

Interviewer: Go ahead and tell us your name and where you were born and raised.

Litton: Well my name is Horace Henry Litton. I was names after a Church of Christ preacher years ago down in the lower end of the county. I was born and raised right here in Lyles Tennessee which is the old home place is five miles east of where we're at right now. And I still own 50 acres of the original old home place and I have two brothers and three sisters. And whenever my parents died each one took a fifth of the farm and my property joins my brother and my brother joins my original old home place is over here right here almost where I was born.

Interviewer: Almost where you was born. What was your birthday?

Litton: February 28, 1926.

Interviewer: 1926 so your how old now?

Litton: Seventy four.

Interviewer: Seventy four years old.

Litton: Some people say if I would have been born a day later I would have been born on leap year on the 29th. I said no if I'd been born a day later I would have been born the first day of March.

Interviewer: I guess we'll go ahead and get into can you remember the first thing that you ever heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor? Can you remember the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed or did you know anything about it?

Litton: No I don't I don't just know that I remember that day because we were strictly in the back woods back then and we were just in once sense we were poor people. We didn't have radio and we didn't take the paper my grandfather lived just inside of the house and he took the daily paper and had a radio. And we had a little bit of the news but Pearl Harbor was just another place didn't have a whole lot of meaning.

Interviewer: Right no significance to you?

Litton: Not that much other than I did know some people that were in the service back then young men didn't have a there wasn't a place to go to work. And some of our neighbors that were older than I was had went into the military because that was somewhere to go for employment. And then so the service did have a meaning to you.

Interviewer: Right how about did you join or did you enlist or was you drafted?

Litton: Well I was called a selective volunteer. When I was about 15 or 16 years old CCCs was in the area and I wanted to join the CCCs.

Interviewer: Now explain that, explain CCC.

Litton: Well the CCCs was another place for young boys to go that didn't have nothing to do except just walk the streets. Let's see what the three Cs stood for I'm not real sure. But anyhow it was a little bit it was service connected and some of them some of the guys that I knew that was in the CCCs they went to Yellow Stone National Park and trimmed trees and picked up trash. And they lived and wore a uniform something similar to an army uniform. They lived like the army had regulations they was disciplined and everything like the army. But my parents you couldn't join without

Interviewer: Consent

Litton: Yeah and my mother wouldn't agree to that at all. So whenever the WWII started there was a big drive for defense workers and so I quit school in the 11th grade at Centerville. Then there was an NYA over at Dickson it was like the same thing we have now for trade school. I quit public school and went to NYA, National Youth Association, and took a course in welding and went to Savanna Georgia and went to work in a ship yard. And when I got to Savanna Georgia when I got to the ship yard I had to wait two or three weeks before I took this course in Dickson and went to Savanna Georgia and took an advanced course and then when I fished that course in Savanna Georgia iron working I had to wait a couple of weeks until I was 17 years old so I could go to work in a ship yard.

Interviewer: So by the age of 17 you were well educated man in the trade?

Litton: Yeah and so I worked in a ship yard in Savanna Georgia for six months. And I never made over 50 cents a day and I was making 90 cents an hour a dollar and went up to a dollar ten and dollar twenty and working overtime seven days a week. And it wasn't too long before I had three or four hundred dollars in my pocket and after six months I come home for a visit. Well everybody in this area was going to Detroit Michigan to work. And I thought I don't know anybody in Savannah Georgia so I thought I'll go to Detroit Michigan where I know some people.

Interviewer: How did your family feel about that?

Litton: That was alright too because I had some people up in Michigan. Well I had two uncles up there and I went up there and I lived with one of the uncles. But any how I went to Detroit Michigan to work I'd been working seven days a week, midnights, overtime and all that and I went to Michigan to go to work and the first thing I had to do was write home and get working papers permission to work.

Interviewer: Oh man when you were seventeen.

Litton: Yeah I was seventeen and I couldn't work nothing but the day shift could work but 40 hours a week and

Interviewer: Wages were a lot better though weren't they?

Litton: Well yeah a little bit but nothing compared to what I had been making. But that was the difference between Georgia and Michigan. But to get back to your question that you just asked was I drafted or what. One of my uncles there didn't have any children and he was I guess kind of my favorite uncle, he was on the draft board. And he knew that and he was an ex service person he went in on the

tail end of WWI. And he was on the draft board and he knew that I had always wanted to join the service, wanted to enlist. So the day I was 18 years old I registered and I registered at the same draft board that he was on and his name was Oscar, Samuel Oscar and I called him Uncle Sam. And he said Horace do you want to go on the first draft or do you want to go on the second draft? And I said I want to go on the first draft. He said okay so he hand walked my papers through the procedure

Interviewer: Right the red tape.

Litton: Yeah he took care of the red tape and on the 16th, I registered the 28th day of February, and on the 16th day of March I was in the Navy.

Interviewer: That was quick.

Litton: Yeah and I was called a Selective Volunteer. And I wanted in the Marine Core and by being a Selective Volunteer I could pick my branch of service.

Interviewer: Right, now being a Selective Volunteer did you have to go through basic?

Litton: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay you did.

Litton: And so I was told that I could pick my branch of service, I wanted the Marine Core. So when they swore me into the service the name said you are now in the U.S. Navy. I said wait a minute I wanted in the Marine Core and he said it's all the same. And so and but they put me on a train to the Great Lakes boot camp in Chicago Illinois. And I had five weeks of basic training in the Navy. There is no doubt about it I was in the Navy I was issued Navy clothes

Interviewer: You were the Navy you were the property of the Navy.

Litton: Yeah the man at that particular time he said it's all the same.

Interviewer: Just to shut you up.

Litton: An old dumb country boy you know. So I spent five weeks in Great Lakes that's how much training I had.

Interviewer: Five weeks?

Litton: Five weeks I came home for a week and I went back to Virginia to OGU and outgoing unit. I stayed in there about a week or 10 days and I was issued a whole bunch of equipment for North Africa. And in two weeks well then before the two months before I had been in the service two months I was on my way to North Africa.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little about the five weeks of basic? Some of the stuff you had to do.

