

Interviewer: For the cameras sake, and it can only see you, I'm speaking today with Judge Muir from Williams Port Pennsylvania who is a WWII veteran. And Mr. Muir tell me a little about your

Muir: It's not Mr. its judge.

Interviewer: Judge sorry

Muir: It's Judge Malcolm Muir which may mean something to the students who see this.

Interviewer: Okay Judge Malcolm Muir Sr. in affect.

Muir: Right

Interviewer: Judge Muir tell me a little bit about your family and how your family made it through the depression.

Muir: Well I was an only child and I graduated from high school in 31. Went to Leigh High they called it and in the depths of the depression when the banks were shut down my dad and mother had no bank account available to them. And I think I had \$400 in the E.P. Wover Trust Company in Bethelview, we were talking about that earlier. And I sent them I believe fifty percent of what I had. It was a tough go because my dad was a dentist and he said that people paid other suppliers to them but they always held up on the dental fees until the end. So they had a very tough time. And he was kept going and my family was kept going by a grandmother of mine if you will who had a little money probably not a lot. But when she died during the war she had an estate probably nothing excessive like \$12,000. She supplied enough money to send me to Leigh High and graduated from Harvard Law School. But at Leigh High \$400 as I recall it was enough to pay my tuition, room and board, and we ate meals on a meal ticket which were five dollars and a half. You paid five dollars for it and you could get a meal for fifty cents.

Interviewer: So you graduated from Leigh High then in 35?

Muir: That's correct.

Interviewer: And you went to Harvard Law School then from 35 to 38?

Muir: Right

Interviewer: And had you always known that you wanted to be an attorney?

Muir: No I didn't know what else I wanted to be. And my grandmother and grandfather Muir were friends with a very prominent lawyer in New York name Reeves. And I remember her and my grandmother and my dad mention that Mr. Reeves charged \$100 for every letter he wrote well that in the 20's was a very considerable amount of money.

Interviewer: Sure where did you start your practice when you completed law school?

Muir: I went back to Williamsport Pennsylvania and I just you may have heard me telling my son the first four months I grosses \$400 well really three months. The first full year I grossed \$2200 and my fiancé

and I decided that was enough for a marriage. The next year I grossed \$1800 that shows you how tough it was to start a law practice.

Interviewer: What did you have a specialty when you?

Muir: No I took any business that I could get. As a matter of fact we searched titles for \$6 a title now just think of that. And we'd go into the court house at 6 o'clock in the morning and work on those things.

Interviewer: What was your expectation for the future at that point? Did you think America would continue to stay out of the war and you could continue to practice law?

Muir: I have no distinct recollection on that. I thought probably we would stay out of the war.

Interviewer: Were you a fan of Roosevelt?

Muir: No

Interviewer: What reason could I if you don't mind my asking?

Muir: Well I can't tell now whether that I'm explaining to you is a result of what I've read since then or what I thought at that time. I really think he was a much greater man than I thought during the depression. I think he did do some dreadful things such as sending that ship of German Jewish refugees back to Germany and most of them were executed.

Interviewer: The St. Louis.

Muir: Yeah but I always have thought that the greatest man of maybe the last out here was Winston Churchill and he said that Roosevelt was the greatest man he had ever met. Which is a pretty good endorsement for me so maybe I've changed my views in the last few years.

Interviewer: So you were working in 1938 and in 1939 and when the war came in 39 did you believe you would be called into the service?

Muir: I didn't know at that time I really didn't. I don't think well I didn't know that's all.

Interviewer: Well it might interest you that this weekend September 15, 2000 is the 60th anniversary of the passage of the Selective Service Act in 1940. Do you recall having a selective service number and starting to think about being called up?

Muir: Yes although I don't remember the number. I don't think I remember my serial number as a naval officer and I'm fine with that. I think it was 204859 but I could be wrong.

Interviewer: When were you called to duty or when did you first start the process?

Muir: I went in in the fall of 42.

Interviewer: Okay and in 41 what were your activities?

Muir: Well I was still working as a lawyer and going out once a week to a remote area in north Williamsport with a friend of mine to view the skies for enemy planes.

Interviewer: Oh spotters.

Muir: Yeah we never saw anything.

Interviewer: Not surprising. Do you recall on Sunday December 7, 1941

Muir: Yes of course

Interviewer: Where you were and did you hear the President's speech?

Muir: No I didn't hear the president's speech but we were at dinner in our apartment my wife and I and her father who lived with us. And another lawyer a friend of mine and also a friend of my wife's family and also the reason they moved to Williamsport called up and said the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and I didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was. I remember asking him where it was and I didn't think he knew either.

Interviewer: Were you surprised that it was Japan who had started the war this way?

Muir: I don't recall.

