June 7, 1990

Regina Akers,
Interviewer

AKERS: This is Regina T. Akers of the Naval Historical Center. I am interviewing Captain Franklin H. Beardsley, Jr., USNR (Retired), in the Operational Archives Branch on 7 June, 1990. Captain, I am delighted to have the opportunity to talk with you about your experiences on Q-ship Big Horn during World War II. As you know, there's not much material available about Q-ships, and so the valuable contributions they made during the war effort are just not known. I thank you for taking the time, and so quickly, to relate some of the much needed information about Q-ships in the war, specifically USS *Big Horn*, that you served on. Okay, Captain; let's begin by having you telling us a little bit about your background.

BEARDSLEY: Fine. I grew up in the Philadelphia area. My father was a printer, worked with the Curtis Publishing Company. I went to high school outside of Philadelphia. Then, I had no money to go to college, so I worked for three years in several different jobs in a variety, mostly manual labor and some other things. Then in time went to what was then West Chester State Teachers' College, outside of Philadelphia, having saved enough money to get there, and worked while I was there. And then graduated from there in 1938 and taught in Springfield, Delaware County, taught Junior and Senior High School English and History, coached track and football…

AKERS: You were busy.

BEARDSLEY: (continuing) for three years from 1938 to 1941, when I went in the Navy to USS *Prairie State* which had been a Reserve Training Center, earlier the USS *Illinois*, years before that, and got my commission in January 1942. I'm married, have three children, the oldest of whom served four years in the Navy as an officer; two girls, the other who lives a few miles away, and the other lives at home with us.

AKERS: Okay. Lets start with *Big Horn*, since that's what we're here to discuss.

BEARDSLEY: Sure.

AKERS: What was your assignment prior to *Big Horn*?

BEARDSLEY: My assignment prior to *Big Horn* after my being commissioned in January of '42, I went to communications school in Noroton, Connecticut for about a month. And then was assigned to the USS *Massachusetts* as a Communications Watch Officer. In fact, my only

distinction on the *Massachusetts* was probably having served the shortest amount of time. From the time it was commissioned, (and I was a plank owner, having been aboard when it was commissioned in March of '42. In June on a Sunday the 14th, Flag Day, I was decoding messages and decoded my own orders; and did a double-take when I saw Franklin-Beardsley come up; and realized a sentence or so later that was for me, to report immediately from the *Massachusetts* which was then in South Boston to the Charlestown Navy Yard where the *Big Horn* was being converted. So it was quite exciting because I got in the station wagon and was gone within an hour in dress whites.

AKERS: Okay, okay. What was your assignment aboard Big Horn? Were you the Communications Officer?

BEARDSLEY: I was. I became the Communications Officer. It was interesting when I reported that Sunday that, there was nothing going on except the conversion. The OD said to come back the next day. And it was sort of a rusty bucket that surprised me, in fact I didn't know what it was until I saw the old AO did I realize that it was supposed to be a tanker. But the OD said the Captain would talk to me tomorrow morning and said, I want to tell you what this is; and he explained the mission over coffee in the Boston Navy Yard (the Charlestown Navy Yard.) He said Are you married? And I said yes, I had just been married that February. And he said well you can tell only one person what our mission is other than yourself, and I assume that is going to be your wife. And I said yes. And she knew the importance of security, particularly when I was directly involved in it.

AKERS: Sure.

BEARDSLEY: But, I got away from your earlier question of what my assignment on the *Big Horn* was as Communications Officer.

AKERS: Okay. Okay. What was the mission of *Big Horn* as it was explained to you?

BEARDLEY: Well, the mission of the *Big Horn* was to serve as a decoy. You could dramatize it is as a "raider," but it was not going to raid anything. In fact the idea was either we would straggle from convoys and proceed independently although that could vary on a given mission. The idea was to attempt to have a submarine attack us on the surface. The armament, concealed guns behind the superstructure of the tanker forward, amidships and aft. They were 4" 50 caliber guns. They weren't new. When the doors were not lowered, you couldn't see the guns. As I recall there were it six of them, 2 forward, 2 amidships and 2 aft—three on the starboard side and three on the port. And then the gun that normally the merchant ship had on the stern was visible as it would be on a merchant tanker. In addition, there were some 40 and 20 millimeter guns, the latter were run out from the superstructure on tracks, so that they were concealed by the superstructure. There were eight of them as I recall it. Ah, later on, I don't know when we got the depth charges, I think they were installed early on but at one point. We did also get hedgehog. We did originally have some older listening gear but in time we got sonar, a better more updated version of sonar. We also had radar. I can't remember all the designations of what type the

equipment was. The radar antenna was on the flying bridge, which was concealed by canvas, which didn't look unusual. So on the surface, some enemy or anyone looking at the ship could not tell that it wasn't a merchant tanker. In fact it had been the SS *Gulf Dawn* which was converted gulf oil tanker, to the USS *Big Horn.* We could do about 15 knots which is a little hairy because the attack speed at that time for ASW was 15 knots and if you weren't going at least that you were going to drop depth charges and be in your own way as it were.

AKERS: How did you feel about serving as a decoy during the service?

BEARDSLEY: That's interesting, because as I told you the Captain talked with me and told me the mission the first day in fact I was aboard. He said I want you to understand that all the men and officers aboard this ship are volunteers. Well, I didn't in effect volunteer because I didn't know about it until I got my orders. So he said since you did not volunteer you have the option right now, I'll recommend you for other duty, whatever you think you want to do, or that you're reasonably qualified for. And I said well Captain, I've long since tried to not outguess the military or the Navy, and if I've been assigned to do something, I'm going to do it. And I guess perhaps I, even during the whole year I was aboard the *Big Horn*, I didn't think of it, and I think most of us didn't, as being that dangerous.

AKERS: Is that right?

BEARDSLEY: It was duty, we understood what it was. And you know I guess it was a lot more dangerous than we thought it was. But, you know, it was what we had to do, and no big deal, as they say.

AKERS: In short you were responding to orders.

BEARDSLEY: That's right. And I didn't feel put upon. In fact it was a little bit adventurous and a little off the beaten track. It fact in Casco Bay during shakedown, we, I got a chance to visit some friends aboard the Massachusetts, just for an hour or so. And the Chief Master at Arms, the Chief Boswains Mate, a guy who I used to know when I was a junior OD said to me, now you're beginning to look like a sailor. You know you were getting out of the compartments were you decoded messages and didn't get any sun. And so it was, you got more diversified duties than you would on a battleship. A friend of mine Carl Crotty stayed on the Massachusetts during the whole war and he was in communications. And he went back, finished law school, and got into the Federal Communications Commission, so he was well specialized. In my case I got a more broader, a different experience.

AKERS: What measures were taken to camouflage her?

BEARDSLEY: Well, as I mentioned, the guns, the 4" guns, were concealed by doors. Which, when they were being coverted in the Boston Navy Yard, there were times when the skipper and the CO were ashore and there were nothing aboard but junior officers, (and most of us were not

engineers); so the yard workman and the people who were installing them would come to us with these intricate diagrams on how this door was going to open and we said it's probably going to be Rube Goldberg stuff but ah, this is what we think, or just used our common sense. And, in fact some of the doors when we later used them had to be kicked open when the cables didn't work. It's was just not having any other conversions, except other Q-ships, which, I don't know whether they had such doors or not, there was no precedent to tell how this was to be done. Well, plus the fact as I also mentioned, canvas on the flying bridge, we also, underway, we took the identity of a merchant ship when we entered port, we took the identity of a Navy vessel, which meant when we left Boston for New York and the supply officer got a bunch of merchantmen clothes; windbreakers and things that you'd wear if you were a civilian sailor, and the merchant ships carried on the bridge amid-ships along side the bridge a sign *Gulf Dawn* which meant to considered to indicate that that's what we were. We also flew whatever country's flag that the Skipper felt so disposed to fly when we got operating. We used to kid about it, and somebody said well you know, that's piracy. And, we said yeah, but you get shot whether you get shot for piracy or because the enemy shoots you, it doesn't make a great deal of difference.

