Nevada Test Site Oral History Project
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Interview with Robert Mackenzie

with Kari Chipman

January 5, 2005
Moorpark, California

Interview Conducted By
Mary Palevsky

Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews conducted by an interviewer/researcher with an interviewee/narrator who possesses firsthand knowledge of historically significant events. The goal is to create an archive which adds relevant material to the existing historical record. Oral history recordings and transcripts are primary source material and do not represent the final, verified, or complete narrative of the events under discussion. Rather, oral history is a spoken remembrance or dialogue, reflecting the interviewee's memories, points of view and personal opinions about events in response to the interviewer's specific questions. Oral history interviews document each interviewee's personal engagement with the history in question. They are unique records, reflecting the particular meaning the interviewee draws from her/his individual life experience.

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Mary Palevsky: *OK, so why don't you start by giving me your full name, place of birth, date of birth, and a little bit of family history that will help me understand how you ended up being in the military and then on the* [USS] Curtiss *that went out to the Pacific.*

Robert Mackenzie: Right. Good. My name is Robert W. Mackenzie, originally from Glendale, California, born January 13, 1933. *Real* soon I'm going to be seventy-two, -three, something like that. But my family—originally we were living here in California—and we moved to Las Vegas, Nevada in 1936 because my father had health problems. He was in World War I, Mary, and got gassed and shelled in World War I. He was in the Lost Battalion. He couldn't get insurance, so in those days they'd send you to the desert and to try to clear up your lungs. And so we moved to Las Vegas in 1936. The population was six thousand people. And no, I didn't buy any real estate, so anyway.

But so, we ended up in Las Vegas. And then in 1950 we were all getting out of high school, the Korean War was red-hot, and so we all joined the service. I went in a little bit later. And I came to California, and I worked down here for about a year or so, and then I went into the Marine Corps. And I just seemed to do very well in the Marine Corps. I don't know why. I think probably because my brother was in the Marine Corps, and he just told me one simple thing, `If they tell you something, do it.` And that was about my whole [thing]—and he says, `And do it right away.` And I just remembered that. But my sense of humor helped because it struck me funny. The DIs [drill instructors] would just *rrrrh, rrrrh, rrrrh, rrrh* in everybody's

face and I'd get in trouble because I'd be laughing. And they'd say, `You think something's funny, Mackenzie?` And my biggest problem was not laughing about all this stuff.

But anyway, when I first got there in the MCRD [Marine Corps Recruit Depot], San Diego [California], they asked if anybody had had any previous military experience—and there was a couple of ex-Army guys, Air Force guys—and I said I was in the ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] at Las Vegas High School, which is still there. And so they made me a squad leader, and that was in boot camp. And I did really well in boot camp. And then the rifle range, on pre-qualification day I broke the range record. And in the Marine Corps, that's everything. Oh! Right away you're the Marine Corps's buddy because you're going to make him look good, make your platoon look good. Then at qualification day, I came in second. But still, I think that might've helped. I don't know.

From there, I went to [Camp] Pendleton [California] and they made me a fire team leader, and that's in charge of four or five guys. And then we were all going to Korea, and I got my, what do you call them, transfer orders and I didn't understand them.

I went to the sergeant and I said, `What does this mean? I don't understand. My orders are different than everybody else's.`

And he says, `You must have a lot of pull or something.`

And I said, `I don't have any pull.`

And he said, `Well, you're going back to MCRD and you're going to Sea School.`

Which was an honor in the Marine Corps, to go to Sea School, because—and Sea School, later you would go on embassy duty—

"Sea School." S-E-A, like sea?

Yes, like “sea.” Yes, Sea School. And that was the oldest school in the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps really started as seagoing marines. That’s where it all started, and so a lot of tradition. Most guys said, Well, I don’t want to go to Sea School. You just spend all day long shining your shoes and polishing your brass and all that. It’s a very spit-and-polish thing. But anyway, it was an honor to go, and there were only two guys, Mary, that went out of our whole company, and I was one of them.

And how many people would that be? Out of how many people, would you say?

Well, let’s see, in the company there’s 150 people, something like that. Yes. So only two out of that. So we didn’t even know why we went. You know, you don’t know why these things are happening.

Yes. And so what year is this? So how old would you have been at this point?

I was nineteen. Yes, nineteen. So we went to Sea School. And then when I graduated from Sea School—actually Sea School is almost like going now to Navy boot camp, because you need to know all about ships, the Navy’s history, where the bow is, where the stern, port and starboard, **[00:05:00]** you know, all the Navy terminology and their Navy history. So now you’ve almost gone through two boot camps: Marine Corps boot camp, Camp Pendleton for combat, and now Navy boot camp. After I graduated—I was fortunate. I graduated first in my class. Of course, there were only fifteen people, but anyway, it’s good to pass on to the grandkids, I guess. So anyway, they took the top three men from each graduating platoon and sent them down to the end of the hallway and said, Just go down there and we’ll tell you later. They don’t tell you anything in the service. So pretty soon, they took the top two or three graduating people from every class in Sea School and we made a special platoon—and it was called the Movie

Platoon—and we made all the training films for the United Nations [UN] and the Marine Corps. Oh, we thought we were hot, Mary. Well, we were pretty good.

Now when you say you made the movies, what did that mean? What did you—?

Well, I ended up being at MCRD for almost eleven months before we went aboard the *Curtiss.* But the Movie Platoon, we made all the, like changing of the guard, that type of stuff, where the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] troops could learn how to do it, and they picked—

So they filmed you doing it?

Oh yes. Oh yes, *every* day we were out there in that hot sun with full dress blues. And then when we weren't filming, we would represent the Marine Corps in the West Coast, and we'd go on TV shows and we'd go to football games and we'd go to competition drill and all that. We'd also go to the funerals at [Fort] Rosecrans [National Cemetery], military funerals, and we'd be the honor guard. And that's what we did. So we represented the Marine Corps on the West Coast. Now on the East Coast, it would be the Marine Detachment, Washington, D.C. that you see in the newscasts and all.

OK. Oh yes, that's what I'm thinking of, when you see the special events at the White House, et cetera.

Right. Well, that's what we did. That's what we did on the West Coast. And it was the third time they'd tried to make these films. The first time, they were halfway through the films, World War II broke out, so naturally they stopped. And the next time was after World War II and the Commandant wouldn't OK them, and they made them back East. And so the third time, and boy, the pressure was on us. The pressure was on us, you know. And then it was kind of—we didn't like it. Let's face it, you don't like anything much when you're in the service, but it was the

retakes, because everything was perfect. And I remember I had a habit as when I held my rifle I'd stick my thumb up. That would kill that shot.

And so they'd show the rushes and they'd say, Well, we're going to have to do it all over again.

Everybody'd go, Oh, no, we don't want to do it all again!

They'd say, Thanks to *Mackenzie*, that had his *thumb* sticking up.

And you could see it. We had white gloves on. You could see my thumb sticking up like this [demonstrating].

They said, We're going to rip your thumb off.

So it's that peer pressure thing, you know. But we had to be perfect. And we used, as an example, the British Royal Guard with those great big beaver hats—oh, those guys were so sharp. I mean they're *professionals*, you know, they'd been in the service five, ten years, and you could see them just walking, their hands come up, and it's *perfect*. And it's *one unit*. But I remember—and the positive thing, and then we'll get on to the *Curtiss* and all—but when we would be marching across the grinder, and that was the parade ground, we called it the grinder—and all the recruits'd be out there, and the drill instructors would tell them, they'd put them at parade rest and all that, and then we'd put on a little show for the recruits. And I remember the DIs saying, When you guys can march like that, you can call yourself Marines. But you could hear the cadence as the heels hitting [slapping hands together] and so when you'd hear those DIs say that, it would tighten up. You'd stand up a little straighter, your head a little straighter, make sure that rifle's just perfect, and then we'd go into our marching manual with the spin, with all the fancy stuff with the rifles, you've seen it, which took months and months and months and months to perfect. And we were the first *silent* drill team. We'd go out and do a whole show and not a word said. We all had the numbers in our head.

Wow! Because I've always seen them with, what is that, the command is given or the instruction is given and then they do it.

Yes. Right. Right. We were the first silent drill team. So we'd just go out there and remember, you know, you'd walk a hundred paces this way, three paces this way, two paces this way, spin your rifle, drop your rifle, to exchange your rifle, whatever. But I'm going to find some movies of those. A *lot* of them were taken.

That was my question. Have you gotten a hold of those?

[00:10:00] No. No. And they have them, I'm sure. I have a movie of us, though. I have it right here. Isn't that right, Kari? [Note: Kari Chipman is Robert Mackenzie's daughter.] Yes, we have a movie of us actually marching and doing it. It was the official Marine Corps movie.

Oh, I see. And you must have still photos, as well.

A *lot* of stills. A lot of stills. So from there, what they did, and we didn't know it, that they were clearing us for our top secret operation.

The whole group of you?

Yes, and we didn't know it. Now what they did, and that's interesting as I look back, our three squad leaders for the Movie Platoon—we had three squads, and we had three squad leaders that were corporals—and they were all from Operation Ivy, which was in 1951. And I realize now they never said anything. They wouldn't talk to anybody. We just thought it was because they were corporals. They had their own room. They were NCOs, noncommissioned officers, and it was kind of like, `Well, you don't talk to those guys`.

So they had been on Ivy and then came back to Sea School is what you're saying?

That's right. They had to be in the Movie Platoon. And when you think about it, we always wondered why they were there. You know, why were these three corporals, which are all alive

today and we know where they live, and they were our corporals and they were in the Movie Platoon and we filmed for six or seven months, then all of a sudden all the guys that could get a clearance went on the *Curtiss* for Operation Castle, as a group.

Now did you know that they were clearing you at this point?

No. No. And later, after, you know, years later, I went back to my old store and they said people were in there from the Secret Service asking about me and they thought I was in jail or got in some kind of trouble.

A job you'd had at a store?

Right. Yes. So they go all the way back to your kindergarten teacher, I think. Want to make sure you didn't steal any of the milk, or I don't know, but they checked you out very thoroughly. So all the guys that got a clearance, we went as a group on the *Curtiss.* Now we knew where it was going but we really didn't know what we were going to do.

OK, so after the fact, at some point you know that you've gotten a clearance.

We didn't know that until we were already halfway on the cruise. And the way we found out is that some of the men were called in and they were told they didn't get a Queen Clearance. They got top secret but they didn't get Queen. And it was no fault of theirs, Mary. Some of them, if they had one relative that was born in another country and something, they just couldn't get one.

Correct. Correct. So "Q" stands for "Queen."

Yes.

Or is "Queen" something you make from "Q"? I wonder. I've never—

Well, "Q" must be "Queen," I guess. Yes. It must be.

You guys said "Queen," though, when you said clearance.

Yes. Yes. And it's a Queen Clearance, yes. And they're still around, I understand.

Oh yes.

Yes. The president has one. So we were always proud of that, you know.

Yes. Yes. You were saying earlier before we recorded that—is this where you were saying you think something more than the clearance went on in the choice of you guys?

Yes.

Why don't you talk to me a little bit about what that was, just your notion of a profile thing happening.

Yes, I think it must've been a profile, Mary. I think just because either we were good on the rifle range or whatever, I don't think—I think that we were profiled because as you talk to some of my shipmates and old Marine buddies, I find out that they have strong military backgrounds. And my father, World War I, Lost Battalion. My brother was in the First Marine Division. He was at Guadalcanal, Peleliu, he was with [Lewis B.] Chesty Puller, had a chest full of ribbons, and he was a Marine's Marine, there's no doubt about it.

Before you said "chest full of ribbons," you said Ches—

Chesty Puller, which is, I mean he's like *the* ultimate Marine. I think he—

Chesty Puller. I don't know what that phrase is.

Ohh! Chesty Puller. He's the only one that's ever had five Silver Stars. Chesty Puller was a colonel in World War II. Later I believe he was Commandant of the Marine Corps. But Chesty Puller is a legend in the Marine Corps. In fact, they even have bumper stickers that say, you know, `Good Night, Chesty`, and stuff like that. In the Marine Corps, he's a legend. I only saw him once. I saw him in MCRD, and I saw him coming toward me. I thought, Oh no, I said, that's Chesty. And you just don't even want to get around this guy because he's going to find something wrong. And the reason I knew it was Chesty is he had his barracks cap, which is his

cover, cocked a little. *Only* Chesty could get away with that. Nobody's going to say, Hey, **[00:15:00]** Chesty, that's not regulation. It's got to be squared away and straight, and he had a little cock to it. And he's got a barrel chest. And he'd been wounded a lot of times. And like I say, a chest full of ribbons, and he was an old China Marine and all that. This guy is a *maniac*, but everybody loved him. And I saw him coming and I said [to myself], Oh, my God. So I saluted him. But he had a tendency, after you passed, you could hear Chesty's voice say, Get back here, Marine. And you would say, Oh, God, I did something wrong, you know, and I kept walking away, and he never called me back. It's the only time I saw him, you know, but yes, Chesty Puller.

OK. Thanks for explaining that. But then you were saying that in reference to your own brother, so—

Well, Chesty Puller was his commanding officer, and at that time he was a colonel, at Guadalcanal, so he was my brother's commanding officer. And he's told me a lot of Chesty Puller stories, you know.

Anyway, maybe, getting back to profiling, because of my brother's history and my father's history, and then even—I don't know if they'd go back that far, but my grandmother was President [Ulysses S.] Grant's niece. And so I don't know if they would go back that far or not. But I mean—

That's interesting.

Yes, well, he's pretty military, you know.

Just a little!

[Laughing] Yes. So anyway, so I don't know. But then, I mean, that's not that unusual. When I talked to some of the other guys, just like Gene Pratt, we mentioned, that did the newsletter

[*Curtiss Atomic Marine Newsletter*] before Kari took over, three generations in the Marine Corps. You'd talk to Ed Franklin, one of my buddies, his dad was on the *San Diego*, which was a battleship when it was sunk by a German mine, World War I. And so all these stories are coming out and I wonder if we were profiled. I mean I imagine that you had to be naturally a pretty squared-away Marine, but I think they went a step more, I really do. I really do. And I don't know.

Well, yes, it's interesting speculation, or it's a perception that I think we have to pay attention to. It's also interesting because it sounds like, tell me if I'm getting this right, that it's something you sort of begin to become conscious of many years after the—

Oh, absolutely. Until we started getting together for our very first reunion—and we called it the "Never-Too-Late Reunion," which was in 1998—we didn't talk to each other until then. I walked in and saw people, Mary, that I haven't seen in forty-five, fifty years. And they still walked the same. You know, they don't look the same. And the eyes are the same, the voice. But I'd say, `Hey, that's So-and-so`, and it was, you know. That's interesting. But we had a great time. Commanding officers were there and all that. A great turnout. First one was in San Diego and we went back to MCRD. And I think that's when we first realized that we probably—there was more *to* what we did than even we realized. And we couldn't talk about it anyway.

But getting back. I'm getting way ahead of myself—

That's OK. Let me assure you about that, because we don't think chronologically. We'll digress. If I feel we're digressing too far a field, or if you do, I'll probably say no. But if I feel we're digressing too far a field, I'll bring you back. But it's natural to move back and forth in time. But we can return now to the—

Well, now we're on the *Curtiss*.

So you go from San Diego, you get orders to go up to—or was the Curtiss *here?*

The *Curtiss* was in San Diego. So we went right aboard there just before Christmas.

And that would be 19—

Nineteen fifty-three. And they let us go home for Christmas, *if* you lived in San Diego. So I was lucky, and so I went home for Christmas. And even then, that you couldn't tell anybody what you were doing. Even *then*. So we thought, well-l-l, but, you know, we didn't think that much about it, because see, Korea was going, and so we felt, well, I don't know. But I remember with my girlfriend, and they *especially* talked to us about the girlfriends. They said, `We don't want you to say a word to your girlfriend.`

And so anyway, I remember with my girlfriend I just said, `Well, we'd better have a really good time tonight. We always do, but we'll make tonight special.`

And she says, `You're not leaving, are you?`

And I said, `I didn't say that.`

And with my parents and all that, you'd tell them but you don't tell them. You know, they knew I was going somewhere, especially my dad. And so anyway, I don't think **[00:20:00]** that the rest of the men, Mary, realized as early on as I did. And I tell you why, is that when I went aboard ship, they made me an orderly, which was a great honor. And so I was the admiral's orderly, and before that I was the captain's orderly. In fact, by the time I was aboard the *Curtiss* for eighteen months, I worked as an orderly for three admirals and two ship's captains and the executive officer, which was a great background for a young man. And I have the *highest* regard for naval officers. I watched them talk to their men, I watched them talk to their fellow officers, I saw how they solved problems, and just what a great example for a young man, to be around people of that caliber. It was wonderful.

Let me ask you a question here because I don't know that much about the armed forces. The Curtiss *is obviously a Navy ship.*

Yes.

And you're a Marine serving on it. Is that common?

No. It's only in capital ships, normally, which would be battleships—

"Capital ships."

Capital ships, which would be—the terminology has changed today, Mary, but in my day it was battleships, cruisers, heavy cruisers, light cruisers, aircraft carriers, would have Marine detachments. Now *originally* the Marine detachments were almost the police force of the ship. And they were called MAs, which would be Master-of-Arms. Very unpopular with the Navy. And the brig is, of course, run by the Marines. But on our ship, we didn't have those duties, not on the *Curtiss*. The *Curtiss*, we were a special force with top secret clearances. People only didn't talk to us because they would say, `Hey, you don't talk to those guys`. It was that kind of thing. So anyway, but we ended up being very close with the Navy, but our duties, we didn't talk to each other about our duties.

What about the other guys in your—what are you called now? A—

We were a detachment. Detachment.

In your detachment. So you're an orderly. Then what are the other guys doing?

The other guys would stand post and stand the guard duty. As part of security, they break the bomb up and all that stuff in a lot of pieces, so if security is breached, they just get one piece of the puzzle. So we had things all over the ship. And the security is extremely tight.

So explain to me how much you knew about the mission or what you thought or what's that like?

