Introduction

It can be argued that on the technology evolution scale, the surface warfare ships of World War II were closer to ships of sail than to the ships of today's U.S. Navy. While the introduction of mechanical propulsion systems, steel hulls, breech-loading guns represent marvelous technical achievements, ships of the Second World War still operated as individual fighting units capable only of combating air and surface targets within a line-of-sight.

With the introduction of computers and guided-missiles, surface warfare changed radically. With ships linked electronically together, composite warfare commanders could fight air, surface, and submarine threats effectively using the all of the ships within the battle group. Helicopters and long-range surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missiles enable today's combatants to engage targets well beyond the line-of-sight.

Captain Robert J. Coontz played a role in that change. As a spotter flying in a helicopter embarked on USS *Missouri* (BB 63), Coontz successfully guided incoming rounds beyond the line-of-sight of the famous battleship. Later, he became a member of the "Fabulous Forty," a group of hand-picked officers who were trained as computer programmers to enable the introduction of the Naval Tactical Data System into the fleet. Later he joined the USS *Chicago* (CG 11) which was converted to embark both NTDS and WDS-1, the guidance system for *Chicago*'s new main battery, comprising only guided missiles. This was the first U.S. Navy application of interacting digital command and control systems afloat, capable of wireless computer-to-computer interchange of target information. Using computer and missile technologies, Coontz witnessed the destruction of an air target some 110 miles away. In later positions, Coontz managed and advised on the acquisition of administrative and command and control systems that were precursors to today's internet.

The Naval Historical Foundation (NHF) thanks Commander David Steigman for serving as a co-interviewer. The NHF appreciates the efforts of Ethel Geary and John Maloney to transcribe and make editing changes to the transcript. Finally, the NHF once again thanks Captain Coontz for participating in the interview and smoothing the transcript.

David F. Winkler, Ph.D.
November 2000

Captain Robert Joseph Coontz, USN (Retired)

The son and grandson of career naval officers, Robert J. Coontz enlisted in the Naval Reserve in 1944, and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in June 1949. As an Ensign, his first assignment was in USS *Missouri* (BB 63), where he served in the Gunnery and Operations Departments. Trained as an airborne spotter for naval gunfire, Ensign Coontz flew 16 combat missions over Korea in the *Missouri*'s helicopter, spotting for the battleship's primary and secondary batteries, the first use of helicopters in this mission. After being trained as an Air Controller at U.S. Navy CIC School, Glenview, IL, LTJG Coontz reported in March 1952 to USS *Charles S. Sperry* (DD 697) as Operations Officer. Following deployments to SIXTH Fleet and Northern Europe, LT Coontz was ordered to command USS *PCE 870*, operating out of U.S. Naval Station, New Orleans, LA. Upon decommissioning of *PCE 870* in June 1955, LT Coontz reported to U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, and thence to duty as Instructor in Electronics at the U.S. Naval Academy. In May 1958, he reported as Executive Officer, USS *Sellstrom* (DER 255) based in Newport, RI, assigned to the then extant Atlantic Barrier. In January 1960, LT Coontz reported to the U.S. Navy Electronics Laboratory, San Diego, CA, as one of the "Fabulous Forty" officers trained as programmers for the Naval Tactical Data System (NTDS), which was then in its Engineering Development phase. This cadre of officers went on to establish Fleet Computer Programming Center, PACIFIC, at that time the source of NTDS computer programs.

In November 1963, LCDR Coontz reported as CIC Officer, USS *Chicago* (CG 11), then undergoing refurbishment at Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard, San Francisco, CA. After a successful tour, in May 1965, CDR Coontz reported as Executive Officer USS *Halsey* (DLG 23), then operating off Vietnam. In June 1966, CDR Coontz took command of the USS *Wedderburn* (DD 684), in San Diego, CA. Following a Vietnam deployment, CDR Coontz reported in October 1968 for duty in the office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OpNav), as Research and Development Project Monitor for "Flag" Command and Control Systems. In August 1971, CAPT Coontz was ordered to his final tour of sea duty as Operations Officer on the Staff of Commander Cruiser Destroyer Flotilla EIGHT. In July 1973, after an 11 month deployment to SIXTH Fleet, CAPT Coontz was again ordered to OpNav as Head of the Plans and Policy Branch of the Management Information Systems Division. In September 1977, CAPT Coontz reported to the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as Assistant for Automation, an adjunct to the Office of the Director, Joint Staff. In May 1979, CAPT Coontz retired from this billet, and from the U.S. Navy, with 35 years honorable naval service.

After retirement, CAPT Coontz was employed for several years as a Systems Analyst and Technical Writer/Editor for consulting companies in the Northern Virginia area. He then worked in the U.S. Army Education Centers at Fort Belvoir and Fort Myer. He now enjoys full retirement. CAPT Coontz has been awarded the Defense Superior Service Medal and the Air Medal, and is entitled to wear various ribbons for service in World War II, post-war occupation service in Europe, and service in Korea and Vietnam. He is married to the former Patricia Irene Patrick of Columbia, MS. They have three children, all of whom are married, and one grand-child.

Subjects Covered

1 October 1998

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Led to loyalty suspicions--Assignment to 13th Naval District
Selection process to CNO

Discussion of his father's entry to USNA--Subsequent passing away
His birth at Alexandria Hospital --Mother from Bristol, Virginia
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Drafted and then appointed to attend USNA
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Chief of Staff CAPT Gene Merrill--Native American
Embarked on *John F. Kennedy*--VIP visitors--Med visits--Soviet Navy

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95% tedious--5% glory
Witness to technological change

1 October 1998

STEIGMAN: Wednesday, October 1, 1998, interview for the Naval Historical Foundation with Captain, your name please, Sir?

COONTZ: Robert Coontz, middle name Joseph.

STEIGMAN: Captain Coontz, you came from a rather glorious naval family, did you not?

COONTZ: Apparently the record supports that. I only remember my grandfather very faintly; I have a very brief memory of him. I was nine years old when he died; I don't remember my father at all. He died when I was about nine months old. But he had some adventures, too. Usually the people who remember Grandfather are able to contribute some anecdotes about him that our family preserves, that have not been recorded elsewhere.

STEIGMAN: Why not tell one or two of the more interesting anecdotes about your grandfather when he was Chief of Naval Operations.

COONTZ: Yes, he was the second Chief; and I'll relate two anecdotes that are relevant to his becoming Chief of Naval Operations. Let's focus on 1911 when he was Commandant of Midshipmen.

They organized the midshipmen cruises differently in those days from how they do it now. He apparently was the Senior Officer Present Afloat in the Midshipmen's Practice Squadron in 1911. Now, I'll make this remark because it has not been generally known. If it had been recorded before, I would probably not be telling you, because it's hard to believe. I have material to back this up in Grandfather's autobiography.

Briefly, they went to Kiel, Germany. It happened that the Kaiser was there, and there was a lot of to-do about the naval reviews that were being held there. Apparently, the Kaiser hadn't planned to be there originally, but he showed up and, on short notice, everybody had to make a lot of plans to accommodate his presence. Now it just happens that the name Coontz is of German origin. A couple of summers ago, I had the opportunity to go to Germany when my daughter was over there with her husband; and they took me around the places where the Coontzes came from. It's quite a common name there. They don't spell it the way I do, with C's and double oo's. They use K's and U's and umlauts I think; but I'm not sure. Be that as it may, it's quite a common name. So when my grandfather showed up as the senior American officer in Keil, the Kaiser was informed that he was of German descent; and although his lineage was nowhere near as magnificent as the Kaiser's was, it seemed that Kaiser Wilhelm took a fancy to

Grandfather, and insisted on having him at his side to show that here was a son of Germany, whose ancestors had gone to America and made good; and who had now returned to his family's place of origin as a respectable, high-ranking officer. So the Kaiser wanted to have Grandfather with him, to show him off. They had their social schedules rearranged; and Grandfather got along quite well with the Kaiser.

He was able to get along well with most people. I think the record shows that he was known more as a "politician" then as a magnificent tactician. In fact, his nickname as a midshipman was "Senator" because of his ability to speak well in public. He was supposed to have been a good debater at the Naval Academy.

So, that was the first incident in his step to Chief of Naval Operations. This was in 1911; and three years later, World War I broke out. I think that Grandfather was a Rear Admiral at this time. There was a bit of doubt about him because, after all, he had a German name. I think that there was some attempt to create the impression that it was Dutch. There is a Dutch version of the name Coontz. Nevertheless, there was a bit of suspicion about him, perhaps because, in 1911, Grandfather had had an opportunity to punch the Kaiser in the nose, and hadn't done it. That was sort of un-American, you see. "Oh, no, there was nothing really, really bad about Bob Coontz—but let's put him out in Com 13 and let him sit the war out, so that if he has any feeling for the Kaiser, his actions in combat won't be influenced thereby. We'll send him out to the 13th Naval District."

WINKLER: Com 13, where was that again?

COONTZ: In Bremerton. Bremerton, Washington. He devised a clever system of identification for shipyard workers. He had photo IDs made of everybody in the Shipyard; and in order to validate these ID pictures, he had his picture made in company with the person being identified. Some of those badges, I think, still exist. Everyone who was a shipyard worker, from High Foreman all the way down to the lowest Stoker, had to have a picture made with Grandfather, or the ID wasn't any good. It was a foolproof system that he devised; the photograph technique was not as good then as it is nowadays, so they couldn't duplicate the ID cards.

So Grandfather sat the war out in the 13th Naval District. Then the war ended. I think Admiral Benson was the first Chief of Naval Operations. The time came to relieve Admiral Benson. The Secretary of the Navy at that time was Josephus Daniels, whose job it was to recommend Admiral Benson's successor. Now the story, as I have heard it from the family, is that there were the Admirals here in Washington who had been running the war, and revising the plans, and so forth, who had their own ideas as to who should succeed Admiral Benson. And there were the sea-going Admirals, who had carried the war to the enemy, who wanted to have a say in it, also. So, in effect, it was a situation that those of us who have had Washington duty become rather familiar with: Powerful factions, butting heads over who was going to be the next CNO. Secretary Daniels was,

among other things, the man who eliminated all drinking of alcohol aboard U. S. Navy ships; and that policy still holds.

WINKLER: It doesn't hold that…

COONTZ: Really it wasn't a bad idea. The story is that that's why the Navy Officers' Club System is the way it is. It's a non-dues-paying activity, except in rare cases. Nobody pays to use the Officers' Club because Josephus Daniels said, "If the officers must drink their filthy poison, create for them a place ashore where they can do it in privacy." Josephus Daniels was down on alcohol.

But I've digressed. Josephus was in between the factions. He wanted to select the next CNO; so he said, "A plague on both your houses; find me an Admiral who does not have any enemies." They looked across the country to the 13th Naval District, and there was Bob Coontz, who hadn't done anything to make enemies; and so, as I have been told, that is how he was selected to become the second CNO. Again, he wrote an autobiography and there are incidents in there to support that conclusion. He was very smooth. He might have been a magnificent combat leader, but he never had a chance to prove that. His lines lay in different places. He had a way of interacting with people, and that was what he was famous for. That's how he became second CNO.

STEIGMAN: Are there any interesting anecdotes you have with your father's career?

COONTZ: Yes, only two that I can remember. At the time of his entry into the Naval Academy, I think the minimum age was sixteen. He was on Guam at the time, because his father was then Governor of Guam. The story is that when my father, at age 15, left Guam to attend Shadman's Preparatory School here in Washington, they swung him out to the liner in a breeches-buoy because the sea was too rough for small boats. My father passed the entrance examinations, but he was still two weeks too young to enter the Naval Academy. So, he stayed with one of his father's friends on USS *Reina Mercedes*, the Naval Academy Station Ship, until he was old enough to become a midshipman. By an interesting coincidence, I too, thirty years after my father, reported on board USS *Reina Mercedes* as an enlisted man, for discharge and processing for enrollment as a midshipman. I am quite proud of my "Battleship Discharge" from enlisted service. I believe that the *Reina* was still there in 1956 when I was ordered to duty as Electronics Instructor at the Naval Academy. But I am meandering. Those were two anecdotes that I remember about my father's career. I believe that he might have been among the youngest men ever to graduate from the Naval Academy.

STEIGMAN: Can you tell us where you were born and how you first got interested in the Navy?

COONTZ: Yes. I was born in Alexandria, Virginia. My father was here at the Naval Dispensary for his last illness. That's another story which I'd rather not relate. Well, I'll put it on the record, because I'm not sure if it's ever been told before. His father, I think, was CNO at the time when my father first became ill. But a certain Medical Officer did not see the symptoms of my father's illness, and he said, "Oh, you're just recently married. You just want to spend some time with your new bride," and sent him back to the Fleet. So he went, and eventually he collapsed on duty and was sent to the Naval Dispensary, which was down on Constitution Avenue. In fact, when I was here for my first Pentagon duty Old Navy was still in use. It was demolished around 1970, I believe.

My mother was living out in Arlington County with her parents. There's a place over there that's still standing, called Alcova. It was a famous place, but I don't know its history. But Mother was living there, and my father was still a patient in the Naval Dispensary. I was supposed to be born there. But the time came one night when I was about to enter the world; and my mother and her father got into the automobile and started down Columbia Pike, which was in those days a two-lane road. When they came to Arlington Ridge Road, about where the Navy Annex is now, they decided that they would not make it to the Naval Dispensary in time; so they turned right on Arlington Ridge Road toward Alexandria. They made it in time for me to be born in Alexandria Hospital, which at that time was on the corner of Duke and Washington Streets. When I came back here for duty in 1968, the same old hospital was there, still functioning. It's now modernized, and moved. The building there now is the Time/Life Headquarters.

STEIGMAN: You grew up in this area then, the Washington area?

COONTZ: No, only for my first five years. My mother was actually from Southwest Virginia, a place called Bristol. Her people down there were
descended from Scots who migrated into that area in the mid-1700's.
I was a sickly child, always coming down with something. Every winter I'd get sick, and have to go back to the hospital. So, Mother decided to take me South and raise me in Florida. The year was 1931. My father had died in 1926.

STEIGMAN: You were born in 1925?

COONTZ: No, I was born in 1926, in January; and my father died in September.

So she decided that it was time to move me down to the sunshine; and in those days Florida had been heavily hyped. It was Sunshine Paradise, that sort of thing. So she was going to take me to Florida, where the sunshine was, and raise me. Hopefully I wouldn't get sick anymore. But she decided that she would detour and take the long route through the mountains to her hometown in Southwest Virginia. She should have gone down the Coastal Highway, which was US 1. But she decided to go through Bristol, and then south through the Georgia roads, and so to Florida. But she got as far as her

hometown; and she met a few friends, and they said, "Don't go tomorrow. Sally's having a party next week." And she looked around, and saw some more people, etc. It turned out that she met a cousin, a widower with four boys; and she was a young widow with me. And they decided to get married, and raise the families together.

STEIGMAN: So you grew up in Bristol?

COONTZ: Yes, I grew up there. I lived in the Bristol area for twelve years, age six to age eighteen.

STEIGMAN: When and how did you come to enter the Navy?

COONTZ: World War II was on, and I was A-1, so I was drafted.

STEIGMAN: Where did you serve during the War?

COONTZ: Now this is what happened.

STEIGMAN: What month and year were you drafted?

COONTZ: October, 1944. But by fortunate circumstance, the Congressman in that area, Mr. Caroll Reece, who eventually became Chairman of the Republican Party, gave me an appointment to the Naval Academy. So it turned out that, instead of going to Boot Camp at Bainbridge, Maryland, I was sent to Tome School, the Naval Academy Prep School at that time. It was also located at Bainbridge. I don't know where NAPS is now; does it still exist?

STEIGMAN: Yes.

COONTZ: Is it still at Bainbridge?

STEIGMAN: Newport, Rhode Island.

COONTZ: Newport. Oh, all right.

STEIGMAN: You were sent to Tome's?

COONTZ: Yes. Actually, my orders were to NAPS Bainbridge, Maryland. So that's how I got in the Navy. There were a couple or three of us, or maybe more, who had to be sent not only to the Prep School, but we had to take special Boot Training to prepare us for the Navy, in case we didn't make it through NAPS. That was an interesting experience. I was eighteen at the time.

We had some battle-hardened heroes who had gotten their appointments; and some of these boys had just been jerked out of the Battle of the Bulge; or wherever the fighting was in the Pacific. There was one fellow from Maine who reported into Annapolis, still in his combat uniform that he was wearing in the Battle of the Bulge.

STEIGMAN: So when did you yourself enter the Naval Academy?

COONTZ: Lets see, it was in the Draft from Bainbridge…

STEIGMAN: June '45?

COONTZ: Yes, June of '45.

STEIGMAN: What are your memories of the years during the late forties?

WINKLER: Can I just interject real quick? When you got drafted where were you living at the time, because you mentioned your first twelve years were down in Bristol? So you obviously moved.

COONTZ: Yes, we moved from Bristol to an old historic place eight miles from Bristol, called Blountville. Blountville used to be a stagecoach stop. I don't mean stagecoaches like you see in Western movies. These were more like wagons drawn by oxen or mules. The main road from New Orleans ran through there. It went through Nashville; and that's the road on which President Andrew Jackson came to Washington.