AKERS: Nope, not in the end.

BEARDSLEY: No, I mean the net result is the same.

AKERS: Okay, can you describe the crew for me, how many enlisted, how many officers?

BEARDSLY: I would say there were about 12, 13, 14 officers. About 150, maybe 160 enlisted. We had the normal billets; Commanding Officer, Executive Officer, 1st Lieutenant, Communications, (which I was), Engineering Officer, Damage Control, etc. A normal complement except were you'd get fire control on battleships, you wouldn't have any of those. Although the Gunnery Officer had to coordinate, there was an officer in each of the compartments where the six guns were concealed and he was an in effect the Gun Captain of the gun crew there. The officers were either former Merchant officers who were brought into the Navy, or Reserve Officers, like myself and others, with the exception of the Executive Officer, Commander,Henry Rawl who was a Naval Academy graduate. Then after Captain Rawl, just before I left in June or July of 1943 was Commander Pattie who was also a Naval Academy graduate. But we were what you might call a "non-reg." Vessel. Which was probably better that way. Because if you had someone who was used to operating an organized well, efficient ship and had this kind of a setting, it might not, it might be better to just have the kind of people we had, who weren't too regimented or oriented to doing everything one way.

AKERS: Tell me, how did your ship communicate with Headquarters and by that I assume it was Eastern Sea Frontier, you all reported direct to.

BEARDSLEY: Yes, well underway we observed radio silence. It would have mattered if they had intercepted messages that were coded. The enemy might say "what's a merchant ship doing with a Navy code." So basically, it was when we got ashore in New York, that's where the

Commander of Eastern Sea Frontier was, but in Trinidad, or Curacao, or wherever, through the Navy Communications Office, just as I got new codes, and I had to update the publications.

AKERS: Now your ship, of course, traveled in convoys. How did you communicate from your ship to the other ships in the convoy?

BEARDSLEY: Right. As a matter of fact, my year aboard, we weren't with too many convoys.

AKERS: I see.

BEARDSLEY: But when we were, it was mostly by signal lights and visual contact. We did have a walkie-talkie kind of radio. But, the range on those is relatively limited. So it was mostly visual. In fact, I think maybe I mentioned to you about the experience off Trinidad. Which, in reading the material you were able to give me, didn't have all the information. Our first cruise we went through Windward Passage and cruised along the coast of Venezuela, independently, of coarse; since we were not assigned to any convoy, or didn't find any, nor did we need one, with the thought that maybe a submarine would find us. We didn't have any contacts, so we got to Trinidad, British West Indies, and here was a convoy proceeding into Trinidad. The Captain said we'll join up with this convoy. Apparently, they didn't realize we were with them. Someone on the bridge intercepted the light messages from the harbor entrance control post at Trinidad, which was then British, being a British island, which in exchange for old WWI four-stack destroyers we got use of the facilities and air stations there. We intercepted the message from the HECP, (Harbor Entrance Control Post) to the Escort Commander, asking how many ships in your convoy? And he said twelve, and the guy ashore said, looks like thirteen to us. Well, they were a little touchy about this because not too many weeks before that a submarine apparently had snuck in there and done some damage to somebody and they weren't exactly relaxed. Meantime, we're dragging along at the stern of the convoy, but looking like we're part of it. And we can see the shore guns, the trees unfolding the guns, looking for somebody, and we knew who it was. And we're friendly, not enemy. Anyhow the British sent out a Lt. Commander in a small patrol boat armed with sidearms. He saw the *Gulf Dawn* sign and he said, "who's your agent?" The Captain said: "Naval Operations Base Trinidad, you dumb S.O.B." Well, the guy didn't know, the British didn't know, but it all worked out and we got into Trinidad without incident.

AKERS: Must have been scary though.

BEARDSLEY: Yeah, it was. You know, it's just, of course only relatively few people on or near the bridge on deck knew what's going on at the time.

AKERS: Tell me, how was fuel replenished, and supplies. Was it generally when you were in port?

BEARDSLEY: Yes, because we, being a tanker, did carry, even though we weren't carrying fuel as cargo. I may have told you, when the conversion was designed, the idea was to use the most of

the compartments. We needed enough fuel for ourselves and we carried enough for the PC's that operated with us later and other ships if we had enough to spare. But we weren't a fueling tanker. The compartments where the fuel would normally have been, were steamed out and empty oil drums, which were steamed out, were stacked in these compartments with strips of steel holding them from rattling. Some of them broke away and they'd rattle around and made quite a noise, but with the principle that they were voids. Air space is a good insulator and battleships have some void spaces. But, I got away from your question. How did we fuel? We fueled ashore. Even though we weren't carrying fuel, we had carried enough for our own use. The ship had steam reciprocating engines. These didn't give any great speed and had their share of problems. It was not a new ship. The Gulf Oil people had it for a few years.

AKERS: You were also rearmed then in port.

BEARDSLEY: Yes.

AKERS: Now, I was reading in the Eastern Sea Frontier Diary that I shared with you yesterday, that the Captain generally, and this was in reference to your ship, when you were in port, would have a check with ComEaSeaFron. And he would give that to the port facility there and that's how it was done. Because you all didn't want to appear as a regular commissioned Naval vessel.

BEARDSLEY: Right.

AKERS: That was done as standard procedure then. How did that effect other sorts of supplies? Generally, when a ship is in port the sailors go aboard and ah, were you all generally on shore leave for the time that you were there or were you free to go.

BEARDSLEY: Well, yes.

AKERS: (continuing) In port. You know what kind of restrictions were there? Because you all were not supposed to be…

BEARDSLEY: Right.

AKERS: (continuing) quote servicemen.

BEARDSLEY: Yeah that's true. Although, as I mentioned earlier, the plan was that when we entered port we'd changed identity from a merchant vessel to a Naval vessel. So we'd put the white hats on and all the other uniforms and so forth. Which may not have been the best security procedure. But that's the way it was.

AKERS: It worked.

BEARDSLEY: It seemed to work. Although we weren't naïve enough to think that there weren't a lot of people, particularly the ladies of the night who the sailors visited, that they didn't know what we were. I just don't know. No one really knew, but at least the net result was it didn't do us any harm. It wasn't supposed to be done. But normally, we'd have port and starboard, or three section watches, just as a Navy ship would and get liberty. In fact, we had one interesting experience in Trinidad. We went up the coast, (I call it up, I don't know if it was that), but along the coast about 10 miles from the Port of Espanol was a Naval Air Station which we docked at, as planned. And some of the officers and crew got liberty one of the few nights we were there, and went into the Port of Spain in a cab. Four or five of the officers, including Lieutenant Commander Cluff the Engineering Officer, and I think Lieutenant Commander Bennett, the Assistant Engineer, and a couple of the others were in their whites and went in a cab. And the next morning we were supposed to sail and they weren't back on board. And so the Captain said to me, (I had the deck,) he said, "I want you to get some men and go in town and find these guys, because we're supposed to sail at noon." And this was like seven o'clock in the morning. Well the what had happened was they had hired a local native cab driver who said he'd charge them let's say two dollars each to take them into town. On the way in, he went off the coast road and went up through a little native village, which was, I recall, where he lived. And then he changed his mind and said instead of two dollars it's now ten dollars. So they said no way, and threatened to beat him up. So he took them on into town. When they got into town, he got out of the cab and ran. They got out and ran after him, foolishly. And he ran right into the Judge's and the Police Chief's office. So that's where they were.

AKERS: Retained.

BEARDSLEY: Detained, retained, everything. So I located them and had about four or five sailors with me with leggings and rifles. We marched into the Judge's office, and I was trying to make a military impression on the judges and here right across the room were these four or five officers in the cell. They'd been there overnight with their whites on and so forth. They said, "Get us out of here." So I said to the judge who was up on a high platform (for impression purposes.) "Admiral Robison, (who was the Commander of the Islands, Trinidad and other nearby ones,) insists that these officers be released immediately," (Rifles at port arms because the sailors were trying to make an impression.) I'm trying to keep our officers quiet. So finally we got them out of there and back to the ship. But it was just a humorous sidelight to live through.

