

Carl Ellis

Interviewer: My name is Sara Spencer and today is April 30, 2005. What is your name and date of birth?

Ellis: My name is Carl Ellis and my date of birth is November 10, 1931.

Interviewer: Alright, where did you grow up?

Ellis: Here in Clarksville.

Interviewer: What did your parents do for a living?

Ellis: My daddy was an electrician.

Interviewer: Okay

Ellis: And we lived over in what was known as south Clarksville on Church Street.

Interviewer: Okay over that would have been near downtown or sort of in that area?

Ellis: I was not far from downtown maybe a mile, mile and a half.

Interviewer: Okay

Ellis: Went to school at the old Howell School that's been torn down over there by the Baptist church and Clarksville High School and then joined the Navy in 1951.

Interviewer: Now what were your memories of the depression? I know you were probably just a boy during the great depression do you remember?

Ellis: No I was born during the depression I don't have no memories of depression.

Interviewer: Now when WWII started did you notice an increase in your father's business or did how were you guys affected by the war?

Ellis: Yes WWII even though it was a bad experience for our country it did help our country to sort of get started economical. It was we were still in the depression and coming out of it a little bit but when the war broke out then there were a lot of jobs. Really helped the men get jobs and make living a little better.

Interviewer: What are your memories of WWII do you remember like the rationing systems or anything like that?

Ellis: Yes I still have a book of coupons that they give us for certain things food and gasoline, tires for your car and it was quite an experience. I know one day my mother sent me to there was a market down on Franklin Street, Kleeman's Market, sold meat that's all they sold was meat. And you had to have coupons to get some of the meat. Well just up the street was a ladies shop Lee's Ladies Shop well when I went down there was a long line and I thought the line was going into Kleeman's Meat Market but what

it was was a line of ladies going into Lee's Ladies Shop had nylon stocking, they had to have coupons for that. And so I was in the wrong line.

Interviewer: Did you get up to the front and find out you were at the ladies

Ellis: Yeh so then I had to go down and get in the line down at Kleeman's.

Interviewer: Oh that's funny. Do you remember the bombing on Pearl Harbor? Do you remember that day?

Ellis: See I was just 10 years old so oh I remember it vaigley and the boys having to go off into the service. I had three brothers in the service. Two in the Navy and one in the Army and the one in the Army was stationed in Hawaii and the two brothers in the Navy their ships was in and out of Hawaii from time to time. And then they would go ashore and look up their brother that was in the Army and they all got to meet there at one time or another.

Interviewer: Had your brothers entered the service prior to the war or did the start of the war bring

Ellis: No it was after Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: After Pearl Harbor?

Ellis: Yeh

Interviewer: Were you guys worried about them at home? How did you fell?

Ellis: Oh yeh of course my parents were but they made it okay.

Interviewer: How often would you hear from them?

Ellis: Sometimes it would be quite awhile before mother would get a letter. But they would write whenever they could and everything seemed to work out okay.

Interviewer: Did you ever write them yourself?

Ellis: No no

Interviewer: Now being their younger brother did you ever think about you know towards the end of the war you would have been what maybe 14 or 15?

Ellis: Yeh

Interviewer: Did you ever think maybe you may have to serve in the war if it didn't end or did that maybe excite you maybe that possibility or?

Ellis: No I didn't never think I would have to go. I thought it would be over with before I got old enough and it was. And we they would keep us informed in school quite a bit what was going on.

Interviewer: What made you want to enlist in the Navy?

Ellis: Well I don't know I just thought I would rather be in the Navy than any of the other services.

Interviewer: What were you doing before you got into the Navy?

Ellis: One of my brothers when he come out of the service him and his brother-in-law went in business in a grocery store and I was working for him when I joined the Navy.

Interviewer: Alright

Ellis: And I went into the commissary when I went in the service because I had worked around food before.

Interviewer: Do you remember around the date that you enlisted? When in 51 it was?

Ellis: Yes it was a real bad winter here in Clarksville in 1951.

Interviewer: Okay

Ellis: Second day of January because the first day is a holiday. And took basic training at the Great Lakes, Illinois and then they sent us to a ship that was being had been out of commission and they were putting it back in commission at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard.

Interviewer: What was your basic training like?

Ellis: Well it was it was worse where I went than it was here in Clarksville at the Great Lakes. It was very cold snowed just about everyday but in the Navy it's mostly classroom work you do a little marching but not much drilling. And it had to be inside everything was inside.

Interviewer: Did you have any experience like qualifying with weapons or was anything like that part of the training?

Ellis: No of course you they do teach you to fire a riffle you go to the target range and they show you how to handle a riffle. But most of the time in the Navy you don't have no use for a riffle.

Interviewer: Now when you enlisted the Korean War was going on how aware were you of the Korean War? Did you think that maybe if you were enlisted you would have to be involved in it or?

Ellis: Well I didn't know whether I would be involved I just knew that it was on and I should go and I did I volunteered. But all my time was in the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. We were our ship was an amphibious forces flag ship. A flag ship carries an Admiral and his staff. And we the reason they put our ship in commission was we were to relieve a ship that was in Naples, Italy that's where the Admiral and his staff was. And we set in Naples, Italy almost two years.

