

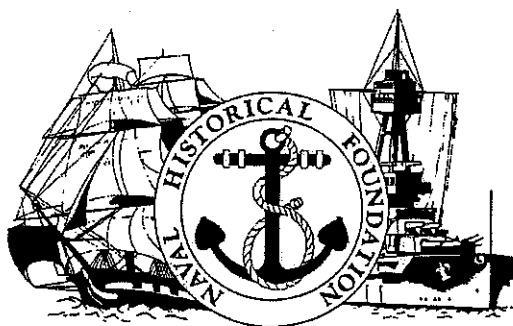
Seaman Paul Peter Fix

**Oral History
Conducted with
Marilyn Carey**

1980

Edited by Carolyn Fix

2000

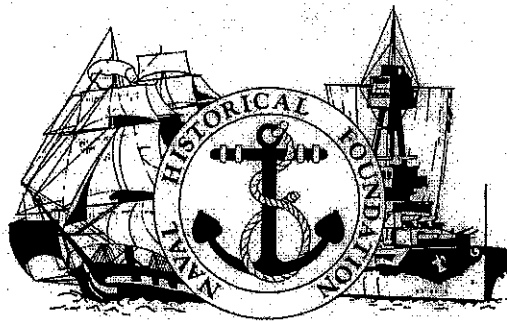


**Naval Historical Foundation
Oral History Program
2000**

Oral History

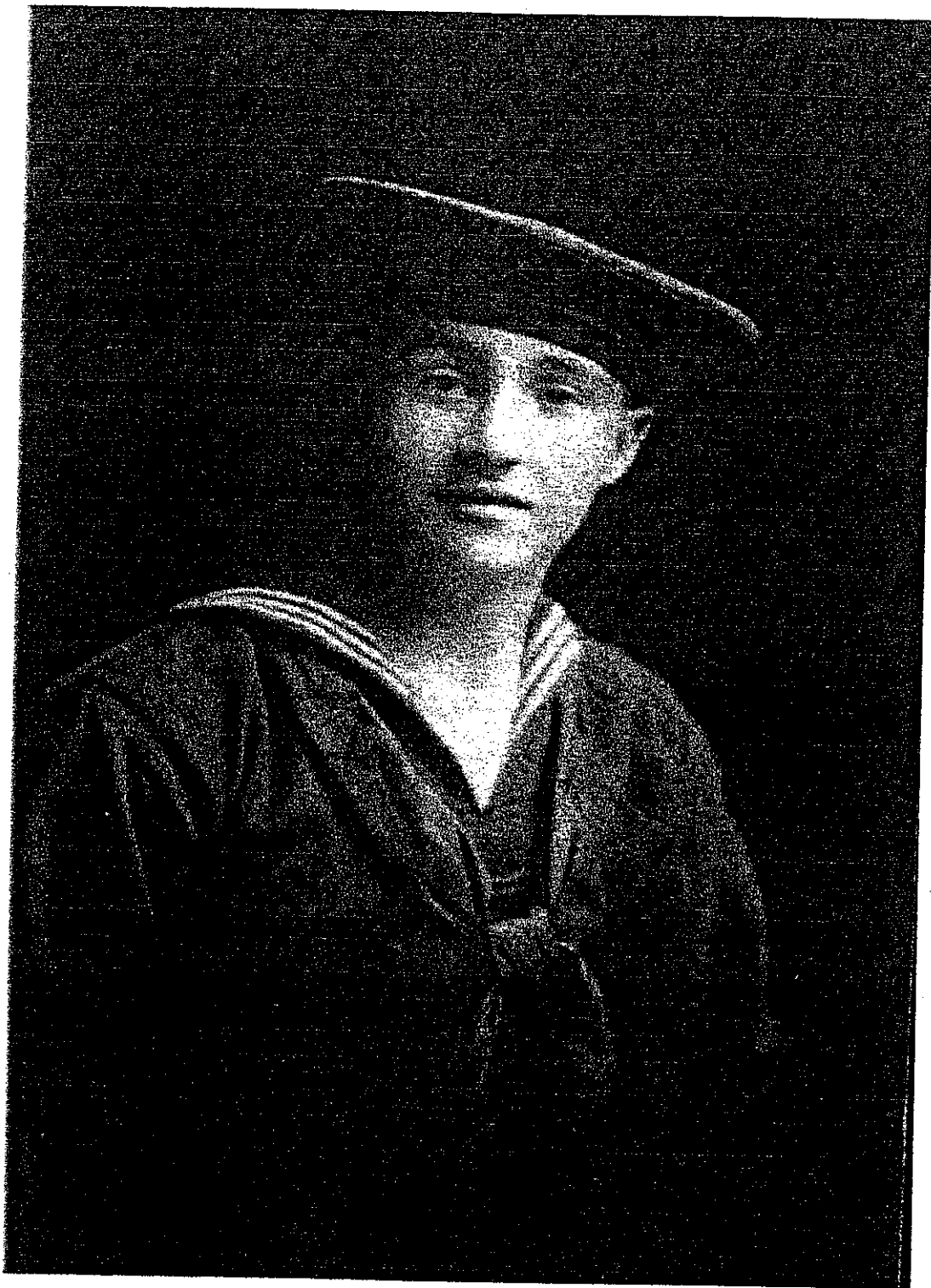
Seaman Paul Peter Fix

World War I Bluejacket



**Naval Historical Foundation
Oral History Program
2000**

Oral History



Paul Peter Fix
U.S.. Navy 1918-1919



Paul Fix as Sheriff Micah Torrance
in the "*Rifleman*" TV series

Paul Peter Fix U. S. Navy 1918-1919

Preface

This is to introduce a rare detailed look at an enlisted man's life in the U.S. Navy in World War I. Paul Peter Fix was a well-known movie and character actor from the 1920's to 1979. About 1980, after becoming too ill to act, his daughter Marilyn (Mrs. Harry Carey, Jr.), suggested he record his early life. In doing this, he found reminiscing with the girl next door easier than talking into a cassette recorder. He made four tapes of his life from ca. 1905 to ca. 1930. Eventually Marilyn had the tapes transcribed.

I recently received a 44-page copy of this transcript. I am Carolyn E. Fix, Paul's niece (My father was William Anthony Fix, Paul's oldest brother). Marilyn has given me permission to edit and distribute this oral history. The World War I service portion is about one-third of the total transcript. It reads like a movie script with very detailed descriptions of action and conversations that are entertaining as well as historically interesting.

I wish to thank Marilyn Fix Carey, his only child, for her part in initiating this and her generosity in providing copies of the tapes and the transcription.

Paul Peter Fix U. S. Navy 1918-1919

Paul Peter Fix (Well-known character actor of stage, screen and TV) was born Peter Paul Fix on March 9, 1901, in the lower Hudson River town of Dobbs Ferry, Westchester County, N.Y., of German parents: Wilhelm (William) Fix and Louise Waltz. He was by far the youngest of six children and the apple of his father's eye. Paul early on informally changed his name to Paul Peter Fix. His father was the brewmaster of the Manilla-Anchor Brewery, which, employing about 600, was practically the only industry in a town composed of large estates--including Lyndhurst, formerly owned by the Jay Gould family and now owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This mansion was next door to the brewery and Paul knew Jay Gould's son, Edwin. Paul's wasn't much interested in school and only completed seven grades.

His father often took him to New York City to enjoy operas and attend German festivals. At one of these festivals in Madison Square Garden, his father won a raffle prize which was a 4-foot model of the S. S. *Crown Princess Cecilie*, a North German Lines luxury liner of ca. 1907. Paul got to float it in one of the brewery ponds and got into the "war spirit" by shooting at it and sinking it. Little did he know that he would on day serve in the U. S. Navy on board the real ship after she was transformed into the troopship U.S.S. *Mount Vernon*! Since his mother died in 1915 and his father in 1917, he was at loose ends and became very bored staying first at one sibling's house and then another.

When the U. S. entered World War I, Paul was gung-ho to go to France and fight and the fact that he was underage didn't stop him. He first enlisted in the National Guard, but after 3 months of

drilling, he walked out. Then he tried the U.S. Army with the same results. Finally on March 23, 1918, he joined the U.S. Navy in New York City and was sent to boot camp in Newport, R.I. While there he was selected to be the drill officer's orderly, so he avoided drilling. Also while there he was assigned his first stage appearance: a female role in the Navy Relief production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, which called for 6 young men to play female roles.

The Navy eventually discovered his two prior desertions, but he was never punished. After that he was transferred to the Navy Reserve Naval Training Station at Pelham Bay, N.Y. He still wanted to fight, so he got himself transferred to the Fourth Regiment in Charleston, S.C. There, he found an easy berth as an Apprentice Hospital Corpsman (although they tried to court-martial him for food shortages in the diet kitchen). He eventually made several Atlantic crossing to Brest, France, aboard the U.S.S. *Mount Vernon*, which were not without problems.

First, while in charge of the diet kitchen, he became part of a scheme to sell sandwiches to the troops and second, he served as the "lookout" for an ongoing crap game. Again, he escaped punishment for the first offense after a court martial could find no witnesses because the troops involved were fighting in France. As far as the crap game, he was never caught. On Sept. 8, 1918, the ship was torpedoed 300-400 miles west of Brest. Listing badly and with the loss of 36 crew members, she managed to limp back to Brest where she was run aground. As steel plate was scarce, she was patched with a concrete plug and managed to cross the stormy North Atlantic. But she never sailed again. Paul was discharged from the Navy on Sept. 5, 1919, as a Hospital Corpsman, First Class.