Interviewer: Many people in late 1941 were expecting a conflict with Germany over

Muir: Sure

Interviewer: With the conflict with submarines and merchant ships being sent to England. And they were surprised of course that the conflict came from the other direction. What did you do after you heard the news?

Muir: I have no recollection of that.

Interviewer: Well did you prepare to be drafted did you think

Muir: Well I thought I was going to be drafted but there wasn't much I could do to prepare.

Interviewer: And did you make a choice when you were drafted?

Muir: Well I actually wasn't drafted I sought a commission in the navy.

Interviewer: And why the navy?

Muir: Well I sought a commission in the army too I got one in the navy.

Interviewer: Okay

Muir: As an inson.

Interviewer: And was this you sought a commission because you were a college graduate.

Muir: I sought a commission because I believe I thought I could send some more money home then but.

Interviewer: Okay did you go through basic training?

Muir: Yes I went to Dartmouth as I recall it for two weeks. And it was extremely cold up there and we lined up in front of the dormitory each morning every early and we were supposed to be in certain positions. But it was so cold as I recall we wore face mask so we stood anywhere in the group.

Interviewer: Do you mean Dartmouth College as in Hannover New Hampshire?

Muir: Yes yes

Interviewer: How would this is not on a coast is it?

Muir: No

Interviewer: How would this prepare you for naval training?

Muir: Well we had to learn the rules of the road all kinds of naval data.

Interviewer: And these exclusively officers in this training?

Muir: Yes

Interviewer: I used to teach at University of Iowa and the air force had an arrangement to train some of their officers the army air core then had an arrangement to train some of their officers there and the former Senator John Glenn was one of the people trained in the army air core out in Iowa. So I've heard of this procedure before. Where did you proceed next?

Muir: My recollection is that I was sent to New York City. That's correct I was sent to New York City in the intelligence branch as I believe in a holding position until they could find something else for me.

Interviewer: And what were your aspirations as far as the navy was concerned? Did you have any particular ambitions?

Muir: No

Interviewer: When did they make a commitment to put you in a particular service in the navy?

Muir: I believe it was March of the following year at the height of the submarine sinking. Another officer who was serving in the same place in New York City and I each got our orders to arm guard the same day and we went out to eat that evening and it was the only time I ever had what I would call a laughing jag on. We were so scared we were just like we were drunk. Submarine sinking were very high at that point.

Interviewer: In fact Admiral King and Roosevelt and even Churchill have been criticized for not doing more than they could have particularly say in 1942 for organizing convoys along the eastern coast. Were you aware of these problems at the time?

Muir: No I all knew is that all any of us knew I believe is that the submarine sinking were fast.

Interviewer: I read a book recently that suggested that in one sense of the word it was the biggest naval defeat that America ever suffered. That in early the first 6 months of 1942 the Germany submarines hunted along the Atlantic Coast and in the Caribbean at will with very little resistance. Was this your impression at the time?

Muir: Well I didn't know that but I knew the sinking's at the time were very high. That's all I knew.

Interviewer: And what about the loss of life? Where there any measures counter measures for search and rescue to try to find the victims of these sinking's?

Muir: I have no idea.

Interviewer: Okay when you were assigned, this was in March of 43

Muir: That's my recollection although it may have been later on but it's about that.

Interviewer: Okay where did they send you then after New York?

Muir: I went to a place I can't recall the name of it right at the moment near Norfolk and the armed guard and many people never hear of it then and many people have never heard of it until now. But what it was was the naval contingent for gunner aboard merchant ships and the object really was to put enough gunners and guns aboard merchant ships that the submarines would have to use torpedoes. They could not use their surface guns because if they came onto the surface we were in a position to make a lucky hit. We didn't have any great system for guiding the projectiles. But we were told to shoot beyond the submarine and shoot this side and then compensate and shoot in between. And I have a gun and my son has a gun casing from it in his office which you may have seen.

Interviewer: Yes I have

Muir: It's about that high and it was four inch gun that would shoot 15 miles. And of course if you could hit anything with that it would certainly sink a submarine. It could sink even an armored vessel because it was a gun taken off of a cruiser and put on this ship. And then we had antiaircraft machine guns and that kind of thing.

Interviewer: It's interesting that you should mention Churchill because Churchill was in favor of an idea like this the notion of arming merchant ships against submarines as far back as WWI. What kind of how large are the ships we are talking about here that were armed in this fashion?

Muir: Oh I was on three ships the first ship was a liberty ship.

