what it'd be like?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** Do you remember that day? That first day that you actually met an adversary that --

**Answer:** Oh yeah, definitely (laughs).

**Question:** Can you tell me what that was like?

**Answer:** Yeah, we had gone through these straits that the south end of Kyushu and north of the Ryukyus where Okinawa is located. This water was too deep to mine so we would go through there at night at a pretty high rate of speed hoping we didn't see any destroyers or any, they usually had a small something the size of a PC, which probably 150 feet long max, sitting there observing and reporting anything suspicious. One time we shot it up, but anyhow we went through there and we went up on the west side of Kyushu and I'm well, Nagasaki is over there and Sasebo and a couple of big Japanese Naval bases. So we were assigned there, we went in a wolf pack, like I said there was the Barb and the Picuda and us and I don't think we'd been there, it was either the first night or the second night, when this convoy came through and I don't remember if we were the first boat to fire or the second but we went in on the surface at night because with our radar we could tell where all the ships were exactly and you could cover so much more territory on the surface than you could at night. And they didn't have radar, we did. So it wasn't any big deal to go in and attack on the surface at night and we fired this one salvo of torpedoes, I think it was four torpedoes at this one target and hit it and I can't -- there was machine gun fire with tracers coming from this ship and one of the lookouts -- there's three lookouts besides the officer of the deck and the quartermaster up topside. And of course during battle stations you would have -- the skipper'd be up there, the XO would probably be in the conning tower on the periscope, and ah, or he'd be on the transmitting -- the torpedo bearing transmitter which is mounted on a tripod, it's about oh, head height, with a compass, gyro compass under it and you can, got a table on there that turns. And you can sight in and transmit the bearing of the target down to the torpedo data computer just by pressing a button. And ah, they started firing these tracers so the captain ordered lookouts to go below. And this one lookout got below and he had a seizure. Well he'd gone up in the forward torpedo room and this chief pharmacist mate was up there and he took a deck of cards and stuck it in his mouth so he wouldn't swallow his tongue.

**Answer:** Then we dove and the tin cans came in and they dropped probably 20 death charges. But one thing you do, if you've been on the surface all night charging batteries, you make a trim dive in the morning to get your ship balanced fore and aft so that when you have to dive, you're not wondering what's gonna happen, you know what's gonna happen 'cause you made a trim dive already and we had a bathythermograph which had a little card in it about that size and as we went down this stylus would leave a trace on there, it was a smoked sheet of cardboard. It would leave a trace according to the temperature and if there was a definite change in temperature that told you that there was a level there below which sonar on the Japanese destroyers would be ineffective 'cause their sonar waves would come down and hit that layer, that temperature layer, and reflect instead of going down to where you were. So we knew what depths we had to go to to get under the -- their sonar capabilities. So we surfaced again...

**Question:** So when you were down under, did you get below that inversion layer?

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**Answer:** Oh yeah.

**Question:** And then did you just sit?

**Answer:** No we ran as quietly as we could, shut down all the machinery we could -- just ran on the battery so there wasn't, shut down most of the moving machinery like the air-conditioning system and everything like that that would make any kind of noise.

**Question:** Did you clear out of there fast or was it quite some time before you made it clear of the charges?

**Answer:** Oh I expect it lasted maybe, hm, a couple of hours. And course by then this convoy had gone further and I guess the other two boats in the wolf pack got a chance to shoot at them. I don't know how many they sank.

**Question:** When you went down under -- during depth charge attack, if you weren't in a duty station, most people lay in their bunks to conserve oxygen did they?

**Answer:** Well, I don't remember that. I think everybody had an assigned station to stay alert for leaks or accidental fires or anything like that. Have you seen this movie, what is it, "U-571"? That was a little exaggerated in there when the lights went out because we had lights that were -- emergency lights that were wired directly to the battery and they wouldn't go out. And they were shock mounted, they had rubber pads between the solid mounting plate and the light itself, so I wasn't on a boat that lost lights during a depth charge till after the war and that wasn't due to a depth charge. We just had a flat power failure at about 300 feet off of the big island of Hawaii. And the skipper says -- called on the 7MC up to the torpedo room to fire a red flare and let these destroyers know we were coming up. And I'm not sure, I think we beat those flares to the surface 'cause when it goes dark down there, there's a terrific incentive to get back on the surface.