We didn't know anything about it, frankly. You know, I realized that it was more than just a mission. Now by that time, Mary, the Korean War was over with. We were steaming out in '54? Yes, January of '54 is when we left San Diego. And Korea had been over for about six months, but the Cold War was extremely hot then. And when I first realized that there was more going on than *we* realized is when we had full wartime conditions on the ship. And I'd thought, Well, what are we doing here? The ship's all blacked out at night. We've got all these red lights on you see in the movies, like those submarine movies, everybody running and all those red lights on at night. And *heavy*, heavy drapes in front of every hatch. And you don't go outside, or as they say, out on the decks without closing that, and then you open the hatch and a red light comes on, then you close the hatch. And they were conscious of sound, of lights. And I said, `What's going on here?` You know. And so when I really realized there was more going on is when I was on orderly duty for the admiral. And I was on duty and on duty and on duty and I just couldn't stand up anymore. So I called somebody in the Marine detachment and said, `Well, when is my relief going to be here?` It was *real* late at night, it was like eleven or twelve o'clock, I'd gone on that morning at 6:30, and I'd been standing all day long. That's what you do. And I just got so I couldn't stand anymore. So I called down and I was told that the admiral only wanted me and there would be no relief, `So just stick it out, Mackenzie.` I wasn't real happy about that. But anyway, so—and I'll put this right on tape—so a Marine never sits down on duty, but I did. I couldn't stand up anymore. So I found a chair in an empty officer's stateroom and I **[00:25:00]** wedged that chair in a real narrow hallway that went into the admiral's quarters, and I put my feet against the bulkhead and I rocked back and I just kind of rocked with the ship. At least I was off my feet, and I figured nobody could get by me. So I guess, I don't know if I dozed

off or what, but alls I know is this sailor was shaking my arm. It was about 2:30, three o'clock in the morning.

And he says, Wake up the admiral! Wake up the admiral!

And I said, Well, who are you? What do you mean, wake up the admiral? It's three o'clock in the morning.

[And he said], Oh, they want him on the bridge right now.

And I said, Who wants him on the bridge?

[And he said], Well, the officers, blah, blah, and all that.

I said, Well, what is your name?

And he gave me his name, and I said, What's the officer's name?

I really realized we were very, very conscious and were trained to be suspicious of everything. I don't know who this guy is. He wants to go in and see the admiral? That's my job. *Nobody* goes in to see the admiral. And so anyway I said, Well, I'll go wake up the admiral and you go back and report to the bridge, and I'm sure the admiral will be right there. I didn't want him to go in with me. And so anyway, he left. So now I'm saying, How do you wake up an admiral? You know. I wanted to do it maybe like I was back in back in boot camp and scream, say, Hit the deck! I says, well, no, I didn't want to go to the brig, so I didn't do that. So anyway I said, Well, how do you wake up an admiral? So anyway, I woke him up. And I remember he said, What is it, Mackenzie? And he was startled. And I said, Sir, the admiral's presence is requested on the bridge immediately. You don't want to say "immediately" to an admiral, but I did. Anyway, he looked at me, and he had a phone right next to his bunk. And I always wondered, if he had phone, why didn't they just *call* him? I don't know. You know, you would wonder. And so anyway, he picked up his phone. And like I said, the respect from the naval officers, they're just

really something, Mary, they really are. And so he went up on the deck with his blue terrycloth bathrobe on.

He picks up the phone and confirms?

Right. And then he puts on his blue bathrobe—

He doesn't even get dressed.

Oh no. They want him right now [sound of fingers snapping]. So I thought, Whoo, something's going on. So I go up there, and it was like an old World War II movie. At my age, I grew up with those World War II movies, you know. And on the bridge, all the lights are out because we're running at wartime conditions at night, and you can just see the shadows, you know, and those were from the glowing of the instruments and the people moving around the bridge and all that. And right away, the officer in charge of the bridge came up, and everybody was whispering. I thought, What is all this whispering about? You know. And he was talking to the admiral. And that's part of the job of being an orderly. You're *there* but you don't get too close because if you do—

You'll hear?

You don't want to hear. And the admirals will let you know, and so will the captains. If you're a little too close to them, they'll give you one of those, turn their head around, you kind of back up. You realize you're a little too close. They want to be guarded. They don't want anybody to get them. That's your job is to protect them, help them in any way you can, so forth. But anyway, and you'll kind of back up. But I wanted to hear what was going on, you know. So then alls I heard was "submarine." I thought, Well, so what? You know. But anyway, it turns out that we were being shadowed by a Russian sub.

For real.

For real. And the sub was directly under us [slaps hands together] like this. And they picked it up. Because I thought, well, how did it get through our screen? We were in a complete convoy, and we had carriers, we had destroyers, we had everything. And I thought, How did this guy get through all that? And they tell me what they do is they know where you're going. They just sit down at the bottom and wait till you get there and just [slapping hands together] pop up. They don't have to go through any screens. And I said, Oh.

Oh. So they know from –

Sure, they know. Yes. They probably knew, with all the spies and all that.

In fact, we had one girl all the guys were very, very friendly with, and I was kidding them, I said, Well, she's a spy.

[And they said], Oh, she just liked Marines.

I said, Really? How come every guy she slept with was a *Curtiss* Marine?

They said, You know, I think you're right. We never thought about that.

I said, I'm sure she knew when we were leaving, she knew about the ship. You know. She worked downtown San Diego on Broadway. Only liked *Curtiss* Marines? You know, I don't think so.

But anyway, the admiral asked several questions, and I guess before, he asked them if they had contact with somebody. And they said, No, sir, we thought we'd wait for the admiral, and all that. And he said, Well, you should've. Did you contact anybody to **[00:30:00]** tell them what the situation was? How have you tried to contact the sub? Evidently they have an international language they use. Then of course they used Russian and they used everything, and no response. And so I always was kidding Kari because this was dramatic, you know. I always said, Whooo, thirty seconds from World War III. Well,

that's the way you think of it later, but it's very true. But the thing that I still remember today is when the admiral walked on the bridge, you get almost like this, your daddy had come home to save you or something. That man had a presence about him. He wasn't tall in stature. And his name was [RADM H.C.] Burton. I'm sure he's gone now. But he walked on that bridge and all of a sudden, you could just—everybody, like, The admiral's here, we're going to be all right. You know. And you could *feel* that. And he asked just a few questions.

And the sub, and they were waiting for the reply to come back, Do we take action? Do we take evasive action? Now it's pretty hard to blow up a submarine when it's right under you. What do you do, when you think about it? How do you get a sub from under us? But we had submarines with us, too, our subs. And so it came back, they were waiting for the reply to come back, and I thought, My God, this is more serious than I realized. You know, it was kind of like a game until then, you know, it was just wartime conditions. I mean we didn't think anything about this kind of stuff. And so we knew security was extremely tight. Only certain people could go by us, then go into certain compartments, and I'll tell you about that in a minute.

But anyway, back to the sub. And so it broke away. And you know you say "broke away," where'd it go? It just broke away. And the admiral, they said—sonar reported or whatever and said, The sub has broken away. They must've known how many seconds they had. Later I saw a Tom Clancy movie about that, where they were checking and there were seconds and all, and I said, My golly, I saw the same thing in 1954, except for real, you know.

So they said it broke away, and the admiral just calm as could be and he says, Carry on, men, you did a good job. If you need me, call, and he went back and went to bed. And I said [to myself], My gosh, it was almost—it was like nothing to him. He was *so* in

command, just *knew* what he was doing, asked the right questions, congratulated everybody for the job they did, and went back to bed. Now I'm wide awake. I didn't sit down anymore for the rest of the night.

But I never told any of the guys about it. I just told that guy, one of our fellow Marines, November the tenth. It was the Marine Corps birthday. We all got together here at Dana Point.

And I told him the submarine story and he says, What submarine?

I said, The submarine.

He said, Well, I didn't know anything about any submarine.

And I remembered, I'd thought about it, Well, why should I worry the guys? And not only that, if something happened when I was on orderly duty, you don't pass that around the ship. That's a confidence between you and the admiral. And so I didn't pass it on.

I have a couple of questions about this. You're aware in real time, then, that it is a submarine.

Absolutely.

Because you're hearing the conversation.

Right.

It makes me wonder, as I'm listening to the story, if they had you on duty for all this time, would there have been some knowledge of some kind of danger, that they didn't let you leave orderly duty? Do you make a connection between the fact that the sub was there and the fact that you had to be on duty for so long? That makes you wonder.

Well, I don't know. It does, Mary. I never thought about it that way. I don't think so. I just really think the reason I was left on duty so long is that we were new at our jobs, and they just didn't realize that when you're on orderly duty, you're attached [slapping hands together], you know, at the hip. And not only that, is the admiral doesn't want to walk out and say, What's your name?

You know, he wants somebody that he can trust and could read him before he says it. I could tell what he wanted. He was looking around and so I call somebody and say, Hey, the skipper's out of coffee. You better get some in there. See? So you're his confidant. He'll say, Well, how are the men thinking? Because he's some concerned about the morale, or **[00:35:00]** whatever. So you're his sounding board. Every admiral's different. Some really use their orderlies. I've had admirals when I reported, they'd say, Well, I'm a little low on cigars, Mackenzie. Why don't you go down and get me cigars? Well, I don't say, What kind do you smoke? So I'd go down and ask the guy to open up the place where you buy the cigars, what'd we call that? Commissary, I think. And they used to question it.

And they'd just say, Well, you sure these are the kind of cigars you smoke, Mackenzie?

And I said, These are for the skipper.

And he said, I don't think so.

And I said, Really? Why don't you call and ask him?

[And he'd say], Oh, OK.

And so that kind of a thing. So, interesting. But anyway, I never did pass that submarine story on to the troops.

That's so interesting. That's interesting.

And so then, now, as time goes by, Mary, as I watch the History Channel and Discovery Times Channel, all these things are coming back to me. And our main concern was frogmen. We were very afraid of frogmen. And so we figured if they came aboard the ship, how they'd come aboard the ship, what we would do, you know, if one did come on. But I never thought about mines or bombs attached to the ship, and now I think about it. Can you imagine if they could've got to our

ship, and we had people on their like [J. Robert] Oppenheimer and had all those scientists on there? We had fifty-eight scientists on the ship. We had all the bombs on the ship. I mean what a coup that'd meant for the Russians if our ship *accidentally* sunk, hit a reef or something, or something went off. You know, you can just see it all right now. It'd be another Cold War incident.

But you don't know *that you're carrying bombs at this point, or do you?*

Yes, we did. We knew we were carrying pieces of the bombs.

You did.

Yes. Yes. Because security was so tight, it had to be something like that, when only the admiral and two or three people could go in there. And then we timed them, how long they were in, who they were with, they signed in, they signed out. They had a badge with their photograph on it. The badges were made by, at that time, the Atomic Energy Commission [AEC], and they were watermarked with all the same intensity and security as our money. And the admiral would have his picture on there. And I didn't just look on his shirt. I had to take it off his shirt, which you don't like to touch an admiral or a captain. It's just this—you've got that—this little [feeling] like, Hi, God that feeling. And you'd take off his badge like that and hold it up right next to his face, make sure you got a really good look at it, and you'd flip it over and check the watermarks, check the number on it. And when I was on, I'd have a check-off list, and his name better be on there. In fact, our own commanding officer forgot to put his name on there and our guys wouldn't let him in the post.

He said, What do you mean?

They said, You're not on the list, sir.

[And he said], Well, you know who I am. I'm Captain [James] Brannaman, your commanding officer.

[They] say, Sir, we been instructed, if your name isn't on the list, you don't get on this post.

And the guys loved doing it to him. He wasn't real happy but.

Oh, I'm sure. Who was this captain again?

Captain Brannaman. He's still alive. Stanford graduate. Super sharp guy. About six-five or so, something like that. Nice man.

I'm not well-versed in military things. Is it usual for an admiral to be on the ship?

No. Now the admiral on any operation, the admiral has what he calls his flagship, and he can change his flag when he wants. The *Curtiss* was an unusual ship, Mary, because it was designed as a seaplane tender, 1939, something like that. It was hit at Pearl Harbor, went all the way through World War II, ended up with seven battle stars. Then after that, the Atomic Energy Commission grabbed it and then converted it for all the testing.

So the Marine captain isn't like a Navy captain. What's confusing to everybody, and it was to me, too, the captain of the ship, the Navy ship, doesn't have to be a captain. That's his job title. OK, and now the Marine captain is a captain and he's in charge of the Marines.

So this is the Marine captain you're talking about.

The Marine captain, right.

Got it. Not the captain of the ship.

Not the ship captain—that's right.

Thank you very much.

Right. Yes. So it's confusing because there's three different—

No, I'm glad you clarified that. Yes.

Yes. And the Marine captain, by the way, another friend of ours was a lieutenant colonel in the **[00:40:00]** Marine Corps and he was *amazed* that a Marine captain would have that kind of

responsibility. He said, you know, You're transferring bombs and signing for hydrogen bombs? You're in charge of all security and all that, and you're a *captain*? He says, Normally this would be a one-star general. And Jim Brannaman, our Marine captain, said, Well, it was because it was a Marine detachment. And you have a lot more responsibility because you're out there all by yourself and you're the only Marines there.

So let me see if I understand this correctly. You've got the Navy ship that's getting you out, but the bomb aspect of it and the security of that is under the Marines, not under the Navy.

Yes, it's under us. Yes. Now the Navy, with the scientists and who-all ran all that, would tell us where to go. It's like I transported one of the hydrogen bombs for 192 miles on a barge. We were told to do that and four of us took it on the back of a ship. But it was interesting because, boy, nobody wanted to talk to us or anything, you know. They said, Who are those guys? You know, that kind of a thing. It was a Navy ship. And it was an LSD [Landing Ship Dock], I think they call it, Mary. The back of the ship fills with water, and then the H-bomb was on a barge, and we *lived* on the barge and the sailors floated it in, then they let all the water out and we just stayed there, and then two of us would stay in the barge and two would go eat, two of us would stay up and two would sleep. I think there was four or five of us.

You know what's interesting about this? I'm going to interject a comment, which isn't always a good thing to do, but I'm going to. It helps me to understand one of the reasons why they may have wanted to establish the continental test site. Because to get that device through the water, just what you just said, is such a big production.

Oh, it is. It is. Now most of the time, it wasn't armed. They didn't put the stuff together [slapping hands together]. And a lot of times it was, you know, but usually we could tell when it was armed. Nobody ever tells you anything. But you see those civilians come aboard and one of them

is carrying one of those little black boxes with him or something. He says, Whoo, they're getting all this stuff going in there, you know. From that time on, it was hot. And so—

But to back up a little bit, are the scientists with you? Are you aware that there are scientists on the ship and things like this?

Yes, because we were told to treat them as officers. So I know a lot of scientists will probably hear this, but they said when it comes to the ship, in different things, They're like little children and you're going to have to help them. And we kind of thought that was funny because these guys are so brilliant. The same guy every day'd ask me to find his compartment for him, and he always called me "sir," and I'm a Marine corporal at that time or something like that. And he'd come up and I thought, Oh, God, here he comes again, you know. He said, Excuse me, sir, he said, do you think you could help me find my stateroom? And I felt like saying, I guess so, I just did last night. [Laughing] But ships are confusing, and they don't know the terminology, and they're so far out there and all that, you know. And they said, anyway you can help them. Now I had a lot of contact with them because I was [in] what they call "officers' country." When I worked as—

"Officers'"?

Officers' country. The officers have a separate part of the ship.

Right. "Country." OK.

Yes, we called that officers' country. It was even a different color than the rest of the ship. It was light green. The rest of the ship was Navy gray. And they had little like carpets and stuff. And it was, yes, it was upgraded, you know. They got upgraded. But I was—

Business class or first class.

That's right, they were all in first class. But I would always be working there as an orderly, you know, and so anyway but I guess the guy always thought I was an officer, I guess. And a lot of times, too, we wore our Marine Corps emblems and it was gold and had them on our collars, and if you looked at it, it looked like an officer's rank or something. Actually it was Marine Corps emblems. But yes, the same guy'd ask me every night how to find it and I said, And this guy's designing hydrogen bombs and atomic bombs and all that? It was just amazing.

But anyway, yes, so we were told to treat them, you know, like officers, and it's Yes, sir, No, sir, and we don't speak to them unless they speak to us and all that. So they gave us the rundown on that.

Do you have a memory of how many people there were that were the scientific types or a sense of—?

[00:45:00] Well, I think we had a lot on board. I don't remember. I know there were a lot of them. But I read somewhere there were fifty-eight passengers, so I would assume those are the technicians and the scientists. And I don't know how many technicians. We had a lot of people out there from Holmes and Narver and Bechtel [EG&G at the time], all the same people they're using at the test site in Nevada, same companies.

Bechtel back in those days, or maybe it was—maybe. I'll have to see.

I wonder if it—I don't know. I remember Holmes and Narver *real* well. I remember them real well.

Holmes and Narver, I know. Right. We'll have to check on that. Yes, because I've seen stuff on them being—

I remember I was talking to a diver, Mary, and what he was—because they'd come out all the time and check the barge. We used civilian divers. And that was way before Lloyd Bridges and

all those TV shows. It was fascinating to me to think people could dive like that. And these guys would come out, these civilian divers, and dive off the barge that had the bomb on it and make sure there was nothing planted underneath, make sure the cables were solid, make sure there's nothing going on. So the security was extremely tight.

But that's when you actually get to your destination that the barge part of the story happens.

Yes, yes. Right.

So if we can back up a little bit just for the chronology, what happens when you start to get—do you know where you're going, even?

No. No.

OK. So how does that happen when you arrive and things like that happen? Then Kari had a question about the barge and we'll talk a little bit more about the actual logistics of the bomb.

Well, we knew—it seems like to me if I look back, Mary, is that any information we got, it seems like we'd get it from the sailors. You'd just walk up to a sailor and say, `Where are we?` And the guy would say, `Oh, we're at Bikini.` And you'd say, `Really?` You know. But that's where we got most of our information from, are the sailors. But nobody ever told us where we were or what we were doing. Well, it's kind of a Marine Corps thing, you know, it really is. You do what you're told to do and that's what you do. You don't ask a whole lot of questions. And not only that, because of the security end of things, too, is that you don't even let your best buddy know about experiences you had. And that's the standard security procedure. Say for instance that you gave a lot of classified information—even though you're all classified—to your best friend, and then he was captured in some way. Now he's got information that he might be forced to pass on, so why give him that information? So like you say, it's a need-to-know basis,

but not exactly in that—it's more or less, you just don't want to give a good friend of yours something he doesn't need.