Litton: Well it was all at that particular time I didn't know what they are doing. I thought why don't you make up your mind. They might tell you to dress out in whites and then go haul ashes you know. And then you'd come in with your whites all dirty and then the next morning maybe before 9 o'clock in the morning you'd have sea bag inspection and you better not have no dirty clothes. And then when I went in we carried our suitcase was a sea bag just a round bag. Everything we rolled all of our clothes we didn't fold anything everything was rolled. We rolled our clothes and you would put them in that sea bag in a certain way. Then we was issued like a hammock and a bed kind of a mattress. You rolled that all and you put it in that you'd take that sea bag and lay that all down just right and you tie it up together. And that sea bag was kindly a big "U" about a half a donut. And it would sit you could sit it up and we would sit that thing up on its bottom and everybody would be in formation. You would sit your sea bag down and then you would be doing be doing double time and pass your sea bag and you'd pick that sea bag up and put it on your shoulder and never get out of step. Everything you owned form your toothbrush to heavy winter clothes was in that sea bag. And when you'd throw that on your back you would kick it on your knee and throw it up and it would land up there on you. And that was and we that we carried our clothes. Every morning when you got up and you had a big piece of wood it was square but it was handing up and you tied that sea bag up on that, you didn't put your bed roll in it, you tied that sea bag end on hung it on that piece of wood about a 4 x 4. And you'd have those lines around there and tie that in a square knot and everybody's knot had to be straight you know. You know we wondered and of course young me how they are now what difference did it make.

Interviewer: Oh but it did.

Litton: It did and what they would do that one person didn't get the discipline the whole barracks got the discipline sometimes. So that made they was teaching you team work. And now you know and of course we did a lot of exercise and we did a lot of swimming and we had to pass a swimming test. We had to jump off a 50 foot like abandon ship and that type thing. But now back then I didn't know why they didn't make up their mind I think what they were doing was they was teaching you just to plane don't give a damn about nothing just do what you are told and don't ask no questions.

Interviewer: They were teaching you discipline.

Litton: Right you don't think somebody else will do your thinking.

Interviewer: That's right.

Litton: And of course by now I've forgot but it seemed like there was 125 all of us in one barracks. We had bunk beds three high.

Interviewer: Three high?

Litton: Yeah and we'd go to chow and we marched everywhere we went. And you know you'd hurry up and get at the front of the line and you'd get to the chow hall and then they would march you right by the door and when the tail end got there you'd do about face and the tail in would go in first. So it didn't take me long to learn the best place to be was in the middle.

Interviewer: You were hurried through your means too were you not?

Litton: Well we had plenty of time to eat.

Interviewer: And you ate what you got.

Litton: You ate what you got. And after hours Sundays we were allowed to go up to the canteen which was a little place had little refreshments. But not too much we wore this was boot camp and we wore leggings boots our shoes weren't boots but we had a canvas legging that we put on. And we put on those leggings every time we got up and we were in boot camp. And if you saw somebody that didn't have on boots they were an old salt you know they were. And just occasionally we got to go to the canteen and get a coke and a candy bar. And the rest of the time we ate what was on there you know.

Interviewer: Ate what was on your plate that's what you had? You didn't really have time to do anything else.

Litton: No we see we it might be after hours might be after 4 o'clock in the our training might come in you'd be getting ready to go to bed and he'd give you five minutes to fall out fully dressed.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: Might even have you fall out with your sea bag. You didn't know whenever he gave you the order to fall out with your sea bag and everything you didn't know whether you were going to catch a bus and leave or come back and go to bed see.

Interviewer: Did you feel at the time you were in basic that your sleeping quarters were pretty close, pretty tight?

Litton: I don't remember that that bothered me that much.

Interviewer: Because you know when you got on the ship they were a lot tighter.

Litton: Well that was basically the same thing. No I grew up in a small house I was born in a house that had one room and what was referred to as a lean to kitchen.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: And an attic and at that particular time there was five of us children and my mother and daddy and they took in a boarder. My dad had a nephew that was running a grocery store right there close by and he came down there and slept too. So close quarters?

Interviewer: You had bigger quarters didn't you? You didn't know what to do with all that space.

Litton: I was used to close quarters.

Interviewer: You said that you went from basic and you came back home for about a week and then you were sent to pretty much wait to go overseas.

Litton: Yeah they called it an outgoing unit that meant you was waiting for an assignment to go out of the states.

Interviewer: Right. Refresh our memories again about what year it was.

Litton: This was 1944.

Interviewer: 1944

Litton: Yeah I was 18 years old.

Interviewer: Okay

Litton: I was 18 when I went in the service.

Interviewer: So the war had been going on for a little while now since 39.

Litton: Yeah and the European war was just a year old.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: There about

Interviewer: Okay so this is 1944 what can you remember the ship you got on to go across?

Litton: I got on they called it it was one of the ships like we made in Savannah Georgia which was a it was designed this ship that I went overseas on was designed for to transport supplies and they converted it to a personnel ship. And it was strictly temporary personnel. And we had we were assigned bathroom time we had no fresh water. We was issued a quart of fresh water each morning. We ate two meals a day I mean we was standing room only just about. They would start serving the morning meal and whatever time you had assigned to eat the morning meal you ate the morning meal and then you didn't eat any more until evening. They would serve the morning meal until like 10 o'clock or 11 I don't remember the exact hour. Then at 2 o'clock in the afternoon they'd start serving the evening meal. And if you eat an early breakfast you'd eat at early evening.

Interviewer: How many days did it take you to get across?

Litton: I think it took us about 14 days I'm not real sure I might have forgotten it.

Interviewer: Fourteen days and yawl must have run a zig zag pattern.

Litton: Oh yeah everything we was in convoy and everything war time and all of that you know.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: And this was like I say this wasn't a personnel carrier this was a cargo carrier it wasn't designed for speed.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: And we left in the vicinity of Norfolk Virginia and landed in Oran.

Interviewer: Oran?