AKERS: Oh, indeed. Indeed. Now you described how your vessel was armed. How effective was the weaponry.

BEARDSLEY: Well, I can only say what our experiences were. We fired during shakedown and occasional training sessions. We went on this mission in April and May of '43 with two PCs as escorts.

Back over the horizon--Commander Farley was the Task Group Commander, which, three ships which hardly made a group, but at least that's what it was called. We proceeded out into the Atlantic, near the Azores. The reason for that was that the great circle course from

Lorient, (where the Nazi sub pens were) to the West Indies went near there. In other words, it was like a crossroads or main street--the most likely place to find a submarine. The reason I'm doing all this is to try to illustrate that we didn't have really much use of our armament. The submarine wake, and smoke from their engines was seen by a man in our crow's nest. He reported to Commander Farley who ordered one of the PCs up to the contact site and the other one to stand by near the first one to make an attack. They did make a few runs. At some point, some of their equipment (whether it was their chemical recorder or their sonar) was not working efficiently. They couldn't easily maintain contact so they weren't sure they were having good accurate runs. Rather than drop depth charges, and not have them do much good, maybe. So meantime, after sometime, we caught up with the scene. We took "the con" over the runs and made about three runs over a couple of hours. The Captain got impatient, (from which I learned a lesson for my later command that says you may have to do this for days if necessary). Anyhow, at the third run he said, "drop depth charges, fire hedgehogs and throw your helmets over if that's going to do any good." So we fired hedgehogs and they exploded. The principle of hedgehog rockets is that they won't explode unless they hit something as opposed to a depth charges exploding at a set depth. The submarine could hide behind a depth charge disturbance. With the hedgehog, the rockets might go to the bottom and you didn't get any disturbance. But this time they did explode, and we got debris and heavy oil slicks. And we realized that about that time in the war it was evident that not only were the Nazi submarines were shooting debris out their tubes, our own guys were doing it, in the Pacific, mostly, to make the enemy think that he'd sunk them. And then the enemy would take one of two steps, either run away to get away or attack you while you stopping to pick up the debris. Well, anyhow we did, and we got a bunch of stuff on board among which were parts of bodies, which our doctor on board said, were "fresh." That even though we felt the Nazi's were pretty sadistic people, we didn't think they were going to kill their own shipmates and put the bodies in the tubes to shoot them up for us to see. We didn't get the hull, we didn't get live bodies. So, the net result was that ComEaSeaFron's impression was that we got "a most probable." In fact, one thing that I've often thought about from time to time, (in light of the fact according to the Eastern Sea Frontier report and Commander Farley's report we did sink a submarine.) That was 47 years ago now.

AKERS: Yes that's right. That's right. For the sake of understanding how, in terms of strategy tactic, you mentioned that your group was composed of the *Big Horn* and two PCs.

BEARDSLEY: Right.

AKERS: According to the Frontier, diary that is, the PC would sight the sub. You all would be straggling generally, behind them. And once she surfaced, or sometimes even though she didn't surface, you all would make the attack. Is that correct? Could you describe that a little more for me?

BEARDSLEY: Well, that was the theory. However, in practice, no matter who sights the submarine, we don't care if they sight it or we sight it, it's a matter of who's radar has the best range. Who's visual, from a height of eye above sea level, we obviously had a higher mast,

(srow's nest) which is one reason why we sighted it. Underway, toward the Azores, the two PCs were back over the horizon. With the idea that if a submarine saw us being escorted, he would be more apprehensive than if he saw us alone. He'd say well here's a tanker, a merchant tanker, I can knock him off. Whereas if he's got somebody attacking him, he's going to be a little slower about taking chances. Understand that all of the junior officers were not privy to all of the information/strategy that came into the Captain's hands. We got it more at the execution stage, but it couldn't help but filter down in what we tried to do. However, there may have been times, just as when we'd had this attack when the PCs would go ahead of us.

AKERS: What kind of medical treatment was available aboard her?

BEARDSLEY: Well, we had a doctor and some pharmacist's mates and a sick bay. Nothing elaborate.

AKERS: So there was help until you got to port?

BEARDSLEY:. Yeah, that's nothing elaborate that a large ship would have, several doctors perhaps. We just had one, and I think we had a Chief Pharmacist's Mate and some rated men.

AKERS: Okay. You mentioned the attack in May of '43. Does any other attack stand out in your memory?

BEARDSLEY: No. There were others. Where there were some other ships involved in the convoy, I think the Eastern Sea Frontier mentions. And one of them I think a PC or somebody got in our way as we were about to fire at the sub. Other times, other ships were involved. Which is probably the reason why it was better for a ship like ours to straggle or be independent. Because if we were to be effective, we needed them to attack us. In theory, the idea being that hopefully they'd come to the surface. And the Big Horn had sort of a watermelon bottom, not a deep keel, which it meant, from one point of view, would mean that a torpedo would have less space to hit below decks, below the main deck. It also meant that when we were in a trough at sea, it rolled like crazy too. I think I may have mentioned it, when we were in shakedown, the Exec, Commander Rawle, retired as a Captain, a very fine man, he insisted that all the crew and officers, except the Captain and he climb the to the crow's nest.. I may have told you the story about one of my Communication Division men who was afraid of heights, and I don't say I blame him. We were at Casco Bay, at anchor, when this mast climbing to the crows nest routine went on. When we were ready to go, he wasn't about to climb. So I said, well you're going to have to do it, so I'll come up behind you. And I talked to him. In effect he got half way up and he froze and I said, well if you come down, you're only going to have to come this far again the next time, so why don't you go. So he got all the way up and when he got in the crow's nest itself, he got pretty comfortable. There was a canvas around him, he had something to stand on other than ladder rungs. Then it was sort of hard to get him down. So I said, well come on let's go. We can't spend our life up here. So, anyhow, it was fun. We laughed about it later. But the

paradox was that the sighting of the submarine that we did get credit for was from the crow's nest.

AKERS: Well it was ironic, huh?

BEARDSLEY: Being a watermelon bottom not only were we up pretty high, but the roll was pretty great, which didn't make it any easier.

AKERS: You felt like a flag a little bit, huh?

BEARDSLEY: Yeah.

AKERS: Okay. What kind of records were maintained aboard *Big Horn*. A regular log or a …

BEARDSLEY: Yes. We had a regular log. I believe the Captain or Commander Farley kept a war diary.

AKERS: No, we don't have it.

BEARDSLEY: You don't have it, so I presume that you didn't. And I think that perhaps this was by design. So that if we were captured or whatever…

AKERS: That makes sense.

BEARDSLEY: So that most of his communications with the Commander of the Eastern Sea Frontier were verbal when we got in, or by coded message from where we might be. I can speak for the communications records. We had probably what you might call a limited variety of codes because we weren't operating as a fast task group with the carriers or that type of thing. And we had recognition signals of both merchant and Navy, which came into play in the Trinidad entry where we were answering the merchant reply, when the Captain came on deck and said change identity to Naval vessel. And I said, Captain were in the middle of replying. Okay. So I cancelled that. I had the signalmen cancel that message and say give them Navy reply. Which we did. And I thought well at this point they knew we had both the books.

AKERS: Okay. I'd like to ask you a few questions about actual activities aboard the vessel. And to begin that, how long was your average voyage at sea?

BEARDSLY: Well, average probably doesn't mean anything in our case. Because it depended on what the Commander of the Eastern Seafront Frontier, and our Commander wanted us to do, where the frequency of sinkings might be. So I guess the one to the Azores was maybe a month. The one down to West Indies, we left New York in September, and we got back into after Trinidad and Curacao, back into New York on December 1st, and I remember that December 2nd.

