

WOOD MEMORIAL LIBRARY & MUSEUM:
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

REMINISCENCES OF WWII BY THE VETERANS EDWARD HAVENS AND ROBERT SHAFFER, RECORDED AT A SESSION ORGANIZED BY SHAWN JACOBACCIO AT HIS HOUSE IN SOUTH WINDSOR ON JULY 13, 2017.

NB. In addition to the main narrators, Ed Havens and Bob Shaffer, and the host, Shawn Jacobaccio, there were present members of American Legion Post 133 (South Windsor), visitors from Normandy, family members, and the interviewer.

Tony Macro (interviewer)

0:00:06 Good afternoon everybody. This is a recording of a session of interviews of US Veterans of the Second World War, long-time residents of South Windsor. They are brought together by Bob Starr here at the house of Shawn Jacobaccio, 1712 Main Street, South Windsor, on the afternoon of Thursday, 13 of July, 2017, and the interview is conducted on behalf of the Wood Memorial Library and Museum's Oral History project by Anthony Macro. The participants include the following: your name sir?

Ed Havens

My name is Ed Havens.

Tony

Ed Havens.

Ed Havens

Yes sir.

Bob Starr

Bob Starr.

Tony

Bob Starr.

Art

Art Sladyk

Tony

Art Sladyk

Roger Anderson

Roger Anderson.

Tony

Roger Anderson.

Bob Shaffer

Bob Shaffer.

Tony

Bob Shaffer, and Edie Starr, on behalf of your uncle—

Edie Starr

Edie Starr, on behalf of my uncle, Donald Dean.

Tony

Donald Dean.

Alan Witkin

Alan Witkin.

Tony

Alan Witkin, and...

Laurent

Laurent Hélie, and my wife, Maryse.

Tony

Laurent and Maryse. Excellent. May I—before we actually start, may I ask each one of you to give your name and rank as you enter the discussion the first time, not after that, but the first time? That will be helpful for identification of the voices. **0:02:00** Now, before we proceed, do I have your permission, Bob, to record this interview?

Bob Starr

Yes.

Tony

Thank you. All right. Now, I'll hand over to Shawn Jacobaccio.

Shawn

Thank you all for coming. It's greatly appreciated. As I was mentioning earlier, my friend Laurent is visiting from France with his family and asked me, out of his own personal interest due to the museum in France he has dedicated to general infantry men and the American presence with World War II on the European stage, to reach out to you to speak with him concerning your experiences and basically everything you've done for the country and the world really. So in that respect, I want to thank you very much **0:03:00** for that very, very big sacrifice.

0:03:06 (end of audio 1)

Before the interviews of the two WWII veterans, Ed. Havens & Bob Shaffer were begun, Shawn Jacobaccio introduced his French friend, Laurent Hélie,

0:00:00 (begin audio 2)

Laurent

It's nice to meet you. It's a great honor to for me to be here. And I'm going to try to be clear in English. Be patient. And I'll begin eleven years ago. I'm forty-nine years old. It begins with a friend, old friend, world war French prisoner of war in 1940. **0:00:58** And it was given to me one grenade, hand grenade pineapple, yes, and the **0:01:08 [inaudible]** cannon. And at this moment, the passion is begun. I have collected some items, photo papers, from all the American force in the Marines and other regions in France. So I keep this interest. Each year, (inaudible, speaking at once).

Shawn

I'll also act as translator as well, if that helps you.

Laurent

Yes, yes, yes.

Shawn

He's at an Association.

Laurent

Yes. Each year, we buy flowers to put on a grave in the American cemetery in Normandy.

0:02:05 So— [speaking French].

Shawn

So the term they're using is “good monsieur” or “godfather of the resting [place]”, the tombs and resting places, through this association. They take care of them.

Laurent

Yes. It's a very important, but it's important for all the guys who are dead in 1944 and for you. It's important to keep the memory of all we have done in 1940 and 1944.

Shawn

So, would you maybe take turns [speaking] – Tony, maybe reaching out and reaching around? It's for the recording.

Tony

Yeah, sure. Right. We are recording now. **0:03:00** Bob, do you want to start off with—

Shawn

The introduction, maybe?

Tony

Further introduction? And then we can start the conversation or we can just start the conversations right away.

Bob Starr

Why don't we start with Eddie?

Tony

Eddie Havens?

Bob Starr

Eddie Havens, he served in World War II. I'm not sure what unit or anything, but you can tell them.

Ed Havens

You want an introduction or a little bit of what I've done and where I've been?

Tony

Yes I do.

Ed Havens

Yes, you do what?

Tony

I'd like an introduction of what you've done. I'd like your name and rank.

Ed Havens

Name is Ed Havens. I've lived here in town for fifty years this winter. Fifty years. Approximately fifty years. I'm ninety-two years old at this time, going to be ninety-three in November. And my service, I'm sure you may be interested in that. I was inducted into the services in 1943, '43, April or March of '43 I believe. **0:04:04** I chose the Navy because I had a choice at that time of what service I was to get into, which I was a lucky guy, because I heard some good things about the Navy and not the Army, many things. I served in the Navy, and my division or the area that I served in was the Armed Guard Service, Armed Guard Service. Many people don't know of the Armed Guard Service. We were Navy personnel aboard merchant ships. We had—we worked with the Merchant Marines, didn't do their work. We had separate quarters and everything else. In any event, I got my boot—I don't want to go too lengthy. Stop me if I'm taking too long.

Tony

No, go ahead.