Interviewer: Okay

Muir: And the third ship was a liberty ship. The first ship was a liberty ship converted to a troop carrying ship. Now I think that is a somewhat interesting story as to why I got aboard this ship. When we finished our course we were sent to New York or to Brooklyn and assignments were made to various vessels. The captain in charge of all these armed guard officers came out and said gentlemen I want a volunteer. The Booker T Washington is in port and we need an officer for the gunnery crew aboard it and there was a silence. The Booker T Washington was a ship that was commanded by a black captain and that was all I knew but there were other black officers and so forth. In the training we had a Dardanelles there were three officers that had the same training and two of them were from the south. And when I heard that announcement I thought of two things I could do this better than those men it would just be an alternative of them. And then for years we had argued the relationship between black and whites. And at the end of the argument the opponent always said but would you live with one. And I thought by golly no bodies ever going to be able to say that to me again. I stepped forward and volunteered.

Interviewer: It's kind of equivalent to the question would you want one to move next door or marry your daughter.

Muir: Absolutely

Interviewer: Or something like that.

Muir: So the first ship I served on was the Booker T Washington and it had frightful quarters for the troops that were aboard. And they put their cooking devices out on deck and they had to eat on deck and it was just very bad set of conditions under which to get transported from the East Coast to Europe.

Interviewer: And tell me how did this work operationally? As a new naval officer you were dealing with civilians and merchant marine on these ships is that correct?

Muir: Well they were all merchant marine or civilians other than the troops.

Interviewer: Okay and how did the command structure work?

Muir: We were in command of the guns and that's about it.

Interviewer: And how well did you get along with I mean was there friction between.

Muir: Very great friction at times. I do want to say this, the captain was black and the first mate was black. The second mate was white the radio officer was white and I sat with the my cabin mate who was an army officer really in charge of the troops abroad but only in the sense that he was a bookkeeper. He didn't have any real command of them. But there were two black officers the radio man and I think the chief engineer and the army officer and I had a table in the mess hall. And the most amazing thing to me was in two weeks when I talked to somebody another officer I wasn't cognoscente if he was white or black that's how easily we developed. But the skipper in my opinion was totally incompetent I think he was skipper because he was black. And we were in a storm off of the African coast and a collision the captain yelled abandon ship and went to his cabin and got a corkboard or whatever he had to take with him. And ran down to his life boat station which was the same as mine and where was our lifeboat it was gone. It was hanging on the bow of the ammunition ship with which we had collided. The point of impact was about eight inches within a double lining of the ship it was a fluke if it would have been eight inches off the ship would have sunk. The command had been given to abandon ship but when the chief

one of the engineers found out where the point of impact was he realized there wasn't any water coming in. So he quick got work that none of the men were off none of the soldiers but it was a storm and if we would have had to go off in life boats it would have been a great loss of life. I remember one thing and it has to do with my son here and I thought as I was standing there waiting for further orders on deck I will never see that little boy.

Interviewer: And this must have been in 44 or 45?

Muir: This was in it might have been in late 43 I'm not sure because I don't have the dates too well ironed out. But we were on that ship and went up to Naples and were there within a week after the Germans left. And you probably know when that was better than I do I don't know when it was.

Interviewer: Well the Italians got out of the war and surrendered basically in September of 43 and I believe Naples and Solano were taken in the fall 33 or 43 rather. And the in 44 further up the peninsula Rome was taken in August of 44.

Muir: Well I was in Naples within a week after the Germans left to give you a point there. And then came back to the United States aboard that ship. And went on the next ship which was the Sinclair HC now there was a gasoline name Sinclair high compression HC and that's the tanker I was on.

Interviewer: An oil tanker?

Muir: Yeah and we ran from Aruba to Melanie Bay New Guiney it would take us about a month for that trip and we ran alone. Now the Booker T Washington was always in a convoy. But when we ran in the pacific we were always alone. We would arrive in Melanie Bay would take us something like 16 to 18 hours to unload then we'd turn right around and go back to Aruba. I got so fed up with that that I remember getting off the ship on the Pacific side of the Panama Canal and taking a train over and catching the ship on the Atlantic side just so I could get off for a little while.

Interviewer: So you went through the Panama Canal when you made this trip?

Muir: Yeah

Interviewer: And in Aruba there are Dutch oil refineries aren't there?

Muir: Oh the refinery was the SO that I remember. And there was nothing else on Aruba now it is apparently some sort of a playground.

Interviewer: That's what I've heard.

Muir: It was just a lot of bent over trees from a constant wind from one direction and this SO refinery and nothing else.

Interviewer: Let's back up to the Atlantic before we get to the Pacific.

Muir: Alright

Interviewer: What route did you take across the Atlantic was this north or south?

Muir: Well we would go northerly across the wait a minute I never went to England on the Booker T Washington we just went right straight across the Mediterranean that I recall.

Interviewer: So that would really be more of a southern route wouldn't it?

Muir: Well it would be yes it was from Norfolk to Gerbroder.

Interviewer: Did you encounter okay how large were the convoys you said you were in convoys?

Muir: I don't recall but my guess would be 100 ships.