**Question:** What's it -- what's it like to be depth charge, I mean, for somebody who's never been there, you know the movies dramatize it and make it exciting or scary or whatever. Can you describe what's going on in your head? Do you remember it that vividly or is it fear? Do you think you're gonna be sunk or what's it like?

**Answer:** I don't think -- at the time I -- I was pretty sure the depth charges weren't going to sink us. I don't know why that was. We were what they called a thick skinned boat. I can't remember where the dividing line was between a thin skin and a thick skin but our boat would go to a test depth of 100 feet deeper than the previous submarines. Like I say, I don't know where the dividing line was between 250, the hull number 250 or the hull number 300, it was somewhere in there they started making them out of thicker steel so we could go deeper and that made your chances of -- I mean they had to get that much closer to you with a depth charge to hurt you. And by hurting you, I mean causing severe leakage, not crushing you. I don't think they were that powerful. It wasn't until they got hedgehogs that they could, we got hedgehogs that they could put holes in a ship.

**Question:** Is that, now that was the first time you'd be depth charge was in that raid, huh?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** Did that very first one that hit, was that pretty strange?

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**Answer:** Absolutely (laughs), 'cause well, I didn't -- I didn't know really know what to expect. I'd never seen any, I don't... well I must have. I'd seen "Destination Tokyo" in New York City when I was going to school up in New London and it showed some depth charging in there so I guess I had kind of been pre-warned.

**Question:** So did the movie prepare you for finding out and readying yourself for what it was like?

**Answer:** Oh yeah. I guess the main thing is when you're down there and you're running silent with no air-conditioning it just gets more and more humid in there and we've been down, I've been down there so long that there's sweat running in the, not the bilges but you had a piece of steel, angle iron, at the edge of the linoleum or tile floor and outside of that was an area under the manifolds and electrical panels. An area that was painted but it didn't have any tile or anything on it. Anyhow, pretty soon there'd be sweat running around on the floor, just due to the heat. I think you could stay down about 14 hours before your cigarettes started going out. You couldn't keep 'em lit, there wasn't that much oxygen in them.

**Question:** Did you ever have that happen, to be down that long?

**Answer:** Oh yeah.

**Question:** How long have you ever stayed down?

**Answer:** I guess about 18 hours. We would have to put out what they call carbon dioxide absorbent. Came in five gallon containers as a powder and you spread it out on the mattress covers in the crew's berthing area to take the CO2 out of the air. We, we didn't have any way of generating oxygen for the benefit of the atmosphere but we could take air out of the air banks and bleed it into the boat to get -- well, air that was fresher, but then you build up a pressure in the boat and after a while you have to let that air go someplace and if you let it out of the ship they're gonna see it up there and so we didn't do that very often.

**Question:** So the 18 hours that you spent under the water was - while you were under attack or --?

**Answer:** Yeah. Under attack or weren't sure if they'd left yet or not 'cause they'd shut off their engines a lot of times and just sit up there and wait for you to make a mistake.

**Question:** So when you're under attack are you sitting there, were you a sonar man under water?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** So you're sitting there listening?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** What do you hear and how do you determine what it is?

**Answer:** Well propellers go chu-chu-chu-chu-chu, they have a regular beat to them and you count the RPM's and report it to the skipper and when they speed up, that's when they're getting ready to drop depth charges and as they get closer, their sonar -- you can hear these pings coming from their sonar and when the interval gets real short that means they're right on top of you. So about that time you zig or you go deeper or both.



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**Question:** So as a sonar man are you more aware of the enemy's position above you than the crew?

**Answer:** Oh yeah. That's one of the benefits of being an electronics technician on my watches I stood either in the conning car or in the control room or we did have a sonar, hand crank sonar, up in the forward torpedo room where the hydrophone was about this long and it was mounted topside which let you hear better than the two sound heads that we had on the, down alongside the keel.