Ed Havens

0:05:00 I got my boot training in Newport in boot camp. And presently, then I went into the US Navy and served aboard my first ship in Brooklyn. And the comical thing about that—that's not so comical—I was standing watch at the front of the ship one evening, an eighteen-year-old kid, never had a gun in my life, and I was standing guard in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. [laughter] And that really gets to be served. So I was a curious kid. So I wanted to know which way the barrel spun, so I got the gun out. I fired it. I had half the Marine Corps and half the Army swarm aboard that ship immediately. And the officer in charge, the armed guard officer, said, "No more will you stay aboard this evening." That fellow was not more than probably twenty-one or twenty-two at that time. **0:06:02** But that was my quick introduction into the Navy, that portion of the Navy. And I made two trips across the Atlantic, on Liberty¹ ships now. If people know what the Liberty ships were, they were turning out one or two a week. I understand there were about 22,000 of them made. And in the Armed Guard Services, there was a 140,000 of us, so that's why so many people don't know about us. But anyhow, I made the first trip into Boston Atlantic, and then those days, it was probably eight or ten knots. It took thirty days. We sailed into the Mediterranean, and the first port of call was Oran. And out at Oran, we went on to our destination—I didn't know it previously, of course—we sailed into the Mediterranean. And our destination at that time was going to be Sardinia. **0:07:00** We had an Air Force squadron there. On the way to Oran, my really first time at sea, I saw some action. At that time, we still owned part of Africa and had conquered Africa. And a German ship, the German Air Force, would come out in the evenings and light up the Mediterranean like it was daylight and bomb the hell out of us. And I think on my first convoy was probably a couple a cutters, a couple hundred ships, all Libertys of all the various types. And in fact, the ship to my right went up just like that, one big bomb. We were carrying—and you won't believe this—we were carrying gasoline aboard ship, aboard ship tanks and below deck, all warfare, all war equipment, mostly. What always I remember in my mind was gasoline.

And we ended up—we went through Oran, not to Oran, left Oran and went to Sardinia. **0:08:00** Off the—that's near Sicily. And we have ordered the ship, of course, and proceeded then to Naples where—I can't remember—loading or unloading. An eighteen-year-old kid got introduced to the Italian way of life and enjoyed the time to visit there. So that would be Italy. Went back home, back to Norfolk, Virginia. The ship was converted to a personnel ship, a Navy ship. Anyhow, we were ordered, 900 Army people, aboard a Liberty ship. I felt sorry for those guys, thirty days back to Naples. Anyhow, they left very short. We had a load of them, of those guys.

0:09:00 And then one evening while we were there under the darkness – so we had Japanese, American-Japanese soldiers, which was an oddity. Not then, but it is now. I always remember that. There were Japanese-American soldiers. And we proceeded that evening to Anzio. I'm sure you heard something about Anzio. Is that right?

Tony

Yes, yes.

Ed Havens

And that was my first really experience. I unloaded the Japanese soldiers, not aboard ship, but from the bay. I always wondered me—I always wondered why those Japanese soldiers—the senator from—

Tony

Inouye, Daniel Inouye.

Ed Havens

I know. I always wondered if he could have been one of those Japanese soldiers. But as you know, they served admirably, and they did a great job. **0:10:00** Anyway, the war was winding down. I got back to the East Coast [phone ringing] (inaudible, speaking at once). I went to some gunnery schools. I was boson's mate during class. And we went to various schools. And then one evening in Virginia, they load us aboard a troop train. So we took five days. We went to San Francisco, five days in a train, a troop train. It was terrible. In any event, we ended up in San Francisco. I ended up in San Francisco, went to school there, had a good time there. And then at that point in time, they took—well, at that time, they were making Victory² ships in the place of the Liberty ships. It was a quarter Lane Victory ship; that was the name of the ship [of the class and type: VC2-S-AP2 Victory Ship]. We went to—we stopped in Ulithi, Mariana Islands, and Guam. **0:11:00** And we finally ended up in Okinawa. And if anybody was old enough, they'll remember we had one hell of a fight about that time that sunk American ships, naval ships, sunk merchant ships. In our ship, we left the port and went out to the China Sea. So it was a lot safer to be there. We lost all our lifeboats. They told us stay below. You know what Havens did? He went up top. He wanted to see what was going on. [laughter] Anyhow, we all lived that. And we went back into Okinawa. Yeah, a few Libertys and we traveled all over Okinawa and saw the remnants of war, dead, to make a long story short.

Then I went back to the states again, picked up another ship in the Port—or not—or was it Washington State? I went back out again. But anyhow, on the way back, the war ended. **0:12:00** And that's briefly my life in the service. It started just about three years old—I mean, I served about three years. And I enjoyed it very much, the best, one of the best three years of my life. I recommend any young man trying to find his way today—I would say find yourself a good service and go in and learn what it is to be—learn a little about yourself. Thing is, we had the experience and I'm fortunate to still be around it at ninety-two years old. Got to be helpful. Got to be healthy. Very good.

Tony

The survival rate of those Merchant Marine ships crossing the Atlantic was very small, wasn't it?

Ed Havens

I might say those—the majority of what was going on, we left Italy. And we went to Nice, France and Marseille. **0:13:00** And that's about the time when they were going into Normandy. So they call that the Invasion of Southern France. That was almost a laugh because all we did was swimming in Nice and Marseille in the bay. [laughter] That was some of the, just some of

the small experiences I had in those three years. It would be—and I'd have to spend the rest of the day talking about it, the rest of the evening. Thank you for giving me the time, and if you have any questions, call me later. [laughter]

Tony

Who would like to follow Ed Havens? Bob Shaffer?

Shawn

Bob Shaffer?

Tony

Bob Shaffer?

Bob Shaffer

0:13:38 I can't follow this guy. It's too much for me.

Tony

Give it at try Bob.

Bob Shaffer

Well, I followed the same routes that he did really. In fact, he followed my roots. I went to boot camp in Newport, Rhode Island, '43. **0:14:00** And I was in the service for three years. After graduation from Newport, I was in ES something, not ASS, AS. That's apprentice seaman. And we took—from Newport, we went by a train to Norfolk to pick up a ship. I picked up a Navy tanker, which is called an oiler in Navy terms. And we served a beach yeoman. Our first six months were in the Atlantic. And the first trip across the south Atlantic from Norfolk, we went to Casablanca. The reason we went to Casablanca was because the French Navy was in the process **0:15:00** of sinking their ships, because the Germans were invading France in the Casablanca area, North Africa. And so we were supplying the cover for the French as they sank their ships. There's another name for it. What do you call it?

Bob Starr

Scuttling?

Bob Shaffer

Scuttling. Scuttling. Scuttling. And there was a ship there. There was a battleship there. I remember it very well. It had eighteen-inch guns, which is two inches larger than our sixteen-inch guns, American guns. It was called the Jean Bart³. Remember that? Anything to do with that ship?

Laurent

Yeah.