There was an inn there, that had been built in 1795. An Irish merchant named William Deery came into that part of the country and made good, and decided to establish an inn there. It was a day's journey from a place called Abingdon, in Virginia; and to a place called Kingsport, Tennessee, which was the farthest up-river port for steamboats in the Mississippi/Tennessee River System.

But in 1940 my mother and stepfather bought the Old Deery Inn, restored it, and it's still there.

STEIGMAN: They came to know the local congressman and he came to know you?

COONTZ: My stepfather was my mother's cousin. He was a "legal" judge in a law court; but in those days the governing official of the County was known as the County Judge, even though he might not even be a lawyer. So, in both instances, my stepfather was called Judge. And my stepfather knew Congressman Reece, and introduced me to him.

STEIGMAN: What are your memories of what it was like at the Naval Academy?

COONTZ: Well, it was very much like I have heard it was in the days of my father. They still had some of the rooms with the wooden furniture in it; and I lived in one of those rooms, with furniture similar to the furniture described and depicted in my photographs in the family albums. A part of it was just as it was, at least in the early 1900's, perhaps when Grandfather was Commandant of Midshipmen. It was quite a bit different from what it is now. I can go over there to Annapolis and maybe find my way around; but they have built so many new buildings. But in my time there, it was very similar to what it was in the days of my father.

STEIGMAN: Were a lot of people at the Academy aware of your background and lineage?

COONTZ: No. I was separated from all naval contacts when my mother left the Washington area, in which she lived up to 1931.

STEIGMAN: But not too many people in the Academy administration connected your name, Robert Coontz with...?

COONTZ: No. That didn't come up at all. There were a lot more well known people in my class, whose families were doing great things in the Pacific at the time.

However, I would occasionally go down and look at Grandfather's photograph outside the office of the Commandant of Midshipmen.

WINKLER: Just out of curiosity, one of our researchers here is working on a book on integration at the Naval Academy at that time and, I guess Wesley Brown was a midshipman?

COONTZ: Classmate.

WINKLER: Classmate. Any recollections about him?

COONTZ: Yes. I didn't know him well. We never interacted, but the class is getting smaller now, so whenever our class gets together there's a social climate. Things are very different now.

But the word came down from the Commandant that Wesley was going to be in our class, and there was not going to be any distinction or any, what's the word, discrimination, and there wasn't.

At least half of my class, or more than half, had been in the "real" service. There were people who could tell "sea stories" of combat, and this made a difference. There were outfits where segregation was just not relevant.

Also, the very definite and extremely stringent word came down from the Command Structure. There was to be none of this stuff that we had heard about—undue hazing, and so forth. We heard mention of stories about that. I never heard any through my family, however.

Wes was accepted. It wasn't just a question of acceptance. He was in the same boat with all the rest of us. It worked both ways. Wes didn't get any special treatment. He was a Plebe, as we all were. Plebe indoctrination was necessary in some cases, I suppose; but there was some resentment among the "combat troops," at least one of whom had the Silver Star. As far as I was concerned, my indoctrination as an enlisted man made it much easier for me to accept the Plebe System.

STEIGMAN: Your first assignment after the Academy was aboard USS *Missouri*. How did they choose you? What are your memories of helicopter training?

COONTZ: Actually the training emphasis was on gunnery spotting, and the helicopter business just arose incidentally. The night before *Missouri* set out on the ill-fated sortie when she ran aground, Ensign Sprince (another *Missouri* officer) and I were ordered to Little Creek, VA, to learn techniques of spotting naval gunfire. In a way, this was very lucky for me, because my Special Sea and Anchor Detail station was Junior Officer of the Watch on *Missouri's* Bridge.

WINKLER: This is Side 2, Tape 1.

STEIGMAN: Captain Coontz, how did you get orders to the *Missouri* from the Academy?

COONTZ: It was a matter of preference numbers. The graduating class would draw numbers to see in what order they could choose the duty they wanted and my number was down around the middle. All of the so-called "choice" billets were gone by the time of my selection. I was the first one in the class to select Battleship duty; I had a sort of a feeling about Battleships. Those were "the things" in my father's and grandfather's time. Of course, they still have their place, but in World War II they didn't fight ship against ship, you know. Airplanes had taken over that task. But they still were good for shore bombardment, and still are in that certain function. So I felt romantic about Battleships and I selected the *Missouri*, mainly because my grandfather was from Missouri, and I didn't have any connection with any other of the Battleships. So that's why I selected it.

STEIGMAN: You got aboard the *Missouri* and you were assigned to duties as a Spotter. Were you a Spotter throughout the war?

COONTZ: Eventually I was sent to Spotter School, but I started out in the Deck Department; and I was a Third Division Junior Officer. Third Division had charge of Turret 3.

Eventually I worked my way up to where I was allowed to pull the triggers in the "manual" firings of the turret. I never had such power since I was a First Classman; but never again in the Navy did I feel as powerful as when I stood in the turret and squeezed the gun triggers to let go the salvos. You had to squeeze the alarm twice before; and it went buzz, buzz, phroom! And that was a great feeling. I learned how to do everything in the 16-inch turret, all the way from the powder hoists and the elevators that lifted up the Cadillac-size projectiles of various designs. The propelling force was contained in powder bags; not any of this "fixed" ammunition. It was strictly powder bags, the way they've been doing it for years; it was sort of romantic. But after I'd worked my way up and was accepted, they sent me to Spotter School.

I remember that the first day at school, at the noon break, we were going up to the Officers' Club to eat lunch. There was a Lieutenant, an instructor, who said, "Coontz, aren't you from the *Missouri*?"

I said, "Yes, she left for Guantanamo this morning, and I plan to join her later."

He said, "Ha ha ha, you think she's gone." He said, "Look out the window there". You could sit in the nice, comfortable Officers' Club at Little Creek, and look out the picture window on the sea side; and sure enough there she was, high and dry. Sprince and I got a lot of ragging about that, but we went on to learn how to spot.

But as far as the helicopter business: That happened this way. There was a Lieutenant Commander named Klingerman in the Gunnery Department onboard the *Missouri,* who wanted to try an experiment. So, during the firing exercises, they used to have to send the helicopter off the fantail to get it out of the way of Turret 3. So they said, "Let's try and send Coontz and Sprince up, get them to a higher elevation just above the battleship here, and see if they can improve our score". At that time there were various optical methods of spotting the salvos, mostly from Sky One, to focus on shore targets. But of course you could get a lot higher than Sky One in a helicopter. It worked fairly well. At first, we would hover over the ship. [I'll make it march: it's a rather long and not a very interesting story about how we eventually evolved more effective methods.]

But when we got to Korea, we had to take a position where we could see the target. In some cases, *Missouri* couldn't get in close to shore; she had to stay ten or

twelve miles off the beach. So the helicopter had to go in where we could see the target. But it was sometimes difficult for me to find our position on the chart; and invariably I had to take a position off the line of fire, because we couldn't judge the trajectories of the 16-inch projectiles, and they might come right through us. That was the hard part, trying to make a mental calculation of how you should call the shots, if you weren't spotting along the line of fire. When you were sitting right over the Battleship, it was different. You could tell, right so and so, up, down, add, drop, etc. When you're off the line of fire, you have to sort of guess. So, the big difference in what training you had in "ordinary" spotting and the addition of the helicopter was that we had to, in effect, make a mental calculation as to our location and how that affected the spots that we were sending back to Main Plot from the helicopter. If we were, say, at right angles half way along the firing line between the ship and the target, and maybe a quarter of a mile offset from there, it's not real easy. You could try to imagine equilateral triangles and isosceles triangles and so forth, and try to estimate the angle that you had to correct for. You usually tried for something like a sine of 30 degrees, which was one-half. It's hard to explain the sort of guesswork that we came up with, but eventually we found the trick of it and we could lay the shells on the target when *Missouri* couldn't even see it. We could be inland on the other side of a mountain that blocked the ship's view sight.

Now, I guess after all this time I can ease my mind on this point. I was strictly ordered not to direct the pilot to fly to a position where it was hazardous. Well, the pilots either ignored that, or they didn't do what I told them to, because in all except one case those pilots were eager to get in there and get a piece of the action. We were the only ones of the *Missouri's* crew that ever saw the enemy. I didn't make a big thing about that, but the aviators did. I was just an Ensign; they were either Lieutenants or JG's. They, as aviators apparently are prone to, would let it be known to their table mates that, "Yeah, you guys sit back here in your steel cocoon and we go out and we engage the enemy", etc. etc. Well, that was true; but I didn't make a thing of it, because our orders from the Executive Officer were very strict; not to endanger that helicopter, because that was the only helicopter in all of WestPac, etc. I got the impression that success of our mission was secondary to security of the helicopter. But it didn't really matter to most of the pilots. There was one who was married, and he strictly obeyed the orders to keep a safe position so as not to endanger the helicopter. By strange coincidence, those missions were the least successful, because I couldn't lay the shot as accurately as with the other pilots.

STEIGMAN: Did you ever come under fire?

COONTZ: Yes, indeed. They wouldn't let me carry a Tommy, you know, a sub-machine gun. Rightly not, because whenever the helicopter made a turn or a sudden maneuver, the plane of rotation of the big rotor would come down at a substantial angle, and it would have been in my line of fire, you see. So we could have shot our own rotor tips off; and if you unbalance those things by the weight of a cigarette paper, the helicopter would shake itself to pieces. So the only weapons that we would carry were a 30 caliber semi-

automatic carbine and a 45 automatic; and the aviators carried their six-shooters, in shoulder holsters. They had their own weapons. I don't know where they got them. They weren't from the Ship's Armory. I guess they brought them themselves. They were nice things, but not really very effective.

WINKLER: I've got a question. How safe did you feel flying? You know, this is early helicopter aviation we're talking about.

COONTZ: It wasn't really a matter of feeling safe. Now I'll tell you the way that I felt. By this time, I'd been moved out of Gunnery into Communications. Well, they still needed the spotter training I'd had. I think Sprince was still in the Gunnery Department. They didn't waste either of us.

Communications, of course, were under the embarked Flag. So I found out later on that the Flag objected to my being used as a Spotter, not because of safety considerations, but because there'd just be one less man on the Watch Team, and I was a Code Machine Pounder. That's where I learned to type. I'll refrain from talking about this coding machine. They're rather like the computers we used to use. They were state of the art, and we thought they were marvelous machines, but they were very primitive by today's standards. So were the computers that I eventually became associated with.

However, we stood eight hours of Communication watches; and I would report to the Watch, and it would come time to go out on the mission, so I would leave the Comm watch and go don my flight gear (I've got pictures of myself in my flight gear), the belt with the knife and the canteen, the pistol and the binoculars with the scribes on them, and the carbine slung over my shoulder. It was useful to have something, because on at least two occasions we had to fight our way out. I'll tell you about that later.

But anyway, I would leave the Comm watch, and found out later on that the Communications people would rig up a special speaker to listen in on how it was going with me, but they didn't let me know this. I was still an Ensign, you see. So they would follow the mission along with doing everything else they were doing. The helicopter's endurance was about two hours on station, and that was stretching it a bit. So at the end of the mission, I would come back, stow all my flight gear in the safe and go back on watch, and would be told "Coontz, you landed fifteen minutes ago. Why didn't you come back down on watch?"

"Well I had to make a report to the Intelligence people, and the Captain wanted to know how we had done," etc. So, it all went for a good effect, because there was a certain element of danger in it, and my "welcome back" would give me something else to think about.

But under the conditions, the only thing that I was apprehensive about was getting taken to task for disobeying the orders about the helicopter. Theoretically, the pilot was supposed to fly where I told him to; and if he acted on his own, then no matter what he did, I caught hell for it. So this had a good effect.

I'll explain about one of the bad times we had when we got caught in a trap. I forgot what the name of the place was. It was way up in North Korea.

In this particular instance, there was a railroad tunnel; the railroad track ran along close to the sea, and there was a mountain that they had to drill a tunnel through in order to get the railroad to follow the relatively smooth coastline, because at that part of North Korea, and I wish I could remember the name of the place, it was quite mountainous. The mountains came down right to the sea. So, we were supposed to block this tunnel, get the salvos laid in and close the tunnel off. I don't know how we succeeded, but it happened that there was a train coming down from the North; and the train people saw what we were doing, of course, and they ran the train into the tunnel and wouldn't come out. But it must have been a train full of soldiers, because soldiers came out of the South end of the tunnel, which was where we were running our mission at the time; and they began to shoot at us with small arms. The pilot's name was LT Francis Yirrell, but he had the nickname "Yip." He was excitable, and he liked to throw the helicopter around and show off what he could do with it. So, when the soldiers began to fire at us, Yirrell maneuvered the helicopter, to swoop and bring it in sideways so that I could shoot out of the door, to try to get the troops back into the tunnel so that we could shoot some more and I could resume spotting. We couldn't take position on the North side of the tunnel, because the people there were shooting at us, too. If I didn't get down where I could look right in the tunnel, I couldn't see how to lay the salvos. We reported that we were receiving hostile fire. Sometimes we didn't even bother to let the ship know, because they would have fussed at us for being in a position where we could get shot down. But Yirrell said, "I'm going to go inland, and I'm going to fly up this valley." He said, "Now when I come over this mountain, they're going to be looking out to sea to find out where we are. I'm going to come up behind them, and you do your thing."

So I said, "Yip!", but he didn't listen to me. I went along with what he had said to do, because he was going to do that anyway. So, he flew up the valley, close to the mountain. As the mountain rose he lifted up the helicopter higher and higher; and finally we came over the ridge and down the other side, on the South side of the mountain where the tunnel was; and there stood a line of soldiers looking out to sea, to see where we were. Yip made the helicopter go sideways, and while they were still looking out to sea, he came up behind them, and I did the best I could, pulling the trigger. There were about five soldiers I guess. But two of them, I don't know whether they were wounded or not, were left lying on the ground. By this time, the ship was demanding that we come back. I didn't close the tunnel, though. That was an exciting mission, but it wasn't a successful one.

STEIGMAN: You said there was a second time you were shot at.

COONTZ: At least one other time. Let's see, that was when we were supposed to take out an ammo dump that was rather far inland and again, we had to stretch our orders a bit. We had to fly inland to identify the building where the ammunition was stored. As we flew over the shoreline, they were shooting at us. We could see the twinkles down below, where they were using small arms. Nowadays, of course, if they had a bazooka missile or something they could have knocked us out; and I understand that the *Wisconsin*'s people who relieved us, got knocked out of the sky right away. We were the first to do that sort of thing. It was new. I'm glad we were not the third or the fourth, because there might not have been any more. But the *Wisconsin*'s helicopter was knocked down. I heard later that Yip Yirrell tried it once too often somewhere else. I don't know that for sure. Anyway we got the ammo dump; and it went up like a miniature mushroom cloud, like an atomic bomb-shaped dome, but not nearly as big. I think *Missouri*'s 16-inch salvos were high explosives. We laid them on target, and the whole thing blew up like a tall, but not a very broad, mushroom cloud.

One more thing about the mission where we fought it out with the troops in the tunnel. As I was on the way to the Bridge to make my report, the Executive Officer stopped me and gave me the usual chewing out for endangering the helicopter. Now this really had a good effect. At this time I was apprehensive, and perhaps overexcited, but I was more afraid of the Executive Officer than I was of getting shot down; so he braced me up by his little talk, and I was thus able to act properly with sufficient coolness in front of the Captain. So that particular "welcome" had a good effect. Not all of them were like that.

Sixteen times I went out on spotting missions. I never made an improper report, but I believe that the people back on the ship began to think that I might have been exaggerating when I said, "Target destroyed". So they gave me a camera, a marvelous machine with a lens on it about as big as the palm of your hand. It had a cocking mechanism that was sort of like a pistol grip. You would hold the camera, and shoot like a pistol, then re-cock it to change the film. I had to bring back "target destroyed" pictures, and I did. They developed them and saw, for example, that the bridge was really off its trestle. We took a picture of it, and they couldn't argue the point. That was exciting.

One time we found some floating mines, and I had to guess the approximate location of the mines. They sent out the minesweepers, and found them. By this time I was experienced enough to look at a point on the beach and get a compass reading from the pilot, and we'd have a rough angle from two different prominent landmarks, and I would draw lines by hand on my target chart to see where they crossed, and that was good enough for the minesweepers.

STEIGMAN: Did you ever feel worried in the helicopter because of the helicopter's own primitive technology?

COONTZ: No, this was state-of-the-art-technology. This was one of those old Sikorsky helos. I've forgotten the designation. It had a long tail sheath that looked like a piece of steel sticking out behind, and the front was sort of a bubble. It looked like a Dragonfly with one great big eye up front and a long tail dragging behind. It wasn't like the marvelous machines they have now, but it worked. One of the things I had to do sometimes was come up to the Bridge after a mission and write that part of the Log as to what the helicopter had done.

STEIGMAN: Following your time with *Missouri*, you received orders to USS *Charles S. Sperry*. How did you come about getting orders to *Sperry*?

COONTZ: I was ordered from *Missouri* to CIC School at Glenview, Illinois. I guess *Sperry* needed a CIC Officer so that's where I went.