After the war, Paul married Frances "Taddy" Harvey of Zanesville, Ohio in May 1922 and moved to Hollywood, Ca., where his only child, Marilyn, was born in 1935. Unsure of his calling, however, he toured the Pacific coastal cities acting in plays with Clark Gable and Stu Erwin and starring Pauline Frederick. He also had small parts in early Westerns put on by Neal Hart. His first role in a larger film was in 1928 in *The First Kiss*, which was part silent and part sound. This film was made in Easton, Md. From then until 1979 he acted in several hundred films, including 25 starring John Wayne, as well as on TV. Probably his best-known TV role was as sheriff Micah Torrance in *The Rifleman* series. Besides acting, he also wrote many plays and three movie scripts and was a minor director. He died in Santa Monica, Cal., on Oct. 14, 1983.

Subjects Covered

Growing up in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. (1901-1917); winning a 4-foot model of the German liner *Crown Princess Cecilie* (later the U.S.S. *Mount Vernon*); brief enlistment in the National Guard and the U.S. Army (ca. 1917-18) and desertions; enlistment in the U.S. Navy March 1918; boot camp life in detail in Newport, R.I.; Medal of Honor winner; acting in Navy Relief production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*; Navy discovers his previous desertions but no punishment; brief assignment to the Navy Reserve Naval Training Station at Pelham Bay, N.Y.; assignment to 4th Regiment in Charleston, S.C.; apprentice Hospital Corpsman in charge of sick bay diet kitchen; hospital life; aborted court-martial for alleged food shortages in his kitchen; two quarantines: (syphilis and meningitis); assigned to diet kitchen aboard the U.S.S. *Mount Vernon*; several crossings to Brest, France; acquitted in court-martial of selling sandwiches to the troops; was "lookout" for an ongoing crap game but was never discovered; saw returning wounded and shell-shocked soldiers; torpedoed off Brest; much confusion on board; ran

aground at Brest; hole in side of ship patched with concrete plug; captain awarded Medal of Honor; last Atlantic crossing; honorable discharge in Sept. 1919.

World War I

My brother Charlie had gone in the Navy. I had never heard from him and I didn't know where he was, when he suddenly showed up. He was down with my sister Anna [in Yonkers, N.Y.] for a while and then I left Utica, N.Y., and went back to visit my sister Anna again. And I saw Charlie for a little while and then he left and boy, it was terrible. I was just going from pillar to post and Charlie was off in the Navy and he told me all about it. Gee, I didn't know what to do, and I was so bored. And then one day I decided I would join the National Guard. I went down and enlisted and I didn't tell Anna or anybody. And they didn't know what happened to me until they found out I was in the National Guard in an encampment up in Peekskill, New York, up on the Hudson. Nothing they could do, they let me go. And I was going to have a career and go over to France and fight. And, boy, that weighed kind of heavy after a while. I was up there for about three months and got sick and tired of "squads right" and "squads left" every day. And we couldn't go to France, and I was awful bored and finally one day I got a 48-hour pass. And I left the camp and went down to New York and decided I would like to go into the Army and so I went down and joined the United States Army. I didn't bother to tell them that I was in the National Guard. But they didn't ask any questions though; even though I seemed a little young, they figured. They sent me to Fort Slocum which was up by Long Island Sound and oh, my God, I went from the pan to the fire, because it started all over again: the "squads right" and "squads left!" And I was up there about three months and boy, it was terrible. It was worse than the National Guard!

The U. S. Navy

So then I was on a pass one day in New York and wandering along and there was 23rd Street and the Navy Recruiting Station. So I walked in there and I joined the Navy [on March 23, 1918]. I didn't tell them anything about being in the Army. They wanted to put me in the Naval Reserve, but I didn't want to have anything to do with that. I wanted to be in the regular Navy for four years. The recruiter said "Oh, you don't want to go into the Navy for four years." And I said "Yes, I do." I wanted to go to France and fight and didn't want to go into the Reserve, that was for sissies! And this old Chief, who was a wonderful guy, said I could be a DOW, that's "Duration of the War." "Come on, you can be in the regular Navy," he said. And I said "Fine." So he swore me in and off I went to get on the boat that night to get sent up to Providence, Rhode Island, and thence to Newport on the old Fall River Line. And I no more than I got aboard this ship then I realized what a mistake I made. My God, they put us down in the hold of the ship, which was where they stored barrels and freight and stuff like that. There were no accommodations or anything, just a great big hulk of a ship. No place to sit or anything, just a big shell of a ship. And there were about 500 guys and most of them seemed to be hillbillies from the South or something. And all of these twangy, hillbilly songs! And some of them had guitars and we would just sit along the sides of the ship all the way around this thing and hearing this nasal twang and these corny funny sayings and everything. And some of the guys were crying and other guys were

praying. Oh, brother, what a mess I was in! I guess I have to admit, I was a bit of a snob, but Jeez, I never knew that people could be like this. They were terrible! And at 2 o'clock in the morning we get to Newport and we're roused off the ship and lined up in a column of fours in the snow. And it was colder than hell and we marched for two miles in the snow across the bridge and into the Naval Station at Newport, Rhode Island, and put into the quarantine barracks there. Next morning, the next thing that happened is they ran us through the wringer there. They shaved off all my hair off my head and deloused us and everything else and gave us uniforms. So, I was there in the barracks for 30 days and that was terrible. They'd read us the Blue Jacket's Manual and told us how it was going to be and boy, I sure felt like I was in prison. And I was. I was awful happy the day we got out of quarantine, too.

Then I was sent to the 9th Regiment. We were in these wooden huts, sort of like Quonset huts, only they were worse. There were 100 men in a company. Fifty men slept on one side and fifty slept on the other. And we slept in hammocks that were pulled taut and you had a hell of a time trying to get up and get in the damned things to sleep. Jesus, this was worse than the Army had been! If you were lucky enough to get into the bunk to sleep, well, you were considered very fortunate. And you couldn't fix the hammock for the slope like you do for a nice comfy hammock. It had to be pulled taut. And if it was at all in a slope, well, a guy would come along with a broad sword and slapped you on the fanny, and boy you really got the hell out of that hammock real quick! You'd be sound asleep and the first thing you know, you thought your eardrums were going to burst. Boy, the loudest noise you ever heard would come in. The guy would come in one end of the barracks blowing a bugle playing Reveille and right behind him a guy playing a bass drum! And on each side the company commander would come and go under these hammocks with these big broad swords--like the old pirates used to have--and if you weren't out of those hammocks they would throw these broad swords up onto to you and boy, did that ever sting you on the ass if you weren't out of there! And you would jump out of there and stand there with nothing on beside the hammock. And you did it quick, boy!

And everybody had to stand right next to the hammock and wait in line at attention until roll call was called, and all you would have is a towel around you, for Christ's sake! And colder than hell. Then when it was time, they turned you around and you went single file out of the barracks and across where you took a shower every morning! And boy that was brutal. Especially if you were one of the first bunch, because you had to go out with the snow on the ground and you were barefooted with nothing but a towel around you and you had to go over to the bath house. Well, if you weren't in the first bunch, you didn't get into the bath house right at first and you had to stand in line out there in the snow and the wind coming off the Narragansett Bay. It's a wonder we didn't all die from pneumonia, for Christ's sake! And we'd get into that shower and the place was so filled with hot steam you couldn't see anything. And you would start to go in there, and if the water would hit you, it was so God-damned hot you would be burned. And I soon found out the way to do it was to crawl along the edges and let a little water now and then get on you, and just sort of inch your way around until you got around to the other end. On the way out a guy would be checking you. By the time you got there you would be shivering and rubbing yourself. Only half of the Navy took their morning showers because they couldn't stand it. Once back in the barracks, we had just a few minutes to get our clothes on and the God-damned bugler would blow and you would have to stand and line up again to be inspected. The

company commander would go by and make sure you were dressed. If you didn't have your shoes on, well, you would be bawled out or something.

If they didn't like something, well, you would have to go out and do all the "police work" where you would pick up cigarette butts and crap all around the front of the place. And it was still dark! Just getting daylight, just past 5 o'clock in the morning in those days. And then you waited again, and then the bugle would blow and you would fall in again. They would march you outside and march you over to the parade ground where you stood again waiting for breakfast. If you weren't the first ones in, then you would have to stand there sometimes for an hour waiting for the other guys ahead of you. And when you went in the great big mess hall, there were only long boards [for tables] and no chairs, and you stood up. You went through the line and they threw the slop on your plate, and then you just went up there where those boards were, but you stood up while you ate. Then you went out the other end and then came walking back to the barracks. And you had about 10 minutes where you could sit around and "the smoking lamp was lit," as they would say. You could smoke if you wanted to and then, Christ, the bugle would blow again and you would fall in again. This time you had to take your rifle with you. And they would march you out on the grinder [parade ground] and you would do "squads right" and "squads left," and, Jesus, that went on until it was lunch time. Boy, oh boy, what a miserable God-damned life that was!