Interviewer: Oh wow

Ellis: And then came back to the states put the ship in dry dock and have to go down to when you put a ship in dry dock and come out of dry dock then you have to make sure everything is working okay so you have to go down to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. And the men would come aboard the ship and you'd go out and fire the guns and make sure the engines were working right and everything is working and came back and went back to the Mediterranean and this time we were moving all the time. In quite a few countries Greece, the French Riviera, Turkey and then came back to the United States. And our last cruise we took some they had made some foul weather gear for some Marines and we went down and picked up the Marines at Moorhead City, North Carolina and went up to Coosebay, Lebidore and this was in the fall of the year, early winter. And they would go ashore with their foul weather gear on stay all day and we would pick them up bring them back to the ship and at night we'd go on what the Navy calls operations. And the next morning we'd pull back into bay and we was up there for about six weeks. And they radioed and told us to get out from up there it was fixing to freeze so we came back to North Fork, that was my home port. And it was time to get discharged then and that was it.

Interviewer: Now you said in the beginning of your service you were in Naples for two years did you get to see a lot of Naples? What was that like?

Ellis: Yeh I knew Naples just like I knew Clarksville, two years. Yeh and they would have tours that the sailors could take if they wanted to to other countries you know. And three of my buddies and myself we took a 15 day leave went to London and

Interviewer: What did you think of London?

Ellis: Well it was it was a good experience to see all of things of course it hadn't fully got straightened out see this was just six years after WWII. And well it was about seven it was 1952 when we went on leave but we just got to see all the sights there in London changing of the guard and Buckingham Palace and everything.

Interviewer: Was there still a lot of buildings that were bombed out?

Ellis: No they had they seemed to have for the most part got everything built back and was in pretty good shape.

Interviewer: Now what when you you said you returned to the Mediterranean and went through Greece and all of those places would you visit those places when you would stop there?

Ellis: Oh yeh we were usually in a port maybe four or five days and the sailors would get leave and you could go ashore and do whatever you wanted to do.

Interviewer: Did you like getting to see the different places? Was it neat after you know being in the United States for so long you know to get to see other countries or how did you feel about it?

Ellis: Well it was just quite an experience for a young man 19 years old. Yes I enjoyed it very much quite an experience.

Interviewer: What was your job on the ship? You said you were in the commissary what did the entail?

Ellis: Well many commissary heed, cook commissary covers three things cooking, baking, and butchering. So at one time or another you are going to be doing one if you stay in long enough you are going to be doing all three. Now the only thing I ever did was cook I never did get into the other parts because I didn't stay in long enough.

Interviewer: Did you enjoy your job or?

Ellis: Oh yes I enjoyed it.

Interviewer: What was typical day like as a cook?

Ellis: Well you're on duty 24 hours and you're off 24 hours. A cook would come on duty on his watch after the noon meal and he would put out the evening meal. And then he would put out breakfast and lunch the next day and then he would be off 24 hours. You work every day but still one day you put out one meal and the next day you put out two.

Interviewer: How many cooks were there?

Ellis: Oh I would say there were about 25 or 30 of us.

Interviewer: How many would be on duty at one time?

Ellis: Now just speaking of the crew of course you had cooks who were officers and there would be 7 or 8 of us on duty at one time.

Interviewer: So did you become good friends with the other cooks or who were the guys you would hang around?

Ellis: Well yeh we all lived in the same compartment there yeh we all knew one another and worked together and we'd ashore together everything.

Interviewer: Did you make any friends during that time that you remained friends with afterwards?

Ellis: Oh yeh yeh yeh and I had one boy standing in my compartment and one of my friends says there's a man up here from Clarksville. I never did know him before but he came down and we talked for awhile and actually we went on liberty a couple of times together.

Interviewer: Did you miss your home being all over the world or how did you feel? Did you ever get home sick?

Ellis: No being away from home never did bother me because when I was young there were may times I was away from home going to church camps. I had an aunt that lived over in Hopkinsville on a farm over there I would go and spend summers over there or a few weeks you know and sometimes the whole summer. So being away from home didn't bother me some of the boys it did early boot camp there was probably never been away from home before so they got a little home sick. But it never did bother me.

Interviewer: Would you write your family often? Who would you write while you were gone?

Ellis: I would write my mother yeh I would write her often.

Interviewer: Would you get letters?

Ellis: From her.

Interviewer: Often?

Ellis: My mother yeh yeh.

Interviewer: What would you write about in your letter?

Ellis: Well I would just tell her what was what was happening and where we were at that was about it.

Interviewer: What would you guys do for fun? Did you have any activities you liked to do when you had time off?

Ellis: Well you could do most anything you wanted to go ashore and mostly it would be drinking and going to a bar or you could maybe someplace was you had heard before would be you thought would be interesting to see and you could go and see whatever. We there in Naples the Isle of Capri is just a few miles out in the water out in the sea there and a lot of times the boys would go out in the Isle of Capri and there was really not a lot of activity on the Isle of Capri. I guess it's strictly a place for tourist people on their honeymoon or something like that.