Because I said to the Exec, my wife is going to have a baby, the 1st. He told me to take the first liberty boat. We went in and anchored off the narrows so we could go to Coney Island. The Exec and I, and the men who were on the liberty boat got into Coney Island where all these amusements were. They were all blacked out. So finally we stumbled around those and got out to the street where some Gin Mill bar was able to get a phone. I called Wilmington and my brother-in-law said Amy had the baby on November 18th. So he's two weeks old, don't rush. Come on down to Wilmington whenever you can. So, I got some liberty, or leave, a little bit and I went. And that's the son that came in the Navy.

AKERS: Is that right? What was your day like? Revelry at 600 and drills throughout the day? Can you give me some idea about …

BEARDSLEY: Yeah we had ah, well when you're underway, you're standing watches at 1 in 3 or whatever the plan was. We did have some long battlestations where people used to sleep at their battlestations under those conditions. But if we, like during an attack for three hours, everybody would, three or four hours or whatever it took. But it was a normal day, standing watches, engine room, gun watches, signal lookouts, and so forth. I remember one time when the first Lt., White, was a former police officer in Washington, D.C. He had come in as a Reserve Officer. He decided that it would be a good idea to get some military discipline instilled in this sort of rag tag crew. So he said we'll get some rifles out and we'll drill them on the deck. Well that's all right if you're in port and the decks are dry, but the decks were wet and the ship would be rolling and it was not the thing to do at that time.

AKERS: Not an ideal exercise.

BEARDSLEY: I wouldn't say that we'd drilled. Regular Navy ships that I've been on before and since, it's not uncommon to have battlestations and drills. Fire drill is the most frequent, man over board, whatever. We didn't have as much of that. We were more a non reg in the sense that this is a sharp crew. How long is it going to take you to get to battlestations? We did it but it and tried to keep improving.

AKERS: Less formal.

BEARDSLEY: Much less formal. At times we had tea and toast. We weren't able to get all the fresh food or meat that we might have liked, as a larger ship might, a regular Navy battleship, cruiser, whatever might have. Because the refrigeration wasn't there. In fact, the laundry was an interesting thing. These compartments that were steamed out were pretty rusty. At times our white skivvies became tan. It didn't make any difference; they were clean. I would say that the day was less structured than that a regular man of war fighting ship would be.

AKERS: Okay. What was morale like aboard your vessel?

BEARDSLEY: Morale, it was hard to tell. I think there was, on one hand there was a sense of bravado. We're pretty cocky guys, you know, that kind of thing. There was every right to feel that way I'm sure, existed. And I guess the secrecy element tended in a way to bind the crew together. I don't remember really many problems. Although I understood, (I never looked through all the records,) several of the men aboard had had court marshals earlier. In a word I don't remember the morale being any better any worse than most ships. A percentage of the year I was aboard, from June till September, anyhow, was conversions, so we were in the Boston Harbor. And we did get ashore in Trinidad and Curacao, which were picturesque places. And as you asked earlier, how long were the cruises, three weeks; a month, September till December, two or three months; they weren't that unbearable. And when we did get ashore, there was something to see. As opposed to the Pacific, where I was during the end of the war, where when you get ashore, it was an island with a bunch of bombed out trees and you had a beer party. Whereas in this case, when you get ashore, there was something to see. I think the morale was reasonable, as I remember, no problems, any more unusual than any other ship.

AKERS: What kind of recreational activities were available to you when you were underway?

BEARDSLEY: Well, not too many. We tried something like volleyball, which the wet deck, with the rolling you couldn't do. So I suppose poker games went on in various and sundry places and those who were disposed to exercise. This fellow Bill Wilson (who a navigator) and I used to go up in the flying bridge and practice our semaphore and quiz each other on things, (when we had time,) and get some sun and relaxation.

AKERS: Now you mentioned before that the clothing you wore were the windbreakers

BEARDSLEY: Yeah, whatever a merchant seaman might wear. Plaid windbreaker or whatever (as long as it didn't look like a Navy uniform), and a cap, looked like a baseball type cap or whatever a merchant person might wear aboard ship, while underway.

AKERS: So then you were stocked with both then, because when you went in port, you went in port as a regular Naval vessel.

BEARDSLEY: Right. And as we entered port, the Captain or Exec would issue an order, change identity from merchant ship to Naval vessel.

March 9, 1998

Dr. Suzanne G. Bowles,
Interviewer

BOWLES: This is Suzanne Bowles of the History Department at William Paterson University interviewing Captain Franklin H. Beardsley, Jr, USNR (Retired) on 9 March 1998. This is tape number one. Frank, you already have done a previous interview for the Naval Historical Center on your service on the Q-ship the USS *Big Horn*. That was done in 1990, so I thought we would talk about other aspects of your naval career during the war particularly, okay.

BEARDSLEY: Okay.

BOWLES: One of the things I wanted to ask you, first was about your initial decision to join the Navy. Am I correct that you joined the Navy before the war broke out?

BEARDSLEY: Yes. Certainly Sue. From 1938 when I graduated from college until '41 I was a teacher.

BOWLES: Right.

BEARDSLEY: And did some coaching. It became obvious in 1940, that either I was going to be drafted because I was single or I was going in some military service. So I applied to the Navy and went originally to the Philadelphia Federal Building and signed up for the V-7 program which is where they said the V-7 Reserve midshipmen were one month as an apprentice seaman and three months as a Reserve Midshipmen, and then you got a commission. I went to the *Prairie State.* My reason was that I wanted to go in some military service and I had a preference for the Navy.

BOWLES: Yes.

BEARDSLEY: Good.

BOWLES: So in other words you definitely had a sense that war, well the war was already going on in Europe.

BEARDSLEY: Yea, that's right. So I enrolled in that in 1941--the latter part of 1940 when I first applied and then the end of the school year in '41 I went to *Prairie State* in September of '41 and got my commission as Ensign, USNR in January of '42.

BOWLES: And where was *Prairie State*?

BEARDSLEY: *Prairie State* was former the USS *Illinois,* first a Reserve Training Center in the Hudson River right near Columbia University. In two classes after ours, (which was the fifth class) they moved the facilities to Columbia University where they had better sleeping, classrooms, and berthing accommodations--everything that was needed.

BOWLES: And it was four months. The course was four months?

BEARDSLEY: Yes, one month as Apprentice Seaman, three months as a Reserve Midshipmen. My experience was interesting there in the sense that many of the fellows who were Reservists who had to have at least two years of college, preferably had graduated to get in the V-7 program. Some of the Reserve Midshipmen chaffed under drilling and discipline, drilling, and time to report for this and do that. I said, "Well, you know it doesn't bother some of us because we don't have to worry about what we're going to wear, what we're going to eat, when we're going to do, whatever. We just have to worry about studying the subjects that we're learning, and not all the daily living problems that you have."

BOWLES: Right. So you were still at the school when Pearl Harbor occurred then?

BEARDSLEY: That's right. We were right there.

BOWLES: Everybody has a memory of Pearl Harbor.

BEARDSLEY: Yes. As Reserve Midshipmen we were standing watches. Not all the time of course, but scheduled. The drill deck of the *Prairie State* was adjacent to the West Side Highway. Anyhow the road that went right along the Hudson River. And the Sailors, the Midshipmen and others were on liberty when Pearl Harbor was announced. And a civilian man who was coming back from work, was walking up the road to his car passed the *Prairie State.* The ship, which didn't go anywhere, was just docked there. And he was coming back from work at an early hour in the morning. One of our midshipmen was on watch with a rifle and we had been told about Pearl Harbor so to put on the bayonets. Here this man walking up the road from work with his clothes in a bag and this sentry hollered, "Stop, who's there?" The guy was afraid he would be shot, not knowing all the details nor did we know but, who it was but it was just a crazy incident when the announcement of Pearl Harbor was attacked. When the Pearl Harbor announcement was made, some of us were at the Giants' football game at Yankee Stadium.

BOWLES: Yes, I saw that on a show on Channel 13 just the other day.

BEARDSLEY: Did they?

BOWLES: Yea, for the Polo Grounds.

BEARDSLEY: Right. That's what it was.

BOWLES: For the Polo Grounds. Okay. And what was, after you were commissioned, what was your first assignment?