Interviewer: Okay do you recall the speed at which you were traveling?

Muir: Yes not precisely but I think that liberty ships couldn't go much over 8 or 10 knots and it was very slow.

Interviewer: Actually some of the ships traveled at 6 knots 7 knots.

Muir: Because that tanker I mention the Sinker SC was fast and to my recollection we did 12 knots but I could be wrong on that too.

Interviewer: And what were the escort ships that you had while you were being convoyed across the Atlantic?

Muir: My recollection is destroyer escorts.

Interviewer: Okay and as a naval officer did you have contact with the naval warships?

Muir: No none

Interviewer: That surprises me a little bit. You would think that you would coordinate that you in sense would be the point man in a way since you were on the merchant ship.

Muir: Yeah I think we were on there just to deter the Germans from shelling us on the surface.

Interviewer: Do you recall using radar or sonar?

Muir: I had no connection with that and I don't recall that.

Interviewer: Okay

Muir: I think radar was known but I didn't have any connection with it. I never went up in the coning tower of course. I believe that's what they call it but I never went up in the place where the navigating officer.

Interviewer: Right I was gonna ask you about something else if I can remember the name of it it's something like it's a type of radar device something like the word run dumb. And it was used to locate German submarines but I may have the name wrong.

Muir: We had nothing like that.

Interviewer: Okay

Muir: That was all done by naval vessels.

Interviewer: How good a gunner did you become on this?

Muir: Oh we never had to shoot our guns at all.

Interviewer: Did you ever have to train on the guns?

Muir: We did train on them but don't think we did that in convoy so my memory is not good as to when we did fire them. I do remember firing big guns a couple times just to make darn sure that we could get the ammunition up from the hold whatever it's called and get it in the gun and use it.

Interviewer: Going back to the Booker T Washington do you know how the captain got his command?

Muir: No I do know that he when the ship would come in before we were on it Eleanor Roosevelt and a great singer whose name escapes me at the moment

Interviewer: Maryann Anderson

Muir: No this was a male singer on the top he lived in Russia

Interviewer: Oh Paul

Muir: Robison

Interviewer: Robison yeah

Muir: I understood at a prior time when it arrived in port the two of them came down. But we never had any like that.

Interviewer: So this was a sort of an experiment or a demonstration if you will.

Muir: Right yeah. Now my first experience with affirmative action and I call it Jim Crowism in reverse.

Interviewer: Interesting

Muir: Later on people referred to affirmative action discrimination in reverse.

Interviewer: But in general did you with the exception of the captain did you think that most of the people on the ship were competent and

Muir: Yeah

Interviewer: And affective in their jobs

Muir: The mate who I believe was the third mate who was black had come in from retirement and he was not competent and he got lines which had run to the pier tangled up in the propeller and we had trouble with that. The chief engineer was black and the radio man was black and was very competent and they and I got along quite well. As a matter of fact I remember taking the two of them to an opera in Salervo so I thought they were wonderful. And I even kept in touch with the radio man after the war for a while and went out to see him in the Bronx and so forth.

Interviewer: How many trips back and forth across the Atlantic did you make on the Booker T Washington? Can you reconstruct that?

Muir: I cannot I hadn't thought of it. I may have even only made one I think that's correct I may have even made one. And then I went aboard this faster tanker the Sinclair at sea and we did run a long time. I think I was on that maybe six or eight months of war.

Interviewer: It took what 12, 14 days to cross the Atlantic on this ship?

Muir: I think on the Booker T I think it took a lot longer than that but I could be wrong. Well how far is it over there 3,000 miles?

Interviewer: At least yeah.

Muir: Alright then divide that by well at what speed do you think we would average? Do you think we would average seven knots?

Interviewer: Yeah ten miles an hour.

Muir: Judas Priest how far is that in a day?

Interviewer: Yeah that's 240 miles.

Muir: Yeah 3,000 miles so were talking

Interviewer: Yeah 15 or 20 days anyway.

Muir: Easily

Interviewer: Yeah

Muir: To my recollection may have even been more than that. We put into Iran Algeria initially and then we had a collision as I recall and we put into a port called Bizerte to have the ship repaired and we were there for quite a long time.

Interviewer: That's in Tunisia I believe.

Muir: Yes it is

Interviewer: Did you what did you do while you were in Tunisia?

Muir: Well we just stayed aboard the ship as I recall we couldn't leave and there wasn't anything to do.

Interviewer: How long did you serve on this Sinclair HC then?

Muir: Well I'm trying to figure out my guess is I really don't know all I know is I was on those three ships. And then the last ship was a tanker which was a converted liberty ship it was called the Carlton Ellis. And that was the one in which we ran to England.

Interviewer: Okay now tell me did they differentiate between German style warfare and Japanese style warfare?

