

Interviewee: CHARLES LINDSEY BREWER

Interviewer: Michael Smith

Interview Date: May 18, 2000

Location: Brewer's home, Durham, NC

Topic: An oral history of Charles Lindsey Brewer. Mr. Brewer was born on April 22, 1926 in Durham, North Carolina. Prior to enlisting in the navy and while still in high school, Brewer took advantage of the new social and economic opportunities the war offered Durham teenagers, such as USO dances and summer jobs at the post office and Camp Butner. He joined the navy in 1944 and served as a seaman on an oil tanker in the South Pacific until after the Japanese surrender. Following the war, Brewer attended Duke University under the GI Bill. He graduated in 1950 with a BA in Business Administration.

CHARLES LINDSEY BREWER

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MICHAEL SMITH: What is your full name?

CHARLIE BREWER: Charles Lindsey Brewer.

MS: Where and when were you born?

CB: I was born April 22, 1926 in Durham.

MS: Where in Durham did you live?

CB: I lived, I was born at home as a matter of fact, on what was then McMannon Street which is now South Mangum Street. The house that I was born in, that was actually demolished in recent years under the urban renewal program. It's now longer a

residential street, but it was in 1926. As a matter of fact, it went north to Main Street and when it got to Main Street in downtown Durham, it changed and became Mangum Street. But it was McMannon Street where I was born.

MS: What was it like growing up in that part of Durham?

CB: We moved from there when I was four or five years old, so I don't have any particular recollection of living in that neighborhood. Our house was across the street from a fire station so that was the big events when the firemen went out. I am the youngest of six children. My brothers and sisters are older than me and so on. I don't have that particular remembrance of living on McMannon Street. We moved from there about 1934-35 to Holloway Street which is still in existence and we lived in a house across the street from Holloway Street Elementary School which is still a city school. And we lived there for four years and of course I went to the Holloway Street school. Back in my working days as a real estate person, I ran across the definition of a neighborhood. And neighborhood is composed of people with similar economic and sociological interests. Well, this meant that our neighbors on Holloway Street, and everywhere else as far as that goes, were people similar to us. And consequently as many of my friends and I have talked about over the years, we really weren't conscious per se of the Depression. I'm sure our parents were, but all of my playmates were from homes similar to mine. So, it was not a matter of have and have not. We were all pretty much, you know, in the same situation. So we did things that didn't cost a lot of money, and one of them, of course, was going to the library. I'm amazed looking back in the day we live in now that we lived, I would say, maybe two miles from the library in downtown Durham and learned to read of course in the first grade and began going to the library.

And no one, my mother or anyone else, thought a thing in the world of me taking my books and walking to downtown Durham to the library, turn in my books, and bring books home and without any thought; you know, that this might be something a child shouldn't do. I would go to the library on Monday and Friday. Friday I would take back the books I got on Monday, but I went twice a week. It was a thing that, again, it was free, and I enjoyed it. The city recreation department was really a top notch organization because due to the economic conditions they had created a lot of programs that dealt with neighborhoods, and close to our home where we lived was Longmeadow Park, which is still there. And it was built under the Works Progress Administration of the government. The recreation department had organized softball leagues, and on Friday nights they would bring a trailer down to the ball area, to the ball playing area and show a movie. The little grandstand, and people would bring chairs and sit and watch a movie on Friday night. And this trailer went everywhere, but it happened to go to Longmeadow on Friday night. The recreation department had provided a lot of activity for neighborhoods and for young people principally. That went on even into the war years, the recreation department. They had created baseball leagues, tennis leagues, swimming meets and so forth. So the Durham recreation department at the time did a really outstanding job of providing things for people to do inexpensively. Even though I don't think they ever described it quite that way, but that was what it was all about. Durham didn't suffer, I think, the Depression perhaps as much as other areas. We had American Tobacco Company and Liggett Myers Tobacco Company here in Durham, and between the two of them, I'm sure they manufactured half of the cigarettes that were smoked in the United States. So to have a job at one of the tobacco factories was top, top of the line. And then

we had a large textile mill here, Irwin Mills. Irwin didn't pay as well as the tobacco people did, but still they offered continuing employment, steady employment. So I don't think Durham necessarily suffered as much as perhaps some other cities. There's a great tobacco story. In those days a pack of cigarettes had a federal revenue stamp on it, and the tobacco companies bought these stamps from the government and had them as they manufactured and packed, a stamp was placed on each pack of cigarettes. As part of the Works Progress Administration, Durham got a new post office downtown on Chapel Hill Street and it's still in use today. A very nice looking building, incidently. So the Postmaster General came to Durham to dedicate the post office, and this was about 1935, I guess. So one of the tobacco companies, American probably, arranged to send the truck to the post office to purchase the revenue stamps that day. And they purchased 240,000 thereabout dollars of revenue stamps which paid for the post office. The city of Durham's post office in those days was the second largest post office in the United States in terms of revenue and it was because the tobacco companies were having to buy. Now, some years later they quit, they didn't put stamps anymore, they did it by computer. But in those days they actually went to the post office and bought big rolls of these stamps. And Durham was the second largest in the country. So as you can tell, tobacco was big. By 1940 of course the Depression was still hanging around, but it wasn't as bad. Pearl Harbor came along in December of '41 and everybody remembers where they were when they heard about it, and so forth. But one of the things that my friends and I still laugh about, none of us knew where Pearl Harbor was, never heard of such a thing. But it was Sunday afternoon and we had heard about it and obviously knew that the war was here. And so young men began, they had already started the draft prior to that, so people were