BEARDSLEY: My first assignment was to communications school in Noroton, Connecticut. I think we had choices to express our wishes and I don't know why but I thought I'd like communications but I did. It was about a six weeks course. All the things a communicator ought to know. One interesting thing I remember from the Boy Scouts. Our Scoutmaster of our troop in Springfield, Pennsylvania, where I grew up, had been a Sailor--a Quartermaster or Signalman. As a Quartermaster in the Navy between wars; he was now a Scoutmaster and this was a few years before the war. Anyhow I learned semaphore and I never forgot it. To this day I can converse with you or anyone in semaphore if you could understand it. But that was just one of the many things we learned including Morse code. But in communications you get to do encoding and decoding of messages.

BOWLES: And where did you go after that?

BEARDSLEY: From there I was assigned to the USS *Massachusetts* (BB 59), which was in about March of 1942, which was a new battleship. In fact, I was onboard at the time of the commissioning. I'm trying to think who the Secretary of the Navy was at the time, but he commissioned the ship. The *Massachusetts* is now located at Fall River and now is a Museum. They have reunions each year. The only distinction I have about serving aboard the USS *Massachusetts* is that I probably had less service than probably anyone aboard her from March to June of '42. In June of '42 I decoded my own orders to go on the USS *Big Horn.*

BOWLES: Right.

BEARDSLEY: So I was on the *Massachusetts* for three months or so. She was not underway yet. She was at South Boston and later went to Casco Bay for shakedown. While I was on the *Big Horn* for shakedown, she was in there at the same time so I went aboard and visited a few old friends.

BOWLES: Okay. So then you went, you did your service on the *Big Horn*.

BEARDSLEY: Yea. That was from June of '42 to July of '43. And then in July of '43 I applied for and was accepted for the Sub Chaser Training Center School in Miami. SCTC it was known as. I went through that for a few months. Sub Chasers were then referred to as the "Donald Duck Navy." PCs and SCs were generally the ones referred to as sub chasers. A PC is roughly 175 feet long about a 23 feet beam. It's like a "junior" destroyer only not as fast or as powerful as a destroyer. It's probably half the size of a destroyer but slim and its major function was anti-submarine warfare. When I finished SCTC I was assigned to the PC 1140 as PCO (Prospective Commanding Officer.)

BOWLES: Eleven forty.

BEARDSLEY: Eleven forty, PC 1140, USS PC 1140. That PC [patrol craft] was built in Bay City, Michigan. So I had, as I told you, I had been commissioned in January '42, married in February '42 to Amy. This past month ago served our 56th wedding anniversary.

BOWLES: Congratulations.

BEARDSLEY: Thank you. I first went to New Orleans--Algiers across the river from New Orleans. It's where the Navy had a base. I reported there and then I reported to the builder's yard. The Prospective Commanding Officer, the Chief Engineer and three or four enlisted men, engineers and others went to the builder's yard to get acquainted with the ship in it's final stages. So Amy came out to Bay City and stayed for a while, while we were there and then I rode the ship around to Chicago. She went by train and then flew down to New Orleans and met me there. And I didn't ride the ship all the way down. In fact, that during the war the Navy commissioned certain river pilots so that they could officially have charge of towing new Navy ships down the Mississippi River. There might be two PCs alongside of a barge or whatever, the tug boats and so forth, so they brought them from Chicago down to New Orleans. Meanwhile, the crew was assembling there for precommissioning training and had training programs and assignments. We then commissioned it at New Orleans. After commissioning, we went from one place to another in New Orleans. One interesting…

BOWLES: Excuse me, how many crew would be on a ship like this?

BEARDSLEY: Seventy-five enlisted men and five officers. At New Orleans during the pre-commissioning and after commissioning we went from one dock to another dock to get fuel, to get degaussed, (anti-magnetic gear). It was a quite tight schedule for a couple of days. You just had to get a pilot to move in the river which makes a lot of sense because unless you know the Mississippi River well the currents will sweep you all over the place. But anyhow, this one time we were delayed. The pilot came aboard. I went to meet him and he was totally drunk. So I said to him, "Come down to the Wardroom." We gave him some coffee and I went to the dock and called the operations officer and I said that our pilot isn't feeling well so we won't be able to hold up our schedule unless you, in order to meet our schedule, send us another pilot. And he said, "What's his problem?" I said, "I'm not really sure." He's not feeling well. I didn't want to get him and myself delayed by a court-martial or hearing or a suit or a problem that he had encountered. So we put him in a cab and sent him home and waited for the next pilot who was there in a couple hours. I did learn that the Mississippi River at New Orleans is quite tricky because in a couple of years I got another ship, the PCE-R 858, which I'll get to shortly. The same routine as the PC: but that was built nearer to Chicago by the Pullman Car Company (that makes railroad cars). We came down to New Orleans and I said to the pilot of the second ship, I said, "I had experience with this river before. I've been on board when we went the rounds. Can I take her from one point to another point?" I said, "Stay on the bridge." He said, "Okay, but I'm responsible", which he really was but that's beside the point. And I got into the current and I said, "You take it. I'm not going to fool with this." It just was very tricky. But back to the PC 1140. We went from New Orleans around to Miami for shakedown of a couple of weeks. Then

we got assigned to Key West and we operated with convoys. We escorted convoys along with other sub chasers, that is PCs and/or SCs from Key West to Galveston and back. Then convoys from Key West to Guantanamo and back. Basically that was our routine.

BOWLES: Were there a lot of German subs in that area?

BEARDSLEY: Not right in that area but there were enough that nobody knew how many there were and precisely where they were.

BOWLES: Yes, and they were mainly attacking convoys or merchant ships.

BEARDSLEY: Merchant ships and convoy, yes?

BOWLES: **Merchant ships and sometimes Navy ships.**

BEARDSLEY: Independently operated merchant ships or in convoys. I would suspect that most of them were farther north, although there were a lot and some in the Caribbean. In Key West there wasn't much by way of anything ashore for the crew, or crews of any ship to enjoy. So they would send sub chasers like ours or other ships there to Miami for some liberty. It is only an overnight trip. Our turn came and I went to the Key West operations officer and said, "The hurricane warnings are up. Do you want us to go?" He said, "Well I can't change it." So I said, "We'll go but we'll probably spend time in the repair yard," which is what happened--(three weeks in the yard getting patched up.) We hit a hurricane and the force of the hurricane was coming from seaward so we couldn't get out into the open sea. We were close to the shore but we didn't want to get too close because it's very shallow along the Keys. The bow would go up, come down and hit the water like cement and then the stern would come up with the propellers out of the water and vibrate like everything. The screws would just be out in the open and I'm glad we made it. I'm glad that I'm sitting here telling you about this because it was a hairy experience.

BOWLES: I bet.

BEARDSLEY: Lifelines are connected to stanchions along the sides of the ship with a cable type thing and they're about that big. The hurricane bent those stanchions 90 degrees. To do so without that wind it would take a blowtorch. It blew overboard the mousetraps that held the rocket throwers up on the forecastle. We had lashed them down with a big wing nut and lines. It just took them like a piece of paper and tossed them overboard. One of the biggest worries a Sailor has is the weather, which he can't control. He can get away from it or adjust to it, but he can't change it.

BOWLES: You were a Lieutenant at this time?

BEARDSLEY: No, I was a JG.

BOWLES: Okay. So they were putting very young officers in charge of these.

BEARDSLEY: Yes, that's right. Including reservists. But the biggest problem I had on the *Big Horn*, I had not had a great deal of ship handling experience. I didn't grow up as a Sailor. I didn't have boats of my own. I had sailed in small sailboats and rowboats and so forth but I was not a yachtsman or another kind of officer who made a good ship handler like a seaman or a fisherman.

BOWLES: Yea.

BEARDSLEY: Somebody who had been in fishing boats and who's adjusted to the sea and maneuvered the boat. But I was not either one of those so I just had to learn the hard way.

BOWLES: Did you ever actually get in any action?