Bob Shaffer

I knew you would. [laughter] I've been reading about it. So anyway, I asked. So, we were at Casablanca and came across the Jean Bart. **0:16:00** And then of course, we turned back to Norfolk in the south Atlantic. And that's all we had to do with the war in France. And then from there on, we were subject to convoy duty, watching this guy sailing his ship, American destroyers, and destroyer escorts. So we took three trips from Norfolk or New York and went to Gander in Newfoundland, and picked up a convoy and went traipsing across the North Atlantic, which was pretty rough in the winter time—this was in the winter of '43—carrying supplies to England. And we were fueling the destroyers and the destroyer escorts, **0:17:00** which were making our convoy safe. And we did that three times, went over, came back. We loaded our ship with fuel or gas. We even went to Texas sometimes, Port Arthur in Texas I think it was. We'd load up with fuel, come back. Went up Gander in Newfoundland, take up a convoy, and we ended up over in Scotland. We returned again—it's getting monotonous now—picked up another convoy from Norfolk, went to Gander. Picked up the third convoy and went over to Belfast carrying troops, ammunitions, planes, whatever, not our ship but the ships we were in convoy with. Okay? We were just supplying fuel for the escort vessels, destroyers, destroyer escorts, which were needed. **0:18:02** They were well known needed because there were a lot of submarine warfare going on there in '43. And so that was my—that was six months spent there.

And the next thing, we went [whoosh sound] through the Panama Canal out to the Pacific Ocean and spent two and a half more years out there chasing Japs. And we went with the 3rd, 5th, and 7th Fleets. And we also went to the islands. The first island I went to was Saipan. Saipan and Guam, they were our home base at that time. And our ship actually fueled the fleet at sea, which was something unusual, something new at that time. **0:19:00** The destroyers—any ship, we would be in a lion boat travelling about eight knots, eight miles an hour say, in a straight line. And the ships would come in on either the port or starboard side, put a line over to them, and pump oil, black, black oil it was. That's the fuel they used in those days. In the case of destroyers—I mean cruisers or aircraft carriers, we'd pump aviation gas. We also had diesel fuel, everything needed to keep all the equipment working, well-oiled, and running.

And so from Saipan, and the range of Saipan, then we invaded Guam and retook Guam. We were still doing our refueling at sea. **0:20:00** [mumbling] Then we—well, the next invasion was Iwo Jima. You've heard of that. The Marines took a beating in that place. I feel sorry for them, but anyway. But we were all fifty miles or forty or fifty miles away from Iwo. And then we set up another base, in the Caroline Islands, called Ulithi, one of the biggest natural atolls in the South Pacific.

Ed Havens

That's where I was too, Bob, Ulithi.

Bob Shaffer

Ulithi. That was huge, wasn't it?

Ed Havens

Yeah it was.

Bob Shaffer

It was huge. You can probably see one end to the other end. And the whole fleet could go in there, rest, get a little rest and recreation, maybe go on an island, see how that sand felt under your feet after being aboard ship for so long. So that was good. **0:21:00** That was good duty. I happened to be a coxswain, and I was a coxswain of the captain's gig. And when we got into port or anchored, that was my duty, was to make sure the gig was available for he and all the officers. And I had two fellows. I had an engineer and bow-boy. There were three of us. We operate the gig. It was twenty-eight feet long. And so wide, six to eight to ten feet wide. And so that was the only duty we had in port, no chipping, no painting, nothing like that. Keep the captain's gig all spiffy, nice and clean, and take them wherever he wanted to go. [laughter] And we had to go pick him up too. [laughter] And that went on. Now, Ulithi was our home base. **0:22:00** We did get to Okinawa, what you were talking about.

Tony

Were you there?

Bob Shaffer

Oh yeah. I was here that time too. Yeah. And that ship was going like this. And it would kind of hesitate like this. And then it would go back like this and hesitate here, and we're hanging out. And you've got to come back. [laughter] But it did around here. [laughter] So I went to the island. One thing that happened, we ended up in Okinawa, which was a tough battle, but there was two things that I want to bring up before—am I talking too long?

Tony

No, no you're not.

Bob Shaffer

Don't be afraid to interrupt me.

Tony

Well, I am.

Bob Shaffer

My wife does. So we were anchored in Ulithi in August of 1944 with the rest of the fleet, aircraft carriers, battle wagons, cruisers, heavy, light cruisers, **0:23:00** destroyer airports, destroyers, and capital ships, all capital ships. And we were anchored with our sister oilers, sister ships, the oilers, other oilers. And I was at the bow. Bow watch, at that time, was from four to eight. And I was up there. And what am I going to see. We're anchored. I'm half awake. I'm half asleep and everything else. All of a sudden, boom. I woke up then. The ship about three others from our anchorage got hit, a sneak attack by a two-man Japanese submarine. In fact, the two men, of course, perished. But they hit—the Mississinewa⁴ was the name of it. And so that was quite a blow there. **0:24:00** We were supposed to have R&R and be safe. And these guys snuck in some way and—I don't know how they got in, but [mumbling]. So suddenly our ship—our little boats

became life boats trying to save the personnel aboard the Mississiniewa. And we stood by all day long, and destroyers were going between ships, back and forth, back and forth, dropping depth charges. And any time one of those things went off, you'd shake like that from the explosion. And we were thinking there might be other subs, and we didn't know if there were any subs in there are not.

Maryse

Did you save some of the crew of the ship?

Bob Shaffer

We saved—yes. They only lost between sixty-six, seventy some odd men out of 230 folks. And I'm good friends now—of course, **0:25:00** correspondence with, one of the fellow's son. He was on the Wisconsin. And he sends material to me. I send material back to him. We talk on the phone. But we're good friends, and he also wrote a nice book and sent me a copy. He wrote a little note in it, and it's my personal copy. *Oil, Fire, and Fate*⁵ was the name of it, written by Mike Mair. And now he's got a second one. It's all about the sinking of the Mississiniewa. I'm going on too long, am I?

Tony

Not at all, no.

Bob Shaffer

You sure?

Tony

Positive.

Bob Shaffer

It seems like I've taken up enough of the time here. What do you think, Art?

Art

0:25:53 You're doing good. Keep it going. [laughter]

Bob Shaffer

So anyway, so then he wrote a sequel to that **0:26:00** with another lady that helped him. It was called *Kaiten*⁶. That's what they called the sneaky Japanese submarine that sank the Mississiniewa. They call it a Kaiten. It's spelled K-A-I-T-E-N. And I also have a copy of that book, endorsed.