That's so interesting. That's so interesting.

Yes. Yes. So that way, the communication pretty well stops, you know, it really does.

Right. Because in day-to-day life, you might want to confide in your best friend.

That's right.

But to protect your best friend, you don't *want to confide in him.*

That's right. That's right.

That's very interesting.

Yes. Yes.

Now when we were talking before we started recording, you were talking to me something about the Rosenberg Act, that you had to sign that. Was that—?

Yes. Right, that was interesting.

At what point in the process?

Well, before we went on the ship, we all went somewhere, and I don't remember where it was, but I remember *again* we were told to treat these people like officers, even though they're not in uniform, that `You're representing the Marine Corps, blah, blah, blah`, and all this. `We don't want any smart answers in there`, and all this sort of stuff. So the guys were in civilian clothes. And so the guy that talked to me, we went into a room by ourselves with a civilian. Had a stack of papers about like this [indicating size]. And he had his tie off and his jacket over a chair.

And he said, `You're Mackenzie?`

And I said, `Yes, sir.`

Then he shook hands with me and he says, Well, he says, what we're doing here is we're working on your clearance. And he said, Now, we can do this two ways. He said, You know we've got a lot of people to talk to out there. He says, We can sit here and you can read this whole stack of papers and sign them. *Or* we can do it this way. He said, If we ask you to keep something secret, your country's secrets, you wouldn't tell anybody, would you?

And I said, Absolutely not.

And he said, That's what we thought. That's why you're here. So he said, I'll tell you, he says, why don't we just sign these papers but, he says, I'm obligated to tell you one thing before you do. He says, You're actually signing your rights away, is what he told me.

[00:50:00] And I said, "Rights away?"

And he said, Yes, he said, if you gave away one of your country's secrets after you've signed these papers, he said, we want you to know that you'll be eligible for the death penalty. And he says, Are you comfortable with that?

And I said, Yes, I am. I'm not going to talk about anything anyway. So what? Let me sign that.

So I signed it, and the next guy would come in. And we were under the understanding, and I don't even know if it's the right title, but they said it was because of the Rosenbergs [convicted spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg]. It was the Rosenberg Act—it was passed in 1946 or '47—that they were so concerned about the Russians getting our nuclear secrets and atomic bomb and all that. Which we all know they had already, but that was the only area that had that kind of penalty. I guess they thought they better kick it up a notch after the Rosenbergs. It'd be interesting, though. But nobody'll even acknowledge that I'm asking for those papers. I thought

it'd be kind of fun to read them now, after all these years. I don't know what happened. Nobody that I know—and you know we had sixty-three men in our unit, and then there were eight operations, but we found a hundred-and-some-odd men—*no one* has had any word on that.

I said, `Well, I signed papers.`

Then somebody says, `Well, that's a nondisclosure contract.`

And I said, `Well, they didn't call it a nondisclosure, I don't think.`

So I don't know.

So you've tried to get those papers?

Yes. Yes, I asked for them.

Through the military?

Yes. Yes. And they didn't even acknowledge. They sent everything else, and I've got a lot of my records. I got—way back in '96, '95—all my records, but that wasn't in there. Nothing about the secret stuff. Now see, that was probably a little too close to totally being declassified in '96. Some papers were declassified in '86, '83. You know, they kind of dwindled them out over the years. But they're still sanitized today, a lot of them. Yes. So I don't know.

But so as far as the security, extremely tight. Another problem, and I can only speak for the Castle operation, the Bravo shot was on that, fifteen megatons, the largest—

Right, we're going to talk about that. I want to get detail on that. But you were going to say, the only thing you can say?

Well, that as far as the security end of it, another problem we had out there, Mary, was manpower, because we didn't have enough Q-cleared men for the posts. And so in the military, if you run out of people, they put you on what they call "running guard." Running guard is what we do to prisoners today for torture, almost. It's you're on four hours and off eight. You're on

four and off eight. Well, what happens is your body clock is saying, Give me a break. But I mean we were walking around like zombies because the first day you might work from twelve noon until four in the afternoon. Now you have eight hours off. Your next shift would be twelve midnight. Then the next shift might be three until twelve. But if you look at the way it goes, running guard is four on, eight off, four on, eight off.

Why did they do it that way?

Because they're out of men. And we didn't have enough Queen-cleared men, and so they'd come into the barracks and say, We need six Queen-cleared men. Nobody'd say a word. And they'd say, Mackenzie, we know you got one. And then they'd just pick out guys and we'd go on some deal and deliver a bomb or something, you know. And that's the way they did it. And so somebody, I am sure, through the Navy or whatever, would call the Marine captain and say, We need six men. We got to transfer a bomb from here to here, or whatever. And they'd fly us back on helicopters.

So this is, you're saying about security in the Marine Corps, so that was in reference to that. And you were only on Castle, is that right?

No, I was on two operations. I was on Castle and Wigwam. Yes. Underwater. Yes.

OK. Great. Let's see, we can talk a little more. Let's see if we can get the narrative to where you actually get to your destination, and then maybe we'll change. We'll take a little break and we'll get some detail on the Bravo shot.

[00:55:00] OK. Well, when we got there, on the way over I was also working as orderly for the executive officer, which is really the guy that runs your ship. He's the XO. He's the guy that's calling all the shots. The captain is the one that probably takes all the blame. But anyway—

Who was the executive officer, do you remember?

His name was Egbert. Handsome man, Mary, he looked like he should've been a U-boat captain in a World War II movie or something. He looked like Curt Jurgens, is what he looked. Oh, this guy! And he was a great man to work for. And I *really* enjoyed working for him. He *did* get me in a lot of trouble, but what happened is in some way or another, he found out I could draw cartoons. And I used to do a little cartooning.

And he says, Mackenzie, he says, I'm worried about the morale on this ship. And he says, You know, what are you hearing from the men?

And I said, Well, they're grumbling, sir.

See, we had no mail. *Nothing*. We refueled at sea. We didn't exist. We saw the same movies every other night. We had no new movies. The magazines, you'd read them a hundred times. And we did have a morale problem.

And he said, I've got an idea. He said, Do you think that you could draw the Plan of the Day in cartoons and make it funny?

And I looked at him and I thought, The man has been out here too long.

And so anyway I said, Well, I don't know, sir. I said, I've never done that before.

And he said, Well, it's never been done before.

And I thought, The Navy, on a top secret operation with an admiral on board, and we're going to do the official POD, Plan of the Day—and that tells you what time you get up, where you got to go, it's the run of the day, plan of the day for a Navy ship—I'm going to do it in cartoons?

OK, hold that thought. I'm going to—

[00:57:03] End Track 2, Disc 1.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 2, Disc 2.

And there we go.

And this is regarding the cartoons for the Plan of the Day.

Right. Back to the cartoon story. Right.

So anyway, as I said, the executive officer asked me if I could draw these cartoons. And frankly I said Yes, and I didn't realize what I was really saying. So now how do I draw cartoons? How do we print them? I didn't know anything about anything. But I said Yes, we can do that. And so he says, Well, if you need anything, let me know. And so I thought, Well, the Plan of the Day was—and I'm really dating myself—was put out on a mimeograph, which was like blue waxed paper—

I remember mimeographs.

Do you remember it, Mary?

Absolutely.

And you'd have a little stylus like a ballpoint that doesn't write and all that. So I went up to the Navy and they had this mimeograph machine. It worked on a big roller, if I remember right.

That's right.

So I figured, Well, I have to draw on a mimeograph thing. I'd never done that before. And so I found out real fast that it takes a certain style because you can't shade, you can't do anything, just blocks of that blue paper just drop out as a big ink blot. I had to work up a new style. And so then I said, Well, I can't just draw on there. So I decided I would draw the cartoons on paper and then put them onto the mimeograph. But now to do that—I couldn't figure out how to do that, so I'd stand up and use a porthole, and I put it against the porthole, and I'd cut them out of there. And the first one, I just thought—I mean I worked on it at night, I worked on it when I was on duty, and all that—and I thought I had some funny stuff in there. And I think back, I was

gutsy even in those days. But anyway, but I didn't sign it. I said, I don't want to be a target. I was kind of afraid to sign it, to tell you the truth.

So anyway, I showed it to the executive officer and he said, Oh, I love it. And he said, Is there anything I can get you that you need?

And I said, Well, I need a light box.

And he said, What is a light box?

And I said, Well, it's just a box with light in it and some frosted glass on it.

And he said, Well, we don't have anything like that.

And I said, Well, I said, it's so hard to stand up and cut these out on a porthole, on the glass of a porthole.

He said, That's the way you're doing these?

And I said, It's the only way I can do them, sir.

And the next day he had this really nice light box. And I said, This is exactly what I need. I said, Where in the world did you get that, sir?

And he says, Well, I don't want to say, but let's just hope they don't have to look at any X-rays in the sick bay.

He went down and stole the light box in the sick bay. So anyway, but it was great, I have to admit it was great to see all those sailors and stuff standing in chow line, reading my cartoons and laughing, you know. And so it was a great feeling. Now all of a sudden the word was getting out that I was doing it, and then all of a sudden I started getting requests from the officers: Could you put this in there for me? *Now* it's starting to get kind of political. So anyway I was standing—and I was still the executive officer's orderly—and one of the Marine officers came

up to me, is *extremely* upset that I was making fun of the Marine Corps. Whoooh, that's a no-no. OK to make fun of the sailors. You can't make fun of the Marines.

And he says, You know, you're making the Marine Corps look bad, Mackenzie.

And I said, Well, how did I do that?

And he said, Well, you showed Marines heaving and throwing up over the side of the ship.

And I said, Yes, sir, I did. I said, Got a lot of laughs with that from all the sailors.

[And he said], Well, you're making us look bad. You can't do that.

And I said, Well, I had the sailors doing this.

So what I had to do is I'd kind of—you can't be milquetoast about this stuff. And the Marines were sick. We weren't the sailors, and we *did* get seasick. And so the Navy would do—I'd have them doing some stupid thing. But everybody loved it. So now I'm getting a lot of pressure from the Marine officer.

He says, Well, the government didn't spend all that money for you for a Queen clearance and you're sitting on your ass on duty drawing these stupid cartoons. So I'm taking you *off* of this duty.

So anyway, I went in and told the executive officer, which was a big mistake, by the way, but in the meantime I wasn't taken off the duty. Of course, I was a marked man for the rest of my life, but anyway—

For the rest of your life?

[00:05:00] Just about, right, yes, because you don't do that in the Marine Corps. And I just went in to the [executive officer]—with any young man—and you know it hurt my feelings, it really

did, because I'd put my heart and soul into those cartoons. And the executive officer loved them, the guys were laughing at it, and all that.

And I told the executive officer, I said, Well, sir, the commander will have a new orderly tomorrow.

And he said, What, are you sick, Mackenzie?

And I said, Well, no, sir, but I've just been informed that I was a candy-ass Marine, I was sitting down on duty, and I had a Queen clearance and I'm drawing these *stupid* cartoons.

He said, Who told you that?

And I went, Ummm, and I realized I shouldn't have said anything. So I told him who told me.

He picked up the ship's phone, and I'll guarantee you, the guy he talked to still doesn't shave on the right side of his face because he says, If you *ever* talk to *my* orderly, touch my orderly, take away my orderly, do anything like that, blah, blah, blah.

Now you got the executive officer of the ship talking to a Marine officer. And I thought, Oh, I'm a *dead* man. I'm a *dead* man.

And so he says, Will that take care of it?

And I felt like saying, Yes, and it took care of me, too.

So the very next day, a full Navy captain comes up, four-striper with a gold thing around here. That mean's he's on the admiral's staff. If you're on the admiral's staff, you wear this thing on your shoulder. There's a name for it, a French name. It's a lanyard.

But anyway he said, Are you Mackenzie?

And I said, Yes, sir.

And he says, The admiral wants to talk to you.

I thought, Oh. You know, it's like God. The admiral wants to talk to little old me, a corporal? And so anyway we went up to the admiral's stateroom. And he was turned away from me and sitting down, Mary, and I walked in, and I'm with a full Navy captain.

And he gets up, turns around, says, You must be Mackenzie.

And I looked at him and he just says, I just want to shake your hand.

And I thought, A Marine corporal shaking hands with an admiral.

And he says, I want to *personally* thank you for what you've done for the morale on this ship.

And I mean I would've loved to have had something in writing on *that*. And that shows you that the Navy, the naval officers, the whole picture was what he was looking at, and the morale of the guys and we were getting some laughter back. There was no liberty, there was no place to go, it was 114 [degrees] in the shade. I mean there's *nothing* out there. *Nothing*. And so if we could get a laugh and all that. And they were a huge hit. I had a lot of fun with them. But like I say, and now when I see these political cartoonists, I know the pressure they must go through deciding on which side of the aisle they're on. They're going to make 50 percent of the people mad no matter what they do. But I did. I'd get three or four funny things with the Marines and I'd get four or five with the sailors and all that stuff, you know.

Right. Yes. Just so I understand this again, at this point you were the executive officer's orderly, so this was a different time period than when you were the admiral's—

Right. Now on the way over to the islands, I started out with the admiral, I believe. And then the admirals will leave the ship. Now when the admiral leaves the ship, then I was the executive officer's orderly.

And so this was a different admiral that thanks you, because he doesn't know you.

Yes. Right.

OK, great. Yes, this is just because I don't understand the way these things work.

Yes.

So let's move now to getting there and the actual mission. Bravo's what I'm particularly interested in, so let's talk about that.

Right. Right. Yes. Before we set up Bravo, I'm pretty sure it was a barge shot. You know, we had tower shots, barge shots, ground shots, but I'm pretty sure Bravo was a barge shot. And we would go out there. We'd have Thompson machine guns and they'd take us out in these little M-boats. [Per DOE/NV—209-Rev 15 December 2000 the Bravo test was a surface shot. Castle had 2 surface and 4 barge shots].

Let me interrupt you for a second. I'm not remembering because I don't have my list. Was Bravo the first shot in that operation?

Yes, it was. Castle.

So that would've been the first shot in Castle, and was that the—yes, you're right, the first—this must be the first test you would be involved with, is that right?

Yes, it was. What a way to start off. But now it was the first *deliverable* H-bomb. Now on Ivy, there was Mike, which was a ten-and-a-half megaton or something, but it wasn't deliverable. It was as **[00:10:00]** big as a house, and it was a different style, different design. So really the Bravo shot did affect the world, Mary, because at that time we were in negotiation with the Russians, and so everybody's rattling the sabers, and they were getting close, we were getting close. And I'm sure that their eyebrows went up when Mike went off, I'm sure. But what are they going to do with it? You know, they can't do anything with it. But after that Bravo shot they said, `We have the planes and now they know that we had the bomb`. And they know we

used them already on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, so all of a sudden, negotiations slanted our way. So it did affect the world, so to speak.

But anyway, so the barge, we would go out on the barge, and it was like we used the little M-boats they used in World War II where the fronts would come down, the troops'd run off of them. We used those for taxis over there. And the Navy would take us to the barge and let us off and we'd stay there. And we had a little shack built on the barge. In the back of the barge was the bomb. And then we had a radio room, and then we had a little room where we could sleep, and we had a refrigerator in there, and we had magazines. And we kept a guy on the radio and he would call into the ship—I think it was like every fifteen minutes or so—just to make sure we were all OK, because now we're separated from the rest of the security. We're out there all by ourselves, and it's obvious that made people nervous. And our big concern was frogmen coming up the four cables. They had these *big* barges and they were anchored with four huge cables, and they felt if frogmen ever got up, they'd come up those cable, naturally.

Right. And when you say "big," give me a sense of how big you're talking about.

Oh, boy. Well, probably twenty by thirty feet, something like that. It was just a regular barge and they're high off the ground. They're about twelve feet off the ground or so, and it's just a flat, floatable barge, is what it is, you know, and so—

So twelve feet off the water?

Yes, they're very high off the water. And so anyway, I don't know, you know, what the size was, but yes, I'd say probably—

Just approximately, so I get a scale.

Yes, right in there, Mary, right in there. And I know when we knew the big shot was going to go is when I saw that refrigerator come onto the side of the ship, hauling up the side of the ship on

the *Curtiss*. And I was looking outside and I said, Hey, that's our refrigerator on the barge.

And so somebody, at that time another orderly, I said, What's the story with our refrigerator?

And he says, Well, the captain's going to take it back home. They're going to blow it up anyway.

I said, Are we going to go tomorrow with the shot?

And he said, Well, I guess so. That's your refrigerator.

That's how we knew the shot was going to go. Isn't that something?

That's amazing! Now on the barge with you, you're guarding the bomb, the device. Who else is on the barge with you?

We had three other men. I think there were four or five of us on the barge. I want to say four, Mary. There might've been five, but we had all four sides covered. And we had the guy on the radio. And then we were told *not* to go into the bomb area, which a lot of the guys did, and they wrote their names on the side of it and all that. [We were on duty for two hours and off for two. That was for twenty-four hours and we were relieved by the next group of Q-cleared marines. I'm not sure about the twenty-four hours tour.]

For real.

Oh yes. In fact, they had one spot there that was marked and they said, Do *not* get close to this site. So two of the guys hated the duty so bad, they took their film badges off and laid them right on that spot and said, If they get black enough, maybe they'll send us back home. Nothing happened. So either they had bad film badges or they had got bad scoop. But two guys laid their film badges right on that spot [that] they said, Don't get close to that spot. Nothing happened.

So you're wearing film badges.

Yes, we had film badges at that time.

Did they give you any education or anything about radioactivity, about the kind of bomb?

None.

Do you know that it's something related to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs? Do you know that much? That you're talking about an atomic or a nuclear weapon?