BEARDSLEY: Yes, later on we did. I don't recall any sinkings. There were threats and warnings. From Key West based after a few, three or four months, we went to the Med. We left from Bermuda so we went the South Atlantic or Mid-Atlantic, not the North Atlantic route. And it was a huge convoy with transports, cargo ships, and around the front of it was the escort commander, the Coast Guard cutter *Campbell* with either twelve destroyers or DEs around the forward half and there were thirteen of us PCs screening the after half of the convoy.

My ship was dead astern. We were out in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean on the way to Mediterranean and we get a voice message to go pick up a man overboard. I said, "You got to be kidding. This isn't the Passaic River, this is the Atlantic Ocean." I didn't say that. But the point was that it was a difficult job to find him. I said, "Give us his last known position." So we zig-zagged for a couple of days, finally found the guy. He had a life jacket on. It was warm weather--not like in the North Atlantic or he'd have been dead in two minutes. We picked him up. In the meantime, we're getting all these voice messages. We thought he was a psychotic merchant sailor and we knew he was off a merchant ship. So, I said, "I had Psych 101 and 102 but I'm not a shrink, but he's not going to give us any trouble because we're not going to let him." So we finally caught up with the ship that they designated which had a doctor onboard--an APA. The APA was way up high like this and our height above water, we're down much lower. The only way we could get him from there up to the point where he would get on the APA was over a 45 degree angle was in a Breeches Buoy.

BOWLES: Right.

BEARDSLEY: And he looked at it and said, "I'm not getting in that damn thing." I had a 45 revolver on but he didn't know it wasn't loaded. I said, "Get in there or I'll shoot you. We're supposed to be screening for submarines out here not talking to you." So he got in and I didn't

blame him one bit for not wanting to. The thing swayed back and forth and he finally made it. So we got a well done for even finding him. It was 99.9+ percent luck.

We got to the Med, went through the pass at Gibraltar. The first stop was Bizerte and it was interesting maneuvering into the harbor because there were sunken ships showing above the surface. You saw the mast sticking up and you had to estimate how big that ship and what position it was in so that you didn't go over it and crack your hull. We just stopped in Bizerte for a while and then went from there to Palermo, Sicily and operated out of Palermo for several months making back and forth escort runs to Naples and North African ports.

One interesting thing about Sicily at that time, a lot of the local people were seriously hungry. I understood both there and in Italy this was in part due to the fact that the Germans had mined a lot of fields where they grew food.

BOWLES: Yeah, I had heard that.

BEARDSLEY: It wouldn't take but one or two people to get their legs blown off or get killed which certainly would account for not going into that field. In total this meant that there was a lot less food available. When we docked in Palermo, Sicily, we put our garbage over in GI cans on the dock. There would be grown men coming around filtering through the garbage to get something to eat for themselves and their families. So the C.O. of the base did a very wise thing. He said, "You fellows," to all these ships that were operating in and out of Palermo, "have a certain amount of food that's edible. If it's not thrown in the garbage can, we'll send sterilized GI cans around once a day and have a soup kitchen for these people." This worked out very well.

Meantime we operated from Palermo to Algiers and back with occasional submarine warnings, contacts, dropping a few depth charges, but no major conflicts, if you will, such as the ones we had on the *Big Horn*. Then we operated on the West Coast of Italy going to and operating out of Naples. There we prepared for what was later the invasion of Southern France, which we took part in.

BOWLES: Oh really.

BEARDSLEY: Yea. One interesting thing. We operated up and down the coast and when a convoy went between the mainland at the town of Piombino and the Island of Elba, which you may remember from Napoleon's experience.

BOWLES: Sure.

BEARDSLEY: This pass was not too wide, maybe ten miles. So some of the Italians who are still favoring Mussolini, and the Germans would come through the strait there and get into the Port of Piombino, sometimes wearing a big thick leather belt towing a bomb of a variety of sizes and attached those to our transports or troop ships. So during the day our Navy had a destroyer

sitting out in the middle of this strait controlling passage. At night they sent two of us PCs up to patrol back and forth. Our senior said, "We want you to drop depth charges to dissuade them from coming through." Which we did. "But don't do them at regular intervals because they're smart enough to realize we'd do it on the clock at twelve o'clock, twelve-thirty, one o'clock," etc.--when not to go. One thing they didn't remember to tell us was we had to communicate. Our two PCs had to communicate with each other so that when we dropped the depth charge the other PC was not going over my depth charge or vice versa. So I remember the first one I said to the men on the stern, "Roll one," which means let the depth charge go. They said, "Captain we're not even at general quarters," I said, "Don't give me a hard time right now. Just roll the thing and I'll tell you why later." Because if I had waited longer it would have been too late for the other PC, he could have come over it and be damaged. Anyhow it was an interesting experience.

So we did go to the Southern France invasion. We were a station vessel, which meant that the waves of landing craft, mostly LCVPs going into the shore, needed some direction as to when to start their runs to the beach. They got off their APAs and circled to wait for directions. Then the beach master from the shore who would communicate with us by signals, light signals usually, and say, "Okay. Send in Wave One (or whatever Wave it might be). We would then dispatch that wave from about a mile offshore, and the officer in charge would take his wave in and later Wave Two would go in. So there were a variety of interesting. Experiences. In any convoy proceeding to the invasion, the minesweepers would go first. Off the West Coast of Italy, what the Nazis had done with any old mines that they were done with or couldn't use, they'd just throw them in the water. The current brought them right down where our ships had to go up to go to Southern France. So the minesweepers were extremely busy. So they would say to us when we were the next element, right after the minesweepers: "If you see any floating mines explode them" which meant with gunfire of course. We encountered floating mines on the way to Southern France and had a heck of a time hitting one of them because I didn't want to get to close to it. The force of an exploding mine is mostly vertical. The explosion means you have to be pretty well nearly over it to get blown apart but you'll get schrapnel coming from pieces. So we first tried our 40 millimeter. Our PC's biggest gun was a 3"50. We had one of those and one 40 millimeter and two or four 20 millimeter gus. So we tried to hit it with a 40 millimeter. A three-inch which had a longer range than the others, but we couldn't get it. We tried the 40 millimeter, but couldn't get it. So we finally got close enough with a 20 millimeter and exploded it. Mines were one of the problems in invasions.

BOWLES: So your duty was called "station ship."

BEARDSLEY: When our PC got to the invasion sight, we were roughly a mile off shore where the invasion waves were assembling, being disembarked from their transports and were then directed to shore by the "Station Vessel" (PCs). The PCs also did escort duty, sometimes minesweeping, and special assignments. One time we were going from Naples to Algiers and back to Toulon when Southern France was secure enough to go into.

We were going to Toulon one time and escorting, leading four or five merchant ships into the harbor. I was concerned as to whether or not they knew what to do. We signaled column movements or turn movements. Making a column movement, you follow the guy ahead of you. A turn movement means that all ships turn at once. I signaled, "This will be a column operation and not a turn so you follow the ship ahead of you and turn in his wake." One of them didn't get the message and he turned too soon and went into a minefield. So our PC had to get the first merchant ship to lead the others into the harbor and we went back and talked him to back out and helped him to back out the same "path" he had gone in—to avoid mines—which he did.

BOWLES: Oh, quite varied duty for that type of ship.

BEARDSLEY: Yes. We were in Marseille, Toulon, and we got into Corsica at one point. We had a man onboard who was a very fine ship-fitter. He could fix almost anything except the electronic gear, the radar and the sonar. His name was Flint, who had been on a carrier earlier in the war and got transferred to us. We could use all the experienced hands we could get.

But one time at Marseilles, we needed some parts, we often ran out of spare parts. A small ship you just need them and you can't stop every time to get what you need. Flint was going ashore with a working party of five or ten men. I said, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm going to pick up some spare parts." I said, "Great. Get all you can get." I said, "Where are you going to get them?" He said, "See that warehouse down there?" It was a French warehouse I said, "Well good luck." I went on to my meeting and came back. Here's Flint sitting there discouraged. I said, "What happened?" He said, All the stuff that we could have used was in centimeters or millimeters, not in inches or feet." It wasn't our type of equipment stored in there, it was their equipment. But he tried.