leaving to go into the service. By that time I was in high school and high school students weren't able to work like they do now because the Depression lingered on and there really weren't that many jobs, but as the men went into the service then high school students began to get part time work and so forth which had not been available prior to that. Many, many high school students would work on weekends in department stores and so forth, and that work was readily available for younger people. Then the word came that they were going to build Camp Butner. Initially the community seemed to be really upset because they were going to take people's land, people's farms. But then the impact began to dawn what this meant, that there were going to be thirty, forty thousand soldiers out here at this army base and the economic effect was going to be quite large. So generally the public accepted and looked forward to Camp Butner coming here. So they build the army camp that summer a couple of my buddies and I went out to Camp Butner because we had heard about the good jobs out there, and you could catch a bus downtown that would take you out to Camp Butner. And so we went out and started walking around to various construction companies looking for work. And, no problem. All three of us got a job with a construction company out of New York, Caldwell Wingate Construction Company. They hired us as laborers. Now you've got to think about this, the pay was forty cents an hour. But you worked seventy hours a week. You worked ten hours a day, seven days a week. The first forty hours was forty cents an hour. Then the next twenty was sixty cents an hour, and the last ten was eighty cents, double time. Again, this was, particularly for somebody sixteen years old, this was pretty significant money, and it was fun. Summertime and working at Camp Butner, et cetera. That was the beginning of the Camp Butner thing. Then after the soldiers got here, it

became a problem of how in the world do you provide for forty thousand, thirty thousand troops. They build the USO club and they converted some buildings around town into service clubs. Then on the weekends they had dances. Now, everything was heavily segregated in those days, so they had a white USO club and a black USO club. The dances at the Washington Duke Hotel, which you don't know anything about, but it was a fourteen story, reasonably modern hotel in downtown Durham. And they had dances there on Saturday night, principally for the officer corps at Butner. At the city armory which still exists downtown, the old city armory, there was a black fellow named Lathe Austin who promoted dances at the old armory which catered primarily to the black servicemen. They have a balcony there that white spectators could pay to sit in. Well, he brought the top black bands, Lucky [Miller?], Louis Jordan, the Count Basie. They came and played dances at the armory which again, the balcony would be full of white people like me but the people on the dance floor were generally servicemen, African-American servicemen from Butner. The bands were the greatest.

MS: You were a fan of those bands?

CB: Oh yeah, yeah. I loved music and kept up with music and I would be sitting there, because you see, I was making forty cents an hour. And it seemed to me like admission was like two dollars or something or other. But during the course of the evening, as you would imagine, young fellows down on the floor dancing and sometimes perhaps sipping strange drinks, there were little shoving matches might spring out. Well, this is an absolute true story. So when that sort of thing occurred, now we're talking about a building full of people, not just a few stragglers, this was a dance floor wall to wall people. Then the orchestra or band would play the *Star Spangled Banner*, which forced

the soldiers to stand at attention and the MPs would then come in and straighten out the misunderstanding. But that's exactly right. To prevent any problems, they played the *Star Spangled Banner*. Entertainment and of course shopping was a problem. Again, young people like myself, sixteen year old people, didn't think so much about it, but I'm sure our parents that were having to use ration stamps. Transportation, it was primarily public. It had been all during the Depression. I got to thinking recently, I don't think in the two blocks surrounding our home that anybody had an automobile. We rode the bus, the city bus, and it seemed to me that it cost ten cent to ride the bus but you could buy four bus tokens for a quarter. So people rode the buses. I remember going to some high school dances at the Washington Duke Hotel during the war years and they were all formal because Fred Astaire wore formal clothes and you know, that was the thing. And riding the bus to downtown dressed in a tuxedo and didn't give a particular thought about it one way or another. Rode the bus to the dance and walked home. People walked a great deal without any thought about it. I played football at Durham High School and I had a friend lived in my neighborhood that played there, and many many days after football practice, and football practice at Durham High School didn't end until it was dark, and we would walk home, probably four or five miles without a particular thought about it. We were young and agile and having a good time. So buses and walking were common. And again, you're thinking about everybody in your neighborhood was pretty much in similar circumstances. I thought about what you're doing and so on and I think one of your things is that you need to get into other neighborhoods. You know, if you talk only to people that live, we'll say, in East Durham, you're not going to get obviously. Hope Valley, well of course in the days we're speaking of Hope Valley was quite small,