Litton: And that I think the longest steps that I've ever climbed except for the Washington Monument was from the dock at Oran up to our living quarters with that sea bag. And we had and then we had been issued a whole bunch of stuff. We had a rifle mosquito net and I don't know a whole

Interviewer: And you had to have that helmet on?

Litton: Yeah and we had and we didn't have no bus boy or no help nor nothing. And we went up and our living quarters were like in a quanta hut.

Interviewer: Now at this time of course you're going to be a replacement. At Oran you got into the unit or you got into the whatever it was you were going to get into the division the unit. Of course you are Navy you know you are Navy but you're specifically a Navy replacement officer. So you didn't know what department of the Navy you were going to be put in at this time.

Litton: No

Interviewer: When did you know the divisions and the unit?

Litton: I'm not too sure that I ever actually knew. I might have been so dumb that I didn't know what it might have meant. But I was actually going over for a replacement in the amphibious force.

Interviewer: Okay so like

Litton: That was a small Navy I mean the small craft Navy.

Interviewer: The ducks?

Litton: Right

Interviewer: The LCD's

Litton: The LCT and the LCI and that type thing.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: But one of the things whenever I got to Oran and I went into this quanta hut for another assignment see and every morning somebody would go out of that quanta hut there would be a sign. And the senior person not senior Navy time but the senior person in that quanta hut become the head of that quanta hut was the Captain of the quanta hut. Well here I am 18 years old been in the Navy two and half months and one morning I'm the senior person in that quanta hut. And that night here comes these people half marched you know they'd done been over and they'd done been through two or three invasions. I don't remember just how many invasions had been done in May or June of 44. But they had

seen some front line service. Here comes these people on the way home and they was assigned to that quanta hut and me the head. That night at bed check see that was one of our duties that night at bed check half of those old salts weren't there. They had liberty and it had come time for bed check and they weren't there.

Interviewer: Now this was in what month of 44?

Litton: May maybe June.

Interviewer: Because you know June 6th 44 that was D-Day. That was the largest amphibious landing you know right there at Normandy.

Litton: Well I was in Oran Africa.

Interviewer: On June 6th?

Litton: I don't know just exactly see less than three months there March, April and May three months I was in North Africa. Now I could have been in Bazertia when that happened because I didn't stay in Oran but a week.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: And I went from there to Bazertia.

Interviewer: So this was probably before the D-Day invasion?

Litton: Right

Interviewer: So this had to be May it couldn't have been early June it was probably sometime in May then.

Litton: Back to these this bed check. Here I am how am I going to report these guys not being there. See I was supposed to go find somebody and tell them the place is half empty. And you know I just didn't feel like doing that. Well I got up the next morning and everybody's in the bed everybody's in there. And so

Interviewer: You lucked out

Litton: So we fell out and whenever my supervisor my chief when he came by for me to give my bed report I gave all present or accounted for. And then I had to stay and I had to assign who cleaned the bathroom or that latrine that kind of thing. Then I had to stay to get further orders see. And when I got back to that quanta hut a bushel basket wouldn't have held what was lying on my bed. Cigarettes, candy

Interviewer: Prize possession chocolatier, cigarettes, coffee

Litton: Whatever right and that very day I got shipped out.

Interviewer: That very day?

Litton: That very day. And I went from there to Bazertie that day. And then I don't remember just exactly how long I stayed in Bazertie until I went on a LCI for temporary duty. And LCI is strictly personnel carrier.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: You put the bawl on the beach and let down some ramps if the soldiers are very lucky you put the bawl on the beach. And if you put it down in shoulder high water they still got on. I went on that LCI for temporary duty and they put me on bawl watch and that's the first time I ever knew anything about safety belts. We sat on that bawl and you sit in that chair and you pull one belt across your waist and another around your shoulders. And you sit there with them binoculars in that little ole LCI. We'd go under two waves and over one and then by the time you'd get your binoculars dried up where you could see again you know. You were supposed to be looking for airplanes supposed to be able to determine if they was enemy or friends. And so I stayed on that LCI for a week or ten days I don't remember.

Interviewer: Let me ask you this during that week or the 10 days there were you running practice rounds with the guys?

Litton: They were running what we call dry runs.

Interviewer: And you were running up to the beach and unloading.

Litton: You see soldiers would have to get off and get in that water just like it was the real thing. And the Navy was doing their part. See this is one of the things that has always been back here at home you would always read in the paper something about the Mainers had landed at a certain place. It didn't say anything about who took them in.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: Somebody had to take them in and that was the Navy's job.

Interviewer: Right if the Marines landed the navy

Litton: The Navy had the LCIs the ducks the Higgins boats.

Interviewer: All of that kind of stuff and set them on the dry land. So I stayed on that for a week or ten days or something and for temporary duty. And I'm just a seaman first class I didn't have anything other than boot camp. I didn't have any specialty of any kind. And so after that week or 10 days I was assigned to an LCT landing craft tank, which is nothing no more than a barge with a motor on the back end of it. For permanent duty and whenever

Interviewer: You felt a little safer in that than you did the LCT I mean LCI didn't you?

Litton: Well right at that particular time the landing craft tanks see we hauled heavy equipment.

Interviewer: And you weren't the first to hit the beach.

Litton: Well not exactly.

Interviewer: Sometimes you were?

Litton: Yeah see the heavy equipment sometimes was the first, went in on the first wave. But anyway there was two of us went on this LCT for replacement and the guy that the other guy was kind of a greasy looking fellow, even though he was supposed to be Navy clean he didn't look his part. And went on that LTC, two people with no specialty of any kind and we went on that LCT and this one has a Lieutenant J.G was the Captain of this LCT. Supposed to be two on there, had twelve men and two officers that was the crew for this LCT. And the Captain he looked at us and he said I've got two openings. One of them is in the engine room and there's in the cabin, and he looked at me and said you go to the cabin and you go to the engine room. I never, I don't know for sure that I'd ever fried an egg and I went to the cabin. And the cook he stayed about six weeks and taught me to cook and I cooked three meals a day seven days a week after six weeks of training from this guy. And very seldom did we ever have two officers and most of the time we had ten men, ten men and an officer.