We used to go out, of course, every day on the grinder and we would have preparations for the drill officer to inspect us on every Friday. And then it got so he would come out and have the whole island go out to the big parade ground every morning. They certainly made a new rule there! There were 25,000 guys training there and every morning we'd have to go out there and pass in review for the drill officer! Then on Saturday morning, the captain (the commander in chief over the whole island who was over at the War College out of sight from where we were) would come down and he would inspect the troops. And the drill officer's job was to whip us in line and shape us up. Quite often, the drill officer would come out and walk up and down the ranks. One day when he came by, our company commander came over to me and told me to report to headquarters after we were dismissed. And I thought "What the hell did I do? My shoes were shined and my cap was on right and I had a haircut and my leggings were all clean." Boy, I was spit and polish if ever I thought anybody was. Boy, I did something, because when the drill officer came by and looked at me, I thought "What the hell did I do now?" And, oh my God, I was scared to death! I could hardly wait and when we were dismissed I went up to the headquarters and they told me to go over to the drill office. And then I thought "Oh, my God, I am in trouble!" I had to walk over to the drill office and it was a long ways away and it was in a great big building. In the main building there were almost a 1,000 yeomen; a great big place, more desks and sailors typewriting there. Typewriters going like hell. Off to the side there was the drill officer's entrance, a big anteroom. I sat down and a sailor came out and asked who I was and what was my business. And I told him, and he told me to wait. Then I was shown into a smaller office and I waited there; shivering like hell because I didn't know what the hell I did. Then another sailor came out and he said for me to go in and see the drill officer. I went in and I was really shaking in the knees!

The drill officer's name was Davis. He was a commander, a swarthy-faced man, a wonderful looking man. He had a Medal of Honor hanging on his chest, so he was quite a guy. I walked in and stood straight and saluted him. And he said that he had noticed me today at the review and how did I

like the Navy. And did I like it? And I said "Yes sir." And he talked to me for a while and then he asked if I knew why I was there and I said "No, sir ". He said "Well, I'm going to make you my orderly." And I thought "My God, his orderly!" Jeez, I couldn't believe it. He wasn't punishing me, he was complimenting me. He says "You look great, trim and neat." Well, I wasn't even shaving yet, I was just a kid, but he knew that. He says "You'll have some duties here and I think you'll make a good orderly and I think we'll get along fine." He explained to me what my duties were going to be and that he would go over them again later. And that I was to come to the drill office every day at five minutes before 8. And there was a great big clock on the wall in the drill office there and I was to come in and watch that clock. And the minute it hit 8, I was to call out the order "Attention!" And at that time, the entire personnel in that place was to stop what they were doing. And they would get up and turn around and face the War College--that was over the grassy knoll on the other side--out of sight from us. And everyone was to remain silent for one minute. And I was to watch the clock, and when the minute passed, I was to give the order "Carry On!" And they would all go back to work again. And in that interim, that meant the flag was going up. And that was one of my first duties. Then I was to go back to the inner office where the drill officer was and get his side-arm [out of the locker]. It was a nice, beautiful gold sword that he had. And I had to hold it and be the custodian of it, and when he came out, hand it to him. And he would take it and greet me in the morning and put it on. And we would go outside the drill office.

And the minute he would go out, everybody would come to attention while he went past. And we would go outside and go off the porch and down to the ground and walk to the parade grounds. We went past two or three big barracks buildings. Just casually, just the two of us. And when I started walking, I was about four or five paces behind him and he used to say "Come on up here alongside of me, what are you afraid of?" I said "Well, I don't know, sir." He said, "Well, come on up here and join me, right here with me." And he had me stand there on his right and we would walk along, and boy, he just treated me like I was his equal. It would be just a beautiful day and he would call me "Boot." He said "I'm hoping we'll have a good day today," and different comments he would make, about the weather and all. And it was just the more I kept doing it, the more I was beginning to like it. This man was such a wonderful man. We would hit the parade ground with nobody else around--a great big field right off of Narragansett Bay. And we would go way out into the middle of it and out to the end where the flag pole was. And he'd walk out there and take his place and he would tell me where to stand. And the bugler would come along and later on would join us. But the bugler always stood six paces behind us. He didn't rank up there with me. Then when we were all set, he would look around and he would talk to me and say: "Well, I guess we are ready, Boot," and make cracks like that. And I'd say "Aye, aye, sir." He told me to say "Aye, aye, sir" and not "Yes, sir." He'd say "Well, I guess we'd better get the thing underway." He couldn't see a soul, just a few barracks buildings, but not a soul in sight. And it was my job to raise my hand up when he said "I think we can get underway, Boot, anytime." So I would raise up my right arm as high as I could. And when I dropped it, way off at the side we'd hear the music start playing and the band would come into view. And in back of them, eventually, 25,000 men would come marching out on that field and they would fill the field. And the two of us--I'd be there standing beside Davis watching them come out--and they used to kid me and say I

was practicing to become an admiral. Boy, I thought I was! It was one of the most thrilling parts of my life.

The entire force of the training station would gather on the field and in their places and would all be standing "at ease." And when the last regiment got in place, Davis would turn around and face the flag pole and there would be two sailors there. And he would look at me and say, "All right, Boot, proceed." And it was my job to shout. So, in my loudest voice, I'd shout "Present!" And all the way down through the ranks you would hear the other company's commanders say "Present," "Present," "Present," and so forth. The voices would die away and I'd give it time and when I didn't hear it anymore, I would say "Arms!" And they would all come to "Present Arms." And when they did, Davis would take out his sword and give it the ritual that he did with the sword and hold it up some particular way. And then the band would start playing [but] on Saturdays [only]. On every other day, the bugler would play "Colors" and the two sailors would raise the flag--going all the way up, then stop. And then it was my job--when the flag was all the way up--I'd say "Order!" and the command would go down all through the whole camp. Then I'd say "Arms!" and that order would go all the way down through the camp. And the men would get back to their original position with their arms by their sides. Then Davis used to make different comments on how they were very good in some regiment, or whenever he could see something. He'd look around and say, "Well, I suppose we ought to have them go by and see our little sailor boys." He'd make funny wise cracks and now and then he'd say "Let's have them go by, Boot; give them the command." Then I would shout "Pass in Review!" and when I did that, the band would start playing. And then the regiment that was supposed to be first that day would go down to the end of the field. And then, "Company Front!" and they would pass [in review].. The regiments were 100 men with 50 in a line and they would march by, the whole 25,000 men. The on "Eyes Right!" and every time a flag would drop, we would salute; Davis and I. And we let all of these men go by and salute and let them get back to their places again where they were when they got there. And they were standing there "at ease" and sometimes Davis would say "Well, let's look them over today." And then I'd have to shout "Stand By for Inspection!" and that command would go down through the ranks. Each company would take two steps to the rear and we'd start off and we'd go up and down that field between them, behind some men and in front of some ranks, all the way through. And he would make comments and grab a rifle here, or comment on this or that. And [then we would] get all the way through and get back to the front and take our places again. And he'd say "Get them straightened out, Boot" and it was my turn. And I'd say, "Attention!" and the command would go all the way through the command and then "Present Arms!" And in a little while, I'd give "Order Arms!" and they'd do "Order Arms" and then he'd say "dismissed," and I'd shout "Regiment Dismissed!" And the band would start playing again and they would all start marching off in a line--the way they were supposed to go--angle off the field. And we'd just stroll away talking about how it was and what we were going to do and how this outfit looked pretty good and that outfit didn't

Then we'd walk back to the drill office and he'd talk about this and that and other things. And I was through then until five minutes to eight the next morning. And, boy, what a job it was! They put me in the quartermaster's quarters. That was an old building that had a gymnasium on the bottom floor and up on the top floor was these nice quarters. There were only four other guys besides myself living there. Boy, we had our own bedrooms and everything and it felt like heaven. And I had the run of the entire

island and a pass to go any place on the island. And I could go ashore as long as I was back by five minutes to eight the next morning, and this was my job! I'd go all around the camp and visit. And, I'll never forget, I'd go over occasionally to my old regiment over there, especially when they had to go out to Strawberry Hill. That was the biggest pile of coal you'd ever seen; it was a mountain of coal. And every so often, the men had to go out there and shovel coal. Jesus, it seemed the stupidest thing, because they would shovel this coal all year long. And they'd just move this pile of coal from one place to another place! We always considered that it was some kind of a punishment. I never realized that it was done to prevent spontaneous combustion. In other words, if it sat there too long, it would catch on fire and would burn inside and that was a very ruinous and dangerous thing. So that it continually had to be moved and shifted around. And I used to go over there and I'd say "Oh, boy," because I'd had my turn on Strawberry Hill, too!

I'll never forget my term of duty as Commander Davis' orderly. That was one wonderful time and I can't remember one minute when I was bored. It was just very thrilling, every day, to go out and watch the troops pass in review. But strangely enough, while that was one of the most thrilling times of my experience and among the happiest times of my life, it also had its moments of very much pain and fright. It went on for quite a while. The better I got to know Commander Davis, the more he seemed to like me and we just got along fine. Then one day, I'd been ashore and I came in and it was late in the afternoon and everyone on the island seemed to know who I was. And I didn't get very far into the island until word got to me that I was to get to the drill office. They'd been looking all over the island for me and it was very, very urgent! I was to report as soon as I could be located, immediately. Boy, I thought "What the hell is up?" I couldn't imagine why I'm being summoned so officially and in such a hurry. I started off as fast as I could go and on the way some people would say, "Hey, you'd better get to the drill office, Commander Davis is looking for you!" I thought, "Boy, I wonder what the hell is up?" Well, it didn't take me very long, for as soon as I got there they told me to go right on in; the commander was waiting for me. I went in and he was sitting behind his big desk. And boy, he had a frown on his face and he was just sitting there looking at me and I was standing at attention. And he asked me where I had been and I said well, I had just gone ashore. I didn't know that I would be needed.