STEIGMAN: She was an Atlantic Fleet ship. What were your memories of duty aboard *Sperry*?

COONTZ: My first destroyer duty. She was, I wish I could remember what class she was. Three 5-inch twin turrets, standard destroyer. Not the Fletcher Class.

STEIGMAN: Sumner.

WINKLER: Sumner.

COONTZ: Yes, Sumner Class; that's right. Later in my career, my Destroyer Command was Fletcher Class, five single mounts. But yes, *Sperry* was Sumner Class, typical. Later on, I think I saw her sunk, being used as a battle practice target.

TAPE 2 SIDE 1

STEIGMAN: Captain Coontz, you were describing your career aboard the destroyer *Sperry* as CIC Officer. What were your highlights of that tour?

COONTZ: That was my first Destroyer duty. We'd had indoctrination onboard Destroyers as Midshipmen. I found it, of course, altogether different from the Battleship Navy. My responsibilities were different in degree. For instance, as a JG, I was a Department Head, and I became eventually Operations Officer of *Sperry*.

There were only a few of us, about fifteen officers, I think, fifteen or seventeen. We were all in the junior officer category, except, of course, the Skipper and the Executive Officer. The Executive Officer was a Lieutenant Commander, and the Skipper a Commander.

So we, Lieutenants, JG's, and Ensigns, all interacted, and we ran things. It was a lot of work, and a lot less formal than in the Battleship.

I'd qualified as Officer of the Deck Underway on the *Missouri*. In fact, my Special Sea and Anchor Detail station at the time that she got underway for her ill-fated cruise was that of Junior Officer of the Watch. In effect, the JOD. I was just as well not on my Special Sea and Anchor Detail station that day, and a lot better off over at Little Creek, studying how to spot gunfire.

So, the responsibilities were greater, and the things that you had to do correctly were all on <u>you</u>; and it was a more maturing experience, in a way, than Battleship duty was. I guess you could say that if I hadn't had to fight for my life, then I would have stayed an obscure Junior Officer onboard the Battleship, and that's quite proper. There's a place for Junior Officers. But I became more of a professional, and, I think a greater asset to the Navy with a broader range of experience than I had on board the *Missouri*.

The *Missouri* was glorious, and glamorous, and had a lot more social functions than on the Destroyer; but the Junior Officers on the Destroyer formed a firmer unit with each other than, for instance, the Junior Officers in the Operations Department of the Battleship with those in the Engineering Department. This is, perhaps, the way that things had to be. I wouldn't have missed my Destroyer experience. It was extremely necessary, and very formative. It wasn't as "romantic," though, as the mystique and the ambiance of the Battleship.

STEIGMAN: What were some of the *Sperry*'s missions and roles and duties?

COONTZ: Ah, let's see. ASW mostly, as I recall. We had some interesting experiences. One of our Commanding Officers came direct from a Washington tour; and I won't say that that coincidence of his being a classmate of my older stepbrother had any effect; but he knew my older stepbrother, out of the Class of '40. I thought it appropriate to make known the fact that he was acquainted with my older stepbrother and he said, "Oh, you're Rosie's brother aren't you? Well yes, I know him." So from then on that made a difference in our interaction. I won't say that he showed me any favoritism, but at least I was better known. I had responsibility, and, in effect, more status than I had in the Battleship.

Some interesting experiences, and I'll make this march. We somehow were fortunate enough during the single Med deployment that I made in *Sperry,* to be ordered

on detached duty. I don't know how the Captain wrangled this, but we were to go show the flag both in the Med and in Northern Europe. So we detached from the Task Group and we went to Trieste, when Trieste was still a "free city" after World War II. That was an experience, hard to describe. When I reported to *Sperry*, the policy was that Department Heads did not have to stand Shore Patrol duty, so I was usually the senior Shore Patrol Officer. I had to establish liaison with the local police, and brief the Shore Patrol on local policy, etc. My experiences in Trieste and Venice were maturing and educational. At that time, ComSixthFleet (whose name I won't mention, even now) had promulgated a policy, enforcement of which was almost impossible: "If you catch a sailor going into a house of ill repute, you'll go in and drag him out by his ears" or words to that effect. Well, you just really couldn't do that, because if it had happened, the local authorities would have made things more difficult for you in port. So one had to arrange understandings between Sixth Fleet orders and the reality of the situation in the port. It was my job, as Senior Shore Patrol Officer, to do that. This was strictly against rules and regulations, but I can now reveal the fact that I was the one who talked to the local police officials and the local Liaison Officer, and clued the other officers who were to stand Shore Patrol what the "real" situation was, and what they had to do to walk the line between strict Sixth Fleet orders and the realities of the port that we were visiting. There was a certain port, whose name I won't mention, where the police liaison officer was an Italian-American from New York, who had come back home to Italy. He spoke perfect American, to the effect, "Look, you can try to enforce all these Sixth Fleet orders, and get into lots of trouble; or you can go along with the way things are here, and we guarantee that no sailor will be hauled into court. No sailor will suffer any injury. And there'll be no complaints to the U.S. Government for reimbursement for damage done by sailors. If you do it that way, that's the deal we make. If you do it 'your way' there'll be nothing but trouble." Now, the Skippers and the Executive Officers probably knew about this, but they weren't going to put their careers on the line by telling you this. So that was one great lesson that I learned from duty on my first Destroyer, the *Charles S. Sperry*. All over the Med it was this way, and I was the one whose career was on the line to create harmony between *Sperry*'s Shore Patrol and the local police. So, when we could turn in a report of a port visit, "No sailors injured, no arrests, no trouble, no claims," that made the Captain look good and me, too.

WINKLER: Did you ever hear about other ships not being strict to comply?

COONTZ: Yes. Yes, we did. In nearly every Mediterranean port except Trieste, there was someone like the Italian-American from New York who had returned home, with whom you had to make a deal. In the early 1950s, you had to cope with the realities of interaction with people, that was not a part of the "official" Navy program.

Two more instances of my duty onboard the *Charles S. Sperry*: I might be revealing the name of the Skipper when I tell you that he was a descendent of the famous Scot named Rob Roy McGregor. There was a movie about him, or a television show. Rob

Roy McGregor. *Sperry*'s Skipper was his Great-Great-Great-Great-something Grandson. So, *Sperry* was selected to "show the flag" at a place called Invergordon, a port serving the Scottish Highlands. It was a port up a firth, one of these long bays that they call fjords in Norway. There was another destroyer with us, *England*, I think. Two Destroyers were ordered up there to show the flag. The Head Man in those parts was Lord Ross, of the district known as Ross and Cromarty. Lord Ross had recently died, leaving a young widow who really ran things up there.

We had an open house onboard the ships, and Lady Ross and her entourage came down. We Junior Officers had been spruced up, and we were standing at the gangway to pick up tour parties as they came onboard. I was at the head of the line when Lady Ross' entourage came aboard, so I had to escort Lady Ross and her people around the ship. Lady Ross gave a big party for the Skippers and the Executive Officers, and "Oh, by the way. That young officer, he was so very charming. Send him along too."

"Coontz, you go".

"Aye, aye, Sir." It was marvelous. Lady Ross lived in a big castle with a long dining table and, as it was in the Middle Ages, there were claymores and shields hanging on the walls, and suits of armor, and servants in livery, with powdered wigs, behind your chairs; and here I was, a JG still, having a great adventure just because I was at the right place at the right time.

We operated with the British out of Londonderry, Ireland. There was an ASW Squadron over there, and we learned their ASW techniques and they learned ours. They made us stay away after they found what we did, because they did it differently and they thought we screwed up everything.

Later on we were ordered to Cowes, a city on the Isle of Wight off the South coast of England. Our Skipper was the senior American naval officer there, and so his wife came over to visit him during Cowes Week. They got invited to all the receptions at the Royal Yacht Squadron; and the Royal Yacht *Britannia* was down there with Her Majesty and His Royal Highness Prince Phillip. There were Dutch ships, and a Belgian ship there, all Destroyers, to represent their Navies at this yacht race. The same yacht race, by the way, which the yacht *America* won a hundred years earlier; and it was still being held annually. Our country didn't have an entry in the yacht race; but it so happened that *Sperry* was anchored at one of the points at the beginning of the race. There was a reception given onboard the *Britannia* by Her Majesty, who was not going to be present, but Prince Phillip was filling in. So the Captain and another junior officer and I were ordered to go, to represent *Sperry*'s wardroom. Prince Phillip was charming. We had all been drilled as to what we were supposed to do. All the nationalities formed into various groups around the big reception deck. The Belgians here, the Dutch there, the Americans elsewhere. Every nation had its own area. His Highness came around to visit each group.

We were allowed to smoke, and at that time I smoked cigarettes. So, I offered him an American cigarette when he came to our group, and he said, "No thanks; my wife doesn't like for me to smoke." So, okay. Then, all of a sudden, a double take; his wife! When SHE didn't like something, that made a difference!! I never met the Queen, but I met Prince Phillip, just by being in the right place at the right time.

The same way, harking back a few years, I met Pope Pius XII on a Midshipman Cruise to Italy. The Officer in Charge rounded up a bunch of us Midshipmen who were on a tour to Rome. The audience with His Holiness was arranged on the spur of the moment. I had plans to go down to the Jicci Club. Now this was in 1947, not very long after World War II, you see, when a dollar still went a long way. But when the word went out to round up the Midshipmen to come and have an audience with His Holiness the Pope, we had no choice in the matter. Not that it's a chore to meet the Pope; but there wasn't time to select Catholic boys, to whom this would have been the event of a lifetime. I'm one of the more harmless of the Protestants. There were some Catholic boys in the Pope's audience group, but there were also Jewish boys, and Protestant boys, and atheist boys. We had no choice, we had to go. If only they could have organized it ahead of time.

STEIGMAN: It's an interesting sidelight though to be…

COONTZ: It's the way that so often the Navy works. It's nothing that you do, explicitly. Circumstances arrange themselves, and you fall into these fantastic situations. I knew a Catholic boy very well, and he told me what I was supposed to do. He said, "Kneel and kiss his ring". I did. The Pope wore a beautiful ring. I found out later it was something called the Fisherman's Ring. It covered the entire knuckle of his hand, and it was surrounded by pearls with a cameo-like thing of, I guess it was Saint Peter. Sure I kissed his ring! I knelt and did it exactly right.

Well, sorry that I digressed; but like the circumstance of meeting Prince Phillip, in which you just had to go with the flow, I had no choice in the matter. The same thing with Pope Pius XII. He gave us all a blessing; and you can imagine some circumstances in my career, when nothing but divine intervention preserved me. If there is any virtue in this sort of thing, then the fact that I didn't get shot out of the sky in Korea, and the next people did, might so indicate. Maybe, maybe not. Post hoc, ergo propter hoc. (After this, therefore because of it.)

WINKLER: Got a question. You're a CIC Officer on this tin can. Was your experience in the CIC perhaps useful in your thinking later on, when the Navy goes into this computer NTDS age?

COONTZ: Good point. My experience onboard *Sperry* and at CIC School in Glenview, where I learned how to control aircraft, had a strong influence on my subsequent duty. It

wasn't the primary influence, the way I got in the NTDS. But later on, when I was a member of that team, it turned out that I was the only person in my particular group who knew how to talk to an airplane. It was necessary for us to test parts of the NTDS computer program by getting our own air services, and have them fly fixed patterns off Point Loma; and if I hadn't been there, they wouldn't have had anybody to speak the air controller's phraseology, so as to make use of the aircraft's services. So, my experience indirectly affected my selection into the NTDS group, but that was not a primary factor in my selection.

STEIGMAN: Since you had been trained though in aircraft as an air controller, did you often make operations with aircraft carriers onboard *Sperry* or did it give you more insight for later on?

COONTZ: No. My primary experience in operating with carriers was as the best Officer of the Deck in USS *Charles S Sperry*. The equipment that I trained on at Glenview was carrier-type equipment, and the only thing I had onboard *Sperry* was a radar scope at which I had to stand up, and a wax pencil. It was primitive by carrier standards. I didn't need the Glenview training to do the job I did on the *Sperry*. Yes, I knew how to work vector problems better, and relative wind, and all that sort of thing.

But my greatest experience was gained in maneuvering in Carrier formation. The other officers weren't as good as I was as an Officer of the Deck underway. I was still a JG, but I was the Number One OOD in *Sperry*.

The Skipper was an ex-aviator, and he had some very clever tricks that he applied to the Maneuvering Board on the Bridge. The experience that I had in the helicopter made it possible for me to grasp what the Skipper was trying to accomplish. You would make a dot on a polar-coordinate board with your grease pencil, then move the pencil parallel and estimate a certain distance just by eye instead of drawing the problem on polar-coordinate paper. In rotating a Destroyer screen around a Carrier, you have to make a very quick estimate of the course to your new station. The Skipper adapted aviator techniques, with the pad that they wear on their knee, to the Bridge; and I knew what he was talking about, but it took the other OODs longer to absorb the Skipper's ideas. So that's how my helicopter experience, combined with my CIC training, enhanced my usefulness to *Sperry*.

STEIGMAN: In your experiences you served as Commanding Officer of a very small ship. How did you come to receive orders to this?

COONTZ: This was an experiment in selecting younger officers to command these little 800- or 850-ton ships. The previous skippers had been Lieutenants and in many instances they were Mustangs. Several of my classmates and I were ordered to command of these little ships. Now these were PCEs. There's a difference between a PCE and a PC. A PC

displaced 750 tons and a PCE 850 tons. The PCEs were ocean-going ships that, as long as you kept them fueled, could keep the sea and cross the Pacific. PCs could not. The PCEs were mostly used to mark the line of departure of amphibious landing crafts.

WINKLER: Lines of Debarkation.

COONTZ: Lines of, that's right. You'd anchor these PCEs at a certain point, and the landing craft would line themselves up on you; because you could go in closer to shore, you see. You were not as big a target, also, to be hit by the shore batteries. So that was what these PCEs were for. At one time, I wished that I might wind up a rich man, and be able to buy one of these for my own private yacht. But when it came time to retire, I had had my fill of sea duty. So I don't even feel the urge to take a boat trip out on the Potomac River anymore.

STEIGMAN: What sort of work did you do mostly, amphibious exercises or training cruises?

COONTZ: Training cruises. We were stationed in New Orleans, and our job was to take Reserves to a liberty port, if you can imagine leaving…

WINKLER: New Orleans.

COONTZ: We had to give the reservists the experience at sea; so we often went to Miami. But my favorite port was Cienfuegos, on the South Coast of Cuba.

Later on, I found that one of the friends I made there was tortured to death in a Cuban prison. His name was Valladaeres. His father was a doctor who had gone to Bowdoin College, in Vermont, or New Hampshire. My Executive Officer, LTJG Eaton, was a Bowdoin graduate.

WINKLER: I think it's in Maine.

STEIGMAN: Bowdoin.

COONTZ: Maine, oh, okay. I knew it was in New England. He was a medical doctor, Doctor Valladaeres, and his sons got in bad trouble with Castro; and one of them was tortured to death in prison. His daughter, America, was going to school in New Orleans; and I was married by this time, so I was in no "danger" of being connected with the Valladaeres family.

Spanish was my language at the Academy. In those days they used to insist that the taxpayers' money be spent so that you would graduate with at least, "to be able to makeshift." That was the phrase that they used. I'm not sure whether it was official or

not. “Makeshift in a foreign language.” So Spanish was the easiest of the languages they taught there. I could “makeshift” in it, no more.

PCE-870 was where I first had my experience in command, and where I came up against a lesson which would teach me a great deal about the Washington bureaucracy. I didn’t realize it at the time, but the lessons that I learned **(TAPE 2, SIDE 2)** stood me in good stead when I finally began my long career in the Pentagon. I didn’t realize that they would be long tours; but I spent a third of my career, ten years, in the Washington bureaucracy. Not a continuous tour. Not the same long tour, but three successive tours here. Roughly, my career was divided 10 years Atlantic, 10 years Pacific and 10 years in Washington. That was my commissioned service.

So, back to the PCE-870. I almost swallowed the anchor on that one. There was a Storekeeper who was, I’d forgotten the term, he wasn’t regular Navy. I think it was a Reserve who’s in a special status. I’ve forgotten the term they used for them. We’re talking about 1954 now. I didn’t know the Administrative part of the Navy. The Supply Department is an administrative part, and there’d always been Supply Officers onboard ships and they had done the administration. There was no Supply Officer on this PCE, and I found out the hard way that I was supposed to do the administering and supervising of the Supply Department. This Storekeeper got away with doing a lot of illegal things, because I didn’t know enough to detect or follow up on him. I don’t blame anyone else. I guess I was supposed to have known this. I knew a lot about getting the ship around the sea without sinking, and without going to the wrong port, and all that. But as far as administering the Supply Department, I knew nothing; and so he and I eventually had to face a Court of Inquiry because of what he had done. He wound up in prison; and it didn’t do me a great deal of good, either. These kinds of things are reflected in your record, and that’s the way it is.