Maryse

Are they fiction books or are they historical?

Bob Shaffer

What did you say?

Maryse

Are they fiction books or are they historical novels.

Bob Shaffer

No, no, no. Everything is true in them. Oh yeah. Everything happened. Yeah. So that's Ulithi. Now, we went to—well, I didn't want to go. But then we went to Okinawa, past the Pearl Islands. Okay, that's ninety miles from Japan, the closest you can get to Japan at that time. And I felt sorry for some of the destroyer guys. They had a picket line all the way around to protect the fleet **0:27:00** in case the Japanese planes came to Japan to try sink our ships. So they had a picket line. And these guys are on the picket line, and they're supposed to drop these Jap planes, Japanese planes, before they got to the fleet. Well, they took a beating. And there should be a story or a book written about these guys. I kept telling Mike Mair about that, but he didn't want to hear it. So Okinawa was tough, like Ed said. Good old Harry, Harry Truman, our president, decided to drop the bomb, which saved him, me and about 500,000 other guys. If we ever invaded Japan, none of us would be here. So that's my story. Well, then of course, after I got my points in, **0:28:00** I got on the slow boat to China from Japan all the way to Frisco to go on my way home. You don't want to hear about that do you? [laughter]

Tony

That's after the war?

Bob Shaffer

After they dropped the bomb. The Japanese gave up three or five days afterwards. They dropped two bombs. The first bomb, they kind of got into a pow-wow saying, "What are we going to do now? Are we going to keep going, or are we going to quit?" And they quit finally. And we were all thankful for that. We got all got our points, and we earned our points. And we took a slow boat all the way back to Frisco on the way home. And we had a nice time in Frisco. I got pictures of fellows at Bay back in '46. I guess it was of March, March of '46. **0:29:00** And then we took, from there, we took a train that had cattle cars on it. That's what they put us in to go all the way to the East Coast for discharge. We weren't discharged until we got to the East Coast. Our paycheck was still coming.

So those cars were something. There was only one place that you could see out of that car was at the doorway. There was a little window about this wide. And we all stood in line to get a peek to see where we were. Nothing but telephone poles and trees going by and all that stuff, so anyway. That was the fun part of it. This was all over. We were all happy. I sent my sea bag home. There was flight mail, and I got home before it did.

Well, I went to hospital in New York to be discharged. **0:30:00** They gave me my pay, gave me my check up, a bus ticket for Hartford, Connecticut. I took the bus to Hartford. And then from there, I went to East Hartford. That's where I lived, East Hartford. That's where my home base was there at that time. And I got home. Told my mother and father, hi. They're like, "Where've you been?" [laughter]

Tony

Well, thank you very much. Thank you both of you so far. Who's next?

Bob Starr

Edie. My wife, Edie, has her uncle, Donald Dean that she can tell you about.

Edie Starr

He was ninety-five when he passed away back in 2003. And we cleaned out his house, and we found all this information about World War II, and how he served as Tech IV. And I have drawings of all the bridges they built over in Germany. **0:31:00** And I have flags and all kinds of stuff that is probably illegal to have right now because it's all—

Speaker

Swastikas.

Edie

—swastikas and all that stuff. And I brought them [here today] for everyone to see. But he was actually a photographer in an engineering group, and he did all the photography work for it. I never saw any of the pictures. He never talked about the war. We never found anything about it until we cleaned his house out when he passed away at ninety-five years old. However, I thought it was important because his family is from South Windsor. His mother was a Vibert, which is a family here in South Windsor, and his father was—his grandparents were Deans that lived across from the East Windsor Hill Post Office. So he was brought up in South Windsor, but lived actually in Hartford. And when he got out of the service, he became a conservation officer for the state of Connecticut and did that for twenty-nine years. But I have his medals and all that stuff. **0:32:00** But I don't understand any of them, and I thought, "Well, I'll bring them. Maybe somebody can help me with that in information." And I'd love to see it passed on somewhere.

Tony

Can you tell from his papers where he served, what theaters he served in?

Edie

Yes. I have that information, but I don't know it.

Tony

Yes, yes.

Bob Starr

We have the discharge. We have all the drawings that were made of the bridges that they built all the way through from Normandy straight through to Yonne River. And we got aspect detail drawings of the bridges.

Speaker

Wow.

Bob Starr

And this is some of the names of people who were killed while they were building them. Some had two or three. In the United States Army, we produced these things.

Tony

I understand that it's not unusual for those who served in the Second World War to remain quiet about their service, in the years after the war. **0:33:00**

Edie

Well, there was only one thing that he said when he was in the convalescent home, when I Bob and I visited him. And Bob can tell you the story.

Bob Starr

He worked for the state of Connecticut conservation—to be a game warden. He could pretty well track the whole trail. And we had a fresh snow on the ground back then. And I walked in and I said, "Gee, Don, maybe there's some tracks out there, and we can follow them." I was thinking of deer tracks, right? And all he said to me was, "Germans! Get 'em!" [laughter] That was that. That was the end of it.

Edie

That was the only thing we ever heard him talk about. But I have the information. I brought it.

Tony

Yes. Well, that's extraordinarily valuable stuff, and I'm sure historians would really love to use that, to read it and make use of it in their histories. **0:34:00** Well, thank you very much. Who's next?

Bob Starr

I think that's it?

Tony

That's it? Well, I would like to hear your views, Bob [Shaffer], of how that Japanese sub penetrated the defenses to get in [to the harbor at Ulithi]. Would you tell us about that?

Bob Shaffer

I can tell you about that. I can go on and on, but.....

Tony

Well, tell us anyway. [laughter]

Bob Shaffer

In Ulithi Harbor, there all these atolls and everything. And we had kind of a gate or a fence across that was submerged below the surface of the water, okay? It was controlled by our Navy, so that no ships could get in or out without opening that gate. It was probably built by the

Seabees. **0:35:00** They were tremendous, these people. They get compliments all the time. Anyway, when this gate opened, a couple of ships came in and the Jap sub came in underneath them. Okay? Well, then of course the gate closed, and he was in. And I understand from this fellow I was talking about here [Michael Mair], he introduced me—he talked to a lot of the Japanese people, soldiers and sailors, when he wrote this book. So he said that the submarine was launched from a bigger sized sub, two of them—seven of them, I should say, were launched. Only one got in, which was that one, the two Kaiten Japs. **0:36:00** I mean, he goes into great detail about how they devise these things. They probably desensitize these people to give their life for their country. There was just nothing but bomb, a floating bomb. That's all it was. When they hit the Mississinewa, everything just blew up. So it went in under another ship going in [through the entrance of] the atoll.