even though it was an affluent neighborhood, Hope Valley really came about in response to building Duke University. They were going to build homes and so forth for professors and doctors and kind of like Gatsby. So the English style was very much in vogue, so you've got Dover Road, Darby Road, you know, English names. As Duke did develop, a lot of the doctors and so on did choose to live in Hope Valley because Durham was principally an industrial town and did not really have sufficient neighborhoods to accommodate this influx of people that Duke brought in. Then there was World War II. I went in the service in 1944 and I was in the service two years. By the time I got home, Butner was closed, was not in use any longer. Well, this was true everywhere. The army bases were closed and so forth. The remnants of the war in 1946 in that era, '48, '50 were shortages of housing and people readjusting. I look back at it and think it's just impossible to think of life today without the GI Bill that was put into effect in '46. That the opportunity to go to college where you could not afford it otherwise. One of the reasons that I played football and worked at it so hard was that it was going to be my ticket to college. And I got home and was offered a scholarship and as a matter of fact had accepted a scholarship to attend Duke, and then I found out about the GI Bill. Well, I thought, I'm twenty-one years old, the Veterans Administration will send me to school, I don't have to play football. And really it was just that simple. So I respectfully declined the scholarship and went to school on the GI Bill at Duke, as did many. Not so much because I was one of the recipients, but think about the doors it opened. Families that had never had anyone attend college. So that opened the doors for children and future grandchildren, and it came from the GI Bill. You could say to me that, interestingly enough, the tuition at Duke University in 1946 was \$250 a semester and the Veterans

Administration paid the \$250. You got, if you were single I think you got \$50 a month. And that took care of your school business. But Duke not being full of dummies, I'm talking about the administration, so the next year Duke raised tuition to \$500. But that was the limit that the VA would pay, \$500, and Duke at that time, over half of the students were veterans. At that time it seemed that Duke didn't have but maybe 4000 students and half of those were GIs or something. So Duke upped it to \$500, but the veterans didn't care. It was being paid. But I always thought, that Duke crowd, they're swift.

MS: Did you volunteer or were you drafted?

CB: No, I volunteered but I have to always add a footnote. I don't know if it was because I was that patriotic. I don't know that. If you volunteered, you could pick your branch of service and if you were drafted they picked it for you. Well, ninety percent of the people being drafted were being put into the infantry, and I had a brother in the service in the infantry, and of course watching Camp Butner out here. So I didn't want that, infantry. So I volunteered for the navy and they had a program that you could volunteer for the navy and they would let you finish high school before inducting you into the navy. That tailored into my situation very well and I remember graduating, I don't know, we'll say it was Tuesday night, and Wednesday morning I left for the navy. But it was part of the deal. Most people were, particularly my age, you'd never been away from home. Here was this grand adventure, war, army, navy. Most young men, youngsters, eighteen year olds and so forth, were not that apprehensive about going into the service. Now later on may have had misgivings. You knew you were going, so the inevitability of it was such that you knew you were going. Durham High had done

something really super. I don't know how many other public schools might have done this. One of the coaches at Durham High School, a fellow named Paul Sikes, he instituted a program of close order drill at Durham High School. And they taught you, in gym classes, drilling. Column left, column right, the whole bit. And this went on for two years so by the time you got out of high school you knew close order and drill. So I go in the navy at Camp Perry, Virginia. The first morning, we got in there at maybe eight o'clock at night, so the next morning we all straggled out outside the barracks and so forth and the fellow who was in charge of my company said, is there anybody who knows anything about drilling? Well, I did and I didn't hesitate to step forward. So my three months of boot camp, I went through all of the procedures that you went through at boot camp, but I was the drill sergeant. This was a little easier than being some other things. And it goes back to Durham High School, that this fellow had had enough initiative and so forth to institute that program. Durham High, and of course, you say well, you went there, you have a lot of feeling, emotion for Durham High School, but the facts stand for themselves. It was considered to be maybe the best high school, at the time, in the state. They excelled in not only athletics but scholarship, Durham High students won state math, you know, it was really a very high quality school. They had a college preparatory course which is what I took at Durham High. But they also had commercial courses that taught typing, stenography, et cetera. Very fine school. If you had gone through Durham High, through their college preparatory course, you had no difficulty entering any school in North Carolina, Duke, Carolina, really. You had a college preparatory course from Durham High, you were home free. Very fine school and fun, for most young people, a fun place to be. They were the athletic kings. Were you a youngster in Raleigh?

MS: Yeah.

CB: The big rivalry of course in those days was Durham and Raleigh. That was the big ballgame of the season. One year you played it in Raleigh, the next year you played in Durham. Durham, and this goes back I think to perhaps the industrial complex of the city, Durham won state championships in football, basketball. I was on the track team and we won the state championship in the spring of 1943. I always have to add an asterisk. Somebody called me about this recently. I won the two hundred and twenty yard, this was before meters, in the state meet, and I think was second in the hundred yard dash. And I said, but I always have to have an asterisk to say, that was the white state meet. The colored, black people, had their own state meet, so I can't say that I was, I can say I was the fastest white boy, but I can't say I was the fastest in North Carolina. But really, we had no relationships. The football teams and basketball teams were either all white or all black. There was no integration whatsoever. Everything was segregated. The theaters in Durham had an entrance for so-called colored people and a separate seating area for colored people. Athletic wise, now this all changed, oh I don't know, 1950 or thereabouts. In the days when I was in school it was all strictly. You know people don't realize some of the things that President Truman did. I was in the Navy in '44, '45, and '46 and I guess it was in '46 while I was still in the navy that they integrated the navy under Truman's presidency. Well, there wasn't a ripple, not a ripple. On the ship I was on, the only black people on the ship were mess cooks for the officers. They had a separate compartment. It was only about ten of them maybe. So Mr. Truman or whoever said the Navy is not going to do this anymore. So they moved the black fellows out into the sleeping area with the rest of us, but so what? I mean, nobody cared. It