However, when I eventually wound up in Washington several tours later, I knew the basic point: Find out what the administrative situation is. Find out how to tweak the spider web so that you pull this corner and the other corner twitches. In other words, know how to cover yourself, all right. I learned that lesson from my first command. I could have wished that there were other ways of learning it, but it was an interesting experience; and eventually, they decided to decommission all those ships, so I cut over to Green Cove Spring, Florida where they have lots and lots of ships in mothballs. Parenthetically, I found out that my skipper on the *Missouri,* who was skipper when she ran aground some years previously, had been ordered to command the Reserve Fleet in Green Cove Spring, Florida, six years before; and he was still there. I will not call his name. That's what happened to the skipper of the *Missouri*…

WINKLER: Right.

COONTZ: I didn't remind him of that. I'd stood a watch with him once, on my Special Sea and Anchor Detail station as Junior Officer of the Watch on the Bridge. But I did not remind him of it.

STEIGMAN: Now about your going to Naval Postgraduate School. Was that your choice or the needs of the Navy?

COONTZ: No. I was recently married by now, and I wanted to get into PG School, but they ordered me to the General Line School. Now...

WINKLER: Could you digress for one second. Where'd you find a wife during this...

COONTZ: Oh yes. I found my wife in New Orleans. Now this is rather complicated. I had a roommate at the Naval Academy, named George. George had a cousin named Jim. Jim was living in New Orleans, married to Mary, my wife's sister. My Annapolis roommate's cousin had a wife who had a sister, unmarried. I'd met Jim before through my roommate. Jim said, "Come on over. We're having a few guests", and I went.

Jim's wife, Mary, said, "Let me introduce you to my sister Patsy. Patsy, this is Bob." Now, Patsy lives over across the Potomac River, in Alexandria. Forty-three or -four-years later. And that's how…

WINKLER: OK.

COONTZ: Three children. They're in their forties now, too.

So New Orleans is quite a romantic place. I hated to leave there for liberty ports, although Miami, and Cienfuegos, and wherever else we would go are worth visiting. We went to Havana a couple of times, too.

Two of my classmates got PCE commands in New Orleans the same time I did. One of them went to Kingston, Jamaica on a liberty cruise, but that was a little far to go.

Kingston is unbeatable. There might be some places as good as Kingston in the old days, but none of them could beat it. But I went there on the *Charles S. Sperry*; and also once on the *Sellstrom* (DER-255) later on when I was Executive Officer. Kingston's not now the way it was then. They had the Myrtle Bank Hotel at that time. The old Myrtle Bank. It's been destroyed. Kingston's not Kingston without the Myrtle Bank.

So PCE-870; I was glad to decommission her, and glad to go to beautiful Monterey, California. They did send me to the General Line Curriculum, about which I knew much already. It made for a nice extended honeymoon.

We lived over in Carmel. Circumstances have arranged themselves so that I have a large extended family. I had cousins in Carmel, and a lot of classmates in Monterey. But most of them were in the Postgraduate School, studying other courses, and didn't have much time to play. But I did. I got two courses in the General Line School that greatly affected my future. One of them was the basic course in electronics. For some reason or other, they also wanted us all to learn how to speak in public. So we had to take a course in rhetoric, and techniques of public speaking. How did this help? Well, on my next tour, when I went to Annapolis as an Instructor, I already knew how to speak; and all I needed to learn was the technique of instruction, and I already knew basic electronics, at least enough to teach the midshipmen. But I'm getting ahead of myself. That's what I learned in PG school. Oh, it was nice that we learned some things about minefields that I hadn't known before; and later on, I never had any experience with the minefields but knew the general principles. The things I learned that were most helpful to my future career were public speaking and basic electronics.

STEIGMAN: And from Postgraduate School you reported to the Naval Academy as an Instructor.

COONTZ: That's right.

STEIGMAN: As Commander Winkler mentioned, one of our colleagues is doing a book on African Americans at the Academy. Were there any midshipmen who were instructors?

COONTZ: If so, it was such a natural thing by that time that I don't remember making any distinction. You remember what I said about how the class was brought together, then indoctrinated about our classmate Wesley Brown. In some cases, I would say more particularly those who had not had the benefit of any military training or service, in some cases that indoctrination might have been necessary. But for anybody who had ever interacted in a military outfit, especially those who'd been in combat, it wasn't necessary. So I don't recall any; I just don't really remember. I don't remember, for instance, the Italian students, or the Polish types, or any Irish or the typical ethnic joke groups that some regrettably are.

STEIGMAN: How did the Academy change in the, by now six or seven years since you had been a midshipman?

COONTZ: It had not changed a great deal except for the presence of what they now call minority groups. But that was such an expected thing that it was not in any way remarkable at this time.

STEIGMAN: Oh I see. So there were no other changes basically?

COONTZ: No, no changes that I noticed. This was now just on the very verge of the great change of integration with agendas. The men were still there. The same type of honor system prevailed that existed in my time. You didn't have this inflexible code, especially not the West Point Code which was: "A Cadet does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do." Now when the time came for the Naval Academy to get its honor code, they left out the last one requirement, the "toleration." But in this, in the unspoken atmosphere of my time as an instructor, the instructors, many of them having themselves been midshipmen, knew that some people would not be able to resist the act of "getting the dope." In other words, finding out what quiz was given, and finding out and memorizing the answers. So we instructors, as a matter of routine, would make our tests such that we could look at the schedules and see which groups were likely to have any contact between classes; and we would take that into account, and give each group a different but similar test, where the answers were different but the problems, in effect, were the same. So this was not considered dishonorable. This was just dealing with the way that things were. When I was a midshipman, there were those certain people who were looked down upon for "getting the dope." We had some that made successful careers out of getting the dope and making better grades. But in my time as an instructor, if the midshipmen were cleverer than the instructors, then we in the Electronics Department considered it our fault. If they could get the dope from our system then they were really clever, and this might be fostering characteristics that might stand in good stead in much later parts of their careers, you see. But we did not consider it dishonorable. It was not; there wasn't a highly codified honor system at the time at the Naval Academy, either when we were midshipmen or when I was an Instructor there.

WINKLER: When you're there...the curriculum. One of the interviews I conducted, it was pointed out that back in the fifties basically you marched together to classes each day. You sat in the same classes all day. Only for the language curriculum did you split up in different groups.

COONTZ: That's right.

WINKLER: Then during the sixties when they started introducing majors, then basically you would go to have Quarters and then you would break up to your different classes. That's the Academy you knew, where everybody basically had the same classes.

COONTZ: That's right. I was there just before the transition.

WINKLER: Right.

COONTZ: So the atmosphere at the Academy when I was an Instructor was substantially the same as it was when I was a Midshipman.

STEIGMAN: You were also there at the beginning of the space race, I take it, the late 1950's?

COONTZ: Sputnik went up while I was there; and I left before we caught up with the USSR.

STEIGMAN: What was the reaction at the Academy to the idea that there was a new world conflict?

COONTZ: The main feeling that I remember at the Academy was, "Oh my God, they got the jump on us. Where did we go wrong", or "Damn the money-squeezing politicians who won't give us what we need and expect us to make 'bricks without straw'". In other words, doing something without the proper tools. That was, as my memory serves me, primarily the attitude. But we were dumbfounded! We recognized the fact that here the Russians had done something that we couldn't do; and it was a couple or three years before we could do it. Now the stimulus that that provided was properly applied, like a spur to a horse. We couldn't really stand it, stand being second to the Russians. Well, even nowadays, comparing our technology to that of the Russians is like comparing a sledge hammer to paper; or rather, a two-handed claymore that hangs on the walls of Lord Ross' castle, to an epee. Ours is analogous to delicate fencing techniques, and the Russians' to the hammer and the claymore. I guess their spacecraft are still more "muscular" than ours; but ours can get the same results with less thrust.

WINKLER: Rickover and the nuclear Navy, Nautilus' commission, do you see the effects of Rickover at the Academy?

COONTZ: I wasn't there to observe any effect that Rickover had. There were legends about him. One of them was false. I had an occasion to check the Lucky Bag for the year that he graduated. The legend was that his picture was put in there in a perforated page, so that his classmates could tear it out and throw it away. That was not true. It might have been true that he lived in a room by himself, because in those days they had rooms designed with what's called a "beehole." They had a two-man regular room; and then you'd go through a little doorway in the wall into a rather large space which was called a beehole, and there was another bed and desk in there. So it probably could have happened that Rickover lived in a beehole, with two other midshipmen in the adjoining room. But as far as his picture being on a perforated page, that wouldn't happen.

STEIGMAN: This was the beginning of the nuclear Navy. Were there major changes in the courses being taught at the Academy?

COONTZ: Not in my time. I was just at a major transition in technology. We were just beginning to teach transistors. That's the new electronics technology. We only had maybe

two hours devoted to the way the transistors worked. All of the rest of it was cathode ray tubes. Some of my classmates who stayed on as instructors after I went to be Executive Officer of USS *Sellstrom* told of the transition from cathode ray tubes to transistors. But in my time it was still CRTs, and the marvelous things that had been done with that technology, for instance the British and their magnetron. The British invented magnetrons. Marvelous, but so clumsy. Transistors have done away with all that sort of thing.

WINKLER: Now your tour as an Instructor is coming to an end and you're talking to your detailer. How did you get the orders to be an XO?

COONTZ: Just luck at the draw, I guess. It was not anything that I requested; but the Detailer looked at me and decided, I guess, to send me to sea; and it was good experience. I was not only Executive Officer, but also Navigator. Again, I stood on the threshold of a major transition in technology. We did have Loran, but the methods that I used to navigate were effective, but except for timekeeping methods, strictly from the Middle Ages. I keep on emphasizing this; that I was on the edge of major technical change, at the very last gasp of the primitive techniques. Now of course they had quadrants, or octants, or whatever they called them, back in the Middle Ages. They were the same sort of instruments that I used to navigate by the stars. I would observe a star, with a sextant and a comparing watch. Loran itself was quite primitive. I'm not sure they even use Loran anymore.

WINKLER: No, it's not used.

COONTZ: You had to know whether it was tracking high or low, and you'd have to know whether it was a sky wave or a ground wave, and all that kind of thing. It was crude. It worked, when it operated right and under proper conditions; and it did help, sometimes.

STEIGMAN: What was the Barrier?

COONTZ: It was an extension of what was called the DEW Line, the Distant Early Warning Line that stretched from Alaska all the way across Canada and through Newfoundland and out into the Atlantic. This was so that the Russians would not make an end run around the NORAD defenses. We worked for NORAD out near Denver, in some mountains out there.

Sellstrom was a modified DE, called a DER. The "R" stood for radar. They took out all kinds of stuff and put powerful radar in there that could detect almost anything that flew; and not just detect; we were also on station to help as markers for military and other flights.

There was no secret as to where we were located. So, we would track the flights and report them, and we could tell what they were, all the flights bound to and from Europe, and through the gap between Iceland and Ireland. Our barrier was extended from the Grand Banks down to the Azores.

We had four ships always on station. *Sellstrom* was diesel driven, and you could stay on station longer than steam-driven ships. I think there were one or two oil burners, steam types. Diesel-driven ships were very well suited for that duty, because you had to stay thirty days on station.

There were two types of maneuvers, and it depended on the Commodore and how he wanted to handle things. You could be assigned to station and you would stay within ten or twelve miles from your assigned point. But there was some smart Commodore who tried this: As a ship would feed into the "close" end, the one closest to Newfoundland, the other ships would, while maintaining complete coverage, move Westward one station. That gave everybody a chance at equal heaven and hell.

It was nice out toward the Azores. It was usually calm and peaceful. It was usually hellish near Newfoundland, especially in winter. The picket line ran roughly Northwest and Southeast; and far to the Southeast was a lot better than the choppy, hellish (especially in the winter time) North Atlantic.

STEIGMAN: Did you ever operate with the Coast Guard?

COONTZ: No, the Coast Guard had their own mission. These little DERs were designed just for this mission. They'd taken off lots of comfort-making stuff to make room for the heavy radar, and that is what they were for.

WINKLER: They must have been very top-heavy?

COONTZ: Yes. They were heavy-ballasted to ride all kinds of seas. The most difficult thing about them was their propulsion plant. They had, roughly, a pneumatic clutch, like two tires that would be pumped against each other, and then they were stuck close enough to transmit the rotation from the engine to the screws. In order to disengage or to change from ahead to reverse, you had to deflate the clutches and then pump them up again. It was a complicated gearing mechanism; you didn't reverse the engines. You had to reverse by shifting gears, so to speak.

WINKLER: Your homeport was where?

COONTZ: Newport.

WINKLER: Okay.

COONTZ: But the end of the DEW line was run from Argentia, Newfoundland, or rather the Atlantic Barrier. So, en route from Newport, we always had to put into Argentia and get the dope on what we had to do, and refuel.

In the wintertime, we had to make choices as to whether we wanted to tough it out for 30 days with no heat and with cold chow. If we did this, we could make a direct run for home to Newport whenever our tour was over; or, if we wanted to live in comfort, we had to go back by Argentia and refuel. This took us two days longer to return to Newport. Usually, the crew opted to "tough it out." I know this is probably a bad command technique, but most of the skippers let the crew vote as to whether they wanted to live comfortably, or to return to Newport two days earlier. Mostly they toughed it out.

(TAPE 3 SIDE 1)

STEIGMAN: Captain, you proceeded to the Naval Electronics Laboratory in San Diego. How did those orders come to you? Did you request them or they just came?

COONTZ: No. That was a result of my experience in teaching electronics in the Electrical Engineering Department at the Naval Academy. It so happened that a brilliant Commander named Stoutenburgh; that's a very basic important name in the NTDS history. I don't how wordy this is, but this could be an interesting anecdote as to how Stoutenburgh got involved and made his first contact with NTDS.

It was Fall; we were still at Annapolis. Stoutenburgh was also an instructor at the Academy when I was there. It so happened that an old shipmate of mine from the *Missouri* Wardroom, Eric Swenson, got associated with NTDS in its early days; and he came over from Washington here to see if he could find this fellow Stoutenburgh, whom he wanted to recruit into the NTDS project. Eric knew that some of his *Missouri* shipmates were in Annapolis. We were Lieutenants at the time, teaching in various departments at the Naval Academy. So, Eric looked me up and asked me, "Do you happen to know a Commander Stoutenburgh?" Of course I happened to know a Commander Stoutenburgh. So I took Eric Swenson over to introduce him to Joe Stoutenburgh; and they started talking at a great rate. Their technology was a little ahead of mine, because at the time I hadn't gone through the training course at San Diego (which I'll get to in due course). I introduced Eric Swenson to Joe Stoutenburgh, and then I might just as well have faded into the bulkhead, which I did after about a half-hour or so because they had a lot to talk about. Eric was there to persuade Joe to come into the NTDS program, of which the cadre was just forming. There were about five of them, and Joe was one of the early ones. Not quite as early as Eric.

Eric has now passed away. His history of this would be quite interesting, but it's no longer available. Joe might still be around though; brilliant!

WINKLER: Where and what time is this all happening?

COONTZ: It was autumn of 1957.

WINKLER: Okay. They both were...where were they assigned?

COONTZ: Eric was out of the Navy at the time, and he was working for the NTDS project. They were in BuShips. That was before the big reorganization, when BuShips was an "active" entity rather than a "supervisory" entity.

So Eric was in that office working for a Captain Svensen, who was the founder, so to speak, of the NTDS cadre. Joe came onboard, after his tour at the Naval Academy. After my tour as an Instructor, I went to sea as the Executive Officer of *Sellstrom*.

Then, after my two years in that billet, it was time to establish the second step of the NTDS cadre. It happened to be the "Fabulous Forty." Stoutenburgh hand-picked the Fabulous Forty, and it happened that two of my classmates and myself had been teaching electronics, and had favorably impressed Stoutenburgh, and he felt that we would be a good part of the Fabulous Forty. It was a major turning-point in my career. It established my subspecialty, and determined my subsequent shore tours and at least one sea tour.

So we were ordered to U.S. Navy Electronics Laboratory, San Diego; and I'll make the joke without meaning to disparage any particular station, or praise another one unduly. But I was moved from Newport, Rhode Island, where the winters are not exactly salubrious, to San Diego, which is about as good as it can get. It was like going from Hell to Heaven; and that's the metaphor that I'll use.

As I understand it, CDR Stoutenburgh had an important decision to make about the NTDS cadre: Would it be more effective to teach computer programmers to be naval officers, or naval officers to be computer programmers? I think an attempt was make to train computer programmers in the ways of the Navy, and that didn't work at all. So, early in 1960, the Navy took a bunch of us young Lieutenants, and some Lieutenant Commanders and Commanders, and made programmers out of us. We trained on the early versions of the NTDS computers, the AN/USQ-17 and the AN/USQ-20. We learned to program in pure machine language at first, using long strings of ones and zeros. Later, after we had learned the elements of the machine instructions, we "graduated" into a technique of machine-language "shorthand" called "bi-octal," in which the ones and zeros were placed in groups of three, each of which could be uniquely represented by a numeral from zero to seven. Still later, we learned to program in Assembly Language, in which we could use simple English phrases that could be "compiled" into ones and zeros that represented computer instructions. In those early days, programming was very different from the techniques used today.