**Question:** So the captain followed your advice of the sonar man, you were in contact with the conning tower and...

**Answer:** Yeah. All you can do is report the bearings and whether the screws had speeded up. You could give 'em a turn count, I mean, how many revolutions per minute the propellers were making.

**Question:** What -- what raid were you on when you ended up going down for 18 hours?

**Answer:** What do you mean?

**Question:** What occurred before you submerged, was it an attack on a convoy or--?

**Answer:** Yeah, but I can't remember now just where it was. And it was only that one time that we stayed down that long. That was an extremely long time to be down.

**Question:** Does that rattle your nerves, being down that long?

**Answer:** Oh no. It gets uncomfortable but I wouldn't say it rattles your nerves.

**Question:** When the high carbon dioxide is in the air, I was on a, I was on a service ship, the only time I ever went on a sub was when I was on a tender I went on a sub for a day. But when you're down that long and you're -- you get high levels of carbon dioxide just breathing is difficult, I mean it's not like breathing the air in this room, is it?

**Answer:** Oh no, uh uh.

**Question:** What's that like?

**Answer:** Like you said it, it's harder to breathe. You have to breathe more often to get the same amount of oxygen, hopefully.

**Question:** So you can feel it though.

**Answer:** Yeah, it has a tendency to make you lethargic. Not as alert and effective.

**Question:** In that first raid after you ah, successfully evaded depth charges, the other two boats were working over the convoy and whenever they got to the surface again, um did, when did you regain the surface? Were you still under the attack?

**Answer:** Oh, as we tried to stay down as short a length of time as possible because these convoys might be making 12 knots and we could make 20 on the surface with all four engines going as fast as they can go. So we could, if we got on the surface, we could do what they call

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an end around and get up ahead again and maybe get in another attack. And I can't remember, it seems like we made at least another attack that night. Yeah.

**Question:** So what was the first target that you took out? That first spread of torpedoes?

**Answer:** Oh I couldn't say, it being that dark.

**Question:** Then your radar didn't have enough definition then to really differentiate?

**Answer:** Uh uh. Well you could tell if it was a 10,000 ton ship or a 4,000 ton ship just by the size of the pip on the radar. But no, you couldn't -- couldn't be sure what you shot at at night. They had recognition books with silhouettes of all the Japanese ships that the Japanese had before the war and it was silhouettes of these in this book. Which, I didn't study them but the officer that's the officer of the deck watches -- looked through 'em quite frequently and the skipper and the XO because they were the ones that have to do the identification if it was at all possible, but jeez, in the nighttime it's fairly hard to say yeah that was such-and-such a ship or and yeah, it was so many thousand tons. Most of the Japanese ships I think we sank were under 10,000 tons. When you see one of these container ships over here pulling into Seattle, those things go over 100,000. Terrific targets (laughs).

**Question:** Did you, when do you hear when you're on, if you have your headset on, do you hear the torpedoes going through the water and do you hear 'em strike the target and the target sinking?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** What's a ship sound like when it sinks after you hit it?

**Answer:** Well it's what they call breaking up noises. As the pieces go down the compartments will compress and when they do it's kind of like an explosion. I guess that's the best way I can describe it. And of course if the boilers blow up -- that's a pronounced sound on the sonar.

**Question:** So what do you think when you hear that noise and it's an enemy ship? Is it sort of a sad noise, 'cause I know, you know, being in the Navy for my experience was is that you sort of feel affinity for any sailor, regardless. Was it elation that it was an enemy or was there a little bit of sadness?

**Answer:** I don't think so. I mean they were the enemy. That's all there was to it. I don't ever recall thinking about that. Hm. No, we were mad at 'em. No three ways about that.