Well, no. We'd never had any schooling at all. And in fact it was available, evidently, because when I got my records back, had all the classes. I'd forgot about small arms classes I'd taken, a rocket class, and all this sort of stuff, and they had there and it said "Atomic Survival" and something like that, and it wasn't checked off. And I said [to myself], Isn't that something. I mean of all **[00:15:00]** those, that's the one I really needed, but I never had it. But no, we had nothing. I don't remember any schooling at all. And I very seldom had a badge. I don't ever remember more than once or twice having a film badge, to tell you the truth. And it was a joke anyway because when it turned black, you're supposed to turn it in. You know, the guy'd have a black film badge for three days and they say, `When you going to turn that in?` And he'd say, `Oh, when I get around to it.` See, we placed no *importance* on this. None, at all. Nobody knew anything about any of this stuff, or if they did, I think that's my biggest question—and I guess it came out in Watergate and it's a standard cliché—is who knew what and when did they know it? And I think I know some people that are in the scientific field that said, `We knew a lot more after Hiroshima and Nagasaki`. Because the test I was on was in '54, so they had nine years to find out from those people that got hit with those bombs. And in nine years' time, a lot of this stuff showed up. Another friend of mine was at the test site in Nevada and he was in charge of sending all the animals' organs back after the shots to

[Lawrence] Livermore [National Laboratory]. And so they knew. They knew. But I don't know. It's just that it's hard to really tell, and at this point in time, it wouldn't make any difference anyway. But I think that—and I wasn't a big fan of Bill Clinton's, President Clinton, but one thing he did do just before he left office is he passed the bill that they'll never, ever again be able to use American servicemen in tests without their knowledge. And I think that's a good thing. I really do. And I wouldn't care so much myself. I think the Marines—when you join the Marine Corps you know you're not going to sell Girl Scout cookies, but my children never signed up for anything. And that's the thing, I think, the key to the atomic veterans, Mary, is this was the first war that was multigenerational, the *first* one. Where before my brother was wounded, my father was wounded, didn't affect me any. But in my case, I was wounded and so were my children, and that, as they say, ain't right. They didn't volunteer for anything. And I think that's the crime of the whole thing, is that it was multigenerational. And if they didn't know about it, I don't know what they could do about it now. But even now, I just got a letter from a friend of mine in Hawaii, Charlie. But anyway, Charlie just sent an article where they're selling babies. The women from the Marshall Islands, when they find out they're pregnant, they go to Hawaii, have their baby there, which makes it an American citizen. They sell the baby for twenty-five to thirty-five thousand dollars, and all those babies are in *bad* shape. And they're coming back here to the States. And so there you go. We're into the third and fourth generation. You know, they have those babies over there, what do they call them? Jell-O babies, without bones, and it's horrible. *Horrible*. And I mean you read like in the newsletter, and Kari says, `Well, should we print that?` I said, `You're damn right.` It was in the *Los Angeles Times*. So we're not printing anything here that people can't find out.

Right. Yes, I read it in the Times*, and then I saw it in your newsletter. Yes, thank you for that. That helps me understand.*

Back on the barge, are there technical people at that point?

Come and go. Come and go. Very seldom. Usually we're pretty much by ourselves. But, you know, we didn't stand there and watch what they did, either. They said, `If people come on that barge, don't pay any attention to them`, that kind of a thing. They're busy—and there's a dog walking through our interview here.

That's OK.

So anyway, so I don't know what they did. They'd go in there and close the door and, you know, we just didn't pay any attention to them. But they'd come and go and take readings or do something. I don't know what they—

Right. I'm going to pause this for one second.

Yes.

[00:19:34] End Track 2, Disc 2.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 3, Disc 2.

Great. It's behaving now. So how long is the barge—do you have any—I know this is a long time ago. The barge sits out there for some period of time before the shot. Days?

Right. Right. And I don't know why. I mean it could be weeks a lot of times. A lot of times, well, it was so disappointing because the scheduled shots wouldn't go off, but to us everything looked fine. But maybe it was at twenty thousand feet there was an extra little current up there or something. And so, you know, we'd get these countdowns, H-minus-ten hours and H-minus-nine hours, and we'd get down, and they'd start counting it down, counting it down. Then, `Well,`

it's not going to happen. And we'd go, Ohhhhh, will we ever get home, you know, that kind of a thing.

So when the shot's going to come, you're back on the ship, so the ship leaves the area or what happens?

Yes, the ship usually will leave the area and they give it a certain area to cruise in. And they leave the ships not anchored during the shots. They're cruising, you know, rather than being anchored.

So what happens with Bravo? What the story on that?

Well, Bravo was probably the surprise of the century. Alls we knew is they had called us out on the decks, and everybody was on the decks, and everybody's got a good sense of humor, you know. That's the only thing that kept us going over there. And they said, Well, you'd think at least they'd give us a lifejacket. And I said, Well, how come some of those sailors have life jackets? And you know we would kid about stuff like that. So all the Marines were there. And the officer in our group, our Marine captain, was with the Navy and they were up on the bridge or somewhere. And the officers up there, they viewed it from a different place, and all the enlisted men were on the deck, and a lieutenant was with us.

And he said, Mackenzie, you know which stateroom is mine?

And I said, Yes, sir.

And he said, Well, run up and get my goggles, and there's an extra pair there if you want to use them.

And so there were only two of us that had goggles, so it was the lieutenant and myself. All the other guys didn't have goggles. And the goggles are absolutely black. They're like welder's glasses. *Real* dark. So anyway, so we all sat on the deck, faced away from the blast. And we put our heads between our knees and put our hands in the back of our heads, like this

[demonstrating], and faced away from the blast. And we were on the top deck of the ship, which was called a boat deck. And—

Are you hearing the countdown now or—?

Yes. Now the countdown's going over the PA [public address] system. And they count backwards and they say, It's H-minus-ten, nine, eight, seven, you know it goes right on down the line. And then I think they say, Detonate. I'm not sure. I can't remember. But in the meantime, I'm sitting there waiting for the blast and for a second or so there's nothing. Then all of a sudden, it starts getting bright. *Real* bright. And brighter. And brighter. And I've got these welder's goggles on and my arm in front of it like this [demonstrating] and I can see my own bones.

Really.

Yes. Several of the guys looked up and they could see a guy right through a guy standing in front of them. The light is so bright and so hot that I really felt that it was all over as far as my vision. I said, There's no way. Because I'm closing my eyes, brighter and brighter and brighter, with black goggles on, and I mean I just can't take it anymore. And then the *heat* was *horrible*. Now the heat, it was like somebody with a blow torch, I guess, and just getting closer to your back. And I thought, Geez, I can't take it much more, I thought. And the Marine officer said, If one God-damned Marine moves, you'll answer to me. Now in the *meantime*, the other people on the ship are running all over the place. You could hear their feet. And you were saying, Oh my God, we're going to die, and Oh my, you know, and all this sort of stuff—

They're saying this?

Oh yes. Out loud. I mean people are scurrying all over. They said, My God, we're going to die. And they've just lost control completely. And we were sitting there frozen, you know. But

boy, **[00:05:00]** you're starting to kind of go like this and figuring, Oh my God, if we make it through this, it'll be a *miracle*. And then all of a sudden, it started to tone down a little bit and I thought, Oh my God, we made it, and the light was not as bright as it was and we thought, Geez, I guess we made it. So they made an announcement on the PA system of the ship that anyone with goggles could now turn around and see the shot. So I got a chance to see a little sooner than the rest of the people. And I turned around, Mary, and I really thought, because you'd seen shots of atomic bombs and all that from the test site and Hiroshima, and I thought way over on the horizon I was going to see this little white cloud coming up with the mushroom on top of it. And when I turned around, I looked straight up and all around us and we were *in* that cloud, but it wasn't white. It was every cloud [color] of the rainbow and just *boiling*. I mean it's like I've written before, I said, `How can anything that beautiful be so deadly?` And it's just *boiling*, like this. Just *boiling*. Just rolling and changing colors and all that, and we're just standing there and I'm looking at it. I was so much in awe, I never really thought about the danger. Once that heat went away and the light, we're home free, and I'm looking around in all that, never thinking how *hot* [radioactive] all that was. And so we're looking at it and it's boiling and we said, `Well, isn't that pretty?` And they said, `OK, everybody can take their goggles off.` So now we're all standing up, and people are running all over the place still, and we thought, What are they running all over the place for? Then they announced on the PA system that the shock wave will hit in five seconds, four, three, and you could see it coming. The whole ocean is going like this [demonstrating movement] toward the ship and we're going [laughing] we thought, How stupid can it be to be *broadside* to that? I mean the ship should be facing *into* it and we're broadside to it. And we're saying, `Do they know what they're doing?` You know, so far I don't think so. And so anyway, and when that hit, nobody told us

about the sound. I only thought about the tidal wave and could we survive that. Now the ship was buttoned up, you know, so it was buttoned up—

"Buttoned up" means—?

All the hatches are closed and everything. So anyway, I saw that shock wave coming, and when it hit, it was like a broadside, a World War II battleship with sixteen-inch guns. I mean it was *g-r-r-ROCK!* And it hit and it just—well, it knocked a lot of us down. And I thought, Well, that's stupid to leave us standing up for the shock wave. But then the ship listed like this [demonstrating] way over to the side *and* it picked the ship up, and the sound—I know it sounds dramatic but the sound was like a ship dying. It was something about those huge metal plates, they made this *creaking*—more like an old, old radio show, *Inner Sanctum* had the squeaking door or something—and I could hear the ship just being *torn apart*, you know. And I thought, We're not in real good shape here. And so not only that too, and so as we listed like this [demonstrating] out of the hatches and every port and air circulation thing on the ship, white smoke is just pouring out, just *rolling* out like this [demonstrating] and just pouring out on *all* that side of the ship. The ship listed over—let's see, port is left, so starboard, it listed over to the starboard and the port side was facing the shot, and all this white smoke, and it's swirling out.

Out of the ship.

Out of the ship. And so then they made an announcement on the ship's PA and said, `All hands will button up`. And I thought, Are they crazy? We're on *fire* and we're going inside? Well, it turns out that the shock wave was so strong that it got inside of the ship, through its air vents, those big round things you see on ships? Went right down and just went all the way through the ship, and the vents hadn't been cleaned out since 1939 when it was new, I guess, and it was all just dust and smoke and stuff, but it wasn't fire. It was just pouring out. We *weren't* on fire. So

anyway, we reported inside, and then all the Marines reported for duty and they issued us .45s. We went to what they called the guard shack, which is, you know, Marine headquarters, so to speak, and—

[00:10:00] *They issued you arms?*

Yes.

Why, I wonder?

Well, because, this is the interesting thing, is that Marines were put on every hatch, on the inside of every hatch, and we were ordered to make sure *nobody* went through the hatches. Now that's a big decision to make. Do you shoot an American sailor to save everybody on that ship? Because they were afraid of people with claustrophobia and we were running out of air. There's a lot of panic going on. And there's a time I sat down on duty, because we were told to, because we don't use that much air. We had no air now. So the ship, *all* the ship, was buttoned up, all air is shut off.

And you're inside.

Right. Right.

And why would you not want someone to go outside?

You're in the middle of the fallout from the shot. It's just pouring down on you.

OK. Were you on deck when it started to come down? The fallout?

Yes. Yes. We were, because we had to be if the cloud was all around us.

I mean do you remember seeing that or—?

No. I remember the cloud, but I know from—I went outside during that. They picked me, for some reason. And I was at my hatch. They gave me a hatch to guard and I was sitting on the inside of the hatch. And an officer came up and said, `Mackenzie, go outside and make`

sure this guy gets back OK, this sailor. And he either had instruments or was checking something, and so it was almost like one of those comedy things where they'd open the hatch and you'd run out and they'd close it real fast. And so I went out with him to make sure he was OK, and we were running, and the ship, they'd just turned off the sprinkler system. We had a sprinkler system that some genius figured out would work and you put a hose into that radioactive water and squirted it all over the ship. What a stupid idea. It didn't work, by the way, because they had never figured that the fallout from that blast were all particles of coral, and the water system wouldn't wash them off, so they just stayed on the deck, that's all. And so anyway, but I went out with him, Mary, and as I was running I slipped and fell. Aboard ship they have what we call scuppers. Actually it's like a gutter where the water runs. And my foot slipped on the deck and I slipped into that and I fell *really* hard and hit my head and it just knocked me out, just for a second, and also my wallet popped out of my pocket. And the sailor stopped in front and he said, Are you all right? And I said, I'm all right. I said, You go ahead. And by the time, whatever he did, he was coming back and I was trying to get back up again. So then we went to get back on the ship. There was a sailor there with a Geiger counter. And I lost my best boots and my wallet.

He says, You're not getting back on this ship with those on.

I said, These are my best boondockers.

He says, I don't care. Take them off.

So anyway, they were red-hot. And my wallet was, too.

And he went all over he and he said, What do you have in your back pocket?

I said, My wallet.

He said, Well, how'd that get—?

I said, Well, it flipped out of my pocket.

And he said, Well, get rid of it.

So I lost my wallet and I lost my boots. So—

When you went back in.

Yes. They wouldn't let me back in. But I remember, too, when I was on duty that two things, they wouldn't let you walk, they wouldn't let you talk, they wouldn't let you smoke. Only the people that are on duty could walk, and that was to get there. And so all the Marines were sitting down at a hatch with a .45 and nobody got by us. They didn't want anybody to crack open that hatch because it was so hot outside, you know.

Did you put anything on, any gear on, when you ran out with that guy or you—?

No. No. We didn't even think about those things, you know. But really, you know, it's one of those things where that—that was our job, that's what we did. And it's one of those things, you know, if one guy, I'm sure that we'd do anything we could to stop him, and that would be the very last thing you'd ever want to do. But still and again, nobody pushed us, you know, I didn't see anybody scream and yell or anything, but I didn't see many—there wasn't nobody moving around. You know they went all down in their bunks and stayed there. The only thing I did see are the guys from the engine room, and that was really sad. It was 160 degrees down there. They'd work for ten minutes and they'd have twenty minutes off. And I was on duty at the mess **[00:15:00]** deck, which was higher up. It had a little hatch, went all the way down to the engine room, so they'd have to crawl up all these ladders. And then there'd be a sailor on each side to grab these guys and just *pull* them through that little hatch and just slide them over to a spot and just let them loose, and they just lay there. And then they'd go get another guy and they'd pull him up and they'd pull him over to another spot. And I looked at it, and the whole mess deck,

and there were no chairs or tables there, it was just all deck, and there were just bodies laying all over from those guys from the engine room.

They were so hot.

Yes, and they'd serve ten minutes down, twenty minutes off. And one sailor wrote about it. He says when he got off, he remembered he took his shoe off and poured water out of it, he was, you know, perspiring so much. So the sailors, if anybody deserves something, those guys do. They got us out of that as fast as they could.

But then they turned around and we went back into the fallout area and did circle-eights to test that dumb wash-down system, you know, and that's the way you did. They wanted to see if that wash-down system would work. So we were trying to get away at about fifteen knots, and I think that the ball itself was a hundred miles. Yes, we were twenty-three miles from ground zero. Fifteen megatons, you know, more explosive power than *all* the explosives used in World War II, in one bomb. Twenty-three miles away and we're making a getaway at fifteen knots? Then to turn around and go back in and do circle-eights to check the sprinkler system, which they never used again, by the way. It didn't work. There were too many hot spots where water was sitting there. In fact, days later we had some pools that were outside. We had guys running all over that ship with Geiger counters, and Joe Stallings, which you and Kari talked about him, was standing on duty. The guy comes up with a Geiger counter and says, `Get away from that puddle. Don't be standing in that puddle.` It was red-hot. And next to it, the water had drained away.

So Bravo was a surprise. That was the bad boy. There's no doubt about it.

What you're describing is an emergency, so you have to assume that you knew at least that it was unexpected, but were you aware at the time of any details about it, that it was bigger [than anticipated] or anything like that?

No. No. No. We never heard about that *ever*, that it was bigger than it was expected. Now I understand there were articles here in the States. A lot of times, we got information from home. We didn't get anything, and we were right there. We said, Wow, let's see what we got from home to find out what we're doing out here, and we'd look at it. And so we didn't really know. But we didn't have any idea that it was larger than it should've been, but common sense would say almost, but you never know when they're testing. You know a lot of guys said, Hey, if that ship went down, they'd just say, you know, our relatives would get a little thing that said, *Well, your son died in the service of his country on a secret operation* and, you know, *Thank you*, and all that. And I said, Yes, sometimes I wonder, you know. So no, we didn't know that it was larger, and like I say, I'm sure—well, the ship, I mean it really tore the ship up because we had to go back into dry dock. Actually all the way back, we were taking on water and the pumps kept it, you know, but it actually split the seams, they say, and water was coming in, and they had to button it down and pump it out to get back. So that's too close, obviously.

Well, the scientists surely knew at—

They had to.

Well, they did. I mean they knew immediately, so it's interesting.

Yes. Well, we did know on one thing because we had the photographer aboard the ship that did a lot of the stuff, and we asked him about shots and all that. He said, Are you kidding? He said, There's no film made that could handle that. And so they didn't—and we also knew that a lot of the instruments pegged. They weren't calculated [calibrated] to handling that

size, so alls they know is it went as far as it would go and pegged. They don't know how much it would've gone on past that. And our ship, the *Curtiss*, was the ship—that's why we were so close to all the shots, because it had all that equipment aboard.

And another thing, too, like somebody said, Well, Mackenzie, how could you be that stupid? Didn't the admiral say goodbye to you the day before?

And I said, Yes, he did.

And he said, Well, how come he left the ship?

And I said, Well, I think he knew something I didn't know.

And so he said, It's been nice working with you, Mackenzie, and he took off into the wild blue yonder, you know, and left me there, so anyway.

[00:20:00] But I don't know. It was obviously a miscalculation all the way along the line.

And then when we left the ship is when they wrote down the amount of radiation that everybody got, which was just a pie-in-the-sky shot. I just happened to be in the office when this happened. You want me to go ahead and run by that, Mary?

OK. Yes, tell me about that. Yes.