After we members of the Fabulous Forty had become reasonably competent programmers, we were assigned to programming teams composed of Naval Officers and civilian programmers hired by the contractor, Sperry Univac. There were two different types of programming teams. One type, the "Applications" Programmers, were tasked to program the computers to track and engage air and surface targets, compute fire-control and intercept solutions, construct messages and exchange data with other NTDS systems, and, in some cases, "push button" commands from one ship to another. That was what the Applications Programmers did.

The other types of programmers were called "Systems" Programmers. Their task was to write the programs that made the NTDS components (computers, consoles, and communications equipment) interact properly. I was assigned to a "Systems" team. We Systems Programmers had easier work than did the Applications types. We had equipment specifications and schematics to help us, but the Applications people usually had to design their own flow charts and logic diagrams.

This way of doing things is now obsolete. But at the time, it was marvelously clever, and it was state of the art; and we were all overawed by it. So we learned, we Fabulous Forty, we learned how to program the NTDS computers, and we worked along with the contractor's people.

Some of us were better than others. I was not a top-notch programmer myself. Euclid was not a top-notch mathematician, but it so happened that he outlasted some of the ancient Greeks who were top-notch people, and we all had our places. I could name some: My old Annapolis roommate, CDR Bill Bryan, who now lives in Bethesda, was probably as good a programmer as any professional at Univac. Admiral Layman, then a LCDR, was also a good programmer. Admiral Cullins, then a LT, is on your list to be interviewed, I think. He was more a "doer", an organizer and an "applications" man than an actual hands-on bit-fiddler. It turned out that when the time came that we needed someone like him, he was there and available; and he has a great story to tell about events at the high level. I won't presume to speak for him, but he had problems which are a part of the history of NTDS. So, that is what we learned to do; and when we learned to do it, we had to apply it.

There were a few of us who were known as Road Runners. There were about five, I think. The Road Runners had to load up sea bags full of programs, and fly to WestPac with them when the *Oriskany* and *King* and *Mahan* were deployed, to carry new programs with new features, functions or capabilities, to the Fleet. If things went bad, we Roadrunners sometimes had to fly out on very short notice to fix the NTDS at sea.

WINKLER: You mentioned *Oriskany*, *King* and *Mahan*. Those were the three test ships for NTDS?

COONTZ: Yes. Those were the three original ships. I served my time in all of them. But of all the Roadrunners, my former roommate, Bill Bryan, was probably the best. He was not brought into the program through CDR Stoutenburgh, but Bryan's record speaks for itself. He was Number 2 man in our class, 1949. In my opinion, Larry Layman was a close second to Bryan.

WINKLER: Bryan, is that with BR…

COONTZ: BRYAN, William L. His father was an Admiral. He had a brother who was also in the Navy. Perhaps not as brilliant as Bill was, but still very intelligent. His name was George.

So, if you feel it's relevant to have the testimony or input from a top-notch technical man, Bryan is the one. Larry Layman, who made Flag Rank, would also have significant input. But Layman shifted fields. He became the Navy's Top Communicator. He decided to shift from NTDS to Communications, and he wound up in charge of Naval Communications. COMNAVCOM; is there a Naval Communications Command?

WINKLER: Naval Telecommunications Command.

COONTZ: Well that's who he became. But he was good when he was a Roadrunner. He was one of the best.

STEIGMAN: You mentioned three ships, *King*, *Mahan* and *Oriskany*, a carrier and two frigates.

COONTZ: DLGs.

STEIGMAN: DLGs.

COONTZ: At that time they were called DLGs. They changed their designations several times. I think that *King* and *Mahan* were DLGs 10 and 11. That's what they were christened; Destroyer Leader, Guided Missiles.

STEIGMAN: Did they operate together as a Task Group or did they operate separately?

COONTZ: Both. That was the big thing of NTDS, you see. This was one of the Navy's great technical achievements, and there are people better qualified than I to speak to this. But NTDS was based on a system that the Air Force developed, called SAGE.

Now, SAGE computers talked to each other over wires; but NTDS was the first application of wireless intercommunication between computers. You couldn't string wires between the ships, so you had to come up with a reliable way of transmitting bit-patterns exactly by wireless. If even one bit in a scheme of a million ones and zeros was wrong, it could mess up the whole program. I'll refrain from explaining the systems that were developed to check, horizontally and vertically, by multiplying the patterns of ones and zeros and coming up again with a pattern of ones and zeros to check the accuracy and find where the millionth bit was wrong. Bryan and Layman were much better at that sort of thing than I, if you choose to find out anything more about it.

But I was good enough to carry the sea bags full of new NTDS programs to the Fleet, and install them. Parenthetically, the NTDS programs for the *Oriskany* were different from those for the DLGs. *Oriskany* programs were designed for three interacting computers. In those days, you couldn't cram the entire NTDS program into one computer. The NTDS program for the DLGs required two computers. However, the software that made it possible for computers to process separate parts of the NTDS program, used up a significant fraction of the computers' memories. As you added more interacting computers, you eventually reached a point where the computers couldn't do anything except talk to each other and keep the messages between, or among, themselves straight. I think you began to loose efficiency at about three or so. They didn't try to design a four-computer system, because there wouldn't have been enough memory left to process the NTDS applications software.

It's hard to realize the limited-memory problems of those days. Nobody, not even in the technological forecasts that I saw in that era, foresaw that there would come a time when you would have enough memory space in a computer. Transistor technology was a recent innovation. The "memory" of the NTDS computers was actually constructed of tiny, soft-iron rings strung on a wire matrix. The "ones and zeros" of a computer program were represented by the magnetic polarity of those little rings. "Printed circuits" and micro-circuit technology were still in the future. Nowadays, the memory of a refrigerator-size NTDS computer can be put on a fingernail-size micro-chip.

WINKLER: The size of your fingernail there.

COONTZ: Yes, a fingernail. I'm pointing to a fingernail. You can now make a memory as big as the memories of three of the NTDS computers, on a thumb. But in the early 1960s, you always had to be aware of the limitations of the memory space; and you had to design your programs so that they would all fit in that space. Now, this required a lot of programming in machine code, especially for "system" programming. This meant writing programs in ones and zeros, according to the instruction repertoire of the machine.

I still have my old textbooks and notes about the machines that they taught us, the USQ-17s and the USQ-20s. 17's were the original NTDS Univac computers. When the

20's came along, there was some improvement, but I found one disadvantage. In the USQ-17, all parts of an instruction could be observed in patterns of lights on the computer console. The USQ-20 console did not display the contents of part "B" of an instruction, which the USQ-17 displayed in what were called "B-boxes." In trouble-shooting and debugging programs, I certainly missed those B-boxes. Modern programming methods do not require the display of instruction parts..

So, the methods were primitive; but "primitive man did not know he was primitive," and I add to that sentence, "primitive man did not know he was primitive, and does not." So someday, fifty years from now, people may say, "Ah! You mean you actually used transistors and things, instead of notching electron orbits?" or whatever they're going to develop in the future.

STEIGMAN: Is there any inter-allied cooperation with the Royal Navy or Royal Canadian Navy?

COONTZ: Personally, I have no experience that would qualify me to answer that question, but I believe that one CDR Hemler was the liaison with the Canadians and the Brits. Bryan might know, and probably Larry Layman would remember. I don't know where Larry is now, but he left the NTDS business and his more senior experience was in Communications.

I'll digress a minute and mention the fact that there were contending factions in the Navy at the time that NTDS was being developed. BuWeps had their own ideas about how they wanted computers and computerized missile systems, and different standards were developed for Weapons Systems and Command and Control Systems.

There came a time when I left NEL and the Fabulous Forty, and went to USS *Chicago* as CIC Officer. This was where the contending Admirals first became aware that their systems couldn't talk to each other. Now the Weapons Direction System, the WDS Mark 1 in *Chicago* was, in it's own way, marvelous. But NTDS computers and the WDS computers couldn't talk directly to each other, and they could not exchange data in the program format for NTDS and the WDS Mark 1. They could each do their individual jobs well, but they couldn't talk to each other. So, a marvelous "hard-wired" interface was developed that would, in effect, act as an interpreter between the two systems. This was inefficient, of course, but it worked! I never learned much about how the WDS-1 worked, and to this day I don't know whether the WDS was programmable or hard-wired, but I did develop a certain familiarity with the hard wired interface between the two systems. It was quite different from the interface between NTDS and the weapons systems in *King* and *Mahan*, and in *Long Beach*.

I believe that the NTDS-WDS installations in *Chicago* brought the need for standardization to the attention of high-level decision makers. Somebody finally got the

word that the Admirals had to cooperate and develop standards, instead of each Admiral taking his own position that his was the way that things were going to be, and if anybody else's system wanted to talk to his system it had to speak his system's language. It was not easy for some people in high places to understand that programming languages and instruction formats were different. Again, I was fortunate enough to get in on the ground floor and go to the Fleet when this was all happening. This is the sort of thing that I think Admiral Cullins, if or when you interview him, would know about: How the Admirals had to learn to talk to each other in the language of this new technology; and some of them never did, nor did they learn about how computers worked. The introduction of NTDS marked the transition from the analog technology of, for example, the Mark 1 Rangekeeper onboard *Missouri*, which was a marvelous piece of machinery, to the digital technology of computers interacting over a wireless link. The Admirals of the "analog era" who suddenly had cognizance over the development and employment of digital systems, had little understanding of the problems of making such systems interact, and the necessity for standardization of system design and information format. It was difficult to explain to an Admiral why a pattern of ones and zeros should convey the same meaning to one system as it did to another, different one.

STEIGMAN: How did all this relate to the Tycom System. That was one of the other old systems?

COONTZ: NTDS succeeded it, and it was a Tactical System, I believe, instead of a Weapons Direction System. That was a very early example of the need for a "central standardization authority" who had the power to resolve disputes between the contending factions.

Just as it seemed that the powers-that-be were about to be convinced of the need for standardization of digital word and message formats in tactical systems, along came the AEGIS System. It was, no doubt, a wonderful idea. As I understood AEGIS, it was a fully integrated system that, in effect, combined the capabilities of NTDS and the WDS into a single system, instead of two singly-developed interacting systems, as in *Chicago*. But AEGIS could not "talk" to NTDS or WDS, because the patterns of ones and zeros that represented certain tactical situations in AEGIS were different from those in NTDS.

My tour in *Chicago* was the last opportunity I had to apply my technical experience in the Fleet, or, for that matter, anywhere else. From *Chicago*, I went to *Halsey* as XO, and thence to *Wedderburn* as CO, and then to OpNav. When I "uncoupled" from my final "technical" billet, AEGIS was in its developmental stage, and I felt certain that the lessons in standardization, learned from NTDS development, would be remembered and applied to AEGIS. It did not happen. About twenty years later, after I had retired and was working for a consulting firm inside the Beltway, I saw the same things happening in the AEGIS Project that happened between WDS and NTDS. They hadn't learned the lessons yet, and I hope that they have by now. That sort of policy

conflicts may have been what Cullins had to deal with. Perhaps, if either of you interview him, you could ask him. That's one of the areas in which he would be able to contribute very much to the history of development in this area.

STEIGMAN: Were there problems inter-operating between NTDS/WDS and the missiles, the Terrier, Tartar, Talos Systems?

COONTZ: Not in *Chicago,* because Talos was the long range missile, with which NTDS primarily interacted. Tartars were *Chicago*'s short range missiles. I don't remember what the interface was with the Tartar system. But by the time the target was close enough to be in the Tartar range, they had acquired some external direction. But the hard-wired interface was between Talos and NTDS.

Now when I was in *Chicago* after my tour at NEL, I was not convinced that this Talos/NTDS interface would work, until I saw it happen. My GQ station was right next to the Talos Coordinator. We had adjacent consoles in *Chicago*'s CIC. We were on the Pacific Missile Range off of Caliente for a major test. There was a "jinxing" target, a radio-controlled old World War II F-6, or something like that. It was out there inbound; and from my console, I pushed the button that designated from NTDS the target to Talos; and it crossed the interface. Talos acquired it right away and shot it down at 105 miles. I watched it all happen right there on the consoles. My counterpart on the Weapons Direction Systems was a LCDR Seeba. The Tartar battery officer was a young Lieutenant, and NTDS could really have used him, but he was needed where he was. He was a bitfiddler, a ones and zeros expert on the other side of the interface. Both the Talos and Tartar systems processed the same data that NTDS did. They just used different formats of ones and zeros to represent the data.

I became a believer when I saw Talos knock down that evasively-maneuvering drone at 105 miles.

STEIGMAN: What are your best and fondest memories about your term as one of the Fabulous Forty?

WINKLER: To follow up that question, how did the Fabulous Forty term come about?

COONTZ: Well that was a PIO thing.

WINKLER: Okay.

COONTZ: I hadn't heard about that until after I left the team. The term that was applied to the group of the so called semi-elite was "Road Runners." We all got a plaque. I still have my Road Runner's plaque hanging up in my den in Alexandria.

We Road Runners were analogous to the people who carried the war to the enemy. We were the ones who took to the Fleet the results of everything that the big-dome boys had done. We took it to the Fleet and made it work. So, whenever I think about those days, I recognize my own deficiencies; but at least, I could eventually make the new programs work. I couldn't go in like Bryan and Layman, stand before the computer console, and hit the blinking light buttons, and everything would fall into place. There weren't many people like Bryan and Layman in the Navy, but the rest of us Road Runners did the best we could. So I was proud to be a Road Runner; still am. I take a certain satisfaction out of remembering the way it was. Again it's not that way now. It was primitive, but we didn't know it. It was state of the art, cutting edge technology. Is that..?

STEIGMAN: It answers quite a bit.

WINKLER: One following question I had was: the whole system is based on the Air Force SAGE System except you're dealing with radio transmissions. You worked on the computer component programming. Was it difficult as far as the transmission receiving that component?

COONTZ: Yes, I had some experience in programming Link 11. Let's see, we had Link 11 and Link 14. I think one was the air data and the other surface data. I don't remember which one was which, but I think 11 was the aircraft data, 14 was the surface data. So that was my contribution to the "applications" side of NTDS programming.

Before I became a Road Runner, I put in some time doing some "dogwork" in the routine application section. But that was mostly done by the contractor's people.

I mentioned earlier that CDR Stoutenburgh and his cadre here in Washington came up with the right answer, that it would be easier to train officers to be programmers than programmers to be officers, and he was right. There were some civilian contractors who became Road Runners, but they always had to go along with one of us Naval Officers.

(TAPE 3 SIDE 2)

WINKLER: This is side two and you were going to talk about the Navy and the British system.

COONTZ: I don't know anything about the Canadian/British system except that it worked. It was being developed at around the same time as NTDS was, and there was an NTDS group that was designated as liaison. I don't remember who these people were but maybe Bryan would. I don't think Cullins would know. He left the NTDS group at Fleet

Computer Programming Center. I know who would know: Layman. If you can find Admiral Layman, he would know that.

STEIGMAN: What were the reactions of the crews aboard *King*, *Mahan* and *Oriskany*, especially the Radarmen and Electronics Technicians, when members of the Fabulous Forty or the Road Runners came aboard?

COONTZ: Fortunately, that had been provided for. There was, on each ship, an officer who had not gone through the NTDS course but who was qualified enough in computers to understand what we were doing, and to explain it to his Department Head, Executive Officer or Captain. There was always an officer there, and on *Long Beach.*

I did ride the *Long Beach*, too; and I guess the best one was onboard *Long Beach*.

But the *Oriskany*, I've forgotten what his title was, the ship's officer who worked with us, he was good. I don't remember his name. One of them, I think he was onboard the *Long Beach,* was named Alcock, and he was very good. I could have wished that he had been in the NTDS team; he was as good as anybody I ever worked with.

STEIGMAN: So there was always one officer assigned in the radar room on the ships. There wasn't a special NTDS division?

COONTZ: No, it was all in CIC and they'd gone to school. Some of them had been brought down to the NTDS mockup at NEL; and sometimes I wished that we had had some of that fancy equipment in what we called the Breadboard Unit at NEL. We needed it at sea with us. I guess it was more needed where it was. If it hadn't been for NEL and the installation there, we wouldn't have known, we wouldn't have been able to learn, what we needed to know. Then, when we left NEL and established Fleet Computer Programming Center Pacific, just across the street from NEL, we took with us the knowledge; and the mockup was there and that became a training facility, Fleet Anti-Air Warfare Training Center (FAAWTC), for the ships. So, the first CIC crews from *King* and *Mahan* and *Oriskany* were trained; a few of them were trained in NEL, but then FAAWTC was established, and it promptly picked up NEL's training functions.

There were two sections at FAAWTC; a Training Section and a Programming Section. So we Fabulous Forty from NEL came as a cadre to FAAWTC, in the Programming Section.

WINKLER: About what year is this?

COONTZ: I believe it was about mid-1961.

STEIGMAN: Following your tour at NEL, you were ordered to *Chicago*, and this was preordained, that you mentioned that they wanted a…

COONTZ: Yes, it was just the way that the need fell. They needed somebody to go to *Chicago*, and I was available.

STEIGMAN: Was *Chicago* one of the first production systems?