wasn't any, well Mr. Truman was the one that did break the ice. I began to see though that these folks were having a hard time. I'm eighteen, and a grand adventure, and so on. But these people with families, it had to be difficult. It was only really as time went by that I realized how difficult it was. War is obviously a young man's game and to think about people that were drafted into the service and that were married with children, it had to be tough. I never, I didn't experience it because again, I was not married and there was a grand adventure. Parts of it were a grand adventure. Back home, it opened up these economic opportunities for young people. They were able to work, earn money. I know just before, the summer before I went in the navy, the local post office hired five of us to work at the post office sorting mail. Not delivering mail, but working inside. They paid sixty cents an hour. This was just unheard of. First of all, in America at that time if you had a job with the post office, you were in fat city. They hired five or six of us, because again of the shortage of manpower. Durham was a very busy, there was an industrial plant down on Holloway Street, Wright Machinery Company, that was actually owned by Sperry Rand and they were building parts for the [Norden?] bomb site. It was patrolled, the fence was patrolled by sentries, again against sabatoge or what have you. Durham was bustling. The soldiers would get leave principally on weekends and would come into Durham and I presume also other little cities, maybe not Raleigh so much, and would go to the movies and the restaurants and so on. Downtown Durham was just, looking at it today, you couldn't believe that the sidewalks in the downtown area were actually wall to wall people, soldiers, civilians. You think about it, I think the population of Durham at that time was seventy thousand probably. That would be city and county. So then if you bring in 15,000 soldiers, as an example, on the weekend, you've created

some people. But I wasn't here when the, I think the first division they trained at Camp Butner was the 78th division, and I was not here when they shipped out. By the time I got home of course Butner had ceased to exist as an army camp. But I was out there not long ago riding through Butner and couldn't believe it. I saw one of the old two story army barracks still out there. What are we talking about? Fifty-five years, and they were just old pine, wooden buildings. But I saw one still standing out there at Butner. There's very little trace left of the army camp. The hospital back there at Butner, it was brick when they built it. It had been enlarged over the years, but part of the brick hospital, original, and I think a concrete water tank is about all that's left of the original. And the streets, the streets.

MS: Where did you go after you finished your basic training in Virginia?

CB: I went to boot camp at Camp Perry, Virginia, which is in Williamsburg, outside of Williamsburg. You got a two week leave at the end of boot camp and I reported back to Norfolk, to the navy station at Norfolk. And about three weeks after that I was assigned to a navy oil tanker that traveled with the aircraft carriers. I was a seaman assigned to this oil tanker. The tanker had been built in Maryland and had been brought down to the Newport News shipyard for final loading. Fortunately they had loaded this thing before I was assigned to it. You don't want to be on a brand new ship that's being loaded.

Really, you can't imagine, the amount. Just think about it, a ship that was empty had nothing on it, no rope, no chain, no food. And you've got to load it. But fortunately it had been loaded so I didn't have to. We left Norfolk and went through the Panama Canal, went through Pearl Harbor, and ended up in the South Pacific. We travelled principally with the aircraft carriers. There was no atomic energy so everything ran on

oil and so on. They had built some tankers that were much faster than normal and these tankers travelled with the aircraft carriers. We went through the invasion of the Philippines, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. My ship was hit with a suicide plane at Okinawa. Some of my buddies, we were talking about it recently, when the war ended, the war ended in Europe in May I think of '45. I think it was May and it ended in August in the Pacific. I said, well, we were at sea when the war ended, travelling, doing our bit. I said, you know there was not anything unusual, nobody jumping up and down. We ate the same food we always ate. Really, it was the most uneventful day. Looking back I find that really strange that we would not have been excited about the war ending. We went into Tokyo, into Yokohama with the surrender fleet, the *Missouri* and so forth. Our captain had been a merchant marine captain before going in the navy during the war and eventually the navy, he became captain of a navy tanker. So we go into Tokyo with the surrender fleet, and the Japanese were sending out pilot boats with pilots to take the ships into the anchorage. The Japanese pilot boat came alongside, we were moving very slowly, to put the pilot on board, and our captain waved them off and said, I have been hauling scrap iron into here since 1932 and I don't need a pilot. And as a merchant marine captain, this is what, you know. Really, and he waved him off and took our ship right down the channel and we dropped anchor precisely with. Said, I had been hauling scrap iron. We sold Japan scrap iron and oil.

MS: Did you have any officers that you remember that stand out as being especially good or bad or indifferent officers?