I was transferred from the PC after about a year and the Exec took over command, Dean Baker, a real nice guy. I left it at, I think it was Piombino up near Pisa, the Leaning Tower, I had three ways to get home. One was to take another ship back down to Naples.

BOWLES: Excuse me, had you been reassigned?

BEARDSLEY: Yes. I was given orders to go back to the States by whatever transportation I could get. I forgot the wording of it. But anyhow I had three ways to get back to Naples--to get a another ship, the Italian train, or to hitchhike. I caught a ride on a South African flier from Peombino to Florence then with three soldiers in their jeep to Rome from Florence. Then another ride to Naples. Then a flight from Naples to Boston, via the Azores. It was quite an experience because coming into the Azores the airfield was in the crotch of a mountain, a valley. The end of the runaway as you approach this valley was a cliff so that the pilot had to be right on. There were passengers aboard the plane from the CBI, European Theater, mostly injured fellows. The pilot made three passes to get on this field before he made it. One time the wind blew him to the right, then the other time the left. I said, "Well I hope he makes it." He did on the third pass.

We came home from the Azores and then I took some more ASW training. One thing they had during the war that was very good was what they called "Attack Teachers." At various ports, bases where there were Naval facilities, were rooms which were a mock up of the bridge with the sonar gear, with a big plotting board. And a "mock up" of a submarine and your ship. You had the helmsman's annunciator so call for could say "one-third ahead speed," i.e. the same orders you would give on a bridge of a ship. Then you would get a sonar contact and the officer operating the gear, would vary the submarine's course and speed. The student had to do exactly what you would do just as if you had a submarine contact. One of the most important things I found is relative speed. In other words, like in football, if you're going to throw a guy a pass and he's running at a 90 degree angle when you throw it, you lead him. If he's running dead down you lead him that way, but you don't lead him to the right or left. The same principle applies in attacking a submarine. After I came home I was ordered to Thompkinsville in Staten Island for additional ASW training. Then I received orders to the PCE-R, which is the "Patrol Craft Escort Rescue," which was about 180 feet, little bit longer than a PC but a wider beam. More like a corvette which the British had a lot of.

BOWLES: Right.

BEARDSLEY: Also basically PCE-R's did escort duty of convoys or individual ships but the "R" stood for rescue. There were something like 30 or 40, maybe 50 additional berths for rescued people. They put a superstructure from amidships aft was erected. It was a little bit difficult to handle when you maneuvered it for picking up survivors or injured people from small boats or whatever way you got them. If another ship that was hit which needed somebody picked up, you would be escorting them but at the same time you could go pick up the wounded and take them to a hospital ship, to a base or wherever. So we had a doctor assigned to us for attending to injured survivors.

BOWLES: Well did that ship have a number?

BEARDSLEY: Yes, PCE-R 858. It was built at Pullman Car Company near Chicago. And the same similar routine that I followed involved going to the builder's yard with the Engineering Officer--only a different builder's yard--and then the Navy having their river pilot bring the ship down to New Orleans. Then we went on to Miami for shakedown and then through the Canal to the Pacific with the PCE-R.

Interesting experience in going to the Pacific was that we encountered the build up for what would have been the invasion of Japan. The war was almost over by the time that occurred in '45. We went from Norfolk to Key West, to the Atlantic side of the Canal. In port, each ship had to assign so many officers and men (depending on your size and your compliment) for shore patrol duty. Our engineering officer, Lee Wright, "drew the straw" for shore patrol duty with three or four men because we weren't that big. We had a complement of a hundred men and ten officers. Lee Wright drew the shore patrol officer job from our ship along with three or four men. While we were in port he came back on board for dinner and I said, "Lee, didn't you know that

the Shore Patrol Officer with the arm band could eat in any restaurant in the city, free of charge?" He said, "Frank, I'm back here for dinner," (even though our food was not super by any means.) He said, "Don't worry about that. I wouldn't eat in that town if you paid me to." But these are the little tidbits you remember.

So we went through the Canal and because of the traffic was heavy going to the build up of what would have been the invasion of Japan. The operations people there said, "Go to Gatun Lake then go through the Locks. Follow the destroyer. We haven't got enough pilots to give you a pilot until you get to Gatun Lake. So get yourself into the Locks which is, if you haven't done it before is a little tricky. Then proceed to Gatun Lake which is a fresh water lake." Which we did. We anchored and the pilot picked us up there later and took us the rest of the way through. However as we were waiting for the pilot, the crew said, "Can we go in swimming? It's fresh water." We were hosing the ship down to get rid of the salt whatever way you can. So I said, "Sure." About half of them went swimming. We divided port and starboard watches to divide them in half. The pilot came aboard and I met him at the brow and he said, "You're not letting these men go in swimming are you?" I said, "They're in the water. There they are." He said, "Did you know there are crocodiles in this lake?" I said, "No. If I did I wouldn't have let them go in. Get them out--Blow the whistle, hoist the flag." (There's a routine for getting them back aboard.) Later on in the bridge I said to the pilot, "I saw a twinkle in your eye when you said," "There are crocodiles." He said, "You are about a mile or two off shore. If you'd been a quarter of a mile or less in, the shallower water there are crocodiles." He said the reason he said it was you and I were standing talking, and behind you was our steward mates who served meals. He was in his shorts ready to run for the side to swim and he was eavesdropping and he overheard me (the Pilot) say "crocodile," like a Mac Sennet comedy, he backed up.

We proceeded through the Canal, which was quite an interesting experience because I had never visualized it except for the locks. Between each of the three sets of locks, its like a river, but the jungle is so thick in spots that, and there are turns which are virtually 90 degree. You could be coming around a turn with, not be able to see a ship coming toward you through the jungles. You have to use a lot of whistle signals so you don't go cracking into somebody. So it was an interesting experience. So we finally got to Balboa on the Pacific side and the pilot's boat picked him up. He said, "Good luck. I hope you find Hawaii," which we did. By the time we got to Hawaii and got anchored at Pearl Harbor, the war was over. So we were in Pearl Harbor at the time the war ended.

First, there were a couple of days before the end of the war where all ships were cautioned since the Japanese surrender had not yet been confirmed so don't let your guard down because we're not sure. But in a couple days it was. There was a big party at the Ford Island Officer's Club. I swear there must have been 500 guys there and Red Nickols Band. Everybody was drinking like crazy. I was sitting there and here across from me is a guy that I had gone to *Prairie State* with, in the same company, same platoon, Tom Campion. He was one of the few C's in our particular "A's" and "B's" platoon. He had been a Penn State football player and a teacher somewhere in Pennsylvania. Anyhow I said, "Tom how have you been and where have

you been from January ’42 to August “45?” He said, “Come here a minute Frank.” So he said, “Look out. See that carrier?” He said, “I fly off that.” I said, “Gee, that’s great.” After some more drinking and some more socializing and celebrating the war’s end. Tom said, “Frank, you’re coming out with me tomorrow on my plane. I’ve got room. I’ve got a two seater fighter and my buddy is sick.” I said, “I won’t do you any good. I can’t fly a plane. You know I can learn little things but not in time to do it tomorrow morning.” He said, “Don’t worry about it. I’ll take care of it.” So I said, “You’re crazy. You can hardly stand up. It doesn’t matter about me, I’m not going to fly it.” What they do after drinking is that they go down to the plane before they take off, they put the oxygen on and in about 20 minutes you’re sober. You get an awful hangover but you’re sober. So we did that. He said as we prepared to take off: “Now push your head back against that leather pad behind your head and we’ll take off.” So we go off the end of the carrier and the plane goes down before it comes up.

BOWLES: What type of a plane was this?