Interviewer: Now how many men were you feeding?

Litton: Ten

Interviewer: Oh just those ten okay.

Litton: Those ten men and that officer.

Interviewer: Okay

Litton: And he ate just like we did.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: Only he could take his he had a little, and our living quarters was just right on the very tail end of that barge that TCL. Three fold up bunks three high. We've get up every morning strap everything down and turn it up to the wall. And whenever we'd in the bed every night if there was anything like rough we had to tie our self in the bunk. And really the LCT was designed to have a mother ship. The LCT went from the United States to North Africa riding on top of a LST. It got over there and it was launched. The LST was supposed to have been our mother ship. We weren't supposed to spend the night on the LCT. That was just we did have those sleeping quarters for emergency purposes.

Interviewer: Right but it turned in that was permanent quarters for ya'll.

Litton: Yeah we went out one morning and stayed 14 months.

Interviewer: Fourteen months.

Litton: On temporary living quarters. Didn't even have a shower we made a shower out of this pipe. I don't know where we got our tank, somewhere or another we got a tank and pumped it up full of water and let the sun warm it and take a shower.

Interviewer: Now in reference to who was around you then during these 14 months? What was going on where were you at?

Litton: We were when I was assigned to this LCT, I was assigned it was like a wreck it had a boom on it just like the old wrecker back here with a wench on it. And we cleaned out Harbor we went to Normandy and wherever. Right behind the front lines we cleaned up the Harbor so the incoming traffic could come. If there was a small boat or whatever had the Harbor messed up we had a diver and we had maintenance people to do what we had to do to clean that Harbor up. And we followed right on along the front line.

Interviewer: So you had a diver did you have a Frogman or anything like that?

Litton: Well we didn't really call him a Frogman. He was a deep sea diver. We had the equipment for a deep sea diver. Back then you had that big ole orange hat on you know and he put it on and it was a hand pump and all that. And he would go down and hook up the cables and what have you to lift this up and all that. And so we cleaned up harbors until we went from I don't remember right now I don't right now I don't remember just the first place that we went but Palermo and Salerno and all around Italy and Sicily and Naples. Everywhere some of the places see Germany they bombed that was one of the things they bet on putting out of business was the shipping area the port of the seas, what am I trying to say. The docks and things like that you know. And anything that they could do to keep ships from coming in to bring supplies, that's what they did. And what we did was to go in and open up the waterways so that the ships could come in and unload and bring in supplies.

Interviewer: So you went to Palermo which was in Sicily and also I guess you went up to Anzio do you remember that name Anzio. That was one of the beach heads that we invaded, come in on. And from there the infantry men they went from Anzio into Rome and stuff like that. But probably all up and down the western boarder of Italy, Southern France.

Litton: We went to we spent a lot of time until we went to Southern France most of our time was spent probably from Naples back. Around from Naples down around Italy right now I've forgotten the name of all of those. I remember Palermo and Salerno and I know we spent quite a bit of time in Sicily. But then we cleaned up those water ways until Southern France. Then when we began to talk about going to France then we got loaded for that invasion.

Interviewer: The invasion of Southern France?

Litton: Southern France and that's the Southern France is the only actual invasion that I made. And we was still had this record type and we went in on the first wave and unloaded our load and then backed off picked up the crippled the remaining time.

Interviewer: So you went in on the first wave?

Litton: And I don't know we had tanks and bulldozers and things like that. We went in the big ships stayed back in the back. And there's some people that will tell you Southern France was nothing like

going into Normandy. But whenever you go in under gun fire that will cut a tree down as big as that lamp shade.

Interviewer: Yeah it's still traumatic.

Litton: And I guess and that's the way we went in, we went in under heavy gun fire.

Interviewer: Mortar shell, artillery

Litton: The whole bit, it took down the forest. It cut it down like clear cut

Interviewer: Now the bigger ships behind you they were firing over your head too?

Litton: Yeah see they was firing for our protection.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: They was blowing the tanks out of the way. The German tanks

Interviewer: The Tiger tanks

Litton: And all that kind of stuff and see in this LCT we had a big ramp in front and we could let it down on dry ground if everything worked right. See they had the tide picked and all that you know. And what we would do was we would get to a certain point and then we would drop anchor hit the beach like full speed ahead and put that ramp on dry ground. And then once you unloaded it that lets you raise up then you pull yourself off the beach with the anchor.

Interviewer: Did you ever once hit dry ground too hard, too far and not be able to pull out.

Litton: No I don't think we, we didn't make too many dry runs once I got on that TLC. I was you know we just had two replacements and we had work to do and that type thing. Then we backed off there and we picked up the cripples and what have you. And I guess one of the things that's always been kindly hard to, we picked up a boat one day and there was one man in there that there wasn't anything except the trunk of his body. And then there was another man in there that looked like he might have just laid down and went to sleep wasn't, the whole body was there. And on his dog tag he had his class ring and maybe another ring or something like that. And one of our Navy men jerked that, took that ring off and crammed his dog tag back down in his shirt with his things broke Four or five weeks later we hadn't had a mail all in six weeks, he was wearing that ring. Somebody asked him said where did you get that ring, he said oh my sister sent it to me the other day. We hadn't had a mail call in probably two months. Him wearing that ring that he stole off of a dead man, one of his own American soldiers. And then the other part that's one of the things I remember about. And then the other thing was they buried the dead with a bulldozer. And three days later two or three days later the bulldozer had to come back and put more dirt over them. They buried them in such an area that they didn't have them covered deep enough for the stink. And this is one of things that I've always kindly thought they make a big deal about where is somebody at, how come you know certain people is not accounted for. There wasn't anybody went through that, there wasn't supposed to be any American people up there at that particular time. But if

one happened to be there nobody was checking to see if they was all Germans or all Americans or what you know. And of course there was nobody there to tell the German people where their relatives was at. I mean no different than during animals. Just clothes and all and then after I don't know we stayed there on the beach maybe a week or ten days, I don't know how long. Traffic in and out and then we started cleaning up some harbors there in Southern France. We spent I don't know how much time we spent in France Marcela and of course Geneva or Genova, Italy.