CB: A tanker is, I have to, you know there's an asterisk for everything. A tanker was a working ship. It was called amongst other ships the "dungaree navy." You never say

anybody on our ship in uniform. We wore dungarees because, again, we fueled ships. The aircraft carriers would come alongside and we would pass hose over and pump oil and gas, et cetera. Our relationship with our people on tankers were more technical. They used to say once you get assigned to a tanker, you never get off. They might transfer you to another tanker, but you know, you're hooked once you learn how to do this particular job. Our officers, it was not near as formal as on an aircraft, for instance, or a battleship. We had three hundred and twenty five people on my ship. A battleship would have eighteen hundred, two thousand. Aircraft carrier would have at that time thirth five hundred, four thousand men. With that many men, discipline was so important that you had to stick to the protocol of the relationship between officers and crew. The tanker, the ship I was on, now it was not a small ship, it was nearly six hundred feet long, sixty feet, seventy feet wide, but the working relationship between officers and crew was much closer than it would've been on a combat ship. I had good friends in officers and shipmates. Again, the story I told you about the captain waving off the pilot, I still remember of course. The day we got hit at Okinawa, it was just not our day to get killed. This suicide plane was actually heading for another ship and someway or another, some reason or another, he changed his mind and turned and came toward my ship. And he was lined up from stern to bow, just perfect line. And when he hit, he hit flat on top of the bridge of the ship. When he hit, the bomb broke loose and sailed through the air, again parallel to the deck. It hit the deck and skidded up the deck, didn't penetrate, then hit on top of 280,000 gallons of aviation gas, skilled up the deck, went through a bulkhead, and exploded in a compartment full of toilet paper. Which was perfect. The toilet paper absorbed most of the explosion, I mean it was incredible. I was close enough

to it that it burnt, the explosion burnt the hair off the back of my head. But we had no one killed. We had some people injured. But if the bomb, as an example, had penetrated the deck, pieces would still be falling. 280,000 gallons of, you can use aviation gas for lighter fluid. You've got to have some luck, you've got to have some luck. That pilot just didn't, made a mistake. And of course, his plane ended up on the deck and the remains of the pilot did, too. After we got the fires put out and so forth, it was thrown overboard. I have a lot of feeling, I always have, a dead Japanese serviceman was missed just as much by his family as a dead American. When the war ended and we went in with the surrender fleet and didn't know what to expect, of course, our ship, we anchored out in the harbor. But three or four days later, a group of us were allowed to go over on the beach. Well, you didn't know. The Japanese, these mean people, and so on. Went over on the beach and there were lots of Japanese servicemen, because these were the only clothes they had, ex-servicemen. But I never saw an incident of any type, and we were there about four months. Again, the Japanese people didn't greet you with open arms, but not one did I ever see that was unpleasant. Between McArthur and the Japanese spirit, a piece of cake. No problems. We didn't, when they announced the war was over, we continued the wartime routines for maybe a month, not being sure what to expect, we had more interest of course in the atomic bomb, even though we didn't know what it was. Our little ship newspaper, which was nothing but a mimeographed thing, it reported this unusual bomb and some of us knew enough about physics to suspect. We had more interest in that than again when the war actually ended. Maybe the war ending was an anti-climactic, that we were anticipating. I remember an officer we had, he was so despondent and I was always cheering up people and could make up things to make

things. At night, the B-29s flying in the area that we were sailing and sometimes it would take two hours to fly over us. There was that many. And then later on, going back the other way. And I said, are you telling me that we've got planes that can fly over us for two hours and that this war is not going to end? Many people, and I'm back in that thirty year old fellow that had a wife and children, and the current expression in the navy at that time was "Golden Gate in Forty-Eight." They truly expected that the war, that it would be 1948 before. Well again, if we'd had to invade Japan, who is to say? But that was the cliché. "Golden Gate in Forty-Eight." And I said, man it just can't be. But really it would take two hours for these B-29s to fly over you. I, at that point I'm twenty years old, but I didn't believe it was going to last.

MS: How often did you get shore leave when you were in the Pacific.

CB: Never. From the time we left Norfolk really. We went to Aruba and picked up a load of oil, filled up our ship. Went through the Panama Canal. We got a four hour pass in Aruba. No pass in Panama, no shore in the Hawaiian islands. And I did not see a building other than a Quonset hut for two years. There was nowhere to go where we were. Really. We stayed at sea once for nearly four months, never saw land. When we had pumped the fuel from our ship, slower navy tankers would come out and fill us up again. So no. Our situation was quite different from what Hollywood or other. A lot of it was the nature of my ship. The aircraft carrier of course was king. They didn't have very many of these so-called fast tankers so we had to do what, extra duty, double duty. We travelled principally with the aircraft carriers.

MS: How did your crews get along with the crews of the other, the carriers and other ships?