**Answer:** I, one of the things, when I was going to Treasure Island to that six months school, at that time I didn't have any idea of what kind of a ship I wanted to go on and there was several of us, all of us practically in the class, and there was about four of us that every weekend, we'd make a trip up to Mare Island, Naval shipyard, and go on a different type ship. So we'd been on cruisers and little carriers, I don't think they could get a full size carrier in at Mare Island, little carriers, cruisers, destroyers. And this one day we're walking down along the waterfront and here's this submarine with its back open wide up, they've got two good sized hatches that they take the batteries in and out of. And it's got air hoses and electrical cables and all -- all manner of stuff running down in -- into the inside of the submarine. And so we went and talked to the deck watch and asked him if we could go through the boat and he said yeah. And they called up a sailor on board there and asked him to be our tour guide. So we went up through and down through the conning tower first and he showed us the helm

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where you steer the ship and there's another helm position down below in the control room but, and this is where the radar was, one of the radars. The aircraft warning radar was down in the control room. So then we went down through the forward battery and into the forward torpedo room and up here between the torpedo tubes on the W-R-T tank were painted all these flags. Rising sun flags and these red dot flags. There was 15 or 20 of them, I can't remember, it was quite a few flags for all the ships this submarine had sunk and it was named Wahoo. It was one of the more famous submarines during World War II and it now rests in the bottom of the straits up there in the north end of Hokaido 'cause it didn't make it out of the Sea of Japan, the aircraft got it and Japanese fishing nets keep hanging up on it. So it's well marked. They know where it is. That convinced me that this is the kind of ship I want to be on, and then we went back into the cruise dinette and here behind the ladder that goes up topside is an ice-cream machine. Can you imagine your own ice-cream machine on a vessel? I don't know. That, and of course the crew's dinette was immaculate and instead of eating off of trays you'd be eating off of plates and I don't know if we had saucers. We had regulation coffee cups about that big around (gestures. But it was, I don't know, pretty enticing. And that's how come I volunteered for submarine duty.

**Question:** The ice-cream maker.

**Answer:** Yep. That cinched it.

**Question:** The ice-cream maker and you could get the Japs.

**Answer:** Yep. Plus they -- they allowed you access to the refrigerator which was down below the main deck there in the crew's dining area and you could make sandwiches or a bowl of soup any time of the day or night you wanted to. Our favorite was tuna fish sandwiches. Take a can of tuna fish and onions and a little dash of vinegar and mayo, not mayonnaise, salad dressing and make a tuna sandwich (laughs).

**Question:** So that was a, the sailor that took you through there was a crew member on the Wahoo.

**Answer:** Um hm.

**Question:** So that's someone who didn't come back.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** When did you hear about the Wahoo sinking?

**Answer:** Oh, goodness, I think it would've been about -- when we came into Guam in December, December 2nd of '44.

**Question:** Did you, what did you think when you heard the Wahoo, it must have been sort of a stand out thought, I mean, since you'd actually been on it. What crossed your mind when you heard that the Wahoo went down?

**Answer:** Well it made you wonder, if they were that good, what they did wrong to wind up getting sunk. There was a, I don't know, kind of a, what would you call it, a belief or a, well a belief that you shouldn't go around swapping onto another submarine during the war. Cause almost everybody that did that wound up on a submarine that got sunk. So, plus up until the time that Swordfish got sunk, there had never been a submarine, American submarine that the name ended in fish that had been sunk. We hadn't lost any. By the time the war was over

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we lost two, the Bonefish and the Swordfish. So being on the Queenfish was, I mean, we were kind of blessed.

**Question:** There was a lot of um, both when I fished and being in the Navy, not wife's tales, but I'm trying to think of the right word for it, superstitions like you know, a Norwegian superstition was you never hung your coffee cups on hooks inside, you always had them hanging so that the mouth of the coffee cup was to the outside of the hole because it symbolized catching water if your hull had been holed, and never open a can on the bottom of the can because it symbolized a sinking ship, and all these things. Were there other type superstitions in the Navy at that time besides ending in fish and never swap a crew?

**Answer:** Ew, golly, not that I can think of offhand.

**Question:** Did you -- you talked about not wanting yourself to switch subs. Did subs also not want people to switch over because of the superstition? Didn't want crew member --

**Answer:** Not that I'm aware of. I couldn't say -- no. But anyhow, you didn't, if you were smart you didn't go out of your way to get assigned to a different ship, a different submarine. Stay with the one you're on. That was just the healthiest thing to do.