Tony

Now, I would like to ask you both [Ed & Bob (Shaffer)] what feelings you developed towards the enemy during your three years. Clearly, it was antagonistic with your enemy, but did you develop any respect for them for their fighting qualities or anything like that? Anything of that sort?

Ed Havens

0:37:00 Well, speaking for myself, I really, in those days, I disliked the Germans, but the Japanese, I think, more than the Germans, because there was closer tie it would seem in Okinawa. And there I was an eighteen, nineteen-year-old man, you don't really have too many—but I do remember in Okinawa, they killed so many Japanese in Okinawa, they piled them up; I mean, they literally piled the people up. And they had American guards guarding them. So as we walked by a group of this heap of men, the dead, a couple of my fellows were almost tempted to want to shoot them again, kill them, re-kill them, you might want to say.

Tony

Yeah.

Ed Havens

But that didn't happen to me, thank goodness. But that will be with me for a long, long time, **0:38:00** because, as I can recall it now, it's amazing. It did stick with me, but I had no bad feelings toward the Japanese. To be quite honest with you, when you're a young sailor, you just have other things on your mind. The people were unimportant.

Tony

Yeah.

Ed Havens

But we did have fun. We did have an awful lot of fun. I saw a lot more misery in Italy during the war, a lot more misery, a suffering people. In switching oceans, it was like passing the Strait of Messina. I think it was the Strait of Messina, between Italy and Sicily. It's a very narrow area. People from Italy would literally come out in row-boats begging for food, I mean, literally begging for food. You know what all the kids would do, they put the—turned the fire hose on

them. I didn't like that at all to be quite honest with you, but they were in the way of the larger ships. They could get killed. **0:39:00** So that's sticks in my mind, the hunger. And one time when I was in the Bay of Naples, women, because the men were all gone, tied up in the army, I saw this one young woman swimming out in the Bay of Naples holding a bag. She was looking for food. That's a true story. And as you pulled into port, you had all these young boys selling their sisters and their mothers, particularly in Naples. So those things stick in your mind.

But it's some of the dangers you would see, I saw when I was just a younger man, some of the sailors, some of the people we worked with were older men. **0:40:00** And we did see some action in the Mediterranean. They [the older men] would really be upset, because we had families at home; but the younger guys, we sort of let it go, you know? It just didn't bother us as much. That's some of my personal feelings about the war. But I just—the hunger, particularly, that's—I really other than that I no hard feelings. But I can just tell you a funny story, well, not so funny. We did capture some Germans. We sent them—they were sent to Virginia, Norfolk, Virginia. And they wanted to stay, a short stay while I was waiting for ships, I was in charge of these German soldiers. They were just cleaning up the base. How they got there, I didn't bother to ask them. And at that time, I was going for second class, but because I didn't wake up **0:41:00** my other helpers. I got a mini court martial. and he [the officer said], "Well, your penalty is you can't go for the second class for six months." Just the little things I can remember about the war.

But it was quite an experience. And it would take many evenings just to recall half of it, you know. It just was a terrible war. Like I said, it was 16,000 people in that war, sixteen, 6,000, sixteen million people who were involved in that war. And as I said previously, only 144,000 of armed guard sailors aboard merchant ships, 144,000 of us. But anyhow, I got quite an education. Luckily though, you ever heard of the Momsen Lung?⁷ I was called, while I was in the Navy, while I was in the port, **0:42:00** they singled me out. They said, "Mr. Havens," they didn't call me mister, "come with me. We've got a message to carry out." So I went and they fitted me with some kind of a lung. You know the lungs? I didn't do well. I said, "What was that all about?" He said, "Well, you just failed a submarine service." [laughter] I don't think—thank goodness I didn't.

Speaking about the convoys circling—no, serious—the last convoy that went over there, it must have been 300 ships in this convoy. We had these destroyer escorts, destroyers, those ships circling us entirely and lighting up the whole sky the whole night-long. They would light up—come by, drop a bomb, light a bomb off the tail of the ship, light up the whole sky. So they kept—if there were any submarines in the Atlantic, they didn't get too damn close to us. **0:43:00** That was the purpose of it. But that's one of the little things we did. But there was so much involved in that. That World War II was unbelievable. We never got billed. We even got paid. How do they keep track of all of that manually? It was unbelievable.

Bob Shaffer

My thing is, we never got any bills. [laughter]

Ed Havens

I know I got—as a seaman, I then got \$78 a month. I can't recall if it was first class or second class or coxswain as you were.

Bob Shaffer

But you were a cox—no, I got sixty some odd bucks a month. It was only an allowance.

Tony

Do you have anything to add, any personal stories along those lines?

Bob Shaffer

No, I don't want to take up your time.

Tony

Well, I began asking did you develop any kind of **0:44:00**—

Bob Shaffer

For the Japanese?

Tony

—fellow feelings? I can tell you, I certainly did not. I was a boy in London during the blitz and during the War.

Bob Shaffer

Okay.

Tony

And I had developed an intense fear and hatred for those German bombers, those bastards dropping bombs on London.

Bob Shaffer

Absolutely.

Tony

And then the Doodlebugs, the V-1s [Flying Bombs] and V-2s [Rockets], but I wasn't close to the enemy. They were up there [in the night sky]. I was separated from them. And that was the extent of my feelings. My attitude toward Germany has been difficult ever since.

Bob Shaffer

Oh, I see.

Tony

But you were much closer to the action, clearly. I have great respect for you Americans. “Got any gum, Chum?” was what I would ask American service men on furlough in London. As the

armored cars would go by, we'd ask for chewing gum, which we were deprived of in England. And you were very generous with it. But that's got nothing to do with your experience.

Bob Shaffer

—chewing gum and cigarettes. We don't want to get into that part. [laughter]

Tony

So anything [more]? You were in action. Any further comments?