He looked at me for a long time and said, "I don't know what to say, Boot, only that I am terribly disappointed in you." I thought, "My God, what happened?" but I didn't say anything. He said, "I don't have to ask you what you did, I'm sure you know." And he got up and walked around from [behind] his desk and behind me and over behind his desk again and sat down. Then he got up again and said, "I can't imagine you would ever do a thing like this. Do you know what you did?" I said, "Well, no, sir." He said, "Yes, you do. I know how you probably feel about it, but I'll tell you. God-damn it, you can be shot!" I thought, "My God, I don't know what he is talking about!" He says "I just got word that you are a deserter. You are a deserter from the National Guard in New York State and from the United States Army!" "Oh, my God," I thought. I can't explain how I felt. He went on, "You know what happens to people who act like that during war? This is war! They shoot deserters! They put them up against the wall and they shoot them! That's what they deserve! Do you think you deserve that?" I said, "Well, I...I...I..." and he said "You are in big trouble, boot. I don't know what I can do. I don't know, I am so disappointed, I just can't imagine you doing a thing like this. My God, how could

you ever think of doing this?" I said, "Well, I...I...I just wanted to go to France and fight." And he said, "Oh, I know, I know, you've been telling me this before. But it's a terrible thing. In the Navy, here, you can also go to Portsmouth for 20 years to life, that's what we do!" And he didn't say anything for a long time and I didn't know what the hell to do. I just stood there crying, I guess. Then he said, "Well, I won't mention this any more, but I don't know what's going to happen and what the outcome is going to be. So, just carry on your duties as usual. I just want you to know what a disgrace it is and that I know about it. Dismissed!" I walked out, and on the way out he said to be here as usual in the morning. I said, "Aye, aye, sir" and went out. Boy, I can't tell you my thoughts. I know I walked back to my quarters and I sat down there on my bed and I think I cried. I don't know. I just stayed in bed. I just wanted to kill myself; I didn't know what the hell to do! To think that I let him down. That was the thing that hurt me the most, as he was so nice to me and then I let him down. Well, I suffered, boy. You've no idea how my conscience hurt me. But I was right on deck the next morning and he greeted me just as usual as though nothing had happened. And we went out to the drill ground and went through the maneuvers as usual and he never mentioned it. And he didn't even seem any different. I knew there was a sword over my head, though. And, boy, I didn't know what my future was going to be and I wasn't smiling any longer. And he knew that I was very unhappy, but he never said anything, except once he said, "Just don't be so down about this thing. Be a man. You know what you did, be ready to take it!"

On the Stage

Well, we settled back into the usual routine and things went on for a few weeks, I guess. But I was still unhappy but trying to cover up and Commander Davis was very nice. Then one day when we came back from parade, he called me into his office. He said, "Paul" and he never, never used that name before, he always called me "boot", but this time he called me "Paul". He said, "Paul, I just had an offer for you and I think it might be good for you to get away from me for awhile. And to get away from each other." And I said, "I'm satisfied, sir." He said, "Yes, I know, but it will be a good opportunity for you. You know the Navy Relief Organization that helps the servicemen?" And I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, they are going to put on a show here. It's all local talent with the men on the base here. We've got some professional actors and they are going to put on a show called '*H.M.S. Pinafore*'. It's a light opera by Gilbert and Sullivan, do you know it?" I said, "No, sir." He said, "Well, it's a good show, a very amusing show." And he said, "They came to me and asked me about the possibility of recruiting you for some of the services." I said, "Well, I don't know what you mean, sir. What do you want me to do?" He said, "Well, they want you to be an actor." I said, "Gee, an actor. I don't know how to act, sir." He said, "Well, they'll show you. I don't know anything about it; but they need some cousins and some aunts in this show. They need six young men and they've got to have young men that look like girls. And this may not be very complimentary to you, but you have been suggested. And they would be very happy to have you serve as one of these girls. Now, I would like to have you do it whether you want to or not. Now you might as well go over and find out what it's all about. Now you can take your leave. And they are not going to play it for very long. So you call and see what it's all about and come back and tell me about it." I said, "Yes, sir." I thought "What the hell is this?"

So I went over to the place where they were getting this thing organize and they did have some professional actors who were recruiting sailors. And boy, they were crazy to get me and said "Boy, you'll be perfect in makeup like a girl, one of the cousins and the aunts; one of the six guys." They were all young guys, and I was certainly one of the youngest guys there. And so we started rehearsing this thing and I kind of got a kick out of it. I didn't know anything about "*Pinafore*," but it was a very interesting show. And finally, after some weeks, we put it on and it was a big hit. And then we took the show and we put it on in Providence first, and it ran for two weeks down there. Then we put it on up in Boston for four weeks. And it was a very funny thing, because our sailor hats usually had the name of the ship you were on. But on our hats it said "*H.M.S. Pinafore*". And the people of Boston were very confused because they thought we were "Limey" sailors--all British sailors. And we got a big kick out of that. And really, that was my first crack at show business. But oh, it was a lot of fun being one of the cousins and aunts in this great act that was the Navy Relief on the "*Pinafore*."

[It was] two nights before our last performance in Boston in a packed house. And when the show was over, we were back in the dressing room and there was a lot of hubbub and everything. And who should show up but Commander Davis and some other people. And, my God, he greeted me like I was his own son! He was so nice. And he said he had never seen the show before, but he saw it that night and he said oh, I was wonderful. That I made "the prettiest girl in the show" and everything and that the show was going to close. I said that I understood. He said that's all right and that he wanted to see me as soon as the show was over; to come back. A few days after that, when it was wound up and I was dismissed from that duty, I reported to the drill office that morning. I was in the outer office and he sent word for me to come into his office. It wasn't quite time for Colors and I went on in. He greeted me and shook hands with me and said he was glad to see me. And he thought that he preferred me as an orderly rather than one of the aunts in "*Pinafore*," and I said I was glad of that. And gosh, it was so wonderful. And I went back out and went back in the groove again and I was so happy. And I went out when the clock hit 8 and I said "Attention!" as usual, and went through that routine; and when it was over I called out "Carry On!" Now when the commander came out to go out to the parade ground as usual, and we started to go across the field and everything, he said "I've got news for you, boot." And he was calling me "boot" again. He said, "I've got this problem straightened out. They aren't going to do anything and they aren't going to punish you. I don't know how I did it, but we got it straightened out. There is one warning. Don't you ever think, don't you even give it a thought, of deserting in the Navy. Because if you do, you'll never live to tell it because they won't tolerate it!" And I said, "I won't, sir. I will never, ever, ever do anything like this again." And he said, "Good boy." And he never mentioned it again. And boy, I tell you, from then on I was back, really back walking on a cloud. I was so happy! Things went on then for quite a while, but things weren't quite the same and I was still eager to go to France.

One day when I was coming back from the parade ground with him, I said "I would like to be transferred" and he asked me what I meant. And I said, "Well, I'd like to be transferred to the Third Naval District" and he asked what I was talking about. Well, I told him I wanted to go to New London, Connecticut, and go to the Submarine School there and be a torpedo gunner. He stopped in the middle of his walking and he looked at me and I stopped, too. And he said, "You can't be serious", or something like that, and I said "Yessir." he said, "What for?" and I said, "I can't get to France from

here and I can be a torpedo gunner [if I go there]." He said, "This is ridiculous, I can't allow this." I told him that I would like to go and he asked if I was really serious. "You really want to go to New London to become a torpedo gunner on a submarine?" And I said, "Yes." He said "Well right now I'm going to turn that down" but he said, "Let's both just think about this for a while. Let's just sleep on it and don't mention it again." And I said, "Yes, sir. I'm sorry now that I brought it up." And I didn't bring it up again for quite some time and things went on as usual. I must have shown my unhappiness, although I didn't know it. But he must have read my mind or something, because another day when we were coming back from the parade ground, he handed me his side arms and asked me to come into his office when I stored the gear. I went in and he asked, "Do you still want to go to New London and become a torpedo gunner, boot?" And I said, "Oh yes, sir." And he said, "Well, I have a surprise for you. I've arranged it." I said, "Oh, gee, that's wonderful. That's great." He said, Well, I've been thinking it over. I think you are making a terrible mistake, but if you still insist on going, well I've arranged it for you. You'll get your shipping orders. Just stand by." And I said, "Yes sir, thank you, sir." And he said, "Don't thank me, boot. I'm sorry that I have to do this." And he got up and he came around from his desk and he put his arm around my shoulder and we started out the door. And he said, "Boot, always be a man and always face what you gotta face. If you feel that this is your duty, you do it and do the best you can, always." And I said, "Yes, sir." And he just patted me on the back and said, "Dismissed." And I said, "Goodbye, sir." And he just turned his back and I think he just felt bad because he said goodbye, but he didn't look at me. God, it was a really sad parting. I went back to the barracks to my quarters. And I remember, now that I was going, I was unhappy and I was crying. Because I hated to leave and he was such a wonderful man.