Muir: Not that I'm aware of as a matter of fact I didn't even know there was a difference.

Interviewer: Oh there actually were quite a few differences. And you were in much greater danger in the north in the Atlantis then you were in the Pacific.

Muir: Really except we were running alone in the Pacific.

Interviewer: Except you were running alone.

Muir: I never we never saw anything we didn't see any other ships we always came up in the morning before dawn and watched carefully. And I can remember being at sea and looking out my binoculars and all of a sudden I saw a PBV we didn't know that they were kind of keeping track of us but that's what they were doing.

Interviewer: Uh huh

Muir: Far off you couldn't hear it you could just vaguely see it.

Interviewer: Did you from the standpoint of your security did you feel more secure in the convoy in the sense?

Muir: Well probably not because we thought it was less danger when we were running alone but running in a faster ship.

Interviewer: Uh huh in fact that's why when the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth were running troops they often ran alone as well.

Muir: Sure

Interviewer: Along the same lines of logic that they were too fast for the submarines to catch up with basically. And that they were safer running along because of their speed as opposed to in a convoy you can't go any faster than the slowest ship.

Muir: Right

Interviewer: Basically

Muir: Sure there's no doubt of that.

Interviewer: So it makes life more difficult. How did you pass the time on these long sea voyages?

Muir: We studied navigation I thought that was interesting and I do have I think an interesting story on this Sinclair HC. I was decoding officer and I was also the medical officer. They delivered to me a great big suitcase full of medicine including dope. And on the Sinclair HC within about two weeks all the dope was gone the radio operator who was a civilian got ahold of it. But we pulled into Melanie Bay and I realized my coding book was about to expire. So I went to the port director office and told them about it and they said well you're going down to Australia and you'll be able to I think it was no you'll be able to get a code book down there we don't have enough of them to hand them out. So I said alright so we went down to Australia at this point and I went into the port director's office in Millburn and said I wanted a code book. And they said we don't have any I said this code book is going to run out in two weeks what do we do? They said we can't help you so our orders were to go to the Persian Gulf. We went through the Indian Ocean and after let's say a week or two the code book went out. When we got to the straights of Armula we were halted and I went up on the deck with the signal and it said what ship are you? And we signaled back Sinclair HC and it was a very long pause. And then they said what are you doing here you have been redirected to Aruba which is probably 13,000 miles straight down through the center of the earth. And that just shows some of the systems well it's a wonder to me we won the war in a way.

Interviewer: What was it Fubar fouled up beyond all recognition.

Muir: I remember the name but it's incredible to me that they could send you out without a code book and then send you a message and put comply.

Interviewer: Did you as an officer were you with whom were you permitted to socialize?

Muir: Well we only socialized with the other officers and there was great friction between the merchant officer and the naval officers. I was a naval officer aboard the Sinclair HC and of course any other ones that I was on. I stood up to the right of the navy as I call it and they were all jammed in close quarters. And the merchant marines had very nice quarters and I think the food was different and all that kind of thing. And one day the senior petty officer and I had with me on the boat named Zink came to me and said Lieutenant we've been talking it over and we think you ought to sleep on the bridge where two of us can watch you all of the time because we think there's a chance you're gonna be thrown overboard. So from then on I had a hammock up on the bridge and there were always two men guards or other naval personal watching out for me. That's an indication of how serious the friction was.

Interviewer: Why were they why did they direct their hostility to you in particular?

Muir: Well I think first I was not one of the merchant marine officers as conceivable because I was a college graduate and that was troublesome. But I think the real problem that I was sticking up for the navy boys and doing the best I could for them against the merchant marines.

Interviewer: How many men were under your command on these ships?

Muir: I'd say somewhere between 20 and 40 depending on the ship.

Interviewer: That's a considerable number.

Muir: I think there were 30 aboard that Sinclair HC.

Interviewer: And you were the only officer?

Muir: Only naval officer.

Interviewer: Were there noncommissioned officers in the ranks also?

Muir: You mean in the navy?

Interviewer: Yeah

Muir: Well it was one Boast who was a former regular navy noncommissioned officer oh I forget what I don't even think you call them an officer he was not a warrant officer he was let's say he wasn't even equivalent to a sergeant in the army. And he'd been in the navy and I do have a funny story about Zag his name is Ed Zag. And one time we picked up laundry in the Panama Canal or something and one day he came up to me and said Lieutenant I got my old towel back today. I said you what? He said I got my old towel back I said what do you mean. Well he said I was going through the line and they were passing out towels and he said they handed me a towel and there was my name and serial number. Well I said how could that be? I said when did you have this towel before they didn't put name or numbers on them when we were at fort. Well he said I was on a cruiser last summer and he said we went through the Canal in a great hurry right after Pearl Harbor and we put all our laundry ashore and we went through so fast we couldn't get it back. But what happened is and the chances of this are certainly no less than one in ten million. It would have been interesting enough if his towel had shown up on the same on our ship but to have him go through a line and have someone hand him his towel. But the amazing thing to me is he said lieutenant I got my old towel back today.