Well, everybody from the operation got a certificate. And they had no way to print the names on there, and so they thought of me again on the art end of things. And they said, Mackenzie, could you print everybody's name on these certificates? And I said, Sure, I can do that. So I went up there and I had the list of all the guys and I was sitting there writing their names on these certificates. And I remember it was a lot of pressure because they only had—it's typical government thinking. They didn't want anybody to get one of those that didn't deserve it. So if we had sixty-three men, there were sixty-three. And I was using the India black ink, and sometimes when you're printing you leave a letter out or something. I said, God, I can't do that, you know [laughing]. So our first sergeant was there and a lieutenant was there, and they

were assigning everybody's radiation. Now I'm sure the official way was to save film badges. We didn't even *have* any film badges most of the time. And how many duty stations you're on. Instead, the first sergeant just come up with a name and yelled the name out to the officer and say, What are we going to give Mackenzie? And he said, Aw, give him .3. OK. What are we going to give Mary? Ah, give her a 3.2. OK. What are we going to give—? And that's how they did it. And I sat there while *every* one of those records were falsified, *never realizing* that forty-five years later those very figures are what cost me my claim at the VA [Veterans Administration] because they said I didn't get any radiation.

That's how it happened.

Yes. Yes. And so they're all false. And I saw somebody, it was really interesting because they thought they had it all figured out. They said, Well, it's obvious that certain ships—it really struck me funny—that certain ships were more honest than others. Now the ships like the *Curtiss* and the *Curtiss* Marines, it's obvious they did it the right way because all their figures are different. Now this *other* ship, it strikes us a little funny that that *everybody* on that ship got 3.0. And I thought, It's exactly the opposite. We're the ones that had all the phony figures. They were just smart enough, they changed them all. They took—and it was a pie-in-the-sky figure. They just made them up. Now I wondered about that, Mary. And my best buddy didn't have a Queen clearance, so he stood a lot of duty stations but he didn't go outside like I did, and I don't think he was on the ship on the Bravo shot. I think he was at Kwajalein and Enewetak, another island, getting ready for another bomb. Anyway, in the Marine Corps, you take your records with you. And I asked him, I said, Jack, what'd they give you for radiation? And he looked at it and he was *way* up, *twice* as much as I was. And I said, What a phony baloney. I said, you know, I said, Look at me. I'm one of the lowest guys here and I'm the guy that

was on the hatch, I'm the guy that went out, I'm the guy that was on the barge and all that. And he was on the lesser stations and all that and he was way higher. Well, they just made all the figures up, you know, totally, *every* one of them. And so I told the lawyer this and he said, Would you testify to that? And I said, Absolutely. Doesn't make any difference now because they have admitted that a lot of the records were lost, a lot of them were—the word "falsified" was never used. A lot of them were incorrect. Some of the figures were, whatever, and some of the film badges were bad, and there's all kinds of hodgy-podgy. But with mine, there's no spin to this. I was there. They were falsified. And to think these poor guys are going to the VA and they just look at their records and say, Well, you know, we're not going to help *you*. *You* didn't get any radiation. And I don't know why they would do that. It's *money*.

That was my question. At the time, or looking back, both, you were there and looking back, from your understanding of the culture, do you have any notion of why at the time they would do that?

[00:25:00] I think the reason they did it was they were naïve. I think the reason they did it—I don't think there was any malice. I don't think anybody could think that it would affect our children, that it would affect us later. Both the guys that falsified those, by the way, died of cancer, and one of them not that long ago, either. And he was the lieutenant. But I just don't think that anybody—it's a kind of Marine Corps philosophy, if you're not bleeding, how can you be hurt? And that's another thing, the unfairness of it, is that what our guys went through—it's like we have a lot of combat Marines in our group, Mary, that one of them went to the Persian Gulf War at fifty-seven years old. And these officers said, What are you going to do over there? He said, I just want to go. That's what I do. We've got World War II guys. We've got Korean guys. One guy got the Medal of Honor. We have a lot of Vietnam guys. And a lot of these guys got Purple Hearts and all because it was during wartime. But the thing is, is

when you're on a top secret operation, which is a big honor over here, but over here you don't get any of those things. You don't get any medals. You don't get any Purple Hearts. You don't even get an attaboy. You know it's kind of like it never happened. And maybe they've changed that now in the military. I hope so. But I think that if nothing else, they could go ahead and issue them and say, `Well, you can have them forty years from now and show them to your grandkids`. Most Marines don't do things to get medals. But still, you know. I don't know, especially when it comes to a Purple Heart, because it affects your VA benefits.

Yes, explain that to me.

Well, the VA has evidently a number system that they use, and the low numbers would be the Purple Heart guys. They're processed faster, they're kind of the first class, as you were saying, and they would get more benefits than if a guy walks off the street and he's a six or an eight or something like that. So that's what it is. Now—

So it's actually connected to a Purple Heart because it—

That's right.

That's interesting.

Right. Right. Those guys, they walk in there and the door's open because they've given something for their country, you know, and all, and it's definitely service-related and it was definitely during a hot war. Now if you did the same thing during a cold war—which talk about an oxymoron, you know, I don't think what we were going through was a cold war, do you? You know when you think about it. It just is that people are dying every day during that. We just didn't talk about it. You know, you killed two of ours and we'll kill two of yours. But really, as far as what was going on, now that after all these years and the people that we talk to at these reunions—which I just love it. And another thing, too, Mary, it's just like it gives me an

opportunity to talk to people I *normally* wouldn't talk to because *my* world was retail. It was a grocery. Right now you might be the president of Laura Scudder or something but we had this common ground. But I wouldn't talk to a Ph.D. I wouldn't talk to a nuclear physicist. All these people. And it's so interesting, and that's the excitement of the whole reunion, the whole thing we're doing. And not only that, you talk about giving. As you get older you say, `Well, I want to give back and all that`, but if you can help somebody, it's fun. It's fun. But then again, you've got this peer pressure thing, you've got patriotism, you've got *esprit de corps*, you've got *semper fi*, you got all these things going against you. We *never said a word* our first four reunions about sickness. *Not a word*. I didn't even tell them I belonged to the National Association of Atomic Veterans because it was like a subversive outfit, trying to get something from nothing from the government, and a Marine doesn't do that. Ohhh, a Marine doesn't say [whiny voice], `Hey, I got wounded. I need some help`. [They would say] `No, you're a Marine,` you know`. Go get another arm. What's the matter with you?` And so that's the way they look at things. And it's a good thing, but it can work *against* you if you're not careful. And so how far do you go? But it broke open. We were all in a hospitality suite in Reno, and one of our guys is a doctor, Chuck Provow who lives back in **[00:30:00]** Illinois or somewhere. But anyway, you know how you get that like in show business, they call it dead air or something, nobody's saying anything, and I thought, Boy, this thing is dying on its feet. I couldn't think of anything to say.

And so I looked at Charlie and I said, `Charlie, didn't you have a lot of health problems back in 1982?`

And he says, `Yes, I did.` And he told everything that had gone wrong with him.

And the guy sitting next to me says, `Oh, that's no big deal.` He said, `I've got cancer.`

I said, You do?

He said, Oh yes.

And this guy over here is the guy that [U.S. Senator] John McCain got a hold of. And he says, Well,

I've got ninety-one pages of things from the VA right now. They gave me three months to live. That was eighteen months ago.

I said, They gave you three months to live?

He said, Yes.

And the guy's got a bag, he's got every kind of cancer, he's just a *mess*. Great attitude, though. *Every* guy in the room. It was just like the floodgates had opened. Because, see, we wouldn't crybaby because that's what they look at, is like a whiner, a crybaby, you know. So nobody wanted—and not only that, reunions are up, they're happy, they're fun.

I'll tell you how I found out about the kids, Mary. Got together, found out there was four or five of us in San Diego, and we got together for a breakfast. Hadn't seen them for forty-five years—*any* of these guys—so I ran into one of them at a shopping center for a minute or something and never looked him up. Anyway, so we're having our first breakfast together. Now we got forty-five years to catch up on.

So I asked the one guy, I said, Well, married?

And he said, Oh yes, married. He says, I married little Mary.

And I said, Oh, I remember her. From Old Town? Had the restaurant?

[And he said], Yes.

[And I said], Well, great. Any children?

And he said, Yes, I've got two, boy and a girl.

And I said, You can't get much better than that.

He said, Well, we almost lost our son. When he was twenty-nine years old, he was in a serious car accident. The doctor came in and said, *Well, if he makes it through the night and his kidney doesn't collapse on him, he'll make it.*

And he says, Well, luckily he's got two of them.

And the doctor says, No, he doesn't. He only has one.

They didn't know it.

So then the guy next to him said, Well, you know, my daughter in later years, out of the clear blue sky, came up with leukemia, and they couldn't figure out what happened.

And the third guy said, You know, they called us down to the school and said my daughter was on drugs and all kinds of things. We had to pull her out of school. And it turns out she's got some kind of a nervous disorder and now they think she might be epileptic and all that.

And I'm thinking all my kid have had problems and I thought, Well, wait a minute. What are the odds of this? Four old guys, all on the same operation; these are all Castle guys. And so I went and called a friend of mine. His name's Keith Cunday and he was on [Operation] Greenhouse, one of the earliest ones.

And I said, Keith, have your kids had any problems?

And he says, You mean other than DUIs and all, and we were laughing about it.

I said, No, health problems.

He said, No, mine are fine.

I said, Oh, all right.

Then I kind of told him this story and he said, Oh, he said, I forgot all about it. He says, My son was born with one testicle.

I said, well, there's five out of five. So I called another guy. His name is John Riggins, an engineer, he's done a lot of work for the government. And I said, John, have your kids had any problems at all, any health problems?

He said, Yes, my youngest son was born with 80 percent hearing loss.

It's always the youngest. That's how it goes, you know. And so now all of a sudden I said, well, it's obvious. And I'd heard some things about that, but we've never really pushed it that hard. Now we had one friend, his name is Dick Conant, and he's a former president of the NAAV, National Association of Atomic Veterans, Dick Conant. And he lives also in New Mexico and he's also in the medical field. And when he first found out there were some problems, he was doing tests. I'm not sure what his profession is, Mary, but the samples that he was getting that was throwing all these tests off, turns out they're all from Utah. And he went, Bingo, and so he started putting it together and realizing there was something there, and it's in the DNA or whatever.

But anyway, that's where that started. So now, you know, and slow but sure, it's taking us, we've been getting together now for seven, eight years. And even the most—we still have a **[00:35:00]** few Marines that say, Well—they're funny, I love them to death. This one guy says, Well, I volunteered, they told me where to go, and they told me what to do. He says, I did my duty. End of story. I said, Boy, that's really interesting. That's going to make a great novel. But that's the way a lot of them think. And you're not going to change that. But I mean they can still think that way. I said, The thing is, you guys, that what we're talking about here doesn't mean you're not a good American. It doesn't mean you're not a patriot. It just means that some people that were in charge made some dumb mistakes. And some they knew, some they didn't know. And it was, The Russians were coming, the Russians were coming, and we could get away with

anything in those days, and they did, you know. It's like this friend of mine in this Operation SHAD [Shipboard Hazard and Defense] thing. I mean he didn't even have a secret clearance because there was nothing secret about it. They just laid down a wave of VX gas, sarin gas, biological gas, and chemical gas, and then his ship steamed through it. And they asked, they said, `Well, is there any danger here?` And they said, `Oh no, there's no danger there. We're just testing the equipment.` And all those tests, and there were *sixteen* of them documented, were testing biological warfare weapons. And now this guy, he's a basket case. I mean he can hardly talk, he's just got—I mean he was on the police department in Hawaii and after twelve years he had so much sickness that they made him retire early. Then he went to the VA and they said, `Oh well, I think you might have Agent Orange`. He said, `Agent Orange? I was in the *Navy*`. [They said] `Oh, well, you might have, maybe have Gulf War syndrome. We don't know what you have`. So he's been fighting with them, and now he gets full medical benefits. He hasn't got any money yet but now they've admitted those tests did go on.

Right. What years were those tests, do you remember?

Sixty-two, sixty-three, something like that [1962]. SHAD and Project 112. It's on the Internet.

Yes. I'll look at that.

Yes. Yes. Interesting stuff. It really is.

We're close to being near the end of this disc and it's getting close to lunchtime, but I wanted to ask you one thing about Bravo, sort of round it out, and then we'll overlap into the rest of these things after lunch. But after the test and after the figure-eights, just where do you go then? What happens next in the story of where you're stationed, et cetera, *and then we'll round that out.*

Well, I think we were buttoned up. Now it's interesting. In one of our reunions, we asked four guys how long we were buttoned up in the ship and we had no air.

And one of them said, Oh, gosh, I know exactly. It was forty-five minutes.

I said, Forty-five minutes? You out of your mind? I said, I was on duty myself for a day.

The other guy said, Well, I think it was three days.

So I don't know how long it was, but it sure wasn't forty-five minutes. But I know that was a scary time because when you know you're running out of air, you know, and I figured, well, they're not going to let us just sit in here and die, I'm sure. And it's a funny thing, I did a stupid thing, and to show you how I know we weren't educated, putting my head right against the bulkhead where those big plates come together, I could actually smell fresh air, and I was afraid to tell anybody. I only told one other man about it, and he came up, and he was a sergeant, and he was in charge of the shift, and I was a corporal at that time.

And I said, Ron, I says, I know where we can get some air.

And he says, You're kidding.

And I said, No, I'm not kidding. I said, It's right here. I said, You get down and put your head right next to that. I said, God, it smells great. And I said, Don't tell anybody. We're going to have, you know, eight hundred sailors here. They're going to kill us, trying to get to this air.

Because everybody was on the floor. There was no talking. The whole ship smelled like a giant toilet. Hear people praying. I mean we were going to die. There's no doubt about that. It must be like submariners must feel that way when they're all the way down there, you know. But I felt, well, if nothing else, we could break out the hatch. I mean I really didn't feel we were going to die. I really didn't. I didn't think of it that way. I was twenty-one then. You don't think

about that stuff, you know. But anyway, but I remember I would breathe a lot of that air, and knowing what I know now, is that stupid or what? I mean radioactive, hot air outside, but when **[00:40:00]** you want air, you want air. I mean I can imagine if a guy had been out in the desert for three weeks, they give him some water and he says, `Well, that is Perrier?` You know. I don't think so. And so I was the same thing. I didn't think of it at all.

But from there, it seems to me that we came right back, because the ship was hurt, that we came back to San Francisco [California] or somewhere, got back as fast as we could. But I don't remember, Mary, I'm not—and I look at the records now, we couldn't have because we had five more shots, and Bravo was the first shot. So see, this shows you over all these years, my memory's not accurate on that.

Right. Well, that's OK because the way we work is the stories are invaluable because those aren't going to be the documents. Then you look at the documents and you try to piece it together. It's a big jigsaw puzzle. So that's OK. I just was wondering—

Other shots, it couldn't. And Bravo, to me, always seemed like the last shot. I know now it was the first shot. And then you know, so, you know, we're on one other operation. But that was a one-shot thing. It kind of fizzled. It wasn't that big to us, you know.

Yes, the next one, I think, may have actually fizzled. I have to check. I didn't bring my list. And I forget its name. Was it Koon?

Kari Chipman: Yes, it was Romeo, and then Koon. Romeo was a barge and that was in March, and then Koon was in April.

I think Koon was a Livermore shot that didn't go the way they wanted it to.

Was it Koon?

Kari Chipman: And then Bikini, it was a surface shot, and you're right, it was Koon. It yielded 110 [kilotons]. It was a small test.

Robert Mackenzie: It was a little baby bomb. Sissy bombs they set off in Nevada. Isn't that funny?

Kari Chipman: They shot Bravo, Romeo, Koon.

Robert Mackenzie: Hiroshima was fifteen kilotons and look what it did. Now all the different guard duties, the ones that were different—and we were by ourselves—were the barge shots. Now we didn't guard anything on land. Now I think Army handled that. I'm not sure, Mary. There were sixty-three of us on Castle, but there were 140-some-odd Marines total, but we didn't see them. We didn't see anybody much. And not only that, too, again it's the, one—is that there was no place to go on liberty so there's no social, so you're not mixing with anybody else at all. And so there wasn't the local slop shoot or bar or whatever where you get together and mix stories and all that. When we went on liberty, which we had I think twice, and that was another barge with nothing on it. And we'd sit on that barge and they'd give us two cans of beer, and it had formaldehyde in it or something and it was horrible, 3.2 or 2.3, I don't know, it was like drinking dirty water. I wasn't a beer drinker and I remember the guys came up and wanted to buy my two beers.

And I said, You're going to go over there and sit out there, 115 degrees, on that stupid barge, and have two beers?

[And they said], Oh, yes, it's going to be great.

And I said, Well, you can have my two beers.

But I didn't go. I think I went one time. And that's why I remember the barges were real high up, because we'd sit on the edges with our legs over and they weren't even close to the water, so they had to be at least ten, twelve feet high. Totally flat and there was nothing on it.

And then one time, once or twice, about three days after the Bravo shot, we went on liberty on the island, what was left of one of the islands. And I remember they told us, which makes me mad now, too, not to eat the coconuts. If a coconut falls off a tree, it's bad. Now you got to get it off the tree, and we don't want anybody climbing those trees, either. Well, you know, we all had our bayonets and all that, and I think we had our two cans of beer, because the guys would take those coconuts and crack them open, then pour a beer in there and mix the beer with the coconut milk. And I took one sip of that and I just thought, Oh, it's just terrible. It's hot and dirty, whatever. And I hate those islands. There's flies and there's bugs and they're hot. Anyway, but you can imagine how radioactive that island must've been, and we're sitting in the sand, the guys are eating those coconuts. They just told us they were bad. They didn't say anything about radioactivity. Those coconut trees had been there since Crossroads in '46, when the tests first started, and now we're talking '54, and all that stuff's going right through there and coming out in those coconuts and all that, and never thought anything about it. And we were swimming in the lagoon and all that. And so I really think—and another thing you might run into in your **[00:45:00]** research is the real reason that they pulled the *Curtiss* out of active service, and I've heard two things. One, it was too radioactive. Another one, I heard that the water system had to be replaced because our sister ship, they completely replaced the water because all the water on those ships, we got right out of that lagoon. Boy, that's a stroke of genius. So they took the salt out but I mean that's all they take out. So really, you figure that the water that you drink every day, the water they cook with, the water you take baths with, and the water you're swimming in, so it's amazing any of us are here. I'm doing pretty good. I got about an hour left. No, it is amazing, it really is. It really is. And then again, that's interesting why two people could be standing side by side and the one guy is just a *basket* case and the other guy is OK, you know.