Bob Shaffer

I didn't like the Japanese for many, many years. In fact, I never did like rice, and I still don't care for it. But I have a niece now. There's a lot of different yellow races, a lot of different countries, so I have nothing against them now. I would treat them as any other person. But I did hate them for a while. It took—I went in at seventeen. And just about three years in the service; **0:46:00** when I went out, five days later, I turned twenty. I spent all my young life in the service. I'm seventeen, eighteen, nineteen either in the South Pacific or in the Atlantic. You're bound to be mad at somebody.

Bob Starr

So I'll give you a perspective of stateside.

Tony

Yes. That really, really helps.

Bob Starr

Robert (Bob) Starr, Junior, was my father, a World War II vet; he went in, in '42, got out in '46. He was a heavy equipment operator, or that's what he was being trained for. But he never saw overseas duty. He got transferred around, and for some reason, he ended up in a place called Seymour, Indiana. And they put him in the commissary back then. **0:47:02** And of course, during the war, there was all kinds of rations and stuff like that. And the biggest thing I remember my mother always saying is that I was born in '44. And that when I was born, she had never received so many gifts from officers' wives being sent back to Connecticut when I was born. And she couldn't understand why. My father was in charge of the commissary. Everything was rationed. And they did ration cards I guess or tokens or whatever they had. I guess my father really never paid much attention to stuff like that. He'd just pass out whatever he had in there and stuff like that. Every time he came up for transfer to go overseas, for some reason his transfers always got squashed. [laughter] They think it was the officers' wives talking to their husbands: "Don't let him go." **0:48:00** [laughter] But he spent three years in the States, but most of his tour was down in Seymour, Indiana. I probably think the last couple years were. And going back to what you guys were doing over there in France, as far as keeping those cemeteries up and honoring them, as a veteran, I can't say thank you enough. That means an awful lot to all of us. Thank you.

Ed Havens

I'll let you know, every time I see those cemeteries, they're so well kept. And there's no bad feelings toward them at the Americans laying there. In a way, I respect them. It's just amazing. And you still keep them up to this very day, you know. Very nice. It's just amazing.

Bob Shaffer

Our post is named after a World War I veteran who was buried in France. And the same thing, when we go online, look at the cemetery over there and how well it's kept, **0:49:00** how they honor it on certain—Memorial day, whatever—it's just amazing to see how they're kept up. And that, again, as a veteran, it means an awful lot to see that happen for us. It's really very—so, thank you.

Laurent

It's very friendly between France and the USA. As we can see the importance to continue the relation.

Bob Shaffer

I think our president is over in France right now.

Laurent

Yeah, that's true. [laughter]

Bob Shaffer

I didn't tell him to go. He just did it. [laughter]

Tony

I think it's only fairly recently, isn't it, that the German representatives from the War have appeared at the French—at the Remembrances in France of the Normandy Invasion and so on. **0:50:00**. I know that the Germans have been showing up recently. And I noticed—I read that the emperor of Japan paid a visit to Hawaii quite recently.

Speaker

First time.

Tony

Yes. In my case, I have developed a taste for *Kartoffeln* over the last few years. [laughter] So I've come around. [laughter] Are there any other observations to be made here? Any other questions?

Caroline Rochon (Jacobaccio)

I don't know. I just wanted to say if we were going to document this at [any South] Windsor History of World War II participation, I think we should note that Mary Ann Lacey's uncle was a—what was he—he was a pastor [chaplain in the Rangers] during the *debarquement* in Normandy, and he's been commemorated in the book *The Longest Day*⁸ (and perhaps in the movie of the same name). You know when they go on the beach, there's a reference; **0:51:01** It's referenced. It was Mary Ann's uncle who was born and raised here at [South] Windsor. So I don't know more. Mary Ann was supposed to come, and I think they've had a last minute—but he's a

very important figure also. He's gone, but he was from here. And I think if the Wood [in its Oral History Project] is going to commemorate the memory of South Windsor's participation, we should mention that somewhere.

Tony

Absolutely. Yes. Yes.

Maryse

I have a question for you, because now we have a way to know what's happened in different areas of the world, so we are well aware. At that time, what was your feeling, because France, Germany were quite far from the US; and we [in France] were just somewhere in between. What was your feeling when you left the USA to go there, [into the Mediterranean,] around Sicily or—because it seems to me **0:52:00** that at that time, we don't have the same amount of information? It should have been so far, seemed so far, to me to go there and people that are very far from you. What is your feeling? You said, "Let's go. We have to go on the **0:52:21** [speaking French]—" Yeah. Go ahead.

Ed Havens

I'm sorry. I don't quite understand the question.

Tony

You're going so far away, France and Europe—

Maryse

And Japan.

Tony

—Japan was in the mind so far, further away, than they are today when we know so much about one another. So little is known directly in those days. It's a very foreign land to go to.

Ed Havens

Then or now?

Tony

0:53:00 Then. Then.

Ed Havens Then. You know something? Here again, I have to say. When you're a young man, eighteen years old, you really didn't give a darn about anything else but taking care of yourself. And you just had your own self-interest. I really had no—I didn't feel bad about anybody in Europe to be completely honest with you. Maybe that's bad, but that's the way it was. I was just too busy worrying about myself and worrying about what was going to happen the next day. But I've visited Europe in the last thirty, forty, fifty years. And I find it very interesting that they really don't talk about it too much, to be quite honest with you. One of my experiences that I was in Berlin maybe fifteen, twenty years ago, I stayed with a family. You know something? He was

an officer. And they didn't say a word about the war, not one word. **0:54:00** I did—they didn't say a word—and I didn't bother to ask. So that was kind of strange. But anyhow, that's it.

Bob Shaffer

I worked with a lot of Italians after I got out of the service. I went to school and got a job. I worked with many Italians. And Italians were involved against the United States in the first part of the war. But I didn't have any animosity for those people. They were happy to be there. Mussolini decided he wanted to go to war. And he said, "All you young guys, you're going to get your uniforms, and you're going to get your rifle, and you're going to go to war." So the war—these people—I worked with a lot of Italian people, good people. And they had probably **0:55:00** some of their family went through the war back in World War II. Well, I didn't hold any animosity to the Italian people. I didn't know too many German people, and the Japanese people, I told you before, except for rice: that I never liked since then and I don't like it now. But the Japanese people, like a lot of people have Japanese descent, Korean, Vietnamese, and all that. So that's that. That's gone. Done with. Next chapter please.

Tony

Any further questions, observations?

Laurent

0:55:44 [speaking French].