**Question:** Did you know a lot of people from the other subs? Did you intermingle so that --

**Answer:** Oh, other than electronics technicians I didn't. But we would swap notes, you know, whenever we'd come alongside each other. Well, one thing that got to me was this good buddy of mine came in on the Albacore, SS 218, when we were down there in Madeira

**Answer:** And I didn't find out until after the war that they had just finished sinking a huge Japanese carrier about two weeks before, so we didn't, for some reason the silent service, that was no big deal. I mean, looking back on it I think it was strange that he didn't tell me that because he was one of my better buddies. He wound up getting sunk on the darn thing.

**Question:** So he didn't survive the war then?

**Answer:** Pardon?

**Question:** That sub didn't survive the war?

**Answer:** Hm-hmm.

**Question:** Was he someone from back home that you knew or just a Navy buddy?

**Answer:** I met him in the Navy at electronics technician school and we went through sub school together and rode the train across the country to Mare Island and ...

**Question:** So was that a personal loss for you?

**Answer:** Yeah. I probably lost -- I guess four good buddies, got sunk on various submarines. The hardest one to take was this kid named Simmons, Davy Simmons, he was on the Sea Wolf and the Sea Wolf got sunk by one of our destroyers, or DE, the Shelton sank it. Which is strange 'cause I went to high school in Shelton. So I don't know -- it was -- . How far have I taken you in my submarine career, or are you just interested in the war part?

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**Question:** The World War II. Do you remember Shelton or Sheldon, is his name Sheldon or Davy?

**Answer:** Oh Simmons.

**Question:** Simmons.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** Do you remember him, his age? Can you picture him?

**Answer:** Yeah he's about, five foot five and straight blonde hair, real boyish looking face, somebody who should have been home on a ranch in the Midwest someplace instead of out at the bottom of the ocean someplace.

**Question:** In talking to all the vets that we've talked to, one thing they say about friends that -- they lost they said the one thing is in their mind, those kids never grew up. I mean, so you still see him as a young kid.

**Answer:** Oh yeah, yeah.

**Question:** A lot of fine, young people didn't survive that war, you know.

**Answer:** Yeah, that's a fact.

**Question:** So when you heard a sub went down you immediately knew, by name you knew if there was some of the crew I mean.

**Answer:** Yeah if there was somebody on there that you knew, why you got a chance to grieve for them.

**Question:** So how did you grieve for a fellow in a submarine like that, I mean just privately, or do you remember that, saying a prayer?

**Answer:** Yeah, I can remember saying a prayer for them and ah, I don't know, maybe mentioning it to other members of my crew that I just lost a good buddy on a different submarine.

**Question:** There's one B-17 pilot that every time he came back from a bombing run over England or over Germany, he would walk to these woods that were by the runway and he'd spend a half an hour there and he'd pray to God to forgive him for the destruction he meted out on Germany.

**Answer:** Um hm.

**Question:** And he said he had to do it every day, he couldn't live with it, with his friends and what he did and it was that, had that much impact on him. Did there, was there I mean, wasn't that hard, I mean never having been, I was in a peace time Navy pretty much but, it must have been an awful thing to lose friends and to be involved in that great destruction of the war. Was this something you ever thought about back then? Was it tough to cope with?