Kari and I have talked about that and the guys in our group that are doing pretty good still were probably more active, had active jobs, or something. We don't know what it is. Maybe it's just genes. I don't know.

I don't know. I don't know that anybody knows.

No. It is, it's interesting, though, isn't it? And some guys, just *everything* fell apart on them. It was terrible. So I don't know. So there you go.

Well, good. I think this is good timing. We're close to the end of this disc. We'll take a break.

Yes, great, let's do that.

Thank you so much, Bob.

[00:46:34] End Track 3, Disc 2.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 2, Disc 3.

OK, so we're back after lunch and we were discussing several more stories that came to your mind during the break that you thought you should add to this before we move on to your current work.

Yes, Mary. To show you how our government can make mistakes, we had one of our top secret Marines, and we called him Limey, big, big English accent. Terence Gardner I think was his name. But anyway, he was on duty and they called him up to see the captain of the ship. So he went in, at attention, so forth, and the captain said, Private Gardner, I'm going to ask you a question *one time* and I want a "*yes*" answer or a "*no*" answer. He said, Are you or are you not a citizen of the United States? And he looked at him and he said, No. Now here's a man on a *top secret* with a *Queen* clearance and he's not a *citizen*? Anyway, and so they gave him a choice, Mary. They said, Well, you're going to become a citizen, and if you don't want to do this, they reminded him that it was a long

swim back to Hawaii. I mean the man had no option, at all. And to show you the power that we had at the Atomic Energy Commission at that time, that man went over and picked up the ship's telephone and they made him an American citizen over the telephone. And I said, Do you want that story told? He says, I've already cleared it with Immigration and everything's fine. You can tell it if you want to. But how they solved that problem, can you imagine the heads that would've rolled if they realized we had a non-citizen right in the middle of a top secret operation, wearing a Queen clearance *badge*, on duty? And so a pretty fast way to shut that up, wasn't it? And that was the end of that.

And I said, Who'd you talk to?

And he said, I talked to a judge. And he says, I don't remember his name, but he says, I don't even remember what I said to him. He said, You know, everybody's standing there and I'm on the phone and we're in the middle of the Marshall Islands and he said, *You're now a citizen of the United States*.

And I said, Did you *want* to be a citizen?

And he says, Well, at that point in time, I didn't have any choice.

I mean that has to be amazing. How'd he get through security? So isn't that something? It's just amazing. It's just amazing.

So we had another story to show you how things happened that make you realize you are a little different than the rest. You don't think that at the time. You're just a bunch of Marines doing a job, you know. And we were just happy, probably, at that time—well, Korea was over with, but we felt we could've had worse duty somewhere.

And so there were three of us and we were at the destroyer base in the San Diego Navy Base. And we were wearing greens, I think, at the time. Anyway, we were stopped by a Marine

sentry, which is an MP [military policeman] and a Navy, which is an SP [shore patrol], and they were working together on the base, and they came up and said that we were out of uniform.

And so one of our guys said, Well, that's not true because aboard ship the commanding officer designates what the uniform is going to be. We don't go by the rest of the Marine Corps.

So all the Marine Corps would be in greens for the winter and khakis or tropicals in the summer. So we were out of uniform for the United States.

And so anyway he said, Well, that's not true. I don't believe that's true. I think you guys are out of uniform.

And we said, No, we're not out of uniform.

And he said, Well, what ship are you on?

We said, We're on the *Curtiss.*

He said, I've never heard of the *Curtiss*. He said, What kind of ship is the *Curtiss*?

And we said, Well, which we had to tell everybody. You can't tell them it's a top secret ship, so we'd say, Well, it's a seaplane tender.

And he said, A seaplane? When's the last time you saw a seaplane? And he says, Who are you guys?

So now it's starting to get pretty vocal. At some time or another, they gave us a phone number and they said, If you ever get in trouble, use this number. But *never, ever* call it on your own because there's ways we can trace it back. Typical military thinking, you know, if you do something they're going to cut your head off. And so you don't use this phone number to see **[00:05:00]** who's at the other end. One of the guys remembered this number. Now we were about ready to go to the brig. It was the Marine who was

the nasty one, you know. That just seems to be the way it is. The Navy guy wasn't that bad. But anyway, so one of the guys opened his wallet and had that number. And he handed it to the MP and said, Call this number. And he says, All right, I will. And he told the SP, he said, You stay here with these wise guys. I'll go call the number. He came back in a few minutes, Mary, and you can't believe the turnaround. And I've always wondered, well, whoever was at the other end of that number said, These guys are *hands off*. Because he came back and said, Well, have you guys eaten yet? Do you have a place to stay? Would you like a limo? You know, it was about that bad but completely like this, complete flip-flop. And so we always wondered. Now we thought we were pretty hot before that, but after that we were just saying, Hey, nobody better touch us, you know, because we're real special. But so it's interesting.

Now another story about the *Curtiss*. After the Bravo and the Castle operation, on our way back to the States, one of our buddies was captain's orderly and he was on duty when the captain of the ship, the *Curtiss*, called Pearl Harbor. He was concerned about the morale of all the troops. We'd been over there for a long time with no morale and all that. And he wanted and asked and requested permission to get a berth at Pearl Harbor so we could get a day or so of R and R [rest and recreation], whatever they call it. And they called him back and said, No way, you're not bringing *that* ship into *this* harbor. Turned him down.

And your friend who was the orderly—

Heard him. He heard him request it, he heard their comeback and they said, There's no way, you're not bringing that ship into *this* harbor. And so we went on to San Francisco. That's how hot it was after the shots. They wouldn't let it in Pearl Harbor. And of course on the way over, everywhere we went, we didn't go anywhere because it was always secret. So we

didn't go in any harbors and we refueled at sea, we got our mail at sea, we switched movies. And that was the big thing, when a little destroyer would pull up and we'd see those bags come across, those big canvas bags on what they call a boson's chair or whatever, and they'd come over and we'd say, God, maybe we got some new movies, you know. I'm so tired of seeing *Birth of the Nation*, you know.

That's what they showed you?

Oh, we had old, old movies. *Old* movies. And then I remember there was one with Marilyn Monroe. And they were always outdoors. The guys'd see that over and over again. Then they had some with James Cagney and there was about three guys sitting there. Nobody wanted to see it over and over again, you know. But yes, we had movies on the outside. And those guys would pull up alongside of us on those destroyers. They'd been over there for a long time. We weren't sure what navy they were in because our ship, because we had the scientists and the admiral and a captain, we were very squared away. It was in what they call shipshape. It was a capital ship. Now the destroyers, the Navy, those guys had their own world. They had beards. Long hair. Their sleeves were ripped off on their shirts. They were wearing *shorts*. And they'd pull alongside of us, and those ships looked like a toy compared to us, and we'd throw them fruit. And it was like you were at a zoo and they were animals or something. We'd throw them an apple and they'd [making guttural sound] and they'd fight over it and all that. And then we'd laugh. We'd look at that movie screen. It was about that big [indicating size] on the back of the destroyer, and we had a great, big, huge screen, you know, and they had this little teeny thing like that. We said, What is that? And the guy, he said, That's our movie screen. And we went [makes choked laughter sound]. You know. So we thought we were pretty salty. But those guys on destroyers are all in a world of their own. But they would bring our mail and

exchange movies and stuff like that. And they even brought us an admiral once, and that was a disaster. They sent him over in what they call a boson's chair and they went a little too low with the admiral and everybody cheered and all that. He went all the way down to the ocean, and then bobbed back up again. And *right* after that operation, we went back to Hunter's Point [San Francisco] or whatever it was and they put a helicopter pad on our ship. I'll bet the admiral says, I'm not doing that again. So from that time we could take helicopters.

But anyway, there was three stories and I wanted to cover about the citizenship, which I thought was interesting, becoming an American citizen over the telephone, and then the fact that Pearl Harbor wouldn't even let us in, and to show that *somebody* said something about us that all of a sudden an MP and an SP just completely turned around, couldn't do enough for us. So I **[00:10:00]** don't know what they said. But I've got a lot more of them, Mary. There's so many different stories, you know.

Yes. I think with the time left, I'm going to pause it and we'll do our next segment here.

Yes.

[00:10:10] End Track 2, Disc 3.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 3, Disc 3.

Great. So let's continue with you joining us, Kari, and it would be really useful in this last hour, basically, to get an understanding of forty years later, the next generation, the atomic veterans movement, in a sense, I guess you could almost call it a movement that's come up about these things and how you became involved. But at lunch you were talking about the trip to Hawaii that you took, and I think that would be interesting to talk about because one of the questions that comes up in a situation like yours, so top secret, was what did your families know?

Kari Chipman: We knew nothing. We knew nothing, and we knew that Dad was a Marine. And anyways I was asked in 1984, beginning of '85—Dad had suffered several heart attacks. And Dad's a very outgoing and fun-loving guy, but his employees had called and said, Hey, he's getting a little testy, you know. And after a few heart attacks I can understand. And so I had arranged a two-week trip to Hawaii, and at the time I thought I was being a wonderful, loving daughter. Little did I know that when we landed in Oahu, Dad proceeded to tell me that we were in the middle of a jungle and there were bugs. And I thought—I started chalking all this up to him just being testy from the heart attacks. But after the first week it kept going *on* and *on* and just *negative* and it's just [he was saying], Oh, it's hot and it's humid. And we would drive somewhere and it was just negative, negative, which is so unlike him. It's just so unlike him. So the second week, we went over to Kauai and boy, I tell you, one of us almost didn't come back from that. We laugh about it now. But not knowing that my dad was in the islands in the fifties. We were over in Kauai and it was humid and a lot of bugs, and we walked in the hotel room and he lifted up a can of bug spray and he said, Look at this. They've got *bug spray* in the hotel rooms. We never knew. We never knew. I would've taken him to Alaska, had I known.

So you didn't know then, either, then.

No. I still didn't know.

And Bob, just real quickly because I'm curious and you've been telling me a lot, but what's that like? Is it familiar? Does it look familiar? Does it smell familiar? What's happening in you that's reminding you?

Robert Mackenzie: The first thing is the smell. That's the first thing is the smell. Because the original island was well-populated and it reminded me of San Diego, frankly. The other islands

didn't. They reminded me of where we had our test. But it's like a movie set where you look at it and, Oh, it's beautiful. Then you walk around in back and it's nothing real, you know, and it's just old boards holding up that beautiful façade. And that's what the islands, so many of them, you come up in the ships, Oh, look at the clouds and the clear water and oh! That clear water full of sharks and you know the trees are dying and they're rotting and there's little crab things running out of them and oh, I don't know. I didn't have any good memories at all. But a lot of it was the smell, and it was the humidity, and you know and it rains and then a minute later the sun comes out and it's steaming. It's a climate I don't think I could ever get used to, although we got so we had to live in it, but you know it was just terrible.

So in 1996, you were mentioning before, when did you actually begin to talk to your daughter or your family about what happened?

Well, probably, I think, the first—in 1982 when my dad sent me the thing about the one guy that went up against the government, and he just put that little note on it that says, You might want to look into it. Not long after that I started sending to—at that time it wasn't the Atomic Energy Commission, it had a different name in between—I don't remember what it was.

ERDA [Energy Research and Development Agency]. E-R-D-A. In between the AEC and DOE.

Yes, it was. It was. And then from that time, I started getting papers from them and they had no listing of me on Operation Wigwam, and I started contacting a Marine captain. Then I realized the records seemed to be inaccurate. I mean they didn't have me on an operation. And I think the first thing that really woke me up, so to speak, is when I sent for my records. It was just fun. I **[00:05:00]** thought I'd just look into this stuff. And I wasn't thinking "heart" and problems, to tell you the truth. Then when I got my records back, there were no records of anything. And I said, Well, wait a minute, there's nothing on there about the islands. There's

nothing in my records. Where did that time go? And I thought well, it's all top secret, so I really still didn't think that much about it. And what made me think about it, I got a call from a guy that at that time was in charge of the National Association of Atomic Veterans, and he had a Boston accent, Bob Somebody, and he said that his doctor said if he didn't retire from that organization, he was going to kill himself. He was so worried about everybody else, he was so tense, and he couldn't get anywhere at the VA, and nobody would listen to him.

And so he said, Well, how are you doing?

And I said, Well, I have skin cancer.

And he said, Oh, he said, we all got that.

He's a rough, gruff kind of guy.

And he said, What other problems you have?

And I said, Well, that's about it. I said, I'm doing great.

He said, What about heart?

I said, Heart? I said, I've had all kinds of heart problems.

He said, Well, they're proving that the thyroid and different things and all that, and our guys are coming up with more and more heart problems.

I said, Yes, I've had a *lot* of heart problems.

And I never talked to the guy again, but it was little things like that. My records weren't complete. They didn't have me on certain operations. You know. And then somebody else called me and there was an 800-number, if you were an atomic veteran, to call that number, which I did, and it was just a recording, and they wanted to know your serial number and what operations you were on. That was probably the late eighties, something like that. And just different little articles came up. There was an article by the commander of the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] saying that he felt the veterans had been overlooked, so forth, and are having problems

and all. And so all that just started adding up, adding up, and it's just like the time was right, I guess.

Now at this point, are you still prevented from speaking about any of these things? Do you feel or—? The actual work, I mean.

Well, yes, I always felt that we only had like a twenty-year time limit. But then again, I was afraid to say anything. I really didn't know and didn't really care, really. I didn't have anything much to say about anything but, you know, it's just that it's obvious, even when you got together with your old buddies, you could tell that everybody's walking on eggs, you know. They don't want to talk. So officially, I'd say that I felt we'd been cleared, but then again, even today, some of those documents are, as they say, sanitized, you know, and here we are at 2005. So I don't think any of us have anything to worry about now. I don't think anyway.

No, I just meant within your own self, if you keep those things to yourself—

Well, I think it gets to be a habit. It's like you mentioned the difference between employees and management—and I was on both sides of the fence—that you do have a certain corporate speak. That if you feel that it might in any way misrepresent the corporation or management, you'll say it in a way that's, like Kari says, using weasel words. And you start thinking like a lawyer, you know, and so you're careful how you word things. And I think that that's the same way when you've been in any secret work. You're careful how you word the things. You talk but you're not really saying anything. And you get in the habit. So did I all of a sudden wake up one morning and say [to myself], I don't have to talk that way anymore? No. And sometimes you do. If you're at a party or something and you're questioned too much, you're not sure of that person's motives, either. You're still representing the country, you know, whether you're active and receiving a check or not. So if somebody wanted to know too much about your operations and

what you did, you say, Well, are they just interested or—? And so you'd be a little careful. Be a little careful. So I think, **[00:10:00]** to answer your question again, it does become more a way of life than you realize, you know, probably like a mother would talk to her kids. Certain, you know, you're careful.

Kari Chipman: I found out in 1997, and how it came about, I never understood, you know, the Hawaii and the island thing. And we laugh about it to this day but, like I said, the Kauai portion of the trip was definitely—you could tell he was very irritated and agitated. We were both happy to be home. And in 1997, I worked for a gentleman in San Diego, a technology division of Nelson-Keystone and Kodak we worked with the manufacturer of Kodak. Carl Nelson had said to me one day, Kari, there's a Marine Corps web site and would you get online and look this up for me? And he said, There's a guestbook. I want to sign that. And in '97, I mean World Wide Web was still being developed. It wasn't in households like it is today. And I got online actually in 1989—that's when very few people were on—so I have been involved in computers. And so anyways, I had got online and I was looking at this Marine Corps web site. And I went home and had called my dad and had said, Hey, this is a pretty cool thing, and they have this Marine Corps web site and it's a guestbook. And he said, Well, can you go on and look for some of my buddies? Dad had come over to the house and my daughter and he were sitting down, and they had found some names on the Marine Corps guestbook, and one of them was from a gentlemen who was on the *Curtiss*. He was on an earlier operation. And it said, "Looking for anybody who was on the *Curtiss* or in Operation Greenhouse." So anyways, from there that's actually how everything started. That was the catalyst right there, is Dad had called this gentleman, Keith Cunday, who had posted. Because I had posted a notice for my dad. You know my dad had written everything out, you know, looking for anybody from—

Robert Mackenzie: Yes, it was long-lost buddies, *semper fi*, or something.

Kari Chipman: Yes. And so I had spelled *Curtiss* wrong. I remember. I had spelled *Curtiss* wrong. I spelled it with one "s" instead of two, so I had to go back into the site and put it in the guestbook again. And so I saw another notice from somebody in there from the *Curtiss*, I think it was Jack Kruse, at the time. So anyways, Jack Kruse and Keith Cunday were from Greenhouse, which was an earlier operation, and Dad got their numbers, you know, we e-mailed them back and forth. And the group of men had hooked up in El Toro [Marine Base] and they had decided to have a reunion now, as opposed to having a reunion with just the Greenhouse members, because Dad was on Castle and Wigwam. And so what they decided to do is start looking for men from the *Curtiss*, from the USS *Curtiss* AV-4 all the men on all the operations. So that's how it came about to be this particular group of men. Now Greenhouse was initial—

So this is the Curtiss *but this is Marines that were on—*

Robert Mackenzie: All the Marines. Right. Just the Marines.

Kari Chipman: Only the Marine detachment. Only the Marine detachment, the seagoing Marine detachment. And it was Greenhouse and then we found some [Operation] Crossroads. So it was—

The sea one detachment?

Seagoing Marines. Seagoing Marine detachment.

Robert Mackenzie: I think another thing that is the key, like you said, it's interesting, a swell of the daughters and all, I think that it's interesting how certain things happen. And it is the computers and the Internet, because I've noticed that each group—we have the atomic veterans, and we've been around fifty years and we're just *now* getting recognized. And then we had the Agent Orange guys, and they fought really hard. Then we had the Gulf War guys, which were

younger and very good with the computers. They got action faster than we did after fifty years, and that's because they knew how to write their congressmen, they knew how to write their senators, they were verbal, their children got involved. So I think that the computers and the communication skills—and another thing, too. A lot of the veterans don't have money to send out three hundred dollars' worth of mailers to their friends. On computers, we can do that. And so I think a lot of it is just the way the communications have evolved.