Shawn

Laurent was asking, a career afterwards in the service, was that ever an option? I mean, did you think about it or just want to be done with it **0:56:00** and then move on to a civilian career? Did you ever consider maybe staying and change your mind?

Ed Havens

Speaking for myself, not really, no. There is the space where you give the discharge, and that was it. I never gave it much thought. There were so many service people; it would have flooded the place with people, which they didn't want. They wanted to discharge us, get rid of the lowest, you know. But I literally had no one—I didn't know anybody that wanted to stay in or make it a career, not that I know of anyway.

Bob Shaffer No, I didn't think about making a career. I couldn't get out fast enough. [laughter] Well, I remember—I [guess], sixteen service men, it all seemed like you all got out and were living in Hartford. You try to get into UConn, **0:57:00** and finally get into UConn, but we couldn't get any—they wouldn't provide us any clothes. They were filled up out in UConn territory, and they were filled up in the Hartford area. So we had to go to a vacant school building to get our courses, our UConn courses from UConn professors. And that was a little—that was tough. I mean, I was a little bit unhappy about that. But I thought, well, maybe if I'd stayed with the service, maybe it would have been an easier road. But you know, when you're young, you make mistakes. And I had nobody to ask. And I stuck it out.

Shawn

In that same line, your reception when you came home, how was that in your area? Did you find that—was it a strong, encouraged civilian population local here that embraced you and thanked you? **0:58:02** Was it easy to integrate into a civilian life after?

Ed Havens

I don't recall that many thank yous. The only person who came by to see me come home was my mother. I proceeded to go to work to the job I left, and life went on. I didn't give it much thought, to be quite honest with you. There were no thanks yous because everybody in those days had served in some way in the service or parts of the service to get us through it. So you'd be thanking everybody on the street. Everybody worked, whether you were—everybody. There was no need to thank you as I recall. And I didn't give it much thought being in the service, to be quite honest with you. In fact, it was very nice of you to invite us down here this evening, because as time rolls on, **0:59:00** you pick up the obituaries of 1,000 or 1,500 a day who were World War II vets. I don't know which figure is right, but that's an awful lot. Fortunately, he and I are still around to speak about it and talk a little bit about it. It's been an interesting life for us. And I think it was part of my growing up. It made me a better person for those three years that I served in the service. It made me a better person. It gave me an outlook on life that I think I've carried on. I didn't know that I was going to do that, and I wasn't assimilating that, but I think it made me a better person. It really did.

Eddie Starr

But all the young went. All the young men went. It wasn't picky-choosy. It wasn't an option. Everybody went into the service and served their time.

Ed Havens

That's right. That's right. That's right. Well, I can thank you for inviting us. **1:00:00**

Tony

Thank Shawn.

Shawn

I appreciate you taking the time to do this. Laurent, did you have any...?

Laurent

[speaking French]

Shawn

Translating, sorry. I'm asking if he has any other questions.

Laurent

1:00:14- 1:00:35 [speaking French]

Shawn

Laurent's asking that more specifically to your families now, however, although there seems a very popular effort, everyone in the country in some shape or form, so there wasn't much to kind of highlight after the fact. Within your families, was there any questioning **1:01:00** from children, nephews, nieces? Do you guys talk within your families about what you guys did? Is there a bit of a heritage that has been kind of discussed that way?

Ed Havens

I think in World War II, we just forgot about it. We didn't even—I didn't talk about it. That wasn't planned that way. It's just the way it was. We had to go on with our lives, go to work, start a family. And that was the way it was. Then you of course had the VFW, the American Legion, that carried on part of the history, which I'm grateful for and thank.

Eddie Starr

Stories come out in bits and pieces. It won't be a sit down conversation about the war. If we're driving by something or something spurs his memory, then we'll hear a story about the war. And you go to the schools. You go to the public schools and talk about—

Ed Havens

Oh, that's after the war.

Eddie

Yeah, you go to the schools. **1:02:01** So the stories come out but not in a really formal way.

Shawn

So can you tell us a little more about that? So you will go to some schools?

Ed Havens

I do that quite frequently, but I don't talk too much about fighting. There are many, many people that go to school. We don't talk too much about the service or our experience in the war, at least I never have, never have, just tell them a little bit briefly about it. I never went into any details.

Eddie

Well, it's younger grades too. You're with the younger grades. They'll ask questions about the war like were you afraid.

Ed Havens

Oh yeah. They ask me. Some of the questions on war was about was I afraid. Yes, I was.
[laughter]

Eddie

The Legion goes into the schools though, right Art?

Art Sladyk

On Veteran's Day each year, we go up to the high school, and we go to all the civic classes. And I guess **1:03:00** as one—as somebody that likes history—how the schools don't talk about it.

They bypass all that. It's not in their criteria anymore, their curriculum. And the same thing, we get a lot of, what did you do in the service, what years were you in, what we did in the service. And we open it up to questions and answers. And, again, like I was saying, I said—I tell everybody, anybody that's been in, I think the biggest thing that anybody—and you can probably relate to this—that's been in the service, I think it just builds your character as a person. It shows you a different perspective on life, how different people live, be thankful for what you've got and what—fortunately, the younger generations today have no clue **1:04:00** as to what it took. That's probably one of my biggest things that I get upset about. They have no clue what it took to make this country what it is today and the sacrifices that were given by all our veterans, especially the greatest generation, the World War II guys and the Korean guys. You know, it's just they have no clue whatsoever. And it's almost like people forget real quick. You get to 9/11. Everybody's got the flags out there, waving the flags and stuff like that. Be a citizen with what happened in Paris. I'm sure everybody rallies around their country and stuff like that. But then things die off and people forget. They don't remember.

It's unfortunate. There are factions out there that don't think the same way we do as free people. It's great that we have, in all our countries that are free, **1:05:00** that we have a military presence there that actually protects our freedom. Our young men and women are out there for right, wrong, or indifferent. That's what they're doing. And you've got to respect that, and you've got to give them a lot of thanks for what they do. Again, when we go through the schools, it's kind of disheartening. You ask them a question about anything about history, and it's just they're looking out the windows. "Yeah, it's a nice day." They have no clue.

Maryse

What's that saying? Those that don't know history are bound to repeat it.

Art

Yeah, absolutely.

Maryse

It feels like it's on your shoulders.