Interviewer: Amazing

Muir: The intricacy though it didn't impress him at all.

Interviewer: He wasn't thinking of the numbers involved was he?

Muir: No

Interviewer: When you would go through the Panama Canal were you fearful at all of attacks?

Muir: No

Interviewer: I've never been through the Panama Canal at all is it a good experience?

Muir: I think it is beautiful area and the sides of the ship are pretty close to the walls of the canal. And I went through it at least six times aboard that ship and maybe eight.

Interviewer: When you arrived in Melanie Bay how long did it take for them to unload the oil?

Muir: Very short period of time.

Interviewer: And they had like oil tanks that could receive it once you showed up?

Muir: I don't remember that but that's probably true. I don't know whether you noticed over the door in my son's kitchen here a spear did you see that?

Interviewer: No I haven't

Muir: It's a spear about five feet long that I traded from some native who came out to the ship in Melanie Bay Harbor Melanie Bay it's not called Melanie Bay Harbor. And I don't know what I gave him but I somehow brought that back and how I ever got that home I must have had to carry it. And Kip was asking me how I got that shell casing home which is at least three feet or four feet high. And I wanted some souvenir of that ship and I think I probably brought that as well as my seas chest I'm not sure.

Interviewer: Did you have any furloughs were you able to go home at all?

Muir: Yes whenever well I never had any from the ships while I was assigned to the ship. But between ships I could perhaps go home for three days, five days a week I don't remember precisely.

Interviewer: So you took the train then back to Pennsylvania?

Muir: Well we would probably I remember putting in in Philadelphia once.

Interviewer: The naval yards there.

Muir: And I can remember my wife and Kip when he was just a little boy being with me in New York a couple days. There is you asked me what I did what did I do with all this time. Well I studied navigation and I said I have what I think is a halfway interesting story on that. When we were aboard the final ship the Carlton Allison this big convoy we had very bad weather for two or three days. And the conniver asked sent out a message said anybody had any fix since a certain time let's say three days. And that had happened is I had taken a sight on Jupiter at dawn. Now normally you try to take a sight on a fixed star you can also do it with the moon that's much more complicated. But even more complicated than that as I recall it is taking a sight on a planet because you've got all sorts of variables. And I took a sight and made all these calculations then I got a running fix on the sun at noon and I think I probably had the closest approximation to where we were than anybody in that whole convoy.

Interviewer: It sounds like you enjoyed this.

Muir: I did enjoy that kind of thing yeah.

Interviewer: Did you

Muir: I know that our navigators aboard that Carlton Allison didn't have the slightest idea where we were.

Interviewer: Did you play cards.

Muir: No

Interviewer: Did you play checkers, chess

Muir: No nothing like that.

Interviewer: Did you have any reading material?

Muir: Reading yes some well there's something I will say about the merchant marines. Captain of course is up there working all the time and the captain aboard that ship was one of the best read men I've ever come across because he'd been at sea his entire life and he read a tremendous amount of good literature.

Interviewer: Do you remember getting GI paperback editions? They had tan covers sort of bland tan covers and they were paperback books?

Muir: No well we never got anything that I know of.

Interviewer: Uh huh I know for the army they had paperback books because commanders believed that boredom was really the enemy in a way. That it lulled people into a sense of false confidence and it made them neglect their training and so on and so forth.

Muir: We didn't have that. But I mentioned recently v-mail and people didn't have the slightest idea what it was. As a matter of fact just the other day something was said in the office I said something about shuffling off this mortal coil. And I said I remember sending a v-mail to Tom Wood the judge who lived right near where I did. But he was in the navy someplace else and I said I remember doing this in October 23 of 1943 now that's when we were in Oran.

Interviewer: Oh okay

Muir: And I used the phrase I suffered off this oblique spearriod I didn't improve Shakespeare a bit. But people don't know what v-mail is what it is I as recall it is you wrote out a letter on a small piece of paper and then it was photographed on microfilm and the microfilm was flown to the destination and developed and went on from there.

Interviewer: And do you know why they did that?

Muir: Well a number of reasons one is you couldn't fly all these letters and another reason is if the plane went down you still the negative back at the starting point.

Interviewer: Well but the first reason I think is the most important one because they didn't want to when you think of the volume of mail that would have been shipped in sort of the traditional way. It makes much more sense to convert that all to a microfilm format and save all that space and all that weight.

Muir: I'd forgotten this I had to sensor every bit of the mail that any of the enlisted men for our ship.

Interviewer: And what were the general rules for your censorship? What were the guidelines that you were given to censor?