CB: Well you see, we had no contact with them. We would be sailing, and I think we fueled at about twelve knots. The aircraft carrier would be on the port side and the starboard side would probably have a destroyer. The destroyer is getting diesel oil and the aircraft carrier is getting black oil and aviation gas. They are, oh, maybe as much as two hundred feet away from us. We had a method of passing eight inch hose over to them and we passed a phone line that enabled us to talk with them. We passed a copper ground line so you wouldn't have a spark jumping. Then we pumped. And you sailed. The only contact we actually had was the fellow on the telephone. And so we had no contact. When the surrender fleet went into Tokyo, the admiral of the fleet, who I guess was Halsey at the time, they put out an order that everybody was going to be dressed in undress blues. Now when you went into the navy, went into boot camp, they issued you the uniforms that you would need including what was known as undress blues. Undress blues were nothing in the world but a sailor suit without stripes. And it was principally a work, but not dungarees. It was wool. The grand wizard says, undress blues to impress the Japanese people. We like to never got enough undress blues together to drop the anchor because we had lost our blues, you know. But when the admiral of the fleet says this is what you're going to wear. So we were scrounging around, you know, trying to get up. Now after we got anchored and so forth, then you switched back to dungarees. We had a hard time getting blues together to drop the anchor.

MS: Did the navy provide any kind of entertainment while you were on the ship?

CB: Any kind of what?

MS: Any kind of entertainment? Movies or anything?

CB: When we were in harbor, the Caroline Islands was the base from which the fleets worked at that time. When you were in the Caroline Islands, we would sometimes have movies on deck but even then not a regular sort of thing. We didn't have the so-called USO shows. None. We had none of that. Now I don't know about the other ships. I keep saying, the tanker was a little different situation. Three hundred and twenty five men. If you took this tanker and put it into civilian use, no gun crews, no fueling at sea, you can operate that tanker with thirty-five people. That's what the merchant. They could operate a tanker with thirty-five people. Well, we had three hundred and twenty five. This was because we fueled at sea and because we stood gun watches and so on and so on. If it only took thirty five men to run the ship, you had to find something for these other people to do or they're going to kill one another. It was a strange existence and some of it was kind of like the movies. A battle between the enlisted man and the officers. There was no alcohol. I remember seeing me like on Christmas Day in 1945 when the war was over and they had, each man got a can of beer for lunch, with his lunch. Well of course it didn't take many of us very long to ascertain who didn't drink beer. You could get four or five beers, and this was like going home. But the navy didn't theoretically allow alcohol even though there were people who tried to make moonshine. Raisin jack. If you could get ahold of a stainless steel container or a pottery type container and you could put raisins and water and a cake of yeast and sugar, eventually it would make alcohol. Then you had to skim off, of course, all the crud. And strain it. There were people who tried to make alcohol. Then the navy had a medicinal alcohol. Came in five gallon blue cans. And this is something that a tanker carried which we would pass over to other ships for medical supplies. This was one hundred and eighty

proof alcohol. You could pour a glass full of that stuff and really, and watch it go down before your eyes, evaporate. Then there were people who were constantly scheming and contriving to get into the medical alcohol. I won't call his name, bless his heart, my first lieutenant. They had this stuff locked up in steel compartments with padlocks on the thing, in five gallon cans. And he said, Brewer, I want to make sure that locker is locked up like it's supposed to be. See if you can get in it. So I said, I know I can get in it. And one thing and another. So I knocked the pins out of the hinges and took the thing off and said, I told you that a child could get in it. He say, can you put it back? I said, well yeah I can put it back. He said, well, let's just take one can then. So at any rate, the navy I think was probably better than the infantry. But you had to be young. Really, I can't tell you, can't impress on you, you had to be young and ignorant. We were in two typhoons. One of them was so violent that the two or three destroyers capsized. We had an [anometer?] on the mast of our ship that measured wind velocity. When it blew off the mast, it was clocking one hundred and thirty five knots. We sailed right at the heart of this typhoon. It lasted three or four days. Admiral Halsey would've been court martialed except his public fame was such that they just couldn't do it. He was blamed for selecting the course that the ships sailed. But the destroyers just capsized, just turned. But if you were young enough, you never thought about anything other than this is one dynamite storm. You never thought about catastrophe.

MS: Were there many people lost when the ships capsized?

CB: I think six men survived, so they probably had five hundred or so that did not. I don't know how six people could've survived. It's just, a hundred and thirty five knots. You know, just incredible. The *Pittsburgh*, the cruiser *Pittsburgh*, the bow broke off of

the cruiser. The bow! And the *Pittsburgh* is sailing along without a bow. So there were two record book typhoons that the navy experienced toward the end of World War II.

MS: Were people in the fleet kind of angry at Halsey after that?