Interviewer: That's where they had the convention the Geneva Convention to for the enemy ally you know the graces there you might could say.

Litton: But we spent we stayed around there for I don't know how long and of course well I guess this would have been that must have been in 45 and then the war was over in November. Right now I declare I don't remember right where I was at the day the war was over.

Interviewer: That's okay but I bet you do know where I bet you do know the things that you saw and heard and witnessed that signified that the war was over.

Litton: Well yeah what they call we listened to the radio and our most favorite person well let's see not propaganda the German's had a lady that would come on and tell us you know all this stuff. We always listened to that seem like her name was Sally. She would tell us what our girlfriends was doing back home you know and try to make us homesick and all that.

Interviewer: Saying that some of the unlisted men they were dancing with them at the balls

Litton: Yeah and all that kind of stuff you know. And then especially to the married people what their

Interviewer: What their wives the affairs and

Litton: Yeah

Interviewer: And how they were becoming more dependent had those jobs.

Litton: Yeah but anyway we worked on those harbors all around let's see I don't know we had a occasionally we would get a I don't we didn't have three day passes. We most of our liberty was just a one day thing we never spent the night off the ship.

Interviewer: Off the LCT never?

Litton: No we never we did very little eating off of the ship very little. Now when we was in Italy there was an older man that was on the ship that was from New York and he was more Italian than he was New York. And we could go to town every once in a while we could go to town and have liberty maybe two or three times in a week just depended on what we were doing if we were kindly just killing time. And he could speak Italian and he we would take supplies from the ship and I'd go with him and we'd go into some of those homes and they'd fix up a meal. And that's the only eating to go to a restaurant and eat I've never eaten in one of them I remember eating in one restaurant in France but we didn't eat but very little off the ship. And there was one of those cities there in Italy there was just a young kid maybe

less than 15 years old he could speak four or five different languages. And he would hang around the dock there and whenever sailors well it didn't matter to him English or what he would go with them to be their interpreter. And we were going to outing onetime I don't know if it was a, but we were going to ride public transportation you know. And you know the Navy uniform we didn't have a place for our billfold our billfold we stuck one side of it over the bill of our pants and the other and our blouse came down over it. We was going to get on this public bus and this kid was going with me for my interpreter you know I don't know where we was going might have been. And he said, and it was just standing room only, he said to me you better let me have your billfold said they will pick your pocket. And I thought man but I gave it to him. And when we got to where we was going you know people pushing and shoving well he had done got a few people between me and him. But whenever we got to the stopping place there he was and he handed me my billfold.

Interviewer: It was hard to trust him wasn't it?

Litton: Yeah

Interviewer: I can imagine.

Litton: But now that then of course then we learned how to count Italian dollars. That pocket change we couldn't count. We didn't care nothing about that and that's you know you get a hand full of that stuff. And of course we were over there trained not to care for nobody almost so make the best of a situation what we did. And we could buy cigarettes you know we didn't have to pay tax on them. We'd buy a carton of cigarettes for 45 cents.

Interviewer: Do you think the war made you callused or hardened in any way or maybe did it turn you the other way and make you a little softer?

Litton: Well I had a lot of growing up to do when I came back, had a lot of changes to make. But no like I say we would buy a carton of cigarettes for 45 cent and go to town and sell them for 20 dollars.

Interviewer: Black market.

Litton: And when we was in Africa bed sheets cost a dollar and a dime get 20 or 25 dollars for the bed sheet. I got shook down one time with one bed sheet around one leg and one around the other and one around my waist. We'd wrap and then them guarding you. They were going to do it to when they went.

Interviewer: Did you smoke at that time?

Litton: Yeah

Interviewer: So your cigarettes were pretty precious to you. I have talked to some men that they didn't smoke some of them said I was like one out of none that didn't smoke and said I'd sell those things, they were like gold overseas.

Litton: Well see we for some reason or another we had a better source of supply than some of them had.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: We could buy basically all the cigarettes we wanted. Certain days you couldn't if the supply was out it was out. And then but I don't know how it worked but cigarettes never was really a scarcity in my situation. And no smoking and drinking beer was our past time.

Interviewer: It helped to kill the pain of where you were at.

Litton: That's something to do.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: I know that's one of the first things when I we had a liberty in North Africa in Oran. And went to Oran and went to the bar and ordered Koniak and I took a when I emptied that glass of Koniak it like to cut my teeth out. And I lit me a cigarette and dropped the match in that glass and it went poof. But anyhow whenever we left France after a certain after a period of time I had stayed on this one LCT all this time and then

Interviewer: You said about fourteen months, now it's 1945.

Litton: Yeah and they decided by the point system I could go home. I was entitled to a 30 day leave. I could go home so and I guess this is when the war was over, I don't remember now. But any how they took me off of one LCT and put me another because it was scheduled to go home. And we went back probably to Oran I'm not sure I don't remember where we started home from. But any how I got off of this one LCT to get on another one because it was scheduled to go home.

Interviewer: It was scheduled to reunite with its mother ship.

Litton: Yeah and it come to the United States it was going to come to the United States. And that's the way I came home I came home on my mother ship. I came back across from Africa to New York City on a LST.

Interviewer: So you were still having fairy you had a fairly decent ride back home you know compared to some of the others I mean you know. But at this time you weren't doing kitchen.

Litton: Oh yeah

Interviewer: You were still all the way home?

Litton: As long as the, until I got on the mother ship. When I got on the mother ship

Interviewer: Right when you got on the mother ship you didn't.

Litton: But I got off the LCT 16 I think was the number and went on 24. And we maneuvered our way down to Africa to get loaded, gonna load this LCT put it on its mother ship. And the first thing I saw when I got to Oran Africa was the LCT I'd just gotten off of already loaded. But anyhow I still stayed on mine and we got loaded and we come to New York City. And but some time another while I was in while

we were cleaning up harbors and we were, I don't remember where we were at or where we were going or where we came from or nothing. The worst storm I've ever been in in my life was at sea. And we all those TLCs being flat bottom were very subject to break into. And there were times when we were actually airborne. You'd go up on a wave and the wave would go down faster than the ship and you'd hit the bottom and then.