[00:15:00] *Do you think it also has anything to do with—this is a little bit of a leading question. I'll put it this way. It occurs to me there almost might also be a difference in culture, that the older guys, there's a different—I think younger people sometimes are more willing to talk about their problems. Do you think so?*

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Oh, well, not only that, too, is because a series of things, you know, like the Watergate and, say, and all that, and assassinations, and all these things were *before* it was truly—like my dad said, World War I, I mean if you didn't go to World War I, you were like some kind of a traitor or something. Well, Korea was the first war—and you know they said it was a police action, we lost 55,000 people or something—but where some of the guys were going to Canada. And we couldn't *believe* that. So then Vietnam came along. And so there's a different mindset in people in this age group and all. And they're saying, `Well, maybe our government might be OK, but some of the people in it are misled and their motives are suspect`. Or like we said, `The Russians are coming, the Russians are coming`. I mean you can make a guy a citizen over the phone? You've got some juice when you can pull that off, you know. So I think that yes, that there is a different generation out there. And I think they're going to keep people more honest. I think it's a good thing. I really do. But the problem is, is that a lot of those guys, I think we're fortunate, this atomic veterans, most of the people that made the decisions that affected us are not around anymore. And everybody says,

Well, they're just waiting till we all die off. They're going to wait until there's five guys left and then they'll pull us up, give us a medal and a check for a lot of money, and they're the good guys. And I said, Well, I hope they're not thinking that way.

Kari Chipman: One guy that we did talk to, he said, Oh, I thought those guys were all dead, referring to the group of *Curtiss* men.

Robert Mackenzie: Yes, he said, I can't believe any of those guys are still alive.

This was an official of some kind?

Well, I don't remember who it was, Mary. We heard it at one of the reunions, I think.

Kari Chipman: Yes, actually I heard it from one of the reporters that was at the reunion. He had given me that little sound byte, taken me over to the side, and then Dad had told me later, so I think that's who you had got it from also. Because we both had heard it at the Las Vegas reunion. And he had passed it on to me that some of our guys at that particular reunion were in wheelchairs and we have since lost them. Obviously.

Robert Mackenzie: We lost two last month.

Kari Chipman: Yes, we lost two last month. I mean—

Robert Mackenzie: But they're old guys, so see, that's the thing. That's the problem.

Kari Chipman: This one particular man was riddled with cancer, and the reporter that was there had said that he was *really* shocked to see this *many* of the atomic Marines gathered. He had said that *he* had thought, based upon *his* research, that more of them would've passed on. And that he had heard somebody, when he had informed somebody that he was going to be going to an atomic Marines reunion, that this—and I *do* believe it *was* somebody in an official capacity had said, There's still these guys left.

Robert Mackenzie: Can I interject something about reunions and the way I thought about them?

Sure. Sure.

Is that frankly, another thing that you'll find out about all the Marines, even though they've got Marine Corps stickers on their car and they're wearing Marine Corps underwear and all that—like the one Army guy says, `Don't they ever let you guys out`? But *none* of us, because of the duties we were on and our secrecy, when we got out, we got out. I mean I didn't see these people for forty-five, fifty years. Now normally a whole bunch meet the first and the second year and then it dwindles and dwindles and dwindles and dwindles. We were exactly the opposite. We didn't talk to each other. At all. And I think that was part of the secrecy thing and part of, we didn't have a whole lot of great liberty stories in San Francisco to talk about. We sat on an island in the dirt and ate a radioactive coconut. That's nothing you want to talk about. There were no girls over there to see, either. So what do you talk about? How big the bomb was or something? So maybe we didn't have anything in common. But *now*—

And you didn't have the normal kind of war stories, either, combat stories.

No, we didn't. No. Not only that, we couldn't talk, and everybody—one guy, I remember one time I felt like punching his lights out, but he was another Marine and he was First Marine Division, which is the most decorated Marine division.

So he says, `Well, you must be Korea.`

And I said, `That's right.`

And he says, `Were you at Inchon?`

And I says, `No, no.`

[And he says], `Were you at the Ch'osan Reservoir?`

[And I said], No, no.

[00:20:00] And so that's the beating you have to take when you can't talk about things.

So I said, I was seagoing.

And he says, Oh, one of those. Oh, one of those seagoing bellhops. You just ran around and polished your shoes.

And I said, Yes, that's right.

That's all I could say. I felt like saying, [whispering] You asshole, you know, I really did, but he didn't know. But that was the thing, is that, you know, I think we did our share, but we couldn't even talk about it. We had to take a verbal beating from our own Marine buddies. So you know it's tough to do. It really is.

Yes. Yes, that's a good point.

It's tough to do. It really is. But then when we did get together, Mary, the exciting thing about it, it's like we talked about earlier, is I have the opportunity to talk to people I *never* would've talked to in my profession. And we've got lawyers and doctors and Ph.D.s and physicists and scientists and guys that are huge in—we've got two former mayors, politicians. We've got everything. It's *amazing*. You go down our list, we've got CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] guys.

We've got one guy, he says, Well, I'm finally retired, Bob. He said, I've been in law enforcement for forty-two years.

And I said, Gee, that's long enough. And so I said, What did you do exactly?

And he won't talk. These guys won't talk.

He says, Well, let me put it this way. He says, And you've seen when we used to have those parades for the president? He says, That very front black car? That's the one I was always in.

And I said, Is that what you did?

And he said, Well, he said, only twelve years, then I went on to this.

But the stories this guy must have. These guys, every one of them, have *wonderful* stories. They really do.

Yes. And you were saying earlier, I think, before we even started recording this morning, that many of them, unlike yourself, decided to stay, used the Q-clearance after they left.

Oh, absolutely. Right. Los Alamos [National Laboratory]. CIA. Embassy duty. We had guys on embassy duty all over the world, and they had to go, even in those days, to—it was a great honor, by the way, because they were working for the State Department. They were still in the Marine Corps but they worked for the State Department. But they're representing our country and they're representing the Marine Corps. I mean they've got a tremendous responsibility and they have a lot of secrets. But see, they've already got their clearances. And we had four of our men that went on embassy duty. Two of them are dead now and we have two that are alive that were in embassy duty.

So let's go back to—well, it's not back—and talk a little bit more about this interesting combination of the kinds of things you're talking about, really important service to the country. And as you articulated earlier, some people feel then to question some other things that the government did as unpatriotic. And I was mentioning earlier how interesting I thought your newsletter—which I know, Kari, you're the person behind it in a lot of ways—has all sorts of information and how you're negotiating and what the goals are, too, of your organization.

Kari Chipman: Well, one of the things is the man who had the newsletter prior to myself, Gene Pratt, he did a great job, he really did. It was about four to five pages and it basically—we subscribed to it, and he would write about—now and I got this as an outsider, OK? So I mean

some of the things would be interesting to me but, you know, being with Kodak and having done a lot of newsletters, I thought, wow, why would these guys want to know about the *Curtiss*? They were on this ship. He spent a year of newsletters telling everybody about the *Curtiss*. And while I thought that's great and informative for relatives and stuff, there were a lot of issues that I thought as an outsider needed to be addressed. And at the time I was working with Kodak. I had North America. I traveled. So for the first three or four reunions, I was there in the capacity as photographer and kind of an organizer and helper. It wasn't really until the Reno reunion, which is the only reunion I've missed besides Branson [Missouri]—I was supposed to be there, I had to go to Puerto Rico—so that was the reunion when things really broke open, because when the men first started, there was no medical problems, everything was well and wonderful. I mean nobody—

Is that the one you were talking about earlier?

Kari Chipman: Yes. Yes.

Robert Mackenzie: That's right. We mentioned that when it broke loose that time—

Kari Chipman: Yes, see, at the reunions prior to that, everybody got together, everything was great, there was no illness, all the kids, everything, there was no problems. It was everybody getting together and I think interacting with the different groups, you know, the Castle and the **[00:25:00]** [Operation] Redwing group and getting together with the Greenhouse, because they were on the ships at different times, so these men were getting to know one another. It wasn't really until the Reno reunion—and that's the one I wasn't at—but Dad one day at lunch there, as I understand it, had brought up some medical problems. And all of a sudden *everybody* started opening up about, `Well, I've had cancer, I've had this, my daughter's had that.` *That's* when things really started coming. It's coming out. People started talking about them.

Right, your dad told me about that and I think it was when you were [out of the room] with the baby. But since you mentioned the children, your dad also said—and I don't think you were here at the time when he was saying—When it involves the children, that becomes really important. You said on the phone that you thought some of your own illnesses might be related, is that right?

There's autoimmune deficiency—autoimmune diseases have been connected to the radioactivity. Some of the children don't have organs, missing uteruses, testicles—

Robert Mackenzie: That's funny because we were talking about all that when she was upstairs. We were talking about Keith Cunday's son and—

Kari Chipman: Yes, I heard a little bit because I was up with the baby but—

Robert Mackenzie: Oh, let me interject this when it comes to the kids.

Kari Chipman: Yes.

Yes, go ahead.

Robert Mackenzie: There's so many offshoots in this. Now on my youngest son, it was obvious there was something wrong with him. I mean it was a sad story, but anyway at that time, Mary, years and years ago, we couldn't get help because the school had to certify there was something wrong with him. And so I said, Well, you know, I've got other kids and it's obvious that something is not right with him. Can you go around in a circle like that for a half-hour and not even get dizzy, like he can?

Kari Chipman: He used to watch the test pattern on the television set.

Robert Mackenzie: Yes, and he'd stare at lights and he just—and he was way too strong, and we couldn't get day care centers for him. Now, at that time, and this is with my first wife, not Kari's mom, is that she was still smoking and then she quit smoking. I said, Honey, you've got to stop that. And so she quit smoking. Then I'd come home and she had a water glass

of Scotch. And I said, Oh, you know. And she says, Well, the kids are driving me crazy, and all that. I honestly thought that it was her, not me. And as I look back, I think it definitely affected our relationship, because now we had this son, I'd look at him and she'd—and then she tried to commit suicide.

Oh, I'm sorry.

Oh, this goes—it was just—

Kari Chipman: A lot of—

Robert Mackenzie: And so really, so many of these things, it isn't just about this country, it isn't just about the Marine Corps. But if I'm the cause of that—and I just called her [ex-wife] the other day and I said, Maybe I owe you an apology. I don't know. But I said, How's Brian doing? And he's still with her back in New Hampshire, and he manages—he's forty-something, he's never been married, and he's—like my mother said, Is he happy?

And I said, Yes, he is happy.

And she says, Isn't that what we're all looking for? Just because he's not just like you doesn't mean he's not right.

I said, I never thought about it that way. You're right, Mom.

And he is happy.

Well, thank goodness.

You know, and he's a genius in certain areas.

Kari Chipman: Yes. He's a genius IQ [intelligence quotient].

Robert Mackenzie: He's *way* out there, Mary. You know for three days when we went to Boston he had one of those sweaters on that had reindeer and those little sweaters and mountains and all that and he's got it on wrong side out. And people are looking at him. He's got all the strings hanging down. I know better than to say anything. So after about the third day I said,

You know, Brian, I said, your sweater is on wrong side out. And he looks at me and he says, So? He said, Dad, it still does what it was designed to do. It keeps me warm. I went, Hm, oh, so much for me. He wears two different colors of socks. You know he's just [whistles].

Kari Chipman: He wears different color shoes. Brian is—he's a genius.

Robert Mackenzie: Yes, he's just *whew*. He is. He got the highest—he actually made it in the Air Force. He got the highest—and you know what he said? I thought I'd give him a compliment. You can't compliment him. He got the highest test score, second highest, in the Air Force, and the other guy'd been in the service before, and he got the second highest and his mother was so proud. She called me back and so I said, Ohh, and I talked to him on the phone. I said, Well, congratulations. I heard you got the second highest grade ever in the entrance exam for the Air Force. And he says, What difference does that make, as long as I passed?

[00:30:00] So they gave him a top secret clearance and he worked on black boxes all by himself. They just put him back in a corner and he was fine. And they offered him twenty thousand [dollars] to stay in. And I said, Well, why don't you stay in? Because it'd been perfect for him. They tell him what time to get up. He needs a keeper. What time to go to bed. He says, Well, he says, you know, Dad, I didn't like those inspections. And that's why he didn't stay, see? Because you know he's got his belt over here [demonstrating] and his collar button over here [laughing] so yes.

Kari Chipman: Oh, he's got all of his money and checks thrown in his headboard. I mean he's not very organized at all. I mean *he* could certainly find something but—

Robert Mackenzie: Money doesn't mean anything to him at all.

Kari Chipman: Nothing. It means nothing to him at all.

Robert Mackenzie: He doesn't like girls, doesn't like boys. I don't know what he likes, you know. He's just—

Kari Chipman: No, he likes playing with lasers and doing his things. But that, I mean, that's some of the byproducts of the radiation.

Robert Mackenzie: Yes, there's a lot of, you know, it's all these things that can affect families, affect your children, affect everything. It's horrible. Anybody wants to use a nuke on anything's got to be out of their mind, don't they? We were going to set off a cobalt bomb. You think that hydrogen bomb was bad. That was our next bomb, was going to be a cobalt. It made that look like a toy. I guess we changed our mind about that. I don't even know what a cobalt bomb is.

Kari Chipman: You know, doing stories on these men, it's very, very difficult to get stories out of them. *Very* difficult.

Yes. And how do you do—? You're doing them for the newsletter or you're doing them like the veterans history project? What's your approach?

I've got a twofold purpose. I've sat and listened to my dad, and he's got these magic books—

Robert Mackenzie: You're a sucker for a sweet voice, is what it is [laughing].

Kari Chipman: And I think, number one, I think there's some stories to be told. And I think there's a great deal of history that these men have, and only them. I mean my dad is the only one who knows that submarine story. He's the only one—he was there—besides the admiral, who's passed on. But I started listening to some of these stories and I thought all this is great. We really need to get these. It was a twofold purpose. And the health. A lot of these men are very sick and they're not getting the VA medical attention that they deserve. And I think, you know, [President Ronald] Reagan said, `A country can be judged on how it treats its`

veterans. And we are not getting very high marks with these guys. Because it was so long ago. It's just like Dad said, we didn't sign up for it; they did.

The children didn't sign up.

And the children are getting affected. One gentleman that I did a story on, I mean it just ripped me apart. I mean he lost three children to cancer. I mean twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two. I mean to outlive your children. And this is not the only one. A lot of the Marines who were exposed to the high amounts of radiation lost children to cancer, leukemia. It's just terrible, terrible, some of the illnesses the children have. And I started getting more involved after Gene Pratt had said, You know, look, I been doing the newsletter a long time, and nobody would take it from him. And at that particular time I had become permanently disabled from Kodak with Parkinson's [disease] and a lung disease. So anyway, as I said, well, I've got some time on my hands and I'll go ahead and do the newsletter. So in going about the way of things, I know the corporate world, so I said, OK. Well, I wanted this newsletter to be more informative, I wanted it to have the latest things that were available to these guys from the VA, from the different threat reduction agencies [DTRA], the different ways to get compensation, to get the medical attention for the children. So I started networking with NAAV and all the different associations that had radiation-related—these were radiation-related organizations who were chaptered in with Congress, who could get their voice heard. Now our group, we are not a tax-exempt organization. It doesn't make sense for us to, because these guys, they're a bunch of older men who want to get together and enjoying each other's company now. They don't want to take minutes of a meeting or, you know, the reunions, they get together and they have a good time. Getting these guys to do anything, to tell stories, to do anything—

Robert Mackenzie: They're all retired, too, and they have a don't—

Kari Chipman: Yes, they're retired. Yes. They don't—

Robert Mackenzie: —give-a-darn attitude, most of them.

Kari Chipman: Yes.

Robert Mackenzie: And they're rough, gruff guys, Mary, and a lot of them, it's like Kari said, that when she sent those surveys out, boy, those were eye-openers, and on there she said—

Kari, you sent a bunch of surveys out?

Kari Chipman: Yes, I did.

Robert Mackenzie: Yes.

For the purpose of—?

Kari Chipman: Well, a needs analysis.

Robert Mackenzie: See how they're thinking and what are they doing.

Kari Chipman: What do you want in your newsletter?

[00:35:00] Robert Mackenzie: Yes.

Kari Chipman: I'm doing a newsletter and like I said, I'm from the corporate world, so before I go doing a newsletter, I do a needs analysis, and so I sent out a survey based upon a lot of questions *I* had in listening to these guys as the reunions. And so I had sent out a pretty extensive survey that had quantifiers in it. See, at Kodak, everything we did, at the end of the day we could get the results of it and say, `OK, this is what we're going to focus on`. So doing a needs analysis. And then all of a sudden, it just broke wide open. I thought oh my gosh, these guys, they want all this information on the VA. See, before—

Robert Mackenzie: They wouldn't even talk about it.

Kari Chipman: No, nobody would talk about it.

Robert Mackenzie: None of them belonged.

But when you put it in the questionnaire they—

Kari Chipman: Absolutely. Ab-so-lutely.

Robert Mackenzie: Right. Exactly. Exactly. Nobody else around, all by themselves. Now if there'd been a Marine sitting on either side of them, they'd say, `Oh, I don't want to hear about that stuff.`

Kari Chipman: That's right.

And it was anonymous, right?

Robert Mackenzie: Right.

Kari Chipman: Yes. Well actually, they had the choice to put their names down or not.

Robert Mackenzie: Yes, she gave them the choice.

Robert Mackenzie: Right.

Kari Chipman: I gave them a choice, and they wrote their names down. And it's amazing, since then we've given people different vehicles and avenues to get the help, the IRR [Ionizing Radiation Review], and I started an Excel spreadsheet on their disabilities because of the asbestos—which we talked about briefly off the tape—but asbestos is one of the things in addition to the radiation, and how these men can go about getting their compensation and the medical stuff that they need. So this was all a part of the survey. And all of a sudden, it started coming out of the woodwork, and the guys who didn't turn in their surveys, all of a sudden, after the newsletter had come out, were calling me, asking me for another survey. `Can you e-mail? I want to send that survey in.`

That's interesting. So in the survey—go ahead, Bob.