The Naval Reserve

Anyway, I got my shipping orders the next day and packed my bags. And they put me on the Fall River Line and I went down to the Third Naval District in New York City and up to the Whitehall building. And I had to sit around there with a lot of other guys for a couple of hours and then they called me and told me to get on a truck. So I got on the truck...And after a couple of hours, we got to a place and I thought, oh boy, we sure got there fast. And I got up and looked around and it was the dark of night. And we were going through a place with a big overhead with some sailors standing around. And the place was all lit up and there was a big sign across the top of the entrance that said "Pelham Bay Naval Training Station, Naval Reserve Force." And I said, "Jeez, this is the Naval Reserve, this can't be for me." Well, I got in there and the truck stopped and they said, "All off!" and I got off. They looked at me, and all of these guys had "Naval Reserve" on their arms and they said, "Well, who are you?" I told them who I was and they asked what I was doing there. I said, "I don't know" and he said "Where is your emblem? Aren't you in the Naval Reserve?" And I told him no, I was in the regular Navy. The guy said, "Regular Navy?" And I told him "Yes." So they called in and they waited a little while and I kept waiting around and waiting around. And they came back and they didn't know what the hell to do with me and said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, I didn't know, that I was ordered here and that I was on my way to New London. They said, "Well this isn't New London" and that there was some kind of a mix-up. I said, "Well, what do I do?" And they said they didn't know, but they finally decided, well, they would put me up for the night. And they sent me over to a barracks

building where they had an extra cot. Put me in with a whole lot of other guys. A lot of Naval Reserve guys, new recruits. And, Jeez, they were in this building and the next morning at 7 o'clock (they didn't do it at 5 like the regular Navy) they finally got up and what do they do? They line up and they go "Squads Left!" and "Squads Right!" and I thought "Oh, for Christ's sake!" I'm telling you I was so mad! I said "Somebody screwed this up. This is a terrible damned thing!"

Well actually, I found out they didn't screw up. Dear Commander Davis was never going to have me become a torpedo gunner and he knew it all the time. He out-foxed me! So he fixed it up, or screwed it up some way that I wound up in the "ladies' Navy," for Christ's sake! And what am I going to do! And he knew a little more about the Navy than I did. And they had me there and they didn't know what to do with me. And I told them that I didn't drill and they understood that. And they didn't want me because they knew that I was regular Navy and they didn't know what in the hell to do with me. And I could eat where I wanted in the mess hall and I didn't want to sleep in that barracks. And I just walked around and, in fact, they told me I could walk out the gate anytime I wanted to because they had nothing to show that I belonged there. So I just walked around, bored to death and unhappy, and sore that there wasn't a damned thing I could do. I wandered around one day and got down to a big storage place where they had mattresses and everything piled up all nice. And there was a nice guy named Reynolds, a gob who was in charge of this place. And boy, he took me into his arms. He set me up because I told him I didn't want to sleep in that barracks on a lousy cot. So he rigged up a place for me to stay in that place. I think I had four mattresses that I was sleeping on top of. And he ate there by himself and he had his own court (?) and it was great. It was nice living there and here I could go and come anytime I wanted to. In and out the gate, into New York, and nobody ever bothered or stopped me. But it was lousy. I liked it and everything, but it was getting awful cold and I was beginning to get desperate again. And I didn't know how in the hell I was going to get to New London. There wasn't any chance. I used to read these different drafts [notices] that they had up in the different regimental headquarters of these places where they desperately needed different talents and skills of people all over the world in the Navy. I got so the thing to do was consult these sheets and when you saw some skill, then you reported, and they would send you there. Well, they were always wanting something like embalmers(?), and things like that. Well, Christ, I wasn't an embalmer(?) Yuck! I couldn't get away with anything like that, but I was getting desperate.

Charleston, South Carolina

It was getting cold as hell there in New York. And one day I was looking at one of the sheets and they wanted some blacksmiths through the Naval Aviation. They wanted them in Charleston, South Carolina. And I said oh boy, that sounded pretty good. I could get down south where it was pretty warm. And I went into the headquarters where the yeomen were typing out these things [orders]. And I know damned well now that I have enough of the Navy experience that no yeoman is going to challenge my ability by asking me questions. And I told them I wanted to get on that draft to South Carolina to be a blacksmith in the Naval Aviation. So he said, "OK." And he filled out the papers and gave them to me and that night I shoved off to Charleston, South Carolina. I didn't know how long it took by train and what not. And it was warm down there and I was glad I made the trip. Well, when I got down there with a lot of other guys, we checked in and there was a big chief and some other guys

checking us in. And they called my name and I came up and the guy looked at me and my rate and he says, "What's going on here?" And I said, "What?" and he said, "Are you a smithy, a blacksmith?" And I said, "Well, I don't know what you mean." And he said, "Well, what the hell are you doing. You're on a draft to be a blacksmith in Naval Aviation." I said, "Well, I don't know" and he said, "Well, what are you doing here?" And I said, "Well, I don't know, sir. I was ordered to report and here I am and, well, there must be some mistake." And he said, "Yeah, a hell of a mistake" and told me to step out of the line. Well, I'm out of the line, but I'm in South Carolina! Everybody passes through and they are stuck there with me and they didn't know what the hell to do with me. So finally they decided to put me up in the bunk room that night and try to figure out how to dispose of this case. So I'm sent up to berth with the Fourth Regiment. And they put up a bunk for me there in the Fourth Regiment. And, Christ, what do they do in the morning but put everyone through "Squads Left!" and "Squads Right!" again! Oh, for Christ's sake, here we go again! I'm telling you I'm fit to be tied. My God! I told them I didn't want to go through this. And they were very nice and all, but there wasn't anything they could do because I was eating in the Fourth Regiment galley.

Then I found out while I was wandering around and around--as I didn't have nothing to do--that the sick bay of the Fourth Regiment is right on the other side of the reserve. There was a big, big encampment with a big high wire fence. And on the other side of the fence was public ground where there was a great old mansion that the Navy had taken over and made [into] the hospital for the Fourth Regiment. And it was right by the main gate and was for the sailors and personnel of the Fourth Regiment that got sick. Why, then they could walk through the gate and get to the hospital. It was over on the civilian side and then they would come back [to the Fourth Regiment after you were well] through the main gate. I kept going over there and found out that, Jeez, these guys were living like kings--the Hospital Corps--having a ball over there; happy and all. And I got to know the chiefs by going up there and hanging around. I said, "Jeez, that's nice this hospital business." And I asked how I could get into this hospital service, and they told me to "strike for it." And I said "What is that?" And they said, "Well, you have to become a Corpsman by starting out as an apprentice Hospital Corpsman." I said "Well, I'd like to do that." And they said they would be happy to have me. Well, they knew a pigeon [when they saw one]. And I didn't know that they were playing a game and I wasn't wise with them. So they put in a request and stuck a red cross on my left arm and I was an apprentice Hospital Corpsman. I then moved my quarters from my base to the Fourth Regiment Hospital. Boy, [they] greeted me like I was wonderful. I couldn't understand how nice they were. They said "Your first duty is that you're going to be in charge of the diet kitchen." My God, I said I didn't know anything about that and they knew that and they said "Well, that doesn't matter to you. You don't have to since you are the boss." There were ninety beds in this place. And I said, "Jeez, I don't know anything about cooking or anything" and they said I didn't have to. They said, "Here's your command, right in here", and it was a nice kitchen, loaded with dishes. And said, "Do I have to do dishes?" and they said "No, no, you don't have to do a thing." They said that we have mess attendants come in and do all the washing; that I was just in charge of it, I was the boss. They said they were short there and that I would be perfect for it. They said, "You'll be in charge of the diet kitchen" and I said, "Oh gosh, that's pretty good", and they said, "Yeah, you are a lucky guy that is striking for Hospital Corpsman and get to be in charge of the diet kitchen." They said "You don't have to know anything about it, the

doctors will pick up the food for the patients." Well, there wasn't any patients. There was one man sick in the ward out of the ninety beds.

Well, I had my own quarters there too, and oh, everybody was just very nice, and it was a very wonderful, wonderful place. I found the first morning that I went into my diet kitchen that the place was loaded with dishes, piled high, and cigarette butts and everything, and the place was a mess. I thought there had been a party there for dozens of people. And I wondered what the hell was going on, since there was only one patient and the place was full of dirty dishes and everything. And I didn't know what was going on and didn't know how to explain it. Well, then I found out really that all the officers on the base--when the day work was through--they can go ashore at night. And they can just walk through the gate, which is right close by. But at night, when they come home and before they check in to their own quarters, they all sort of gathered together in MY diet kitchen, to sort of have a coffee klatch. And to have a talk about all things and what is happening, and cook ham and eggs, and have a good time in my diet kitchen. And at the time [they arrived] it is all cleaned up and everything. And this goes on and nobody ever had done anything about it. I said "Well, gee, that's pretty good because I'm leaping on the side of the land, too." Little did I know. Well, life at Sick Bay Four was an experience. We rarely ever had any patients, certainly none were ever confined in any beds in the ward, but boy, there was some strange characters. There was one guy that was a dentist, and his only job was to run up and down the hall in his shorts and play the ukelele all day long. Raising hell. One time, a great big colored fellow come in with a toothache and boy, I never heard such howling and suffering in all my life. This guy was drilling on his teeth and he had one of those equipment things where you had to go in and it had a big wheel on it and he had to pedal it with his foot while he was drilling. It was one of those antiquated machines, and oh my God, you can imagine what this guy was going through while he was doing this kind of dental work on people. Oh Jesus! And there was all kinds of stuff like that. But it was pretty nice as we could go into Charleston, and the trolley into the town came right by the sick bay door.