Muir: Well they couldn't state where they were.

Interviewer: Sure

Muir: They couldn't state anything about where they were going.

Interviewer: Yep

Muir: And of course couldn't say anything about the armaments we had.

Interviewer: Sure

Muir: Anything that would affect our national security I just sent a letter back and told him to rewrite it.

Interviewer: Did you ever cut anything out?

Muir: I don't think I ever cut anything out to my recollection I may have stricken stuff put and sent it back and said alright you rewrite this.

Interviewer: Were you maybe it's difficult for you to judge this but were you a popular officer with your men?

Muir: I don't know I think I was completely fair with them and I heard from some of them for years after the war I mean at Christmas or something like that.

Interviewer: Tell me more about this third ship we've talked about the other two. But the Carton Ellis you said was a liberty ship that was converted to a tanker.

Muir: When I went to the port director's office we were directed to a small port in the British Isles it was called Heysham. And they had refineries there and the port director said to me or the officer said lieutenant you're going to be carrying partially refined aircraft gasoline. Said you know how volatile that is and I said no. He said if you take a glass of it in one hand and an empty glass in the other and you pour from the first to the second it will ignite. Needless to say not only on that ship but on every other one we never closed the door from the cabin. There was a hook that kept the door open three or four inches because if there were a torpedo strike on the ship and the door was shut you'd never get out. And I think probably always on that ship I slept with my shoes on and everything army type shoes because you couldn't run across a flaming deck with bare feet. But that was quite a cargo.

Interviewer: So this was really more frightening than the other two?

Muir: You didn't have much chance no matter what if you were struck by the torpedo.

Interviewer: But I assume this was also later in the war too.

Muir: This was the field this was the last ship I was on and I think I got off that one probably about well I can tell you almost exactly. I was aboard that ship on VE-Day and I was transferred from the ship and anticipating discharge or being sent to the Pacific at VJ-Day. So I got off that ship between those two periods in 45 two dates in 45.

Interviewer: What was the what were your other circumstances like on the Carlton Ellis? I mean was it a good ship did you have a good captain were you happy with the conditions was it better than the Booker T Washington?

Muir: Oh much better as far as the captain was concerned. He was competent I don't remember what he was now but I don't remember who he was but there was a much better I don't know how to put it. It was much more confident we were gonna be alright aboard that ship.

Interviewer: I often ask people if they were aware of the bigger picture at the time and in your case, and very often they say they weren't, but I'll ask the question anyway.

Muir: Well I probably was not.

Interviewer: Were you aware of how important supply and logistics was in terms of carrying on the war?

Muir: No I don't think I was. All I knew is that we had a job that we were assigned to do and that's what we did. I'll tell you what when I was on the north Atlantic front it was very much in need of being sent to Vermance. And got this last year my second son and I his wife and a friends took a cruise down the coast of Norway. And we started it six miles from the Russian boarder and 40 miles from Vermance.

Interviewer: So you almost made it there anyway.

Muir: But that was almost a suicidal trip them they had terrible losses.

Interviewer: In fact I was reading about there was a famous convoy that lost 25 out of 40 ships in I believe it was in the fall of 42 possible terrible terrible losses. Were any of your friends lost?

Muir: Yes I had a friend in the same service I was in killed early in the war.

Interviewer: In a sinking?

Muir: He was in collision it sank yes but not by enemy actually. And I had a cousin killed after VE-Day in an aircraft straight over Yugoslavia a Yugoslavian shot it down it was a transmitter plane.

Interviewer: When you were in the convoy in the north Atlantic was it ever attacked by submarines?

Muir: No but one time when somehow we were running up the east coast I remember seeing a flare to fire maybe four or five miles off.

Interviewer: And you never really saw a submarine then?

Muir: No I never saw a submarine.

Interviewer: Lucky man lucky man. What happened to the Carton Ellis afterwards do you have any idea?

Muir: No I don't know. Some years after the war my boys and I and a good friend of mine and his son ran up the Hudson in his boat from Coney Island up to Seneca Lake New York. And we passed a tremendous flotilla of liberty ships in the Hudson that were there as a reserve.

Interviewer: In fact there are a couple of museums devoted to the liberty ships at least there is one museum that I know of that's devoted to the liberty ship. I think my personal opinion is that Americans capacity to out produce things like liberty ships and aircraft I think is really the key to our victory.

Muir: Oh I have no doubt of that at all.

Interviewer: That you know without taking any credit away from soldiers on a battlefield or sailors in the Pacific or Midway or places like that. The Japanese couldn't match our ability to build aircraft carriers and ships the Germans couldn't match our ability. We could build the ships faster than they could sink them. And I think that's a part of the war that in the popular memory gets neglected that prospective gets lost. You think of the drama of D-Day which of course is important and very dramatic but you don't think so much of the bombers leaving Willow Airport outside of Detroit every few minutes headed to Europe.