COONTZ: As I recall it, *Long Beach* had the first production system. The systems in *King*, *Mahan*, and *Oriskany* were Engineering Test Systems. But the one that went on *Chicago* was one of the early production systems.

STEIGMAN: What were some of the difficulties of integrating the production system of NTDS? I know you've spoken of some of the difficulties. Can you explain how your duties on *Chicago* and….

COONTZ: There was an officer assigned to *Chicago* who was called the NTDS Officer. He was a "hardware" type. His name was Behrle. He was a Lieutenant Commander. He was, in effect, a technician, a superior hardware technician.

There were very highly trained enlisted men who were bitfiddlers, and I could talk to them. But their training at this stage was more in assembly language than in machine language, if you follow me. I started out in 1960 as really a bitfiddler, and when I went to sea the transition had been made from machine language to assembly language.

But these enlisted men were smart; and although they had to work from the documentation which was in assembly language, on the rare occasions where I had to backstop those men, they could speak my machine language and show me where the bits were in the assembly codes. They could decode it and say, "Oh yes; here's the address, and here's the bit pattern." But they didn't need it by that time, because of the advances that had been made in the languages. It was not yet a compiler. The transition to a compiler was made just about the time I left *Chicago* and, in effect, left the hands-on bitfiddling behind me.

So the people were trained, the crew was trained properly, at least in NTDS; and I think in the Weapons Direction System, too. But again, they originated in different organizations, and were different systems; and if it hadn't been for the hard-wired interface, which came late in the game when the Admirals realized that the systems couldn't talk to each other, then the systems would never interact. Now, I'm digressing; and if I haven't answered your question, then I'd like to.

STEIGMAN: During your time aboard *Chicago* did she deploy or was she solely engaged in trials?

COONTZ: During my time in *Chicago*, she was engaged in trials. I did not deploy with her. I left before she deployed. I don't know how *Chicago* made out in the active Fleet. I hope she did well, because I left behind me a team that knew how to work the system, and a system that was working. I knew that the WDS and the NTDS were working together, and the remote data that NTDS received from its data link could be accurately transmitted across the hard-wired interface into the WDS, and that the WDS would use that data to acquire targets and shoot them down.

STEIGMAN: Was the NTDS used solely for the Talos aboard the *Chicago* or also other fire control systems?

COONTZ: Now, that I'm not sure of, because I don't know how they worked it on the other side of the interface. We would send the data over to the Weapons Direction System; and although we were both in CIC, the WDS consoles were in a different area, and I never did watch what they were doing. I think that they telephone-talked it into the Tartar system. Whatever method they used, it worked.

STEIGMAN: How many people were working for you? How large a department did you have?

COONTZ: Oh, let's see. I don't remember what the Ship's Organization Book required. I think ten, three shifts of ten. We would assume full manning of all the consoles and, in order to stand Condition One watches, it would take about thirty people. Say ten consoles; thirty men and three officers plus an expert at the NTDS Officer's Console.

Now, this is something that I haven't mentioned before. The NTDS Officer, Lieutenant Commander Behrle whom I mentioned, manned the NTDS Officer's console, which I think *Chicago* was the first to have as part of her NTDS. Behrle could, by activating certain keys and generating certain bit patterns, disconnect a damaged console, and bring another one online by inserting the proper patterns of ones and zeros that told the computer to substitute a different console for the defective one. This was called the Systems Console. It was not a tactical device at all. It didn't attack airplanes, and had no radar presentation. It was strictly connected with the computers and the NTDS components. But it was a marvelous device and Behrle knew how it was supposed to work. But its proper operation required a computer systems technician more than it did a radarman.

STEIGMAN: Lieutenant Commander Behrle reported to you?

COONTZ: No, he had an independent status. He didn't report to me. He reported to the Operations Officer.

STEIGMAN: As did you?

COONTZ: As did I, yes. But we had to work closely together. He was in charge of the hardware, but he had to know how the software worked. So I'm not sure whether that concept was carried over into the other, bigger NTDS ships. *Oriskany* did not have that feature, a Systems Console. If anything went down, one could manually disengage the damaged console by turning off certain switches, and you could manually readjust certain switches in a different console so it would represent the address and function of the damaged console. But in *Oriskany*, you couldn't do it online. You had to take the console off line and manually reset a bunch of switches, whereas with the Systems Console in *Chicago* you could do it while everything was still online. It took up a fair amount of computer memory to get that program to work.

STEIGMAN: How many exercises or trials did *Chicago* take part in during your tour?

COONTZ: Well there were…

STEIGMAN: Let me rephrase that. She took part, I imagine, in both single ship trials and Fleet Battle Problems?

COONTZ: The only Battle Problem that occurred while I was in *Chicago* was the previously-mentioned exercise on the Pacific Missile Range, where I became a Talos believer. I believed that the system would work when I saw it work. But that was the only time that I actually participated in a real training exercise.

STEIGMAN: All the other exercises were single ship exercises?

COONTZ: Single ship and Post-Repair trials.

STEIGMAN: Did the system require a great deal of repair during those early days?

COONTZ: No. Surprisingly, the designers had properly applied the lessons learned from the Engineering Test. The gear was not delicate. People had recognized that when seas pounded, the system was subject to shocks, and that had been allowed for in the design of the system. So there were few of that type of problem. However, there were always some bugs in the computer programs, but nothing serious enough to degrade battle readiness. I heard later on that the concept of the system console and on-line system re-configuration was not carried into further development, or installed in other ships, because it required such a great depth of technical bitfiddling knowledge, and also a lot of computer memory space to make this happen. I think that in subsequent NTDS installations, it was accepted that they would have to take consoles off line to reconfigure

the system. At least, they would have to reset certain switches manually. I think that was the concept to which subsequent systems were designed. It came to be accepted that emergency system reconfiguration could be done by people who didn't need to be trained so highly in programming techniques, manually switching the components offline.

STEIGMAN: May 1965. Before we go to *Halsey*, is there anything else you'd like to say about the news at NEL or *Chicago*?

COONTZ: *Chicago* was the only experience I had in which an old ship was re-designed to a new concept, given a new mission, and re-commissioned. She was given a top-notch, hand-selected crew; and it was a real pleasure to go to sea with her. Everybody knew his area of specialization. It was, and is, too bad that all the ships in the Navy couldn't function at the degree of efficiency that the *Chicago* did, with her hand-picked crew. I later heard that the exigencies of personnel and Fleet Reduction made it necessary to transfer all the key people into billets where they were needed to upgrade a defective organization or something like that. So, that was unique in my experience in going to sea. *Chicago*'s crew was the best I've ever served with. The Skipper, Captain (later Rear Admiral) Dacey, was the best. He was comparable to my first skipper aboard *Missouri*, Admiral Harold Page Smith, who was Captain at the time. So, that is a summary of my experience in *Chicago*. No, I didn't deploy with her. I left for *Halsey* when *Chicago* was getting ready to deploy.

STEIGMAN: One final question on NTDS. You mentioned last week Admiral Grace Hopper and her development of computers. Was she connected with NTDS?

COONTZ: No, my association with her came later. When I came back to OpNav after my tour in *Wedderburn*, that's when I left the Pacific. After *Chicago*, I served in *Halsey* and then *Wedderburn*. But after that, I came here to Washington; and, except for my final sundown tour at sea, I stayed here.

I think I mentioned in the first interview, unless it was lost on tape, that my commissioned service was roughly ten years Atlantic, ten years Pacific and ten years Washington. The Atlantic and Pacific tours were actually ten years on the Atlantic Coast, ten years on the Pacific Coast, but the Washington tour was broken up. I would go somewhere, and then come back here to Washington at OpNav.

STEIGMAN: Looking back then, you've had your tour on *Chicago*, you've now been assigned to *Halsey*, a guided missile destroyer. Did she have NTDS aboard?

COONTZ: No. *Halsey* didn't have NTDS aboard. Some of that class of ships deployed to Vietnam had NTDS. I think the *R. K. Turner* had NTDS, but *Halsey* didn't. CDR Bryan, whom I have mentioned as one of the best NTDS Computer Programmers, was Executive Officer of *R.. K.. Turner*.

Now, I went to *Halsey* as Executive Officer, and this was where I severed my technical association with NTDS. You know what an Executive Officer has to do. As XO, I was deeply involved in Operational and Administrative matters. I had two skippers; Captain Ringenburg was the skipper when I reported to *Halsey*; and I see that Admiral Lebourgeois is one of your people to be interviewed. He relieved Captain Ringenburg; and I served him as Executive Officer, too. *Halsey* was deployed to WestPac, and I flew out to join *Halsey* in Subic Bay, the Philippines. I relieved my predecessor while we were in transit from Subic to Yokosuka; and at that time I left this fancy technology behind, and became a "real" seaman again. I went back to the way the Fleet was before all of this digital technology. We had radar, of course, but all the computers were analog type. I no longer had any need of, nor use for, the mysterious and wonderful world of digital technology; but every now and then I would dream about it.

To return to the point of a previous question: I didn't come into contact with Grace Hopper until my first tour in OpNav, in late 1968.

STEIGMAN: What are some of your high and low memories of being XO, which is a very intensive tour?

COONTZ: Yes, intensive is the word. Having previously served as Executive Officer and Navigator, a combined billet in USS *Sellstrom*, I was familiar with the demands of the billet. The greatest challenge I had to face in *Halsey* was adapting to the vastly different personalities of the two Commanding Officers whom I served. Such differences can be inferred from the differences in their surnames: Teutonic Ringenburg, and Gallic Lebourgeois. They were both, each in his way, great skippers.

STEIGMAN: Did you see any combat operations?

COONTZ: No, not in *Halsey*. That came later, in *Wedderburn*. I reported to *Halsey* near the end of her six-month deployment to WestPac. All hands, especially those who had extended their enlistments until the end of the deployment, were eagerly anticipating an easy TransPac to San Diego. And then came the word that the carrier (I don't remember which one) had been ordered to stay in WestPac for an indefinite period, and *Halsey*'s deployment had been extended to stay with her as escort and anti-aircraft defense. I don't think I ever saw the Vietnam coast at all. We were there to guard the carrier, and she did not operate near the coast.

In regard to *Halsey*'s task as escort and guard for the carrier, it should be mentioned that *Halsey* had no guns; only missiles. Missiles can defend against aircraft, if you can lock on them far enough away, but if the enemy attacks with, say, torpedo boats, you're helpless. I don't mean just the carrier, but *Halsey* herself would be hard-put to defend herself against a determined attack by destroyers with 5-inch batteries. Be that as

it may, the carrier usually stayed so far off-shore that I am not certain whether my time in *Halsey* could be counted as service in "Vietnam waters."

STEIGMAN: Did she ever serve as link between U.S aircraft?

COONTZ: Yes, she was good at that, and it turned out that that became one of her primary functions. But here this marvelous missile ship, very missile capable. Now what did she have?

WINKLER: Terriers.

COONTZ: Terriers, yes, of course. Terriers in *Halsey*.

STEIGMAN: What are some of your memories of being on Aircraft Station?

COONTZ: Nothing in particular. This was my second tour as Executive Officer, and it was very much like the first cruise. The first cruise was off the Atlantic Barrier. However, in *Sellstrom* I was also Navigator. But in *Halsey* I just had time to be Executive Officer.

The first major problem that I had to deal with arose from the fact that about one-fourth of the crew had extended their enlistments for the length of the cruise to Vietnam. They had extended for three months, or six months, or however long it would take to complete the tour; and then *Halsey*'s tour was extended indefinitely. So, the crisis came; and this was the sort of thing that I had to deal with, rather than the interesting technical things I'd previously dealt with in NTDS.

Well, what were we going to do? A fourth of the crew, their enlistments were expiring, and none of them was willing to extend again.

WINKLER: Sounds like George Washington at Valley Forge.

COONTZ: Okay. So, that was my first big problem in *Halsey*; and that was the type of thing that I was dealing with. It was, perhaps, a foretaste of the type of thing that I would be doing when I came here to Washington.

One of the steps that I took was a bureaucratic one. This was my first application of practical bureaucracy. There's an Article in the BuPers Manual that says, in effect, I don't remember the exact text: "In wartime situations, enlistments may be involuntarily extended in order to preserve safety of the ship and meet the mission". So I went to Captain Ringenburg and proposed that we request permission to invoke this Article. The Captain concurred. Now it happened that our immediate superior, the Task Group Commander, 70.1 I think, was being relieved at this time too. Otherwise, he probably wouldn't have given approval for *Halsey* to implement the policy of involuntary

extension of enlistments. But we got permission to do so; and, as a result, we didn't let a fourth of the crew off at Subic. We took them back to Vietnam with us; and it wasn't until ten days or so afterwards that all hell broke loose, and we got a message from BuPers, canceling our permission to extend enlistments involuntarily. Well, by that time, the immediate emergency had been covered. We didn't get left with an inability to man even enough stations to defend the ship. But we had to let a number of men go the next time we got back into port. So, that was the type of thing that I was dealing with, and the sort of methods that I had to use.

We had a case where an Electronics Technician suddenly decided that our actions were actually resulting in the deaths of innocent Vietnamese, and that his religious beliefs would no longer permit him to participate; and therefore, he was not going to stand any more watches, or obey any orders. So we court-martialed him; and his Defense Counsel was the Wardroom's most clever officer, who got him off by proving that, after the man had declared his position, no one had given him a direct order to do anything! Those are examples of the types of problems that I had to deal with, shortly after I relieved as *Halsey*'s Executive Officer. Most of these problems were due to our extension of deployment.

STEIGMAN: How long was your deployment?

COONTZ: I think it was originally six months; but *Halsey*'s was extended for at least six more weeks.

STEIGMAN: Racial problems had started hitting the...?

COONTZ: Now, I heard about some of those, but I was never involved in any. The particular problems that I mentioned did not involve race. I had heard about a carrier where some problems arose, but it wasn't on any ship with which I was associated. My observation was that at this time, the attitude in the Fleet, especially among the units who had been out where the action was, was that race was not relevant. It was, rather, that your buddy next door was going to be there as a member of your team. It didn't matter what color he was. If he wasn't pulling his weight, he was subjected to appropriate corrective action, usually at the Petty Officer level.

STEIGMAN: Drugs had ....

COONTZ: No, drugs were not a problem. I'll tell you what was a problem, though, and I found this in *Halsey* and in my own command, *Wedderburn,* when we deployed to WestPac again. A certain country, Sweden, strongly objected to the U.S. action in Vietnam. Word went out to the Seventh Fleet that groups of Swedes were present in ports and near bases in the WestPac area, where American armed forces were likely to be, trying to persuade soldiers, sailors, and airmen to desert, and go to Sweden. Their targets

were, usually, young enlisted men. These groups would do their best to subvert these men and persuade them that our action in Vietnam was wrong. These groups had a certain amount of success, especially among young members of minority groups in our society. As I recall, although I won't make oath on it, one or two *Halsey* sailors turned up missing, before I relieved as Executive Officer. As I recall, we didn't lose anyone from *Wedderburn*, perhaps because we made liberty port usually in Subic Bay, the Philippines. We did have a tender availability in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, but that island was under such tight control by the Chinese Nationalist government that it would have been almost impossible to hide a deserter and smuggle him out. We made port in Yokosuka, Japan, only twice; once when we arrived in WestPac, and once when we were bound for home.

So, if there was a racial factor in my experience in this billet, that was the only situation that I remember in which every race was subject to this subversion. The blandishments were very cleverly constructed and designed to play on the prejudices of the individual enlisted men. I still don't feel too good about the country of Sweden. I don't buy Volvos, or Saabs, or anything like that. A group of us resolved not to do it. But that hasn't come to mind for years, until your questions stimulated my memory.

STEIGMAN: Was it Swedish men or women?

COONTZ: Both, usually it was; the only experience that I remember was in Yokosuka. There were two men and one girl, and they were good looking. They weren't picked for ugliness. I imagine that they were selected for maximum attractiveness and persuasiveness. But they were there, and they had an effect.

STEIGMAN: One final question about the ship, about *Halsey*. You had said about *Chicago*, primitive man doesn't know that he's primitive. But going from a guided missile ship with NTDS state of the art to a guided missile ship that didn't have it, did the thought ever pass through your mind that maybe I'm going back to be primitive man?

COONTZ: No, because the systems in each ship were state of the art. Now, yes, *Chicago* was new, but the effect was the same. The missile system in *Halsey* might have been primitive, but the 16-inch batteries in *Missouri* are run by Rangekeeper Mark 1, and they're effective, too. So I had no qualms about the "primitive" system in *Halsey* being less effective than the modern technology which we just barely made work in *Chicago*. I don't know that we could have shot down a jinxing target at 105 miles with *Halsey*'s battery, but...

WINKLER: No, because you had Terriers.

COONTZ: We didn't have those great, big, air-breathing Talos. Those Talos things made a ghastly noise. I mean even down inside the ship you could really tell when they went off. It drowned out everything.

WINKLER: I just had a question on comments you mentioned about the CO's, and you talked a little bit about the enlisted crew, about being the crème de la crème as was *Chicago*. How about the Wardroom on the *Halsey*?