Interviewer: Thirty to fifty foot waves you think?

Litton: Yeah I don't know. It was bad enough that we were traveling in convoy we were traveling in complete darkness in the zig zag pattern. The storm got bad enough that we put on all running lights broke convoy and our orders was to do whatever you could do to survive.

Interviewer: That's a bad storm. When they give you that permission to do that that's

Litton: I mean you couldn't stay on course there was no way you just hoped you could avoid a collision. But that's one of the things about a storm at sea, there is nothing as calm as the next morning. Just the water looks so clean looks so blue.

Interviewer: Peaceful

Litton: Kindly like your sitting down in a plate you know.

Interviewer: Did you ever experience any type of sea sickness?

Litton: No I was very fortunate I was very fortunate that sea sickness didn't bother me too much. Now the night that we left France we went to town and run out of cigarettes and we bummed cigarettes from anybody that had one. And we was in this night club and it was all so tight you know and the waiter would come by with his tray of drinks you know going to another table. We'd just reach up there and get us a drink and whatever it was we'd drink it. And I bummed a cigarette from an Englishman and I tell you what dirty socks would have tasted better. And the next day the next day it was so rough whenever we got out. You know we didn't get out of site of the harbor until it was white capping and everything. And had baked beans, I was cooking baked beans a lot of the fellows could eat baked beans if the sea was rough and we was cooking baked bean. I was cooking baked beans and it was getting about time for the beans to be done and I still tasting that cigarette had a hand over too and opened that stove door that oven door and them baked beans the aroma hit me in the face and I thought I was going to vomit right in them beans. But I got them set down and got to the outside and that was all there was to it.

Interviewer: I've got a question for you and you just struck my interest on something. Here the waves are white capping here you are in this smaller vessel smaller ship, you're not supposed to call them a boat right. In the Navy you're not supposed to call anything a boat but anyways here you are and you're trying to cook baked beans. Now how in the world did your utensils not just go everywhere? I mean did you have some way of securing these pots or securing this, tell me about that.

Litton: Well just like our garbage cans set in a ring you know your garbage can is 24 inches on the bottom. Well you'd make a little ring about six inches high weld it to the deck and you'd sit that can in

that ring. And of course when I was on the LCT I don't even remember if we had a garbage can I don't know. Might have just threw it out the port hole I don't know.

Interviewer: Probably.

Litton: But then like the baked beans was in the oven and your pans you had little they fit you know.

Interviewer: They fit secure.

Litton: And the grill on your top of your stove had a you know. And so it wouldn't slide off you know they might bump around you know. Now after I came back to the states, I came back to the states and stayed 30 days then I went back.

Interviewer: You came home to New York City?

Litton: Came home and stayed got a 30 day leave.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: I came home and stayed 30 days then I went to New Orleans to pick up an assignment to go to Japan.

Interviewer: Oh me, that wars not over there.

Litton: No and my 30 days is up and my orders see I had traveling orders from New York to Nashville. Thirty days later I had traveling orders to New Orleans to Louisiana for another assignment.

Interviewer: This time to go to the Pacific.

Litton: Yeah and on the way from Nashville to New Orleans was on the train and that's when the war was over with Japan. That was between Nashville and New Orleans.

Interviewer: So the bomb had been dropped.

Litton: But I went on to New Orleans and still in an amphibious force but I got a promotion. I went to the mother ship I went to an LST. And there was about 700 on that LST. Been cooking for ten and started cooking started being a team part of a team and started cooking for 700.

Interviewer: Seven hundred that a lot of men.

Litton: There was three of us I mean there was six of us. Three to the ship we worked 24 hours and off 24 hours. That didn't mean we didn't get to sleep during the 24 hours that we was on duty. But we would get up every morning at 4:30 and cook breakfast and then cook lunch and after lunch was served why we was off duty for 24 hours. And but anyhow I was assigned to the LST in New Orleans we stayed around there loaded that thing and here again was another piece of special equipment. This was a like an aircraft carrier on a LCT. It had a big boom on the fan tail and a big boom on the big arm on the bawl hung off here on the side 20 or 30 feet. And it had a cable running from this boom to that boom and this

little airplane some kind of a little Piper of some kind you know had a hook on the top of it. And this cable had about a 3 or 4 foot handing down there with another cable running across it and this little airplane would come in there and hang that hook in that cable and he would run from down this and then we'd bring him in and set him down. And then the same way whenever it took off he'd take it back here on the fantail on the stern and he'd rev that thing up and he'd run the length of that LST and he'd turn his hook a loose and then he'd take off. And we were going to Japan and what we was going to do see over there they had a lot of these big balloons whatever you call them. That was the way they kept the airplanes from coming in too low. They'd take steel cables and put these, well what's a good, blimps and they would go clear out of site. But they was all around and the airplane would come in there and fly into this steel cable so they couldn't reconnaissance. Reconnaissance was what so we would go around the edge of the sea shores and all of that and this little airplane was going to maneuver around see the steel cable was more designed for larger aircraft. And this little Piper was gonna and so we were headed for Japan and we left New Orleans and the only way I knew was because, I'll tell you know thing about being a cook you had a lot of friends you know. And I was pretty good friends with the yeoman which is the bookkeeper you know. And so we left New Orleans and we traveled towards Japan for X number of days, I don't remember three or four days. We just traveled the captain supposable wasn't supposed to know where we were going. He had orders to go a certain direction for so many days then he opened his second bunch of ordered. Then he followed those orders for so many days, we did that until he opened a third set of orders. I don't know where we got to we had been at sea for a while. And we got we opened that third set of orders then we got orders over the radio to come back to New Orleans. That's how close to Japan I got.

Interviewer: That's close enough isn't it?