Interviewer: What would you guys do for leisure on the ship cause you were on the ship for long periods of time when you were traveling right?

Ellis: Oh yeh there's not a lot to do in the way of activity of course the ship has a library and if you liked to read you could go to the library and read at night they would show a movie, you could go to a movie. If you were tied up next to the dock you could go down and check out baseball equipment balls and gloves and go pitch baseball if you wanted to things like that. But a ship is strictly a working duty.

Interviewer: What kind of food did you serve? Did you guys enjoy the food or would you get sick of having did you have the same food often?

Ellis: Well its yeh most of the food is I think our ship probably had better food because of carrying an Admiral and his staff. And I think that your food has a whole lot to do with the people that's preparing it. If you have good cooks then you're going to have good food. If the cooks are not pretty good then the foods not going to be very good.

Interviewer: Now where did you learn how to cook the food did they teach you that during basic or did you have an advanced training?

Ellis: No you right there aboard ship they just take you right in the galley and you just start off from scratch people showing you what to do.

Interviewer: And what kind of food would you cook?

Ellis: Well most anything you would expect from breakfast you know breakfast food eggs and bacon and then for lunch regular changes daily what you would have for lunch.

Interviewer: Like sandwiches?

Ellis: Well potatoes mashed potatoes usually a the man that's making out the menu usually our chief petty officer he has a well a system that he has to go by you know so many calories that your gonna get so many proteins that your gonna get so many of each thing. So then he has to that's what he has to make his how he makes his menu.

Interviewer: Okay

Ellis: So that the mans going to get a balanced meal that's what they go by. I guess they do that in all services.

Interviewer: Probably, did you ever think about doing the staying career military?

Ellis: I thought about it a couple of times but at the end I didn't think the military was my lifestyle so I got out.

Interviewer: What about it did you not like?

Ellis: Well you have a lot of pressure on you all the time all the time. And there's no let up I guess that's what I didn't like mostly its just from the time you get up in the morning until you go to bed at night it's you know you've got to stay busy.

Interviewer: Right

Ellis: For the most part.

Interviewer: So when you got out of the Navy what job did you go into then? Did you go into anything related to cooking or

Ellis: No I of course was just looking for a job to do anything and I finally found a job at the newspaper.

Interviewer: Here in Clarksville?

Ellis: Here in Clarksville and I worked at The Leaf Chronicle for a little over 41 years.

Interviewer: What did you do at the newspaper?

Ellis: I was in advertising in the composing room at the paper. And we put the ads together the you see in the newspaper and back in them days we worked with lead everything was done with hot metal. And it was really I really enjoyed it when we first started out and then towards the end as you got into computers and things like that it seemed to loose a lot of the skill and everything it took to put a paper together. Of course it still takes a lot of skill but not like it was when it was in hot metal and we printed

13 newspapers every week. Not only The Leaf Chronicle but we printed newspapers all over middle Tennessee.

Interviewer: So would you actually take the lead and how would you

Ellis: Well the lead is melted see and sets in the machine and you have a machine called a line and type machine and when the operator of the line and type machine goes about setting that's how you get the name line and type sets a line of type up. And it when it goes into the slot where it's going to make a line of type it freezes instantly see becomes hard. And you take it out put it together and make the pages.

Interviewer: Okay what was your job in that whole process?

Ellis: Well I've done a little bit of everything except I never did run a line type. They put you take these illustrations pictures that you see in ads and they type and it you have a layout that you go by and you just take all of this and put it together to make the ad and different sizes from real small up to a full page. And the hot metal you had machines where you had to make these illustrations from a lay on a piece of material like a piece of cardboard and you would take and a machine and put it in there and run the hot metal down beside it and the image of that would come on the metal. And but now today everything's computer and the mostly young ladies young women sit at a computer and they control all this stuff right there on the computer and put it all together right there. So that's the difference.

Interviewer: I never knew the process it took to put a newspaper together.

Ellis: Yeh it's quite an operation.

Interviewer: Did you ever miss cooking? Do you ever cook at home?

Ellis: No no I I don't miss cooking.

Interviewer: What made you choose the Navy out of the branches of service when you were enlisting?

Ellis: Well it could have been because I had two brothers in the Navy.

Interviewer: Did they recommend that you go into the service your brothers?

Ellis: No no I just thought I just thought I would like the Navy the best. And a buddy of mine we joined together and I think him going in the Navy too sort of influenced me along them lines. And he stayed in the Navy 33 years.

Interviewer: Oh wow he made a career out of it.

Ellis: I'm glad I went in the Navy I really enjoyed it. I recommend it to any young man it helps you get a start in life. You learn what life's all about.

Interviewer: Did you feel like it gave you a sense of discipline at all? How do you feel like you've changed from you know the young man that went into the Navy to the young man that came out of the Navy?

Ellis: Well most young men as you get into high school and a little older you are able to sort of do what you want to. Maybe stay out later at night probably do things that you wouldn't be doing shouldn't be doing and then once you go into the service its completely about face. You have to be here at this time and you have to be doing this at a certain time and it's real strict and it teaches you discipline. And how to get along with your fellow man it's a good experience for any young man.

Interviewer: Well thank you for your interview.