COONTZ: A good group. I emphasize for the last time that *Chicago* was an exception. Hand picked for commissioning. I gather that all major ships, and perhaps every ship, has a hand-picked crew for its commissioning. An effective group in *Halsey*.
(TAPE 4 SIDE 2 - 6 Oct 98)

STEIGMAN: You were discussing the Wardroom aboard the USS *Halsey* and USS *Chicago*.

COONTZ: Yes, the *Halsey* Wardroom was, well let's call it seasoned. They had been together for a while, and they knew how to work together, whereas *Chicago*'s Wardroom was hand picked. Each competent in their own area of specialty. But it took a while. I wasn't long enough in *Chicago* to know whether the shakedown period resulted in an intuitively-interacting group instead of a group of competent experts in individual fields.

So, I came into *Halsey*'s Wardroom as an outsider, and I had to prove myself; whereas in the *Chicago* Wardroom, we were all outsiders. If each person had a fault, it was over-awareness of his own competence in his own area of specialty. In other words, *Chicago* initially was a group of individual experts, instead of a team. The *Halsey* Wardroom was a proven team into which I had to fit and prove myself. So, as I mentioned earlier, the first gesture that I made, even though it turned out to be kiboshed at the top level here in Washington, was to keep the team together, using a perfectly valid-and-approved-by-high-command bureaucratic method. This was my first application of the bureaucracy, and bureaucratic techniques, in which I became so familiar later on during my Washington tours. More about that in due course.

STEIGMAN: While *Halsey* was on deployment, this was when you found out you had achieved the pinnacle Command at Sea.

COONTZ: Lets see, I had a comparatively short tour as Executive Officer. I think it was about a year. That was sufficient to convince my two Commanding Officers, Ringenberg and Lebourgeois, that I was competent enough not to have my career downgraded by adverse fitness reports, so that I would not be considered for Command-at-Sea. So, I was given Command at Sea.

The Command was not the most modern of ships. In fact, it was one of the three operating Men-of-War, I make a distinction between the Operating Forces and the Support Forces, left over from World War II. Let's see, *Wedderburn* and *Hopewell* were the two destroyers; and I think *Hopewell* was the oldest Man-of-War still operating in the Pacific Fleet at the time, and *Wedderburn* was the next oldest. There was one other that I've forgotten. But this was a Fletcher Class, five single 5-inch mounts. Way back to the old days, but at least, by that time, primitive man was not so primitive; and I had learned all this kind of thing when I was a Midshipman, and practiced it on the Midshipmen Cruises and so forth.

STEIGMAN: What were the operations *Wedderburn* took part in when you were…

COONTZ: Well, we had work-up with Fleet Training Group, San Diego, and Fleet exercises and the big Battle Problem leading up to deployment. But the big objective was to get *Wedderburn* through another deployment. I understand my successor in Command had to withdraw *Wedderburn* from the line because she finally broke down.

But I got her through a deployment, and that was my great accomplishment in *Wedderburn*.

Now, I have sea stories, but nothing glamorous. Nothing on the cutting edge of technology. Nothing like the bits, and the computers, and all of the high-tech equipment which I can look back on with affectionate nostalgia, and wonder how it ever worked; but it did.

STEIGMAN: But this is probably just as interesting because here you're peak during a day and age when ships were being ridden hard and put away wet. You're keeping a ship on the line that's seen her years of good service and might be beginning to show her age. What are some of your memories there?

COONTZ: I have some vivid ones. I used to own the Vietnam coast of I Corps. That was my area. I took my turn there; gunfire support, calling down all kinds of missions, ready, day and night. I will mention three vivid memories.

One of them was at night, and most of our gunfire support action took place at night. We were ready for whatever, but we only had five single mounts, and we could only have so much ready ammunition. So, during one mission, apparently the people on the beach were getting overrun by an attack; and we registered in, and we let go a salvo, and we got a "Fire for Effect," which was fairly rare. Usually, the spotters on the beach had to move our salvos around until we were on target. But we got a "Fire for Effect." So we let go with five rounds, twenty-five all together, five from each of the operating mounts. No, I'm sorry, the middle mount, we didn't put it into action any more than we

had to; so there were only four barrels in this operation. So we said, “Rounds complete, over.”

“Repeat, Repeat!” came from the beach.

So we loaded up and fired five more salvos of twenty rounds, and we said, “Mission complete” this time.

We got another frantic message, “Repeat, Repeat!”. So we fired five more salvos, and by this time the handlers in the Ready Room were just about exhausted. We could maybe have gone out one more time for “Fire for Effect” salvos. So I let them know on the beach that we needed to bring up more ammunition into the Ready Rooms. At this time, another voice from the beach came on the line and said, “Mission complete,” in a matter-of-fact tone. I wonder, I wondered at the time, and still wonder, what that was all about. I’ve tried at various Veterans’ groups and, oh, just wild off-chances, you know, if anyone was there who knew what that was all about and could tell me. I haven’t found anyone yet. But it was in the I Corps area. I think most of my time on gunfire support was in I Corps, and maybe once down in II Corps.

Another incident that sticks in memory is, this was a daytime fire mission. We had been firing at targets assigned by a spotter in a shore-based helicopter. It took me back to my old days, when I was one of the first ones to spot naval gunfire from a helicopter. But this time we weren’t using 16-inch guns. He was spotting our 5-inchers, and apparently achieving satisfactory effects, when a mission came in from a Field Commander who was receiving fire from a certain hill. He called the helicopter to register in on this particular target. Well, you know how we do, we set up on our track, and we had the same kind of charts they did. So we set up for the target, and gave the ready signal. We waited, and waited, and waited, and finally the helicopter reported to the ground person with whom he was communicating, that there was no target there. There were only women and children on that hill. Then an argument began. “Well, that is where my troops are receiving the fire from and that’s what I want neutralized!” Now argument went back and forth, but the spotter wouldn’t call the fire down because there were only women and children; and the Field Commander got more and more angry, “They’re killing my people here. Get those people wiped out”.

In the meantime, I was sitting out there with hot guns, you see, having gotten quite hot in the previous fire missions. One thing I didn’t need at all was a cook-off. If you’ve had any gunnery experience, an uncontrolled explosion can just blow the hell out of you; we could sink there before we even got the message off that things had gone wrong. So, I finally chimed in, and said, “Give me a fire mission, a target, or I’m going to have to break solution here and unload to seaward.” Well, there was more argument back and forth; and finally I just told them, I said, “I’m not going to wait anymore. I’m training to seaward”. So I did, and I unloaded at sea. I don’t know how long we had held fire, I

wasn't keeping time, but it seemed like every second I was expecting guns to cook off and blow the hell out of ourselves. Those are my most vivid memories.

There was always something going on, though. We used up a lot of ammunition in those old 5-inch barrels, and fortunately the supply ships had a lot; and we used to break out of the line to go fifty miles out and meet the supply ships that came up and down the line off Vietnam.

One thing, one tragedy happened. It was a tragedy, in a way. It precluded my joining my squadron mates in action against a large shore battery near the, it wasn't the 38th parallel. What was the parallel across Vietnam, was that 38th or was that…

WINKLER: No, that was 17th.

STEIGMAN: 17th.

COONTZ: 17th, okay. 17th Parallel. There was a shore battery that had the nickname "Big Charlie," and every so often a destroyer squadron Commodore would get a group of ships that were leaving the gun-line, and form them up to duel with "Big Charlie." They didn't draw ships from the gun-line to do this. The ships would go in in formation and would make a fast run, and as they came broadside of "Big Charlie" everybody would let go with everything they had and try to knock out that big shore gun. I later saw some pictures of ships that got bracketed by fire from the beach. I wanted my piece of this action; but the day before we were to join the dueling team, *Wedderburn*'s Fire Control Computer developed a problem, and I had to submit a CasRep. This was an analog device, marvelous in its own way, and it performed its function well. But this time, it didn't work. It wouldn't generate an "elevation" solution. This became obvious as we were about to fire a mission, and I saw the barrels pointed down at the ocean. I called a halt to everything until they found out what was wrong. We didn't find out until ten days or so later, when an expert came in response to our CasRep and saw that one of the analog components down in the guts of the computer had broken, and there were pieces lying around inside this analog device; and it so happened that it was the mechanical solver that generated the angle of elevation of the guns, and it didn't work. Good thing that there actually was something wrong, because if I had submitted a frivolous CasRep, my career would have been over. But the *Wedderburn* crew didn't get the Combat "V" that the other boys got for engaging "Big Charlie". So, I came out of Vietnam with service honorable but not magnificent. We did our job using not any glamorous technology, but the same old "stone age stuff." Very effective, though.

I guess the unhappy memories that I have involve *Wedderburn*. It took a great deal of ingenuity to keep the old ship charging along; and trying to keep up the crew's spirits. Our misfortunes began when we wiped a bearing between San Diego and Pearl Harbor, and had to overfire the boilers and take a shaft off line. We made it to Pearl on

one shaft, and the boilers did not blow up due to overpressure, and we kept up with the rest of the ships. This was a 600-pound plant, not one of the new 1200-pounders.

Then after that, between Pearl Harbor and Yokosuka, something happened to one blade of my portside screw, and it started making a noise which sonar all over WestPac could pick up. I submitted a CasRep on it, and we didn't stop to investigate the problem because it was 12,000 feet deep in the middle of the Pacific. We went on into Yokosuka into dry-dock, and we found that one end of one blade of the port side screw had been bent. Now it wasn't as if the screw had dragged on the bottom and bent all three blades; it was just one blade. The nick was about the size of a pack of cigarettes. We put a pack of cigarettes by it, and we then took photographic evidence of it to show the size of the nick. Nobody could figure out how or why such a thing would happen. So the conclusion was that there must be something still on the bottom of Pearl Harbor, left over from the Japanese raid on December 7, or something that just hasn't been found yet and is so unimportant, so small, that just one blade of the screw would engage it and the others wouldn't. That conclusion saved me from a judgement of incompetence. Nobody could figure out how I would do something wrong that would cause that effect, so the investigating officer wrote it off as an incident, an unexplained incident.

So, I was unhappy in the sense that I was apprehensive. Yes, there were incidents that ruined my day, but as far as looking back with sadness and weeping about them, no, nothing like that.

STEIGMAN: Any other....

WINKLER: I was about to say the Chief Engineer's job on *Wedderburn*, that must have been a challenge.

COONTZ: Oh yes. We had a Mustang who'd come up the hard way, and he was competent. He was a good Chief Engineer, but the only thing he knew and the only thing he needed to know was a 600-pound engineering plant, and he knew all about it.

STEIGMAN: Anything else you'd like to say about your tour aboard *Wedderburn*?

COONTZ: I was glad that I'd had some previous experience, even in small commands. But the problems in *Wedderburn* were totally different from the problems that I had in my first command. In my first command, the problems were mainly administrative. The mess-up of the Supply Department was due to a dishonest Storekeeper. The problems in *Wedderburn* were such that I was able to cope with them, but there were a succession of them; and it was a case of continuous coping, and just hoping that when the next one came along I would still be able to cope. I guess most skippers, except skippers in hand-picked crews, and new ships like *Chicago* have different problems. So that was the summary of my experience in *Wedderburn*, and I was very glad that I survived.

STEIGMAN: Following that you were ordered to Washington, D.C. Was this another payback for your tour at NEL?

COONTZ: It must have been. Yes, it was. It was based on my experience at NEL, and in general with automated data systems. But the job that I went into at OpNav was not in the tactical systems, but in the, well, strategic systems, so to speak. My title there was Assistant for Research and Development of Flag Command and Control Systems; and the programs that were evoked by those consoles were not D=RT, they were, well, more abstruse equations of force levels, and firepower factors, and so forth. In other words, these consoles were in Flag Plot instead of Combat, where I'd had my experience. But I wasn't there. I was not "hands on." I was up at the high level, not of management, because OpNav does not manage, but of oversight. This was where I had to apply the methods and technique of my grandfather, who was, as I may have mentioned, a smooth operator who didn't have his chance for command in battle, but who did his thing and did it well; and his thing was interacting with people.

Here's where I got to do that. It involved functioning in a bureaucracy, and success at my level required communication skill. Perhaps it's different now, but I don't see how it could be. Such skill involved mostly writing; creating plausible truth where necessary.

Examples: It took me about a year before I could effectively do this, because I had to learn how to write. I thought I knew how to write, but I didn't. You have to know how to write in the Washington context, in the bureaucracy. I won't expatiate on this, because a lot of other people have written books about it. But I learned how to do it, and I could call a project manager in BuShips and say, "I need to know the effect on your program if 50 million dollars are cut out of it for the next two years; and I have to know the minimum, the 'keep alive' amount, and the 25-percent-of-accomplishment amount you need." And when I got the raw data from the managers, I would write a paper that the Admiral could take either before the Secretary of the Navy, or the appropriate Assistant Secretary, or even to Congress, and make a plausible case for funding these projects in that amount. That was essentially what I did. It was something that, at first, I was horrified that it was necessary to do this sort of thing. But then I realized that either I became resigned to it, or else I realized that the system had to function somehow, and this was the only way that all of the political, bureaucratic, and economic power could be harmonized in Washington.

What I learned in that tour, and in my subsequent OpNav tours, enabled me to make a very easy transition. I had joined the Navy at age eighteen, and had never drawn a paycheck elsewhere. I never earned any other money. But when it came time for me to retire from the Navy, I stepped out of the Joint Staff on a Friday, and into a local office managed by one of my old OpNav bosses, on Monday; and I didn't miss a beat. So, if

you can't make Admiral, which I knew well along that I wasn't going to, then one can prevent hardship, and disappointment, and heartache, and all that, by acquiring a skill; and I did.

STEIGMAN: What were your duties as a Development Project Monitor?

COONTZ: With one exception, they were to either fund the project, or else to persuade whoever was handling the money to provide enough money to keep it alive. There was never enough money to fund everything; so I had to work the Program Managers to balance the available funds and fund the things that the powers-that-be decided was necessary to fund, and keep the rest of it alive; or, if it couldn't be kept alive, to be ruthless enough to "X" it out.

Now, there were two exceptions here. One of them was the Navy Logistics Information System (NAVLIS). This was the Supply Corps' great thing, and the Project Manager didn't exactly know what he wanted; or if he knew, he couldn't express it. But I talked to him, and I came up with a description, and I wrote certain documents. I have forgotten what the titles were. They were all "management" documents, with funds, and schedules, and money, and tasks. For NAVLIS, I described what is now an Internet. I wish I had known, or had enough foresight, to call it an Internet. But that's what the Supply Corps needed at the time. They needed an automated system rather like SAGE, only it had an entirely different purpose. The only common feature that NAVLIS and SAGE had was the wired communications system only, instead of tactical problems against an attacking enemy, they could do logistics problems, arranging shipments of goods from one place to another, or harmonizing schedules, and all that kind of thing. I now realize that what I described was a forerunner of what is now the Internet. The Internet did not grow out of NAVLIS because it was later on cancelled. But eventually, DoD established a communication system that was identical to what my vision was.

It was when I was trying to write the NAVLIS document and a similar one later on, that I first made contact with Grace Hopper. She was a law unto herself, and she did not tolerate anyone about whom she formed, for any reason, a negative opinion. I don't know if you know who Grace Hopper was. She was…

WINKLER: I met her.

COONTZ: All right.

STEIGMAN: Developer of COBOL.

COONTZ: Yes, the developer of COBOL. She was full of concepts. She might have been at one time a bitfiddler herself. What was it, ENIAC or something that Eckerd and Mauchley put together? She worked for them.

Somehow, Grace tolerated me. I could go to see her, and she always had time for me. Later on, in my second OpNav tour after I was on the staff of ComCruDesFlot Eight, I went back to Washington and I worked in Op-91, the same as Grace was; and I wound up on an Organization Chart in which my name was in a block above Grace's. That does not mean that I was Grace's boss; but I found out later that Grace would tolerate my name being in that block, because she knew I wouldn't bother her. The only thing I had to do was to draft her fitness reports, which was very easy. When fitness report time came, Grace would call me in and she would hand me a stack of papers that consisted of magnificent testimonials to Grace Hopper's greatness for all the lectures that she'd given. So, all I had to do was mark everything down in the highest grade, and send to the Admiral the draft fitness report with all these testimonials. These were the easiest fitness reports I ever wrote. Grace and I got along fine.

Sometimes people would come to me to arrange access to Grace. I remember that the IEEE, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, wanted to give her a gold medal, but Grace wouldn't answer the phone. Grace had given me a phone number where I could reach her. So I called her on it. That was the only time I ever used that phone number. I said, "IEEE wants to give you a gold medal. They can't get in touch with you, Grace."

She said, "All right, okay. I'll take it. Tell them so, and tell them I'll be in touch with them." It happened that one of my neighbors was the head of the committee trying to get Grace to accept their gold medal; and so I went and told him that Grace would do it.

So, being accepted by Grace Hopper was an experience; and it all began with CDR Joe Stoutenburgh's selecting me to become an NTDS computer programmer. It led to my acceptance by Grace Hopper. I was invited to her retirement ceremony onboard the USS *Constitution*. My grandfather flew his Flag in *Constitution* when he was CNO. I guess they all did, maybe still do. But that didn't cut any ice with Grace. All she wanted was somebody who could intelligently, I guess, understand what she was talking about, and try to embody her vision as I tried to do it in that NAVLIS project, and in one other project which failed.