Everything was fine until one day I found something staring me in the face that scared the hell out of me. It was a summons that I was going to be court-martialed. My God, it seems that I was going to be hauled up before the senior commanding officer, the medical officer at the station. I went to the chief and told him that it seemed that there was a big amount of food that couldn't be accounted for missing from the Fourth Regiment galley. And they were going to court-martial me, and that there was going to be a trial. I didn't know what the hell to do; I was scared. Of course I had a commissioned officer that was going to be my lawyer and help figure everything out. One day we had to go over to the senior medical officer to have a hearing over on the base. The senior medical officer was an old man, sort of looked like Colonel Sanders. He had a great big white mustache, sort of Martinesque. He was one of these guys that would see you coming and would shout, "Salute me at six paces." So I was over there and had my so-called lawyer with me, and they had the Fourth Regiment galley cook there-- a big fat fellow. And we got to talking things over and it seems there was a lot of food being dispensed from the Fourth Regiment, and charged to the Fourth Regiment Sick Bay. And there were no patients there, so they wanted to know where the hell everything was going and what was going on. Being that I was in charge of the Fourth's diet kitchen, it was up to me to explain this stuff. Well, this commissioned officer that I had and I figured it up and the chief petty officer was there too. And we got together and

we explained that it was true that there were a lot of charges there, but they weren't completely accurate. To prove it the cook had to agree to some of it, although most of it was wrong. But anyway it was true, for instance, when I needed something, I would go up to the Fourth Regiment galley and put in a requisition for things, like a tub of butter. And they wouldn't have a tub of butter, so they would give me a half a tub. And then I'd ask for a crate of eggs, but they wouldn't have a crate, so they would give me half a crate. And [I wanted] so many cartons of milk, and they wouldn't have that much, but I would take what they had. But I was always charged for the full amount that I wanted and I never always got all of that stuff. And [I asked for] three or four hams but maybe they only had one ham. But I'd be charged for four. "Well," the cook said "sometimes that was true, but very rarely was it true." So anyway, while we were talking, the senior medical officer, named Stewart, was walking around his big carpeted office, and he was talking,.And he got over by the cook and the cook was waving his hands around explaining what this was all about. Then this weathered old guy, the senior medical officer, finally stopped and asked what that sore was on the back of his hand. And the cook said he didn't know what that was. The senior medical officer asked how long he had had that, and he said "Oh quite a while, for a long time, and I don't know what it is." So then Stewart says "Come over here," and he brought him over to a big window where the sun was pouring in, and he said "Come over here in the light and let me see what it is." And he told him to face the light, and told him to open his mouth, and the cook opened his mouth and he looked into his mouth and said, "Jeez, oh my God, put sentries around the camp. Quarantine the camp. Good Heavens, this man is in terrible, terrible condition." And actually, what it was, this cook of the Fourth Regiment had syphilis so bad that it was eating the roof of his mouth out. And when the senior medical officer saw that, oh Jesus, they forgot all about the enquiry and the whole Fourth Regiment was quarantined and we were all checked out.

Quarantined

Oh brother, do I remember that! Boy, what a scandal that spread all over the camp and all over the place. This guy was a cook and I don't know how many thousands of men that he cooked for, and boy we all had to take tests for syphilis to see if we were carriers. It was a hell of a mess. For quite a while we were all quarantined, the soldiers and the sailors in the camp and all of sick bay and everything. That was really something. Christ, I was sort of a hero in a way. We discovered that and we were awful glad. But finally that calmed down, and we got back to more or less normal procedures again And the next thing that happened, one Sunday, it was very quiet, there was only myself and another Corpsman named Ricketts in sick bay--he had charge of the ward. He had a kid in there who had been there a few days. And I was just out in my diet kitchen and Ricketts came running in and said, "Gee come in and help me out." And he had this young guy who was delirious, and was trying to jump out of bed And he couldn't control him and didn't know what in hell to do. And would I come in and help him. And I "Said sure, why not?" And I went in, and boy, we tried to hold this guy down in bed. And he lets me try to hold him while he tried to call the base hospital and say that we needed a doctor over there to look at him. And we really had a job trying to hold this kid back on the bed. This kid was one of the members of the big famous Rogers silver people. A young kid, too. Quite a while later, two officers showed up. And they looked down from the end of the hall where the entrance was. And they sort of looked at him, and they told him not to leave and to stay there. And the next thing you know, we

are quarantined! Jesus, the word goes around that the kid has spinal meningitis. Oh my God, and that is a killer, you know. And Ricketts and I are both collared away, and not allowed to be with anybody. And they take us away and put us out to a place called Piney Grove. It's in the woods, with big pine trees, just acres and acres. And the Navy built a great big place--all fenced. It was a big compound and they put up tents in one place, with Ricketts in one place and me in another. And we weren't allowed to come within hundreds and hundreds of feet to each other, and we could hardly see each other and couldn't come near anybody. And they put us up in a place where they would bring the food in and leave it on a stand And we couldn't come near until the guys that brought it left. I had my place and Ricketts had his, and we were up there in the Piney Grove for 30 days. When they tested us, they found out we were both carriers--that we had meningitis. Jeez, that was a terrible thing and I was scared to death, and but what could you do? So, we were up there for a month. I was just wandering around in the Piney Grove with nothing to do and so was Ricketts. So they did the tests from time to time and finally one day they came along and they said we were clean. And were let out and we went back to the hospital again, where we went back, more or less, to the normal procedures again. Even then things got dull around there, too. I wanted to go away, and I wanted to ship out and go farther south, and I wanted to get down into the Virgin Islands. The Chief Pharmacist Mate, said "Oh, Jeez, don't, don't, for God's sake you can ship out, but don't go to the Virgin Islands. That's the last place in the world." He said "You'll go down there and you'll be lost. The Navy will never hear from you again." He said "That is just the hell hole of the world. It's terrible, just stay away." I said, "Jeez I don't know what to do," as I was very unhappy.

Troop Transport

Then next thing you know a draft comes along and they want to get a crew for a transport. Oh boy, that's for me! So I volunteered for a draft to go on a ship that was going to be a transport-- up to Boston. And away I go to Boston. I'll never forget that trip, because on the way up a bunch of us walked up to the Washington Monument and ran all the way down. Boy, the next day I could hardly move my feet! Jesus, that was a stupid thing to do.

Anyway, we get into Boston and get aboard this ship. It was an old German ship that the Americans took over when the war broke out. It was all fitted out and everything now and ready for a shakedown cruise and ready to become a transport. It was a big ship, painted gray. When I got aboard I looked around and said, "For God's sake, it is the *Princess Cecilie*!"--the real thing of the replica that my old man won in Madison Square Garden that I sank in my pond. And now I was a member of the crew of the American ship called the *USS Mount Vernon*. How do you like that? Well, I can't tell you what my feelings were about that. And I was wandering around like everybody else seeing this thing and wasn't assigned to anything yet, except the hospital crew. There was sort of a pall over the place. Finally we all reported together and they got it all straightened out and were given assignments. And Jesus, you won't believe it, but they called my name and what I'm in charge of is the diet kitchen, for Christ sake! "No, you can't, oh my God!" But I don't think there is anything I can do. So I go up above later and the diet kitchen is narrow but a beautiful kitchen, up on the top deck. And it was the place where they had fine dinners and everything. Oh it was a beautiful ship with parquet floors and everything, but now it was all transferred to the Navy. And where they used to dance up on the boat

deck now had beds in it and it was going to be the hospital for members of the crew. This wasn't a hospital for the soldiers. This is just a hospital for the crew. It was a beautiful kitchen with everything ship-shape and nobody in there. But I can't get over that they made me in charge of the diet kitchen again, for Christ sake! And I didn't know what the hell to do. The kitchen had two, what you might call port holes, but they were big; one on the port side and one on the starboard side. They opened out onto the boat deck, you see. There were also other places you could serve the meals out where the beds were, that used to be used for dancing. There wasn't anybody there, and I finally went down below where most of the crew were gathered, down on the main deck watching them load up.