**Answer:** I don't think we thought about it that much. It was just, it was our job.

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**Answer:** One thing we did have happen which was a horrendous experience. It was on our fourth war patrol and we were out there between Formosa and the mainland, which if there were any Japanese ships moving north or south, they would have to go through there, so it was a good place to shoot and we'd -- see, the Barb had departed from our wolf pack and now we had the Picuda and the Spot it seems like, no the Sea Fox and the Spot, and we were spaced probably fifty miles apart, north and south and looking for shipping. This one afternoon, it was the last day of March '45, we had a report from the Sea Fox that she thought she stuck a torpedo in a destroyer while she was sinking a couple of other ships and unfortunately she was -- whenever a submarine in a wolf pack sighted a ship, they were supposed to stick an antenna up out of the water at the very minimum and transmit to the other two that there were ships here for the picking and get over here as fast as you can. Well the Sea Fox waited about six hours after this attack before sending a message. So about right around midnight, eleven thirty or so, I was on the radar on the P-P-I out here, can't remember what range we were had it set at, I think 20,000 yards to the edge of the scope and it was a faint, looked like it might possibly be a target out there and pretty soon it showed, it developed, it was a target. So we made an approach on it and it was making 18 knots and not zig-zagging, just going in a straight line. So we figured it had to be this destroyer that the Sea Fox had claimed she put a torpedo in and this destroyer's trying to make it to port before it sinks and that's why it's not zig-zagging. So we went in, made an approach, turned the tail of the submarine, we had four torpedo tubes aft that we -- shoot and if we missed 'em so we could escape faster, that's why we used the stern tubes. So we fired four torpedoes and all four of 'em exploded. And when that happened, we knew we hadn't sunk a destroyer. You can't stick four torpedoes in a destroyer, there's not enough left after the first two for the other two fish to explode on. So turns out this was a Red Cross ship that the Japanese, I mean the, we had guaranteed safe passage from Singapore up to the Japanese home islands. They were supposed to be carrying Red Cross supplies to our POW's and there was 1,120-some people on there. Most of 'em were crew members of off ships that had been sunk further south and they were on their way back to Japan to pick up new ships. And, I don't remember what the temperature of the water was but it wasn't that warm that last night in March, and at that time we had instructions, all submarines had instructions to pick up at least two survivors off of anything you sank and put one in the fore torpedo room and one in the aft torpedo room so they couldn't get their stories together and then bring 'em back to port for interrogation by the experts. So we milled around there on the surface for maybe two hours throwing life rings out to these people in the water, trying to get 'em to come on board and one person grabbed a life ring, the rest of 'em swam away. And the reason this one Japanese grabbed a life ring, he'd been in Merchant Marines for ten years before the war and he could speak a little English and he knew we weren't gonna cut him up for shark bait or something like that whereas I guess the rest of his people thought we'd do 'em harm instead of saving 'em and so that's why they swam away. So by that time it's getting close to daylight and we were just off the coast of China pretty close, so we ran back out in the middle of the straits before we submerged for the day and when we surfaced that evening another submarine sent us a radio signal and said there was a lot of debris in the water over there that didn't constitute Red Cross supplies and we ought to come back and pick some up for evidence. So we did that and there was bales of rubber about this square that wouldn't fit down a hatch and there was five gallon cans of some kind of ore with wooden packing around the outside of the can. Sealed cans. And I don't remember what else there was but we picked up everything we could find and we couldn't take the rubber bales down the hatch so we had to lash 'em up in the superstructure and brought 'em in for evidence. Well this Japanese survivor that, when he came down through the conning tower hatch was covered with bunker "C" fuel oil, which is quite a job to get him clean. Anyhow the first words he said were Awa Maru which was the name of the ship we just sunk. We didn't want to hear that because we had had messages, classified messages, about the fact that this ship was coming through our area, but for some reason they -- they changed their course and they altered their speed and the submarine force sent out a message to us,

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unclassified. Well we'd been alongside the tender in Saipan on the way out there and there was something wrong with our bow planes so while we were alongside the tender. the radio shack on the tender copied all our messages so when we got ready to leave they gave us a stack of messages like this. And of course you go through the classified ones first and I guess they didn't get around to reading the unclassified message which would've told us this ship was coming through and approximately what time and on what course. So we never -- never got around to reading that message and that was a mistake. So anyhow, we still had 20 torpedoes on board which we could've fired at anything that came along because at that time Okinawa was opening up and there was Japanese ships, a bunch out there, destroyers, battle wagons, you name it, but they ordered us back to port. Said bring that prisoner in to Saipan. We weren't allowed to shoot at any of those targets and the skipper got a general court martial and got relieved, and he lost 50 numbers and it was stipulated in his record he could command no more submarines during the war.