CB: The king of all the historians is Admiral Samuel Morrison. He was a history professor I think probably at Harvard and a friend of Franklin Roosevelt's. And Franklin Roosevelt when the war started got Morrison down to Washington and said, you are going to write a history of the United States Navy and World War II. And gave him a personal pass that authorized him to go anywhere and everywhere. Mr. Morrison, and I have his fourteen volume history, and he says that Halsey should have been put under the brig. Oh, really. It was so disgraceful. I won't bore you, but what Halsey did, he sailed the Third Fleet, which was principally the aircraft carriers, up the track of the storm. So instead of passing through the storm, he sailed the track of the storm and this is why it lasted the three days. Finally, and we were in this group. And finally the word was passed over the ship communication systems that each ship could select his own course. And our captain, who again was an old, old seaman, made a turn and in six hours time we were home free. And Morrison said the same thing. He said, any dumb-ass knows that you sail into the face of the storm and take a 45 degree, you know, and it takes you out of it. But Halsey was a hero, kind of like MacArthur really, and they couldn't. I always thought one of the interesting war stories at Midway. Halsey was still one of the ranking admirals but when they went out to do the battle of Midway, they had put Halsey in the hospital with dermatitis and [Spruance?] took the fleet and of course won the battle. I always thought, well how convenient that somehow or another Mr. Halsey had a skin rash that was so bad. And really, Spruance was known to be the brain. But Mr. Halsey,

he didn't get to take the fleets to Midway. But again, if you had to be in the navy, the dungaree navy would've been preferable. You talk to people that were on aircraft carriers and so forth, battleships and so on, and it was so strict. Everything, uniforms, duty, and so forth, that so many of them would say, you know it was a pretty miserable sort of thing. And the dungaree navy was a little more down to earth. Not so stilted.

MS: Were you all nervous about sitting on top of all that fuel?

CB: I didn't realize it at the time. I got home. The way I found out about it, this is getting back to me telling you what a neighborhood was. Here were these three hundred and twenty five men all exposed to the same thing and one just as crazy as the next one. Got home in June of 1946 and started at Duke in September of '46. Just was not doing well at all and so on and so on. The dean of the freshman class, he said, Brewer, if you didn't even go to class you would do better than this. Something is just not right. So he sent me over to student health and the fellow, the doctor that was handling the student health thing at Duke, was a former navy during the way, had been a navy doctor. He asked me what duty and so on and so on and I told him. He said, Brewer, the Veterans Administration all over the United States is having this same problem with you tanker men. He said, when you got home you just unraveled. That you didn't realize the tension you were under on the tanker because of the so-called danger. And that when you got home, you just unwound. But at the time, no, I didn't, didn't on board. But it was the same thing, we were all under the same. I have forgotten now and I'd have to translate it, but it was like a barrel of oil was like forty gallons, forty two gallons. We hauled six million gallons of black oil and 300,000 gallons of aviation gas and probably 800,000 million gallons of diesel. It was potentially an interesting piece of. The first day

we were overseas after we had left Panama and Hawaii and got to the Caroline Islands, and here you are. You've been out of high school three or four months. You're in the tropics, the blue water, the palm trees on the little atolls and so forth. And it's hot. The ships were not air conditioned at that time. So we're sleeping, many of us, sleeping on deck. Taking your mattress and thing was no problem. So sleeping on deck. First night, woke up that morning, sun coming up, nice breeze, palm trees on the island, and there was a tanker, our sister ship, anchored next to us. That was probably a quarter mile away, maybe even further, and you heard this "whoomp!" and you looked over there and there was this big cloud of smoke coming up out of this tanker. A Japanese midget submarine had gotten into the anchorage and sank that ship, that tanker. It sank. That was the opening introduction to that these fellows are playing for keeps. But again, if you're eighteen, it helps. All of these bad things are going to happen to somebody else, not you. But I do, looking back, I had, I feel so much sympathy for people with families who were taken into service. You know, I saw a program recently on the Discovery Channel about one of the big aircraft carriers, nuclear carriers. Five thousand men on it. And it said, the average age of the five thousand men was something like twenty-two and a half years. But that's the way it has to be, really. You can't take these five thousand twenty-eight year old men with two children and put them in that kind of environment. I had an opportunity recently to go to Norfolk and visit a modern day tanker. It's quite obviously another world than the tanker that I'm familiar with except for the people. The people that I saw, the sailors, were just like me when I was in the navy. Everything else has changed. This tanker even had a helicopter on it.

MS: If you had to do it over again, would you still volunteer and join the navy?

CB: Oh I think so, definitely. You know, this war business is so cruel. The air force, for instance, ten percent of the Americans killed in World War II, combat now, were in the 8th airforce. Think about that now. In the 8th. This is the crowd flying out of England, bombing Germany and so forth. One of the most nostalgic things, that's not the right word, but my wife and I visited London some years back and we were in one of the big cathedrals. Back of the altar they had a room that was dedicated to the the Americans aviators, pilots, aviation people who were killed flying out of London. And they had a great big book with the names. Just think, ten percent were in the 8th airforce. The English people had said they couldn't bomb Germany in daylight, but here comes [Hep Arnold?]. I guess cowboys can do anything. Of course, I just think it's disgraceful. I found a tombstone out here in [B?] in a church out there some time ago. It was of an American soldier, air force guy. He's not buried there. It says he's burring in a cemetery in Europe. But the thing that was so sad about it was that he was killed in April of '45 and the war, of course, Germany surrendered in May. I bumped into some people out here in the rural area that knew about the family. Did not know this person and said he was a glider pilot. And I thought, what in the name of God were we doing sending gliders into combat in April of '45? The war was over. It was just a matter of who would have sent up a mission. It's sad. Of course, I get sad about Gettysburg. How do you get people to march across that wheat field? It's unbelievable. I would definitely go back in the navy. I wouldn't want the air force, the life expectancy's too tough. The same thing about marines. The navy, you have a place to sleep and you have hot water and food. So yeah. I would think that would be preferable.