They were all the 26th Division, and we were going to go to France. I was watching them load up and everything, with the bands playing and a lot of people down on the docks and waving and it was quite an impressive sight. And finally they cast off, and the tugboats pulled us out into the middle of the bay and turned around and we started out toward the sea. And I thought well, I'll go up to my post. So I go up to my diet kitchen to sort of look around. And when I got up there, Jesus, when I got up there to the diet kitchen, the place was full of smoke! I said, "What the hell is going on?" And I went in there and there was a guy. A big old guy and his name was Jones, and he had on a sailor suit. and he's got hash-marks, and he was just an ordinary sailor, a First Class Cook. But my God he had gold hash-marks going up his sleeve almost up to his neck. I never saw a guy that had been in the Navy for so many years. He's even got an old figure-eight knot that went out of style in the Spanish American War! And he is busy as hell, going back and forth from the stove, with stuff cooking and frying on the stove and all and it was full of smoke. And I said, "My God, hey, what's going on?" And he said, "Are you Fix?" And I said "Yeah" and he said, "Well, you are my superior." Then I said "What do you mean?" and he said "Well, you are in charge of the diet kitchen and I'm under you, I'm your assistant." I said, "Well what's going on?" And he said, "Oh nothing, I'm just doing a little business here." And what he was doing was making ham and egg sandwiches and was selling them to the guys going overseas through these portholes in the ship! These soldiers. Christ they were dying to get something decent to eat. And they are paying from 50 cents to two dollars for a ham and egg sandwich. And he's got both stoves going and making money and I said, "Hey, Jeez, that's not allowed." And he said, "Don't worry, I've been around this Navy a lot longer than you have, boy. Don't you bother. Just get busy and don't get in my way here and we'll do alright here. Just keep the hell out of my way. Look out, look out!" I was afraid, but I hoped this guy knew what he was doing. And boy, they were lined up outside. He was doing a hell of a business and God, I was baffled. I didn't know what the hell to do. I'm watching this guy and the smoke is billowing up in there. It still seemed like a dream, but it was all true. I was scared to death but I didn't know what the hell to do. I certainly wasn't going to rat on him. I knew better than that. Somebody else was going to have to discover him, but nobody did.

So we went all the way across the pond and he kept doing business every day and we got over to Brest and dumped the troops out and the guys went away. And then on the return trip, sometimes we turned around the same day and came back. We'd make the trip in five days. And on the way back Jones gets hold of me and hands me a roll. And Christ, I'd have two or three hundred dollars! He said, "This is your cut there, boy. See how that is, that's pretty nice." Christ, I couldn't believe it, but boy at the same time I said, "Hey, this is a great scheme." Then I didn't think it was so bad. I didn't tell anybody. And, as soon as we got another batch of men aboard to take across to France, we'd be out

to sea, and in a day or two Jones would open up for business again. Christ, the place was full of smoke and they were lined up for ham and egg sandwiches. Everything went fine and we had made four or five trips. Then one day a Boatswains Mate, one of the deck hands named Severin, was talking to me through the porthole and he asked me what the hell was going on. I said [to the cook], "Look Jones, this man wants to get in on this, he wants a cut." And Jones said, "Well don't talk to him, don't waste your time." I said, "Well, wait a minute." And the Mate said, "You had better talk to me because I know what's going on here. Christ, you're out here selling these sandwiches to these guys." And this Boatswains Mate was an old timer too, and he wanted his cut. But Jones told him that he wasn't going to cut him in and neither was Fix. I said, "Well, I don't know, Jones, we ought to make some kind of a deal." And he said, "We'll make nothing." And the guy said, "Well if you don't, I'm going to turn you in." And Jones said, "Well you go ahead and turn us in, but get the hell out of here, you're not going to get any money from us." And the guy left. And, by Jesus, the next thing you know, we were turned in and we were put under house arrest. And we were going to be court-martialed on the way over. My God, I thought, this is going to be terrible! And this is on the way to France, and this thing was busted up and there was no more cooking and selling. Then the business was shut down and we were under house arrest, but then one of the doctors was our lawyer. And they wanted to have a trial, but he begged for some time to prepare our case, and could we wait to do it? And the Captain was a wonderful man and he said certainly. So he said we'd have the case later.

So we got to France and dumped the troops off and were on the way back to New York. On that trip I thought [the trial] might be squashed, but no sir, boy, we were up for General Court Martial! [So we were] on the way home, about three days out of Brest, France. On the way home and no news about our trial. And I began to wonder gee, maybe nothing was going to happen and maybe it would be all fixed up. And suddenly BOOM, the bottom dropped and we were told there was going to be a trial later that afternoon--that day! And the trial was convened that afternoon. Well, we told our story and it seemed that our story was, according to Jones anyway, that it was true that he was handing these sandwiches out through the porthole for the soldiers. But we weren't taking any money for them, we were giving them away. Jones felt so sorry for the soldiers and they were so eager to get some good food and we weren't taking any money for them. And then this Boatswains Mate got on the stand and he absolutely denied that; said that we certainly were selling the sandwiches because he saw the money passing. And boy, I didn't know how we were going to get off that hook, but we had a pretty good lawyer. And he was pretty smart, I guess, because the next question was: can you produce a witness who accepted some of this gratuity but paid for some of these sandwiches, etc.? And the Boatswains said no, he could not. And [our lawyer] said "Well, why not?" And the Boatswain said well, it seems that naturally they were all in France and nobody knew where in the hell they were at. And certainly they weren't going to stop the ship and turn around and look for witnesses for this trial. And he couldn't prove that any soldier had paid for the sandwiches, and he couldn't prove anything. So it wound up that the Captain admonished us to not be so generous with government property, and we were not to proceed with such generosity in the future or we'd be in real trouble. And of course that was the end of anything like that; as we said we would comply. And, I might add here that old Jones had been broken from Chief Pharmacist Mate about 25 times. He'd been in the Navy for so damn long that he couldn't keep count. And his deal was, that he had a secret deal with some of the cooks down in the galley

aboard that ship. And he'd smuggle them alcohol and they'd smuggle him food. Jones was a vanilla extract freak. And this is how he got all his food on the side, by trading alcohol to the cooks' department. That's how that all came about. But anyway, that put an end to my nice payoffs, and they were pretty good. I felt sorry about it, but I was glad it was all over and I considered that we were very lucky.

It was right after that that I got very disenchanted. I didn't want to have anything to do with that damned diet kitchen. I was so fed up with that, and I asked them to give me another assignment to do something else. So they thought about it, and it wasn't much longer after our other experiences had passed on that I was assigned to another duty which was a job at the gangway that was amidships on the deck; one deck below the main deck. That whole area there was the troop space where the soldiers were that were coming back from the war. [There were] a lot of casualties, shot up, etc., that were coming back. They could get around, but they were in bunks that were four and five and six high. It was terrible down there. At the bottom of the stairs there--at the main deck--was a desk, and it was my job to sit at this desk. If any of the soldiers at the time didn't feel well or anything like that, well, I was the main Navy man down there to help out the Army. If anybody felt sick, they would come to my desk and I would take their temperature if I felt they needed it. And if they were running any kind of temperature I would send them up the stairs to sick bay and they would take it from there. The hospital department of the Army just couldn't handle them all.

Other Rackets

I wasn't doing too much business there, but I wasn't down there very long before I made the acquaintance of a Chief Pharmacist Mate named Hart from Denver. He was a nice guy, and he came to me one day and asked if I would like to make a little money. And I asked him what he was talking about. And well, actually, this Chief was a professional gambler, and what he was doing was running a game in the middle of the ship where one of the masts was--an area about ten feet by ten feet, an empty space that was surrounded by all of these bunks and stanchions. What was happening was that Hart was running a game there--blackjack and craps--with all of these guys. And they were loaded with money, coming back from France. The game was running all the time, but he had to be very careful because if he ever got caught by the Navy he would be in big trouble. What he did, and what he told me about, was that he rigged up this secret communications thing that he had with this little button under my desk. That all I had to do was press when the Watch Officer from the Navy came around every hour with his little book that noted anything wrong; because he made the round of the whole ship every hour. He always came down the stairs and it was my job to press the button and the little light would come on that Hart had rigged up by the mast where these guys were. When they saw the light, they would throw a big blanket over all the money and the dice in the middle of all these guys and then it would seem like just a bull session. These guys talking about their experiences, etc., and the Watch Officer would eventually come through and just see and look at these guys, then go on his way. And when he was out of sight--and they were sure of it--they would take the blanket off and go on with their game. That was the only contact that I had. Well, when we got into Hoboken where we usually docked, the first time after this went on, Hart gave me 400 dollars! My God, this was my part, my

payoff. And you know he was ripping me off, and you wonder how much money he was making to give me that much. And I made as much as five hundred dollars a trip! I did that four or five times.

Boy, when that ship pulled into Hoboken, I was rolling in the dough. I wasn't getting any money from the Navy, as they still hadn't found my records and they couldn't pay me. And I wouldn't even go up to the window to get my 70 or 80 dollars a month--some ridiculous amount--and they couldn't pay me anyway. I didn't care because I would go into New York and I would be loaded with money. Even then I couldn't spend it because [the public] saw this kid with these four big stripes that were tarnished [silver] and all that denoted [that I had been in a] war zone. And a lot of people that saw them couldn't believe that when they saw this kid, they didn't think it was true. But then when they found out that it was true, they would sweep me up and take me to opening night shows and buy me dinners and I couldn't spend the money that I had. So I was really living like a king, even then. This was a new racket. But I didn't have anything to do with it, it just happened to me. Gosh, and that went on. Then next thing, I was contacted by another guy and he wanted to know if I wanted to make some money. He said I didn't have to do anything except when I came ashore--which I was always doing--, was to take my little grip ashore every time. Well, come to find out he was a diamond smuggler!! And that would really be a big pay off. And that really frightened me. And I said, "No, no, I didn't want anything to do with that." And I didn't do that; and thank God I didn't! So I just went back to going back and forth overseas.