Litton: Yeah and so we run up and down the East Coast from then on. I would up being in the Navy 26 months. Whatever time the last 6 months of my career why we rode up and down the East Coast. We got an old some kind of ole shell I don't remember the importance of it but it was down on the tank deck where the equipment you know. And we carried it up to Maryland or somewhere and I don't know why and then we went in some rivers and then we were in Galveston, Texas for Navy Day. And the people the citizens of the town they come aboard and looked over our equipment and that type of thing. That's what we did the last six months I was in the Navy.

Interviewer: That was a lot easier and a lot nicer wasn't it?

Litton: Yeah and we left not Maryland, New Hampshire where they do a lot of shrimping. What state does a lot of shrimping?

Interviewer: Up north?

Litton: Yeah let's see what was the name of that state. We were up there up a river and we left there one morning, we got orders just like we was still war time you know. Just overnight you'd get and we left up there in one of those north eastern states and the deck hands were chipping ice that's what they was doing, and went to Key West Florida. We hadn't had out whites out in no telling when because most of the time overseas the uniform of the day was whatever we could steal you know.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: We liked the Army uniform better than we did the Navy. We wore it out. And but anyhow we went to Key West Florida and the uniform of the day was whites. And we broke them things out and they had been in a roll see they weren't all that wrinkled but we'd quit keeping our sea bag up to date. We hadn't had a sea bag inspected in we couldn't tell when. Wonder we hadn't sold them. But anyhow

Interviewer: Well the war was over I mean ya'll were taking breathes right now.

Litton: Yeah and we were just killing time and so we went to Key West Florida and stayed down there for a little while. And then we come back somewhere in Virginia I don't remember now Norfolk area somewhere in that area. And they was going to decommission the ship.

Interviewer: What ship was it, what was the name?

Litton: It just had a number it was an LST with a number 326 something like that it just had a number.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: But it was an LST which was the mother ship for the LCT only we didn't have an LCT.

Interviewer: Ya'll had the little plane.

Litton: We had the little plane. And the first thing we done before we left New Orleans was hang them arms on the telephone on an utility pole. I went in there while ago I thought I can't believe that I don't where those pictures are. I've got a picture of that airplane and I can't believe I don't know I must have taken them out to show them to somebody and

Interviewer: Misplaced them

Litton: But anyway we went back there and were going to decommission the ship. Well and getting ready to discharge and I was going to get discharged on the points system. See all the time that I was at sea I was in the service 26 months and I got credit for 24 months of sea duty. Sea duty and war zone was all the same. So I had two months of when I was home on leave my 30 days I was still on sea duty because I was between assignments. So I was going to get discharged on the points system which sea duty got time and a half, 15 points per month and then 10 for the other two. And they was going to decommission the ship and so we was all going home all ready to go home. And at the last minute here again we're not going to decommission we're going to keep a skeleton crew. And without you know I would up being part of the skeleton crew.

Interviewer: Oh man

Litton: Here you are you're going home and when you get up and whenever you get ready to go to bed your being held back you're going to be part of the skeleton crew. Half of them leaving and the other half going to stay and I was part of the half going to stay. And we went to town and that

Interviewer: You went to town

Litton: Went to town there didn't come home. Two or three days later they changed their mind again. And I came home that thing (pointing to his tattoo) so red it scabbed up just like you'd been burned.

Interviewer: Did a whole bunch of you go out and get a tattoo?

Litton: You know the old saying was screwed, stewed and tattooed.

Interviewer: Yeah, that was the Navy. That was the Navy. So they changed their mind and you got to go home.

Litton: Yeah and see I went in the service from Michigan so that's where they paid me to go back to was Michigan. Well I chose I could have chose to come to Nashville but it was further to go to Michigan then it was to come to Nashville from Virginia. The way I remember that but anyhow I decided to come to Tennessee. So actually Tennessee don't even know that I exist as far as service is concerned. Whenever they did thing down here at Centerville I could have gone down and had my name put on that monument put on that monument down there on the square because But I didn't I didn't and maybe I should have but I didn't. But anyway in all of that time I came home with everything except but just about a quarter of an inch of the end of my thumb. Which I got in a meat slicer.

Interviewer: Got in a meat slicer?

Litton: Yeah I had all of my body parts but I you know 20 years old I had no idea in the world how messed up I was. And because of family and my upbringing and a number of things I've been fortunate to overcome a whole lot of it. One of the, I guess one of the things that's been hard to overcome there had been no fear in my life. I had no fear of man, hell, nor death. You didn't mind if you died.

Interviewer: But now all of that's overcome.

Litton: And that's not easy to overcome. I guess right now it's not a big deal. Trying to be what you're supposed to be to your fellow man is something you have to take very seriously now. Other than family death don't mean nothing.

Interviewer: You reached a point in your life which I would say mature point especially from a Christian point of view however what Paul says for me to live you know if Christ but to die is gain.

Litton: I mean you know well I think about the grandchildren a lot you know. I'm still their grandparent you know just but worldly gain doesn't. We've got more than some people have got I don't deny that but all in the world it is is juts comfort. I mean we've got a warm place, a cool place, a dry place, plenty to eat and thankful that our finical status is not so much that we can't have a few of the little luxuries. But what else are there to have and that's what we fought for. And maybe now it's going out the back door.

Interviewer: I hope not, I hope not.

Interviewer: But again that's what you fought for that's what you were there for, for your grandchildren for their children you know.

Litton: When I say it's going out the back door, Germany and Russia is not our enemy anymore. Our enemy is right here in the United States.

Interviewer: Yeah we're starting to leave God out of our lives.

Litton: Absolutely and you know this is one of the things like on that ship that I went over on. The Chaplin he's up here preaching you know well we've just there's room to stand there's somebody standing there. He's up preaching and there might be a crap game going on right over there or praying poker.

Interviewer: And either you were protestant or catholic or nothing.