Muir: And of course I think Roosevelt deserves tremendous amount of credit.

Interviewer: I do too in fact I have a picture of him in my office.

Muir: This is somewhat aside but when Truman was in office I didn't have a high respect for him. But I think he did exactly the right thing with the use of the atomic bomb. If it hadn't been for that I probably wouldn't be talking to you today. But I believe we would have lost when we invaded Japan.

Interviewer: My step-father feels exactly the way you do. He was in the Philippines when the war ended and his next destination it would have been in the fall of 45 next destination would have been the landing in Japan on that southernmost island I can't think of the name of it, it is Honshu the southernmost island anyway. And he believes that he wouldn't have survived that either.

Muir: I think Truman did the right thing there as far as the people of this nation are concerned but he did a great many wonderful things during the polish of his presidency. It took me ten years to appreciate that.

Interviewer: It took historians a long time to appreciate Harry Truman as well.

Muir: Who?

Interviewer: Historians

Muir: Really?

Interviewer: Yeah and when he left office in 1953 he was very unpopular and he got a lot of bad credit. He got a lot of bad publicity for failing to end the Korean War.

Muir: To my recollection and I could be wrong on this but when he took the train home there was only one official that came to the station and that might have been the invited secretary of state to see him off.

Interviewer: But he lived long enough fortunately to see his reputation revived. I'm pretty much out of questions but I'd like to know if there's anything I haven't talked about that I haven't asked you about that occurs to you offhand that you would like to say something about that I've simply neglected.

Muir: Well you asked about friction between the officers the navy officer and the first mate. There was very bad friction between the navy personnel the navy boys as I call it and the merchant marine. I'll give you just an incident but on the Booker T Washington the navy boys came to me and said gee we don't see anything about anything other than the Russian progress in the war. And the Booker T Washington had a lot of people that were either had been communist or still were communist. They volunteered for service aboard that craft and the bulletin board concentrated on how Russia was doing not how we were doing. Well what I'm working up to is shortly before we came back to the United States several of the navy personnel came to me and said we think you ought to know the merchant marines are smuggling into the United States a complete machine gun. And we think they are gonna use it in the race. So when we got to port I immediately reported before anybody could get off that ship and we were kept in quarantined for a day or so until the personnel located and it was removed. But nothing ever happened to the captain of that ship and I don't know for the collision. And one time when we were in Sicily I heard a noise at night and I went up on deck and cartons of cigarettes not cartons with ten packs but large cartons were being carried over the side into a glider and they were Red Cross cigarettes I believe I think they were being sold into the black market.

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Muir: And nothing ever happened.

Interviewer: That makes sense. Actually there is another question I meant to ask you and I forgot. Very often people who were in the merchant marines complain and have complained ever since that their sacrifices were not properly acknowledged.

Muir: Well I think that's true.

Interviewer: In comparison to the sacrifices in the army or the navy. Do you agree with that assessment?

Muir: I think they made great sacrifices and I think it's not generally recognized. I happen to be in a situation on that Booker T Washington which was highly unusual.

Interviewer: How did you cope with the heat?

Muir: With the heat?

Interviewer: The heat.

Muir: You mean in the Persian Gulf.

Interviewer: Well the heat in the Panama Canal the heat.

Muir: Well I don't think it anywhere approached not as bad as it is in the Persian Gulf. But we coped with it I know one thing we had to do in the Persian Gulf we had to put water on the ammunition boxes near the big gun or the ammunition I think would have deteriorated. I do not think it would have exploded but we had a navy gunner with a hose playing on that keeping it from deteriorating.

Interviewer: I would have had a hard time with the heat just generally. Tennessee is about as far south as I care to live and if it doesn't get and you were under you were you know you were in the bows of the ship most of the time and I imagine it never got very cool down there did it?

Muir: I don't know that I was in the bows of the ship. When I was on that Sinclair HC I had a perfectly wonderful cabin with a shower and my own head and that was because it had been a merchant officers cabin which they assigned me. Now aboard the Booker T Washington the army officer I mentioned earlier I had a very small double deck cabin and I don't remember what it was like aboard the Carlton Ellis. But I don't recall that it was extremely hot in the cabins but of course I was sleeping on deck a lot on the Sinclair HC.

Interviewer: When I asked my step-father he was in New Guinea much of the time and he said it horrible hot.

Muir: Hot there no doubt.

Interviewer: Horribly hot and that most of them tried to sleep on deck because at least you might catch a breeze on deck. Whereas if you were below it was impossible. Is there anything else is there anything I've left out?

Muir: I can't think of anything.

Interviewer: Okay

Muir: It's been very interesting to talk to you.

Tape ended