My connection with Hart finally gave out because Hart got sick and had to give up the game, and I was just as glad that it wasn't going on anymore. We made a few more trips and they used to call me the "Atlantic Tourist" because I wasn't at the desk anymore. I actually didn't have anything much to do. I would just walk around the ship. Boy, it was a thrill just walking all over the ship, and it would be a terrible thing to see these poor shell shocked guys. They had a cage in the back of the ship, and a lot of these casual guys would be back there on a nice day, and these fellows would be laying in the sun and these guys would take a mess kit with their knives and forks and make noise and they would throw it up in the air and let it drop and Jesus, when that thing hit the deck, all these guys in this cage would jump up and go into hysterics and get delirious and raise hell. What a terrible thing to do. God, they used to have to put MP's in there to keep people from doing that. They used to do it for laughs. They would laugh at these poor bastards that were mental cases; terrible thing!

Disaster at Sea

Well, anyway we were going and coming pretty regularly. We would turn around the same day and come back but this one time, when we got into Brest, we were going to stay a few days and I had a chance to go up to Paris. So I got a look at Paris. And boy, that was quite the thing. Nothing very exciting but it was wonderful. I remember one of the great things that I did along with another shipmate named Walters, a young kid. Our big achievement in France was that we piddled under the Eiffel Tower. We thought that was about the greatest thing that could have happened. Just think of that. How many kids could do a thing like that!

The next thing that was pretty important was that we were on the way back one morning about 8 o'clock [Sept. 5, 1918] and I was down in the mess hall. And we were just finishing breakfast and sitting at this table and there was a bump with a kind of a subdued noise. It felt kind of like something hit

the ship and pushed it over to one side. And then there was a sound like an explosion, and then the ship tipped to the port side--the side we were sitting on. And we just sat with nobody doing anything-- just sort of stunned, we didn't know what it was. There was a big coffee urn at the end of the table and the ship listed so much to the port side that the coffee urn tipped over onto the table and all of the coffee ran out and got into our laps. Did that bring us to action! And everybody suddenly got up and we started running like hell and panic broke out. I just got up and stood there because I didn't know what the hell to do. And guys clogged the pretty wide stairway going up and it was all jammed with the guys trying to get out. And I noticed a guy standing on the table right where I was, and he reached up and pulled something down, and it was a rope that was going up through a ventilator and he pulled himself up. And boy, did I do that, even though I had never tried that before, but I climbed up that God-damned rope with the knots in it and came out on the boat deck, where the life boats were. And Jesus, there was panic up there with shooting going on, they were shooting into the water but nobody knew what the hell they were shooting at, and there were sirens going off. My job was in the hoisting out party on the last lifeboat on the starboard side of the ship. It was my job to see that the stern end of the last lifeboat was lowered. We always used to have lifeboat drills and we would just run up and stand at our post and they would come by and check us out and that was it. But we noticed that these boats were tied with these big hawsers, ropes; with all the salt water these ropes were just knotted in there. Christ you couldn't untie those if you were the strongest man in the world. And they knew that too, I guess. But alongside every davit there was a little hatchet tied to the thing. And it was there for that very purpose; if you couldn't untie the ropes you would use the hatchet to cut it loose. And I knew damn well what I would do if I ever had to do it. And suddenly the time come and boy, I was going to do it. And everybody in the life boat parties were all chopping like hell, there was nobody trying to untie the knots. And it was terrible because you would chop a boat and one end of it would come loose and swing loose before the other guy got his cut loose. And I think maybe a few boats landed right side up in the water and they didn't even have the weather plugs in and they just got full of water and got awash and sank. Other boats were hanging there by one end, and when the other end dropped the boat landed upside down.

There were big life rafts in the middle of the ship and it was some guys jobs to throw them overboard to launch those big rubber things. Well, the guys would throw them over but neglected to put a line on them, and they just fell in the water and just floated away. Christ, everything was just floating away and there wasn't a boat around the ship at all. And the guys were shooting in the water, but didn't know what they were shooting at; just shooting like hell. Right at the stern where I was there was a big long chute where the depth charges were, and they were called ash cans because they looked like ash cans. They were just getting ready to launch them when a lieutenant, named Lillyken (?) he had a big .45 and he pulled it out and he called out, "Hold it, hold it, God-damn it. If you let that go I'll kill you!" And jeez, everybody said what the hell is wrong with him, that's what the things were for. Then he said, "Christ you know what will happen, if you drop that thing off, it will blow our ass off." And that's what would have happened, because the destroyer *Shaw*--which we knew-- had dropped it's depth charge one time. And it didn't get the submarine, but it blew the whole fantail off the ship! So nobody was ever ready to drop a depth charge after that. We were listing way over by this time, and then we turned around and tried maneuvering and we had about a 45 degree angle, and they thought the ship would

capsize but the captain turned the ship around and headed back to Brest. We were about 500 miles out. And we limped into Brest, and the captain ran it onto the mud flats there in Brest that way and we only had about 5 more degrees to go and we were gradually turning over. Thank God we got it into the mud flats before it did capsize. And there we were in there, and he had saved the ship, and he got a Medal of Honor for that. Well, then we were there and it was lousy and the weather was lousy and Brest was terrible. It was a terrible town and, my God, we were there for three months. There were 36 men killed in the explosion and it ripped a big hole in the starboard side of the ship just below the water line amidships. We had to lay there in Brest for three months because we couldn't get any steel to fix the ship. Because on account of the war, there wasn't any to fill the hole. Somebody eventually came up with the idea to fill the hole with concrete, and they filled the hole with concrete. And one day then we launched it, and we came out to sea, and were going back to Boston where we could get some steel to fix it.

And we were on our way, and everything was fine. Then we were a day out of Boston when a big storm came up. And, boy, we had a hell of a time--with officers running back and forth and everything--and there was all kinds of panic and we couldn't see what in hell was going on. We found out that the water pumps were going like hell, and it was holding the water all right. But what they were afraid of was this big chunk of concrete was contracting like a big filling in a tooth. And they were afraid the storm might get much worse and put much more pressure on the ship. And since the ship had a lot of ballast on it to compensate for the heavy concrete, they thought if it tipped much more that piece of concrete would just drop out like a filling out of a tooth. And then the *Mount Vernon* would turn the other way and spin like a God-damn top and that will be the end of us. And we didn't know whether we were going to make it or not. It was a hell of a storm and I was scared to death. And oh my God, Jeez, we got into Boston. We made it, but oh, brother what an experience that was! The dear old USS *Mount Vernon*. They got the ship repaired very quickly, but the funny thing was apparently they didn't trust it too much anymore because we never went back across the pond again.

Norfolk, Virginia

We thought we were going back to Europe, but we wound up down in the Norfolk Navy Yard. As we were pulling into Norfolk there was an old tramp steamer looking thing; a Navy ship going into the bay. And I was up on the deck railing watching as they were going in very slowly going up to where I guess they were going into dry dock to be worked on. As we were going in, there was a barge coming down the James River and I never saw so many watermelons piled up on this barge. There were some colored guys on this thing, and just as we were passing it, or it was passing us, there were some waves from another ship passing by and it flooded this God-damned barge full of watermelons. And it tipped over, and the watermelons were floating all over the water. And Christ, we were laughing like hell. And this old, funny, dirty looking old freighter was coming into port, too. And it was going very slowly, and we were also almost stopped to. And as it was passing it caused this barge full of watermelons to tip over. And [we were] up on the bridge, hanging there looking out. We were very close and we could see [the sailors]. And who do I see but my brother Charlie, for Christ sake. And I called and called to him, and he couldn't see me because there were so God-damned many guys on my ship looking. But I waved and waved and he kind of waved to me and said he would see me later, and

I didn't know where in hell [his ship was]. We pulled alongside one of the battleships. I think it was the *Oklahoma* or something, and that evening I got to go ashore and I saw Charlie. And I hadn't seen my brother in so damned long. God, can you imagine that! We had a wonderful visit together. He was so surprised to see me. He didn't even know I was in the Navy. The ship that Charlie was on was called the USS *Bear*, an old freighter that would do 8 knots. And it was carrying ammunition and things like that. And oh boy, what a wreck that was. And he was on that a long time, and my God, it was a terrible duty. Charlie was an electrician on it. But he made, Jesus, I don't know how many trips, but it would take forever to get to Europe. But we had a wonderful visit there in Norfolk. I saw him almost every night for about a week or two. And then one day we were told to report next morning for inspection, and we found out we were going to be shipped out; that the ship was going to be decommissioned. We couldn't figure what the hell that was all about. A couple of days later we were called out and paraded and told we were going to be sent out, and we wondered where in the hell we were going. As we left the ship, the captain had books printed that we didn't know anything about. And each sailor--member of that crew--was presented with a book of the USS *Mount Vernon*. And I had it up until about two years ago and I gave it to some jerk to read who wanted it very much. And god-damn it, I never got it back. And I sure would love to have that book. My daughter Marilyn remembers seeing it.

Anyway, we didn't know where we were going. And we finally wound up in Bayshore, up in Long Island, across from New York. And that's where we were going to be, and we were going to be paid off. I was there for about a week and found out I was going to be put out of the Navy. And we were. We were discharged from the Navy very unceremoniously one day. We were called to the parade ground and given these discharges like diplomas, and I was out of the Navy, the end of my great fighting tour [Sept. 5, 1919]. Well, I was glad to get out as I had plenty of money saved up. I went back to my sister Anna in Yonkers.

THE END