Litton: Yeah right or nothing I mean you had that. I mean that's. And you know the service is like a lot of other things we put a lot of emphases on numbers but numbers don't mean everything. I mean there's there were people that stayed in the service four or five years and maybe they never actually got out of the safety zone. Somebody else with just a very short time and you know they saw a lot of front line action. And you know this is one thing I am very thankful for I actually never pulled a trigger that killed a man. But we hauled in the facilities to use for the people that did to use.

Interviewer: Right

Litton: And you know somebody else might say you know I never went over to Germany you know didn't have to kill nobody. But they might have made the, they got up early in the morning and worked all the hours they could to build the equipment that the person was using over there.

Interviewer: They were building the shells to build the bombs right.

Litton: So who is more guilty than the other. It I don't know it just but anyway this little ole LCT that I was on we had two 20 millimeter guns. And before I went on it they had shot down a little reconnaissance plane. That thing was painted on the back of the deck you know, big time.

Interviewer: Shot down one reconnaissance plane.

Litton: Yeah

Interviewer: When you got back when you got back to Tennessee you said you had a lot to learn. Do you feel comfortable now in saying if you had it all to do over again would you do things different or would you probably not?

Litton: I don't know if I'd be able to do it well or not, I wouldn't want to try it again. And the only reason in the world that I took a desk job because that's what everybody else was doing. They were ditching about what this Navy life was like you know. I could have re-upped went to had an opportunity to, I could cook that was one things I can still cook. But I had an opportunity to re-up and go to officers cook school. But everybody you know got to go home got to go home. And I come home and the only thing in the world that kept me from re-upping before that 90 days was up I got married. Lorene and I had we met in the second grade and somewhere in early high school we kindly went our separate ways. But

about the time I went in the service why we got to seeing each other again and I got home on the I got home in May the 8th day of May.

Interviewer: Of 46? Forty six and 90 days after.

Litton: We got married on the 28th day of June. But I could have I had 90 days to re-up.

Interviewer: To re-up yeah

Litton: With all of the without any changes you know got all of the benefits and stuff. But anyhow I stayed in 26 months and that eighth day wouldn't have hardly been 26 months. Let's see March and April I'd have had to needed to be in the 16th maybe I lacked 8 days being in 26 months. Somehow or another the 8th day of May seems like when my discharge was.

Interviewer: Just something that's sticking with you now.

Litton: A lot of stuff I can't remember. I guess that's one thing that the lord gave me the ability to forget. Some people you know they can't. I came home on the LST the LST I came home on I wasn't on duty on the LST. I was being transported I was one of the passengers and there was a man on there

_____ (tape began skipping) and known as a man of steel. And he lost it all on the way home never did get back _____ he had done seen too much and that ship would break in two or whatever. And he came home in straps.

Interviewer: That's sad because there are so many men that would have loved to have had that same opportunity to have come home.

Litton: Yeah I mean it's like you know quitting times at 6:00 you know but you never make that last hour.

Interviewer: I know that you had you seen a lot going through and going here. On my behalf I respect you for what you did. I mean that was that was

Litton: Well the whole world here if we hadn't have we would be under somebody else's government right now.

Interviewer: Right I believe that.

Litton: The whole country pitched in and did what they had to do for us to do that. And it's you know to see people eating out of trash cans you know I mean actually hungry. Not because their traveling there's nothing there to eat. And you see little 10 year old kids pimping for their sister that may be 15 trying to survive. You know I guess some of the things some of the things I have forgotten and some of the things hopefully you will never see. It's hard to even imagine what it would be like to be that hungry. I saw a French guard unload a ship of flour with a bunch of German soldiers one time and the French didn't have much more to eat than the prisoners had. The French was they were hard up.

Interviewer: Yeah especially during this time their land had been destroyed.

Litton: Their army was very short on supplies. But anyhow he was this French guard these German soldiers was unloading that load of flour he had 100 pound bags and those soldiers those German soldiers was so hungry knowing they would get a beating for tarring a bag of that flour. They would fall against the wall or something to tare one of those open and they would take that flour and mix it with sea water and eat it or eat it dry.

Interviewer: Eat it dry

Litton: Put it in the cuff of their pants until they, try to hide it until they had an opportunity to maybe. And then one morning I was still on this LCT there in France somewhere and this German soldier this French soldier had this German soldier cleaning up the dock picking up trash or emptying trash cans you know. And he passed and he asked me if he could have a cut of coffee and I said well yeah I'll get you a cup of coffee. And I said how about him and he said oh you don't want to give him a cut of coffee and I said yeah I do too. And he was a little reluctant to let me give him a cup of coffee. But he wanted one so bad he thought he would take a chance I suppose. And they was sitting there and our living quarters was not bigger than this room and the little ole galley was right there and had a little like a little bar. And I got them a cup of coffee and of course we had powdered eggs and spam and anything you could get in a can you know. And I asked him you know would he like for me to fix him some breakfast you know, why yeah, so I started cooking powdered eggs maybe cooked some spam or something you know. And I know that poor German soldier he ate enough to die. There ain't no telling how much they ate that morning both of them one was just about as hungry as the other one. But you know it just but I couldn't I mean I couldn't feed that French soldier and that other man standing there hungry I just, that wasn't part of my upbringing.

Interviewer: Well you know the American soldiers on the whole not everyone but most had a heart they would take these German soldiers or any man and feed them or give them something or give them a break. But in return the German and especially the Japanese they were heartless towards our prisoners.

Litton: From what I can hear the Japanese were worst. Not the German prisoners they didn't want to leave you didn't have to guard them.

Interviewer: Yeah I know it.

Litton: In Masuria whenever I got to Masuria there was kind of a Navy night club there and they had a German band had German soldiers for the band. And you would buy them a beer and they'd play anything you wanted. The people the American people that were German prisoners Missy Cockran that goes to church Bud Cockran's mother Bud's daddy he was a prisoner on the other side and they went lots of days with a little slice of bread.

Interviewer: Right and I'm thankful he wasn't a prisoner on the Japanese side because like you said earlier they usually if Japanese took you that meant that you would probably die. Well Horace I guess I'm done with questions is there anything else you want to

Litton: That's about all of my service career. I came home I got married and I married a very understanding person