I managed to persuade an Assistant SecNav for Research and Development to fund a project involving software techniques, by which programs that ran in one computer could be converted to run with equal effectiveness in computers of different design, even though the instruction patterns were different, and the word-lengths were different. Now, when I conceived this project, I made an incorrect assumption. I assumed that computer hardware technology could never overcome the problem of limited memory space. How wrong I was! The limitations on computer memory that plagued programmers in the early 1960s <u>have</u> been overcome. The contents of the memories of

three NTDS computers can now be stored in a chip the size of a thumb-nail! My project was to develop software techniques to preserve programs that were already running in the then-existing, limited-memory computers. As things turned out, no great harm was done, nor money wasted, in my project. About the time when it was just getting started, I was ordered back to sea as Operations Officer on the staff of ComCruDesFlot Eight. The officer who relieved me in Op-724 was not a computer programmer, and was not able to defend my project against other projects competing for limited funds. So, it was cancelled shortly after I left OpNav for my sundown tour at sea.

STEIGMAN: You're now being ordered to your final sea tour. What were your duties as Ops Officer and how were your feelings on it?

COONTZ: This was an experiment in that a non-aviator Flag Officer was given command of a Carrier Task Group, in this case TG 60.2, in the Sixth Fleet. The Flag Officer was my classmate, RADM Harry Train, USN, a submariner. He flew his Flag in USS *John F. Kennedy*. His Chief of Staff was CAPT Gene Merrill, an aviator. As Operations Officer, I had an aviator as Assistant for Air Operations, CDR Andy Burnett. He was promoted to Captain about three months after he reported to the staff. So, Admiral Train had plenty of support regarding aviation matters. I might mention that my having been awarded the Air Medal for my spotting missions over Korea had some effect in easing my acceptance by the aviators. Not much, but some. They were curious as to how a "black-shoe" rated the Air Medal, and the staff aviators told them. I also had a competent Assistant for Surface Operations, who had had Command at Sea. There was also a very good LCDR as Communications Officer, and a gem of an Electronic Warfare Officer. It took a little while for this experimental staff to get shaken down, but when we did, we functioned as a team equally as good as *Chicago*'s commissioning crew. When it came time to maneuver the Task Force around, I had no qualms on the Flag Bridge. The aviators would have been lost there, even as I was lost when it came time to plan flight operations, and in-flight fueling schedules, and other things that that I had no idea about. But the Chief of Staff and the Assistant for Air Operations did.

I don't know that this is relevant, but I will mention that CAPT Merrill was the highest-ranking officer, in any of the U.S. Armed Forces, of Native American extraction. He was from Oklahoma. His wife was also of Amerind extraction. She proudly displayed in her home a portrait of her grandmother in Amerind dress. Captain Merrill was a big man; and with no intention to denigrate him, he got the name, among some of the Junior Officers of Staff, of Big Chief Wahoo. There used to be a comic strip character by that name. He was a competent aviator, and he was not averse to having it known that he was of Amerind extraction, especially in Europe. Everywhere we went, the Europeans were fascinated when it became known that the Chief of Staff was an American Indian. The perhaps overly-romantic implication of his origin amused him very much. I never knew him to speak to them in tribal dialect, but I believe that he knew the native language. I

think that he was of the Cherokee nation. I believe it was the Cherokees that were uprooted from somewhere in…

WINKLER: To Alabama or wherever.

COONTZ: Wherever in the South, and transported out to Oklahoma; and they were downtrodden for a generation or two, until it was discovered that they were living on top of a lake full of oil. So, that was the kind of staff that we had, and I believe that Admiral Train had personally selected us all.
(TAPE 4, SIDE B)

WINKLER: Continuing on about the Staff.

COONTZ: All right. That just about brings the Staff together. The Staff were experts in their own fields. They were as good an outfit as I've ever been to sea with; they and the *Chicago* officers and crew. I could not ask for a better outfit. They knew their jobs and we all fit together after the shakedown period, even as the *Chicago* crew did; but I wasn't with *Chicago* long enough to work at sea under actual, operational conditions with them. But I'll never hope to find a better outfit than that Staff after we got shaken down. We functioned well together. It was a real pleasure to serve with such competent people, from the Admiral on down.

There are sea stories. Because of the prestige of the *John F. Kennedy*, we were always getting visitors flying out to ride for a few days and observe our operations at sea. Incredible, marvelous, interesting people; but they would come one group after another, and we would have to be on our toes all the time to see that these powerful people were properly entertained. Well, not entertained, but shown whatever they came to observe. Just a few examples. Mr. Metaxa, who is the head of the Greek distillery that makes Metaxa Brandy, a great name in Greece. He is, perhaps, the third or fourth ranking millionaire after Onassis. And there was another wealthy Greek gentleman who came with several attendants. Metaxa brought bottles of his goods, which, unfortunately, we had to put away in storage until the appropriate time. But he also brought silk scarves for the wives of those of us who had the privilege of escorting him around, and whose performance pleased him. I don't know how many languages he spoke, but we did not speak Greek to him, which was a good thing. If he liked us, he would give us a silk scarf for our wives or girlfriends.

Lets see; the Secretary of Defense for Great Britain; he was Minister, I guess, of Defense. He and his right hand man came to visit. I think he came on the flight that was circling to land as the departing flight of Metaxa and his party was being launched. One after another, these marvelous people would come; and I was so exhausted that I just wished that I could be alert enough to enjoy their company. But we all had to perform. We would come in from operations at sea into Piraeus, Greece, and look forward to,

finally, a night of sleep; and word would come from the Embassy that "His Excellency the Ambassador is entertaining tonight, and you will present yourselves at 2000 in Dress Uniform," etc., to add your presence to the occasion, or something like that. All of these were great things, great people, and great opportunities, that under other conditions would be a thrill of a lifetime, just like meeting the Pope in Rome, when I was a Midshipman. But we managed to survive somehow.

The social duties of the staff were perhaps as great, and as demanding in their own way, as our operational duties. We had to be nice to these powerful people, all of whom were, with one exception, very nice people. Lord whatever his name was, I don't remember, the U.K. Minister of Defense, he and his private secretary, were both nice men; but the time that I had dinner with them I almost fell asleep at the Admiral's table because I'd been up for 36 hours.

When I graduated from the Naval Academy, I was able to communicate in the Spanish language. So when we were in Spain, I was always on deck to talk to important Spanish visitors. The Chief Justice of the Spanish Supreme Court came to a party given in Palma de Mallorca by the *John F. Kennedy*'s Welfare and Recreation Fund. The American Consul in Palma grabbed me, told me that the Chief Justice was not exactly a friend of the U.S., that his presence at this function was a great concession on his part, and that I had to be nice to him. I did my best, and saw that he was well served. We parted friends. I was told at one time that my intonation of Spanish was much on a higher cultural level than my English was. I give credit for this to the Head of the Spanish Division at Annapolis, one Don Angel Cabrillo y Vasquez. He spoke with the pure accent of Madrid, and he taught his fortunate students to "cough" our h-sounds from the back of our throats, and other subtle nuances of speech. I was told that when I spoke Spanish, I sounded like a gentleman; but when I reverted to my American, I was just a commoner. Well, enough said. Duty on the CruDesFlot Eight Staff was overwhelming in a way, but we survived because we were, again, a great Staff.

WINKLER: When you're in the Sixth Fleet area you also have the Russians out there. I just wanted to inquire, what was the situation with the Russians, as far as their Navy was concerned?

COONTZ: This is the situation. The word is etiquette. There was an etiquette that developed between us and the Russians. It wasn't written down in any book by Emily Post, whom my generation recognized as THE authority, or Miss Manners, or whoever it is that now writes the etiquette books. We would always make it clear, somehow or other, to the Russian shadowers what we were about to do. If we were about to change course, or speed, or something, we would not pull tricks as sometimes were pulled by suppressing the smoke from the stacks to be sure that we didn't give off an indication like that; but always telegraphed our intentions. Not by radio or anything, but just by appropriate indication so that the Russians would not be too antsy and precipitate an

unjustifiable action or something, and get too nervous about it. So that was the way that summarizes our interactions with the Russians. They were always there.

Lets see; once when we were leaving Greece, some of the Staff asked me to ask the Admiral if we could steam East for about an hour or so, before we turned around and headed for Palma. They were really enthusiastic about doing this, just to see what the Russians would do. But Admiral Train said, "No, I wouldn't do that. It just goes against my instincts. Let's not do it." He was correct. We shouldn't have done it. So, another use for etiquette. Don't upset each other. And, to the best of my recollection, the Russians didn't use us for calibrating their Fire Control Radars, or anything like that. We were always alert for that sort of thing, and nothing was ever detected.

WINKLER: Any other comments about that tour? I'm looking at your next tour of duty here—you addressed this a little bit—this is where you worked with Grace Hopper.

COONTZ: This was my second time. The first time, my first OpNav tour, I was working with Flag Command and Control Systems, and one Administrative System. My second OpNav tour was strictly concerned with Administrative systems. I have forgotten what they were. I wasn't even involved with the strategic system as this is. Very dull, matter of fact. Nothing romantic about it or exciting. But it was, the systems were all administrative in various fields. NAVLIS had vanished away at the time. I checked on it, and I don't know what happened to it. It was funded in my time, but I never saw any results of it.

WINKLER: Now whom did you work for specifically in this tour?

COONTZ: Admiral Haak, Frank Haak. As a matter of coincidence, he was the roommate
of one of my bosses on the CruDesFlot Eight staff, Admiral Wellander, who relieved Harry Train. Haak and Wellander were roommates at the Naval Academy. That didn't have any effect on me. I just worked for both of them.

STEIGMAN: Next to last tour?

COONTZ: Yes, that was my next to last. Then I moved from that job to a different part of the Pentagon, the Joint Staff. That was, perhaps in its way, the most challenging of all the jobs I had, because it was an "above-the-line" billet. If you looked at an organization chart of the Joint Staff, there are organization charts below a great big line. Then, above the line, is the Director, Joint Staff. He is not the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He's the Director of the Joint Staff. He keeps the Joint Staff functioning. I worked for him.

WINKLER: Right.

COONTZ: My billet was an adjunct to the Office of the Director. Now, the history of that billet was roughly as follows: After World War II, computers were beginning to be heard of. You may imagine the attitude of the senior Flag Officers of those days, who had never heard of computers, and didn't want to know anything about computers. The only computers they knew about were, perhaps, adding machines, and they didn't have much use for them, anyway. So they created a billet on the Joint Staff, above the line, reporting directly to the Office of the Director, Joint Staff, which was called the Office of the Assistant for Automation (OAATM). The Assistant for Automation's job was to answer questions about computers, or handle computer matters that had been referred to the Director of the Joint Staff.

A significant example of such a matter was justifying to Congress the Joint Staff's need for the expensive computer equipment under its cognizance. J3, the Operations Division of the Joint Staff, had a valid need for such gear in its analysis of potential enemy capabilities and how to defend against them, and quite properly had number one priority for use of the computers. But J3 was not always running analyses or conducting strategic exercises, and at such times the computers were idle, and available for use by other Divisions of the Joint Staff. One of the most important tasks of OAATM was to schedule the usage of these computers by the other Divisions, and keep records to prove that they hardly ever were idle. Our "above-the-line" status gave us the clout to apportion the available computer time between the contending Divisions. In all cases, though, J3 was not subject to OAATM's scheduling, and could "bump" anyone in an emergency.

OAATM was useful in other ways, too. When I relieved in the billet, the Assistant Director of the Joint Staff was a Marine Corps Major General named Shutler; I believe his first name was Phil. Now, Marines are warriors, not Administrators. One day I found him worrying about an administrative problem posed by a powerful person who wanted to know who on the Joint Staff had the power to commit funds in the name of the United States. I happened to know that only Contracting Officers have such power, and I so advised General Shutler. I further told him that I didn't believe that there was a Contracting Officer on the Joint Staff, and so, no one on the Joint Staff had such power. This was the answer that he needed to hear. From then on, General Shutler regarded me with favor. I was very careful to keep things this way, because if I ever did anything to make my boss look bad at this high level, it would result in my immediate ruin!

MG Shutler was relieved by a MG Dalton, USAF. As I recall, Dalton was, like Shutler, a Naval Academy graduate. But Dalton was years behind Shutler. Shutler was two years ahead of me at the Naval Academy; and I later found out that Dalton had been a Plebe while I was a First Classman, but we hadn't known each other at the Academy. Both Shutler and Dalton had chests full of impressive medals, ribbons, and qualification insignia. But Shutler was a Marine and a warrior, and he seemed never at ease in the

billet that required so much response to political pressures. When I worked for him, I had had about eight years' Pentagon experience, and knew how to work within a framework of power. I knew the scope, and, most importantly, the limits, of my boss's clout, and how to apply it to further his interests and assure his success.

As was the case when I was Executive Officer of *Halsey*, my second boss, MG Dalton, had a different personality from MG Shutler. Dalton felt at home in this high-level bureaucracy; and, moreover, he knew computers. I believe that he was the first Flag Officer who had first-hand experience with them. I explained to him the clout he had in the area under my cognizance. I told him, frankly, that I knew how to apply his clout without ruffling anyone's feathers or overstepping his limits, and that if any situation should arise in my area of responsibility that required his personal intervention, I would brief him carefully about the facts, and the possible consequences of any decisions he might have to make. General Dalton accepted this arrangement, and that defines our interaction until I retired. He was a smooth, urbane, self-assured officer, well-suited to a high-level Washington billet. A year or so after I retired, he returned as Director of the Joint Staff. He abolished the Office of the Assistant for Automation, and used the billets thus gained to enhance the efficiency of the Joint Staff. I lost track of him when I retired, but I wish him well.

STEIGMAN: How would you summarize your naval career, Sir?

COONTZ: I summarize as follows. Two things. My service was honorable, but undistinguished. I didn't really do anything great. My Grandfather Coontz was the one that preserved the U.S. Fleet at the 1921 Conference of Limitations of Armaments; and the battleships that were sunk at Pearl Harbor were the battleships that he saved by saying, "Don't yield! Stand fast on your quota!" What was it, seven-seven-five, or…

STEIGMAN: Five-five-three.

COONTZ: Five-five-three, yes, okay. Grandfather said, "Stand fast on that." All this is in his papers, in his autobiography. I guess my Dad didn't do anything great, except that he was in the faction that carried the war. He was on convoy duty during World War I. So when it came time that he had had any piece of the action, he was only a JG at the time; he would have been in the faction of Admiral Sims, I guess, the bellicose types who claimed they ought to provide the next CNO. You heard me the last time I was here about what the family lore is about the Washington types and the seagoing fighting types and how they cancelled each other out. That's how Grandpappy became CNO. Okay. So that's the first thing. I'll characterize honorable but undistinguished and that, I think, is a fairly realistic view.

The only family member who did anything great, recently, is my Grandfather Coontz's nephew, the late VADM Levering Smith, USN, who was for years the Project

Manager for the Polaris Missile. Polaris was the weapon loaded in ADM Rickover's submarines. This invincible combination bought time for the Western Powers until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The British Government recognized Cousin Levering's great service by awarding him a Knighthood, which our Government allowed him to accept. He and I never interacted professionally, but he and his wife, Cousin "Boots," and I had a comfortable social relationship. Levering and I were kin to Boots by blood, as well as by marriage.

Second, my naval career can be summarized as, let's say 95 percent danger or tedium or weariness or anxiety, and five percent glorious, magnificent, incredible adventure.

Example: When our Ambassador to Greece came onboard USS *John F. Kennedy* with a bunch of guests, and we were giving them a flying show, he was beat to the sod; I said, "Look, Mr. Ambassador, if you want to disappear for a while, I know where to hide you, and you can get a nap, or whatever." So I took him into my own stateroom and shut the door.

He said, "Give me two hours, and God Bless you!" I've forgotten his name. He was a career diplomat.

Meeting the Pope; I've already told you about the visit with the Pope, and kissing the Fisherman's Ring after receiving instruction from my adjacent Catholic fellow who knew what to do, and I didn't.

Let's see, what else. Meeting Prince Phillip, and being told that his wife didn't like him to smoke; so I put away my cigarettes. Little things like that. Nothing because I earned it; it was just being there, and having it happen. So, 95 percent drudgery, and five percent a fantastic adventure; fighting it out with the North Korean troops and having to shoot those guys to keep them from knocking the helicopter down, because the pilot wanted to have a piece of the action. Things like that; and on that note, I'll end…

WINKLER: Well, the only other thing I'd add is that you were witness to a period of great technological change.

COONTZ: Yes. That was another example of just being where the action was and getting the eye of a man, Stoutenburgh, who came over to Washington where the power was, and remembered me, and some others, and started me on that line. That's how, as I said earlier, I could step out of the Joint Staff on a Friday and into the office of one of my old bosses in OpNav on Monday. Although the technology had, basically, drastically changed by then, certain basics were still applicable, such as knowing how to write a bureaucratic letter.

WINKLER: Okay, that seems to be a good place to conclude…thank you again for your time.