Art

History does repeat itself too. And again, we look at homeland security now in this country and all the things we do to support or try and deter any kind of terrorism or anything like that, and people just sit back. And they don't think it's going to happen, but it will. **1:06:00** And, again, I think if it does happen again in this country, it's probably going to be something really, really catastrophic. Again, we're going to rally around and waving flags out there, and we'll start all over. We live in a great society, and we're very fortunate to have the freedoms that we have. Can't take it for granted that's for sure.

Tony

This afternoon's session has been an attempt to keep that noble history alive. And I want to thank you all for showing up and telling your story. It really is inspiring, enlightening, and, I guess the word again, noble. And I thank you very much.

Bob Shaffer

Quite welcome. Before you go, I have a little story.

Tony

A little story. Did you hear that? [laughter] **1:07:00**

Bob Shaffer

How many minutes you got left [on the recording machine]?

Speaker

How many do you need?

Bob Shaffer

How many hours you got left?

Shawn

It's digital.

Tony

It's thirteen megabytes. That's a couple of days.

Bob Shaffer

Give me a day and a half. Talking about school, my—I'm lucky enough to have a granddaughter who teaches fourth grade. So naturally I'm always invited on Veterans Day or any kind of Memorial Day—not Memorial Day, Veteran's Day—to speak to the fourth grade. They're pretty sharp. So every fourth—I've been doing this for about four years now. The last class, I'm kind of sick of just standing up there, telling them these things. It's hard to equate to a fourth grader.

1:08:04 You're not talking about bombs and killing and all that stuff. But anyway, I said to myself, I'm going to take questions and answers. So there was a little girl—I sat down. They all sat there. This isn't—this is [mumbles] A couple of boys ask me a couple questions. I answer them. Then a little girl says to me, "Mr. Shaffer, Mr. Shaffer. How was the food?" [laughter] You're 10,000 miles from San Francisco. How was the food? [laughter]

Maryse

That's funny.

Edie

Priorities.

Tony

Thank you very much.

Bob Shaffer

Yeah.

WWII-Oral History Interview
July 13, 2017

[chorus of thank yous] [applause]

1:09:08 (end of audio 2)

NOTES

1. Liberty ships: www.usmm.org/libertyships.html
2. Victory ships: https://ww2db.com/ship_spec.php?ship_id=480
3. Jean Bart: https://ww2db.com/ship_spec.php?ship_id=142
4. Mississinewa: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Mississinewa_\(AO-59\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Mississinewa_(AO-59))
5. Michael Mair, *Oil, Fire, and Fate; The Sinking of the USS Mississinewa (AO-59) in WWII by Japan's Secret Weapon* (2008).
6. *Kaiten*: Michael Mair & Joy Waldron, *Kaiten: Japan's Secret Manned Suicide Submarine and the First American Ship It Sank in WWII* (2014).
7. Momsen Lung: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Momsen_lung
8. Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day: The Classic Epic of D-Day, June 6, 1944* (1994).

COMPANY PRESENT (PARTICIPANTS AND AUDIENCE)

Shawn Jacobaccio & Caroline Rochon, Hosts, South Windsor
Laurent & Maryse Hélie and family, visitors from France
Edward Havens, World War II Veteran, South Windsor
Robert Shaffer, World War II Veteran, South Windsor
Robert Starr, American Legion Post 133, & Edith Starr, for Donald Dean, World War II Veteran (deceased), South Windsor
Arthur Sladyk, Commander, American Legion Post 133, South Windsor
Roger Anderson, Assistant Adjutant, American Legion Post 133, South Windsor
Alan & Patricia Witkin, South Windsor
Susan Havens, South Windsor
Mary Ann Cole, South Windsor
Anthony Macro, Interviewer, South Windsor

INDEX

A

Africa	5,7
American cemetery	3
American Legion	1, 22
Anzio	5
Armed Guard Service	4, 5
Army	4, 5, 13, 15
AS, apprentice seaman	7
Atlantic	5, 6, 7, 8, 15, 17

B

Bay of Naples	15
bow-boy	9
Brooklyn Navy Yard	5

C

captain's gig	9
Caroline Islands	8
Casablanca	7
China Sea	6
commissary	17
coxswain	9, 15

D

Doodlebugs	16
------------	----

E

East Coast	6, 11
East Hartford	11
East Windsor Hill Post Office	12

F

France	2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18, 19
French	3, 7, 18, 19, 20, 21

G

Gander	8
German	5, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19
German Air Force	5
godfather	3
Guam	6, 8

H

Hartford, Connecticut	11, 12, 20
Hawaii	18

I

Inouye, Daniel	6
----------------	---

WWII-Oral History Interview
July 13, 2017

Italy	5, 6, 14
J	
Japanese	5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13,14,16,17,20
Jean Bart	7
K	
<i>Kaiten</i> , Kaiten	10, 14
Kartoffeln	18
Korean	20, 23
L	
Liberty ship	5,6
The Longest Day	18
M	
Mair, Mike	10, 11, 14
Mariana Islands	6
Marine Corps	5
Marseille	6
Mediterranean	5,15,19
Merchant Marines	4, 6
Mississinewa	9, 10, 14
Momsen Lung	15
Mussolini	20
N	
Naples	5, 15
Navy	4, 5, 7, 13, 15
Newfoundland	8
Newport	5,7
Nice	6
Norfolk	5, 7, 8, 15
Norfolk, Virginia	5, 15
Normandy	1 ,3, 6, 12, 18
O	
<i>Oil, Fire, and Fate</i>	10
oilers	9
Okinawa	6, 9, 11, 14
Oran	5
P	
Pacific Ocean	8
Panama Canal	8
Pearl Islands	11
Port Arthur	8
R	
R&R	9

WWII-Oral History Interview
July 13, 2017

S

Saipan	8
San Francisco	6, 24
Sardinia	5
Sicily	5, 14, 19
South Windsor	1, 12, 18
Southern France	6
Strait of Messina	14

T

Texas	8
Truman, Harry	11

U

UConn	20
Ulithi	6, 8, 9, 11, 13

V

V-1	16
V-2	16
VFW	22
Victory ship	6
Vietnamese	20
Virginia	5, 6, 15
Vibert	12

W

WWI	18
World War II	1,2, 3,4,12,13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22,23
Y	
Yonne River	12