BEARDSLEY: Fighter plane, two seater job. I forget the designation. I’m hollering at him, “Tom get it up!”, He said, “It’ll come up Frank.” So we flew around and we finally came back down. We hit the arresting gear, the cables that slow the plane down. And he said, “Push your head back again.” So I did. We finally got out of the plane and I said, “Tom come here a minute. See that little ship over there. That’s mine. You’re coming out with me tomorrow.” He said, “I wouldn’t come out on one of those damn things. It’s too dangerous.” I said, “Compared to what you do.” What he didn’t want to do, he didn’t want to get seasick. I said, Well I can’t guarantee you won’t get seasick.” Anyhow our PCE-R proceeded from Pearl Harbor to Saipan where I received my orders to come home, having enough points to be discharged.

BOWLES: How did they do that? In terms of how many years you had already served.

BEARDSLEY: How many years you served, how many years at sea, or combat zones, or whatever. I’ve forgotten exactly how they calculated the points.

BOWLES: So in other words they had a priority system.

BEARDSLEY: Yeah, the guy in Service longest with the quote “seemingly the most dangerous whether it was or not,” didn’t matter.

Anyhow, the Exec took over the PCE-R at Saipan. We were there maybe a week. Problem they were having in Saipan was that the war was over but the Japanese were hidden in caves. So the best way our Marines could get them out of the caves was with flame-throwers. Anyhow, I caught a ride to the States, and *PCE-R 858* proceeded on to Japan and they put minesweeping gear on her because as, even with the war over, as ships were going into the various bays, particularly the biggest one near Tokyo they needed the mines swept. Even though the war was over, that wouldn’t stop mines from exploding. That’s what the ship did after I left her.

I caught a ride on a civilian tanker, the *Val Verde*, which was going back home. All the merchant captain wanted to do with this tedious, long trip was to play penny ante poker and eat and sleep. We had about four or five Navy officers and about ten enlisted men going back on this tanker. We got to Balboa, the Pacific side of the Canal and anchored. In the meantime for a couple of days, ships of our Navy, (mostly carriers or cruisers) were going by to go through the Canal and get home for Navy Day. Finally, as the senior guy onboard, (I was then by that time a Lieutenant) I said, "These 10 or 15 Navy guys, they're on my back. They want to get home. They've been gone for longer than I've been gone for." I said to the tanker captain, "How about that small boat. Can we use your small boat?" He said, "Yea, but it's not working." "Don't worry about it. We got a couple of guys that can fix it I'm sure." So they fixed it. We got in two or three, four Sailors and myself got in this boat to take it ashore to find out what we could do to get off this tanker, sitting there waiting to enter the canal. What happened was--well anyhow, half way into the dock, the engine broke down, so we rowed in the rest of the way. The fellows on the docks said we looked like we rowed in all the way from the Pacific. Once on the dock, I called the operations officer and I told him our problem. He said, "You're tanker is suppose to come into dry-dock." I said, "I know that, but the reason the tanker captain doesn't want to come into dry-dock is because his merchant sailors left New York a year ago to go to take planes from the States to England when the war was still on a year before. His tanker was supposed to come right back to New York. Instead they got rid of the planes he had onboard, got his tanker fueled and was sent through the Suez Canal. He spent a year with our Fleet that was not even suppose to happen. Here all his merchantmen on board expected to be gone that three or four weeks to England and back. So they ended up in the Pacific for a year. If they had gone ashore, assuming the tanker came into the Canal to have it in dry-dock, they would "jump ship" and go home." So I said, "That's your problem, not ours." We Navy men finally got ashore. We stayed a night or two in various places on the base and some of us finally got a ride on an old four stack destroyer which was being brought from the West Coast to East Coast to be scrapped. As we were going through the Canal to the Atlantic side, the destroyer had trouble with it's boilers and they said, "We're going to go in Guantanamo to get them fixed." I said, "Three or four years ago I used to go in and out of Guantanamo."

We finally got to Philadelphia. I called my wife Amy who was in Wilmington, Delaware. She said, "What train will you be on?" I said, "That's a fine hero's welcome, what train will I be on, like I'm coming home from work." Meantime this whole six weeks of getting from Saipan to Philadelphia, I had grown this silly looking handle bar mustache and I knew I'd get some reaction from her about it. But anyhow what I didn't expect was Barry our son who was then three years old came running down the train station platform in Wilmington to meet me. He looked at me, he didn't recognize me with this silly mustache and he ran back to his mother crying. She said, "I don't know whether you look more like an international jewel thief or a banana vendor with that mustache." It came off.

BOWLES: It's coming off.

BEARDSLEY: So it came off that night. Anyhow then I didn't decide whether or not I was going to go back to teaching. I had started on my graduate work, finished quite a bit at Penn while I was teaching for three years. Whether I want to go back to that or what I wanted to do. So in the course of initial effort to get discharged in Philadelphia I extended my service to take a billet at Philadelphia Naval Hospital. from December of '45 until March or so of '46. I was not a patient although they said, "You have lost much too much weight on these small ships." I was so thin at which I can't believe myself now.

BOWLES: So when were you finally discharged?

BEARDSLEY: Well I was finally discharged in April of '46. In other words I spent from December until April at the Philadelphia Naval Hospital as Welfare and Recreation Officer. And this included coaching basketball and I'll tell you why I mentioned that and then doing other things.

One of the interesting and sad experiences I had there: The Exec, the officers other than myself and a few others, were doctors. The Exec who was a doctor called me in one day and he said there was a patient in here, a Marine Corporal who has not been out of this hospital in two years. And he wants to get out and see some of the outside. The Exec said, "He likes classical music. Could you arrange to get him to the Academy Music in Philadelphia to see and enjoy something?" I said, "Sure." I went up to the deck where he was, Corporal Duprava, I said, "Corporal Duprava?" The minute I did it was wrong. He was a quadruple amputee, no arms, no legs, very embarrassing. He said, "Don't worry about it." The problem - how to get him there and how to arrange his seating. So we got a big former pro football player who was a physical therapist, and a female nurse. They took him in a station wagon and sat on either side of him at the Academy so he wouldn't topple over or wouldn't be embarrassed. That was an interesting experience at the hospital. As basketball coach, I went out for the first practice, not that I was that good in basketball but they needed somebody to help with them. The two managers, one was a Sailor, one was a Marine who were not players, were arguing on the floor. The team guys were shooting baskets getting ready to practice. My first day there and they got into an argument calling each other names. Finally one hauled off and kicked the other in the shins. Wow, I could feel it. It turned out that they both were amputees kicking each other in their artificial limbs and not feeling it! This for my benefit.

I joined the insurance company North America. They needed people who had been teachers and I said to them that, "I know nothing about fire and casualty insurance." And they said, "That's all right. We have a six months course which you take and then you teach it," which I did.

BOWLES: So that was why they wanted teachers.

BEARDSLEY: That's right. They wanted somebody who could teach. They could give them the subject knowledge in reasonably short order I guess. So I did that for two and a fraction years and then recruited at colleges for another four years and taught part time back in Philadelphia.

BOWLES: So you stayed in the Reserves.

BEARDSLEY: I stayed in the Reserves for another 18 years plus, so that was a total of 23 years service. When I came off of active duty I was a Lieutenant Commander. so I made Commander and Captain while I was in the Reserve. I had two Reserve commands, one was as Director (C.O.) of Naval Reserve Officers School, NROS in Elizabeth, New Jersey. One before that while I was still in Philadelphia, of a Surface Division in Philadelphia at the Philadelphia Naval Base. These were mostly, the Surface Division, compromised of about 200 men and they took courses and training. Most of those men were Penn, Temple, Drexel students who were trying to stay out of the Army draft and get in the Navy. This was after the end of the war. Then I had various assignments during the 18 years onboard ships, different kinds of ships, destroyer escorts and other types. One interesting experience was taking two of them to the Bay of Fundy to St. Johns, which has a 35 foot change of tide. You probably heard of that. Another on the *Botetort*, which was a transport. Also I was back to Key West a couple of times for updated anti-submarine warfare training. Key West had then grown into quite a city by then. The Naval War College for a weeks course, assorted shore and ship duty.
BOWLES: I think we've covered it Frank.

BEARDSLEY: Good, is that it?

BOWLES: That's it…thanks a lot.