Robert Mackenzie: Well, another thing, Mary, is that out of 160 you sent out or something like that, it was up there—

Kari Chipman: Hundred and sixty, yes.

Robert Mackenzie: But I think like three guys belonged to any organizations at all. I think we had three guys that belonged to the National Association of Atomic Veterans, and that's the greatest source for us. We're all on the same page. And three or four guys belonged to the VA. Nobody belonged to anything. Anything that had to do with service. I think two guys belonged to the Marine Corps League. We said, Do you take *Leatherneck* magazine?

[They answered], No.

[We said], Do you belong to the Marine Corps League?

[They answered],No.

You know, and all the way. And the guys that were getting *Leatherneck* [it was] because their son or grandson was in the Marine Corps and they got Dad a subscription. So it's obvious that after this was all over with, there was disconnect. Obvious. And VA? Hardly *any* of them have gone to the VA because they use their wife's insurance or their private insurance. And frankly, the VA doesn't have—among the servicemen, that would be the *last* place you'd go. You'd rather go to your own, naturally, your own doctor because, you've got a relationship with him. And at the VA, you're more the number. And so our guys would hesitate going to the VA. Hopefully it's getting better, and I think it is getting better. But yes, it's an interesting thing. And so with Kari's questionnaire, she found out what they wanted and they kind of—

Did you ask in the questionnaire—oh, excuse me, Bob.

And we took some here from these shows [referring to videos from television shows] which—

Oh, the spin stuff? [While off recording he had discussed the spin put on some of the TV commentary]

Yes, and so and a lot of that, too, is she gave them the sanitized view of an article written in 1954 and an article written today. You read them both and make up your own mind. [Referring to *Curtiss Atomic Marines Newsletter, Summer 2004, 30, 2]*

Kari Chipman: And what I did, one of the things—

Robert Mackenzie: And all with documentation.

Yes, I saw—

Kari Chipman: I documented everything.

Robert Mackenzie: *Los Angeles Times, New York Times*. Yes.

I know.

Kari Chipman: There was web sites to everything that I did, every article, because some of the articles that I received were old black-and-whites, and I had to go on these quests for these articles because I wasn't going to reprint something if I didn't know the source. That was one thing. You just don't do that. I mean even though we're not a formal organization or anything, I wasn't going to put anything in that newsletter that I couldn't point to.

Robert Mackenzie: Well, if somebody finds one thing wrong, we're finished. Everything in there is going to be suspect.

Kari Chipman: Yes. The credibility is gone. So everything that was in there was thoroughly researched, and I printed, you know, all the different versions of the articles. And the newspaper articles *then* and the ones *now*, oh, a drastic difference. Like the fisherman on the *Lucky Dragon.* `Oh, nothing happened`. Well, my gosh, there was a lot that happened, and you know—

[00:40:00] Robert Mackenzie: Oh, another great story. Another great story. Went on a tour of the Atomic Test Site Museum in Los Alamos, located in Albuquerque [National Museum of Nuclear Science and History].

I've never been to that museum.

Well, they had an old guy there, Mary, a nice old guy. But anyway, so one of the men set it up and thought it'd be nice for us to go on this tour. Well, the guy, really he shouldn't have lied, which obviously he did. He met us, very nice. He says, Well, he said, *Curtiss*, he says, I looked you guys up and, he says, you have a very impressive record. Well, that was a good way to start. We like to hear that. We said, Great! So then he went into his 100 percent sanitized canned speech for schoolchildren. And so now our guys, it's kind of like a shark and you smell blood. Really, I felt sorry for this old guy. And finally I told him, I said, We were all there. I said, Every man in this, they have Q-clearances. So now we're starting to needle him with these stories. He didn't seem to get it. And I told him, which is a true story, about Oppenheimer when he came aboard our ship, Mary. Well, they pipe them on, like an admiral or something, so we knew we had a big civilian coming on. So I went down there with the admiral to meet Oppenheimer. But I didn't know who he was. Nobody knew who he was. So anyway, when he came aboard the ship, and we've never seen him before, the admiral picks up *his* luggage and carries it. And we all thought, My God, who is that? God? I mean everybody—and later, nobody knew who it was, and we went up there, and then the admiral says to me, he says, Mackenzie, show Dr. Oppenheimer his stateroom. And I said, Yes, sir. I went, Whew! Oppenheimer. Pretty big. Well, your parents probably knew him. But anyway, and so I, you know, I told that story, and I forgot where I was going with this. [Note, Mr. Mackenzie

is looking for documents to support his recollection of Dr. Oppenheimer's presence on board the *Curtiss*]

Oh, you were saying—yes, you were saying about this guy, why would he talk that way with you guys when you knew so much?

Yes. And so anyway, so yes, and so anyway, they told that story and I thought, Well, this ought to let this guy know who he's talking to here.

And he says, Well, he said—and then he starts quizzing me. He says, Were you at one of those shots?

And I said, Yes, I was.

And he says, All right, he says, tell me what color the cloud was.

And I said, It was every color in the rainbow.

And he went, Oh, oh, he says, that's right, he says, everybody always says white.

And I felt like saying, Didn't you get the memo?

So the topper was he says, Well, now, we have a hydrogen bomb here. And he says, We don't show this to everybody but you're a special group.

And I thought, Oh, stop it. And now the guys are starting to wander away and they're looking at pictures and they're trying to be nice to this old guy.

And finally, just before he took us in to see this top secret hydrogen bomb, I said, Well, were you on the Trinity shot?

And he says, Oh, well, no, no, no.

And I says, Well, I thought they told me you were from Los Alamos.

And he says, Well, I was but, he says, I worked in Supply, and he says, and I was there that day when they set it off.

I said, Oh.

So anyway I'm saying [to myself], Oh, God. And so this guy just did not get the message. So now he's going to take us in to see this top secret hydrogen bomb. And the guys now, they're just starting to addle this guy, you know, starting to needle him.

And he said, Well, this is something that you've probably never seen before, and he opens this door like that.

And one of my buddies followed him and looked at it. He says, Yes, he says, that looks familiar. I wrote my name on one just like that, except it was real.

And so anyway. But I felt so sorry for this guy. But then after it was all over with, I said, You guys were kind of mean to that old guy. He was just doing his job. And I said, He's being paid by the Department of Defense, and if they're signing your checks, you're going to pass on the company policy.

But what really made me mad about him, [which] is what brought this whole thing up, is that he calls me a liar indirectly about the fisherman on the ship.

He says, Well, he says, there are a lot of exaggerations on that Bravo shot over there.

And I said, What kind of exaggerations?

He says, Well, he said, they said that some of those Japanese sailors got **[00:45:00]** fallout. And he says, You know, I had a friend that was actually over there.

I finally said, Where do you think we were? We were twenty-three miles from ground zero.

And he says, He said there was no such thing that happened like that.

And I just wanted to strangle this old guy.

I said, Well, I've done all of it for you I can. You're going to stand there and make a fool of yourself.

Kari Chipman: Yes. Very argumentative.

Robert Mackenzie: I said, Why don't you talk to the guy on the *Lucky Dragon*—it just skinned him? You know, he died the next month. And now they have this thing in Japan about it and all that? But the guy was so—I guess, I don't want to use the term "brainwashed," but he was. You know, he could've backed off and all that when he—

Kari Chipman: He was very argumentative.

Robert Mackenzie: Oh, he was.

Kari Chipman: I mean all of these guys having *been* there—

Robert Mackenzie: Well, he was going to be our guest speaker at our dinner. And I couldn't get the guys to tell him. I said, We don't want this guy there. I said, The guys are going to stone him and everything else.

But I think the larger issue that this is an example of is what you just said. It seems to me that's the lingo that he was supposed to give at this museum.

Robert Mackenzie: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Kari Chipman: That's right.

For the general public. And you're saying, Look, we were there. And so that's where—

Robert Mackenzie: Right. Right.

Kari Chipman: And he wouldn't back down.

Robert Mackenzie: And he wouldn't get away from his—he was like a record and he couldn't, you know, with him it was like pushing "pause" and then pushing "play." He couldn't change his pitch. He could've just—and after it was all over with, he says, Well, I kind of got the feeling you guys should've taken me for a tour.

What's interesting about that—what I'm getting from what you're saying—is you guys were really there, so it's almost the facts don't count, in a certain sense.

Robert Mackenzie: Yes, that's right. Yes. And you'd think he would've been smart enough to have said, you know, I've always wanted to talk to some guys who were really there and tell—you know, we could've gone through and he could've showed us all the stuff but—

Kari Chipman: Well, he could've saved his spiel for the schoolkids.

Robert Mackenzie: Well, that's what he gave it to us.

Kari Chipman: That's the spiel that he gave these guys, and yes, I mean these guys were there. But he wouldn't back down. *Very* argumentative. When they came out, oh, the things I heard, and I'm thinking, oh, what did they do to this poor guy? I mean because all he came out and—

Robert Mackenzie: Well, I felt sorry for him at first, but I took him aside and I said, You're talking to these guys like they're kids. And I said, They don't appreciate it. These are not kids.

Kari Chipman: He definitely had the company line and, you know, I think the tack he should've taken is, Hey, you guys were there. I mean this would be just great to talk to these guys one-on-one to hear their stories, but—

Robert Mackenzie: Well, we walked in the space museum in San Diego [San Diego Air and Space Museum], and there were two of us, and all these old guys sitting there, all volunteers in San Diego, beautiful building, nice facility.

And I said, You know what?

And I was with another one of my Marine buddies.

And I said, I got a feeling this whole place is full of swabbies.

And the guys turned around and he said, Oh God, he said, we must have a couple of Marines in our midst.

And I said, That's right.

We were having a lot of fun, a bunch of old guys.

And I said, You have any Marines working here?

He says, You know what? He said, We did run into trouble once and we had to scrape the bottom of the barrel, so we've got one Marine working here and he's over there.

And we went over to talk to the guy. And he's one of the three living Ba-Ba-Black-Sheep Marines left. John Vandergrift [sp] is his name, and his uncle was the Commandant of the Marine Corps and in charge of the Marine Corps and all the operations in World War II. Big name in the Marine Corps. And he works there, you know, on his own and talks to old guys like us there. But that thing is something well worth seeing, the space museum in San Diego. Balboa Park.

I haven't been. I'll go next time. I wanted to get back to one thing because we're getting real close to three. About your survey and about your own work, Kari, did you ask in the survey about illnesses specifically?

Kari Chipman: Absolutely. I'll give you a copy of the survey. I asked about them because the guys had started opening up at Reno, and at this point in time my dad had contact with Doc [Robert M., Jr.] Campbell down in San Diego, who was a Navy corpsman and he was at the time vice-commander or one of the area commanders for NAAV. And he'd given my dad this poster that says, "The VA Cares," with this number for the IRR, the Ionizing Radiation Review—and I think Dad's going to show you that right now—because when I was putting the newsletter together, I wanted to be very thorough. And obviously we needed to address these issues because

I had been hearing about all the illnesses in people. The guys weren't getting the medical attention, they weren't getting it in the VA, they weren't getting compensation. The way these guys have been treated is absolutely horrible. To me, it's just unfathomable that these guys could be treated so poorly. So anyways, that poster, I looked at that poster every day, and when it came to the part **[00:50:00]** where I had to do a write-up for the VA, Doc had asked me if I would put that 800-number in the newsletter. And so what I did is I called it, and after calling that number and not getting a hold of anybody, after the eighth call, I had finally got a hold of the Radiation Department at the VA—

Eighth call.

Eighth call. Eight times I called that 800-number. I mean it was ridiculous. I got shuffled around from department to department, from VA to VA. Nobody knew anything about this IRR. Nobody knew anything about the Ionizing Radiation Review.

And I called Doc up and I said, You know, Doc, I can't do this. I, in all good faith, I cannot put this number in here. I'm really sorry.

And he said, Oh, well, Kari, you know, I'm putting them in the VAs and I'm putting them–

And I said, You can go put them up, I said, but I'm telling you, Doc, nobody knows anything about this, and I am *not* going to put this in the newsletter.

He was upset. And he had called a few folks. And, you know, and I had told Dad, because my dad wanted me to put this in, but it wasn't going to help our guys. So that's what took me on. The newsletter got postponed again. And now I took it further and I got online and I downloaded the IRR, the newsletter that [Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J.] Principi had just started, it was the first one, and I thought now this has some information in it. So the

newsletter, it actually was up to a hundred pages at one point, which was a book, and I said, `This is just getting out of control`. It has to have the content and the information. And so I *did* print out the IRR and made it a part of the newsletter because it was the first one, and it contained very, very important information that Principi had principally for the atomic veterans. So, you know, based upon the survey, that's what our newletter's comprised of, the stuff that is going to help them. But like I said, the word is not completely out there because Doc [Campbell], now NAAV, has had a restructuring again and Doc has got a higher position in it, and they are trying to do the same thing we are, get a Purple Heart for the guys so they can get into the VA and they'd have the lower number and get seen quicker. And NAAV is trying to diligently do that right now. And so we're kind of tagging along with them.

What is your sense of how that's going?

Very slow. To be honest with you, I don't see it happening.

Robert Mackenzie: I don't either.

Kari Chipman: I'd like to see it happen.

Robert Mackenzie: I'd like to do it. I'd like to. That'd be a great challenge. I'm retired. I'm not going to do it. But if I had a little better health, I would do it. But I think what's happening, Mary, is the same thing that happened in my old corporation when I saw it dying. I worked for Lucky Stores[grocery chain] for a million years, and it was like watching a loved one die of cancer and you can't do anything about it. At the same time, the people at the top think they're doing all the right things. And what they want, by the time it gets down to the firing line, is not the way they've perceived it. And even we got a new CEO [chief executive officer] for Lucky Stores and he wanted to talk to everybody, and he came up with this idea of luncheons and you would get with the folks and all that and you'd go out and have lunch with the CEO of Lucky

Stores. I mean Lucky Stores had Gemco and Memco and, you know, we were the tenth largest in the nation. So he's going to come down and have lunch with the folks.

And so me in middle management, I get the phone call from my boss and [he] said, You've heard about our new CEO's lunch with the folks and all that?

I said, Yes, I said, I think that's a great idea.

And he said, Well, he's coming to town and we want you to pick five people. And you do know what I'm talking about?

And I said, Guys who'll just spout out the company line and what he wants to hear, right?

And he says, That's right.

So here this guy, his own company is working against him. He had the right idea, but believe me, I made *sure* that *no one* would say anything except the right thing. And I took my time picking those, and I was a corporate guy, you know, and I'd been there, at both ends of it. And so this guy's going around and just getting—he's playing with a loaded deck. Well, I think that's what's happening to the VA secretary. He's got the right idea.

But anytime Doc Campbell goes into the VA in San Diego and looks around and says, Where's your poster?

[00:55:00] And the guy says, Oh, well, I don't think we got those.

And he's personal friends with the secretary, and *his* secretary's got her phone number in his wallet.

And he says, Well, I know you were sent twenty-five of them. Every VA hospital got twenty-five of them.

The guy says, Well, that's Bill's responsibility and he's not here today, so I can't help you with it.

And he says, Well, do you mind if I put up a few? He said, I've got them in the car here.

And so he says, Well, we have to get that OK'd.

And you feel like saying, Well, it's for the guys. It's for your buddies. It's for the veterans.

Kari Chipman: It's from your boss.

Robert Mackenzie: So you got to get it OK'd so I can put up a poster? So he went back and he notified the VA, and the VA sent every single commander of all the states twenty-five or fifty of those posters and said, *You* go down and put them up. So that shows you he's working around his own people, that he doesn't trust them. He's already sent them twenty-five. They say, Oh, more of that stuff, and throw them away. So are they all civil servants or what's going on here at the VA? You know, I mean is there no fear of—not that you want to work under fear, but it's kind of like, Hey, you can't do anything to me anyway, or whatever. I don't know what's going on there. But he needs help.

But then we have a new secretary of the VA anyway.

Yes. Does anybody know anything about him?

No. I just heard it on the news in my recent travels.

Well, he got his budget. It's all about money and he got shorted something like twelve *billion* dollars.

I mean I'm curious. If I went into the VA in Las Vegas, it'd be interesting to see if I saw those posters up there.

Kari Chipman: No, you wouldn't. You wouldn't.

Robert Mackenzie: Yes. Well, they might because of the test site there.

Kari Chipman: Well, unless they keep—

Or in any big city.

Robert Mackenzie: Oh yes. Yes.

Kari Chipman: But here's the issue, OK? Even if you do go into the VA office building and even if you do see them, try calling the 800-number. I'll give it to you. Just for giggles, trying calling that number. It's amazing because like I told Doc, I said, `I'm not putting it in the newsletter`. And I mean right now, the way we're going about getting compensation for the men is utilizing the Ionizing Radiation Registry, the IR Review. We are utilizing the Tiger Team, which is the over-seventy. We're getting all of our guys in because only two of them were on the Ionizing Radiation Review. So we're going about it that way. There are some things as far as post-traumatic stress syndrome and the different cancers and asbestos and things like that. Our guys are now just starting, some of them are just starting to get the disabilities that they've been, you know, trying to get but I mean my dad, he's got to go back and redo his.

Robert Mackenzie: Some of the guys—one guy, I asked him about signing up on the list. He said, `Are you kidding? I don't want them to know where *I* live.`

Oh, that's another dynamic.

Kari Chipman: Yes. Yes. That's right.

Robert Mackenzie: That's right. They're not finding out where I live. See, a lot of guys feel that they have information and maybe—I don't know what they're thinking, but I mean it's a pretty strong comment.

Kari Chipman: One of the guys called me and asked me what operation he was on and I thought that was really unusual.

Robert Mackenzie: Fun stuff, though, isn't it?

Yes, it's interesting. Let's stop here, and I know we'll see each other again.

Yes. Oh, absolutely.

And once you get the transcript, we can add things.

Yes. Oh, that's great.

Thank you so much.

[00:58:32] End Track 3, Disc 3.

[End of interview]