MS: How was the food?

CB: The military people are so good at what they do that it's incredible. The war was over, we were anchored in Tokyo Bay, and here comes one of the few Japanese ships left afloat. With a Japanese crew. A destroyer. Comes along and ties up to the ship I'm on. They need fuel. The Japanese don't have any fuel, so we're going to fuel. So we put the hose over to the Japanese ship, but it won't fit the connection. And I was in charge of this particular operation but I didn't know what to do. Here came an old navy guy on our ship, regular navy, and he said, Brewer, just hold it. He goes down to the shipfitters locker and he comes back with a fitting that is American on one end and Japanese on the other. Incredible. This is what I meant when I said, you don't want to load this ship. Somebody in the navy had put a valve on this tanker that was American on one end and actually it was metric on the other, but the Japanese were metric. And so we fueled the Japanese. But you see, somebody in the navy was smart enough to do this. The navy put out a menu once a month. Theoretically all the ships, thirty days, three meals a day. You couldn't just order any food you wanted because the navy couldn't have that. So they put out a menu and your supply officer, he ordered so many units of whatever they were to eat. When we left the United States going to the Pacific, the food was awful. But I didn't know any better, I was new, and I figured well this is the navy. But the food was not good. So we got, maybe this was a month or so later, they shipped the chief commissary fellow off of our ship and brought in another. The first morning he served pancakes, bacon, and pork and beans. This is a true story. And you say, what's so great about that? They kept the mess hall open an extra hour because everyone went through the line twice. And after that the food was impeccable. This fellow was using the same food that the

first one, but the first fellow just didn't know apparently. Served pancakes, bacon and pork and beans. On holidays, July 4th, Thanksgiving, Christmas, the navy would try a little. But their food was basic. You ate a lot of ground meat. They did pretty good with things like bacon and sausage. But on holidays you could probably get turkey, sliced turkey and that sort of thing. But no, the ship, now this was not true of all ships, no Co-Colas, no soft drinks, no ice cream on our ship. Bigger ships, the carriers and so forth, they had ice cream and soft drinks and so forth. But the tankers just wasn't big enough. We had a little ship store where you could buy toothpaste and so on. Cigarettes were fifty-five cents a carton because there were no federal taxes paid. But you bought your own toothpaste and shaving and that sort of thing. The navy furnished your clothes, dungarees, shoes, and so forth. Had a laundry on the ship that did your laundry. Had a barber that cut the hair. Had a tailor, ship's tailor that altered clothing. And of course if you go on a big ship, you'll see it's really a city. We had a sick bay. Had a doctor from, he home was Richmond, Virginia. And we had three hospital corpsmen that worked in the. And maybe eight beds in the sickbay. It was pretty much, now no dental. If you had dental problems they took you to an aircraft carrier generally. If you broke your eyeglasses, you went to an aircraft, one of the big ships, battleships. We didn't have dental or eyeglasses. But the normal health. One of my good friends from Wilson, North Carolina, on my ship, and he went to the sickbay one morning with a stomachache. They treated him for a stomachache and it didn't get any better and they didn't tell the doctor about it, the corpsman who was looking after him, and by the middle of the afternoon this fellow was really sick with appendicitis. We transferred him on a stretcher from our ship to an aircraft carrier to be operated on because we didn't have that facility. But we

transferred him and he survived. Very fortunate because it had ruptured and the whole bit. He survived and lives in Wilson now.

MS: Did you keep in touch with many of your shipmates after the war?

CB: Yes and no. Initially the first three or four years they visit you, you visit them, and it gradually fades out. None of my shipmates are from Durham and I haven't seen any of them in a long, long while. That I think was true of military experiences. When you get home and resume your life you don't. But one of the interesting things about the military was the difference between career people and draft people. Entirely different. Career people in the navy are very serious about the navy. Draft people are waiting to go home. Now they do their job, but they're not that gung ho about the navy. So the difference between, and we had some regular navy people on our ship, officers and enlisted men. And their attitude was quite different. They were much more serious about the navy and the protocol that goes with it. And generally the civilian sailor was not that hung up about it and refused to get that way.

MS: Would you call your captain one of the civilian sailors?

CB: Well yes, as a matter of fact. He, our captain, was a naturalized American citizen. He was a native of Denmark, an old man. So old that he had actually sailed on a square rigged whaling vessel in his younger days. I think he must've been in his sixties when he was on our ship. He was a captain. Now when you say captain in the navy, this is not like an army captain. An army captain has got two bars. A navy captain is captain of the ship. He could be captain of the ship and be a commander or something. But a navy captain is a four-striper which would be the equivalent of a brigadier general. But our skipper was a naturalized American citizen, a merchant marine guy, and was captain of

our tanker. He wasn't hung up, and you had no dealings with your captain, really. He lived up in a cloud, ate by himself. Now he would invite other officers to come in and eat, but he had his own stewardmate. Oh yeah, the captain of the ship.