

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Therese Strohmer

INTERVIEWER: Jacqueline Marion Edmunds

DATE: October 25, 2012

[Begin Interview]

TS: Alright, today is October twenty-fifth. My name is Therese Strohmer. We're in 2012. I'm in Greensboro, North Carolina to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I'm with Jackie Edmunds. Jackie, how would you like your name to read on the collection?

JE: Jacqueline Marion Edmunds.

TS: Okay. Okay Jackie. Why don't we start off by having you tell me when and where you were born?

JE: I was born December 29, 1951 in Greensboro, North Carolina.

TS: What kind of family—Did you have a large family, small family?

JE: Well, I have an older brother, Brian. He lives in Memphis, Tennessee. He's a teacher—just retired schoolteacher and I have a twin sister named Debbie, and so it was just the three of us, and both my folks are—were only children. So, I didn't have a lot of—

TS: Oh, not extended family?

JE: —extended family, but I did have grandparents that were the bomb.

TS: Is that right?

JE: Yes, I loved them.

TS: What did your folks do for a living?

JE: Well, mom was a—I guess in that generation there weren't a whole lot of women that worked out of the home so mom was a homemaker and she took care of us, and my father owned a small construction business; steel construction business. He set steel beams and, like, the smaller churches and stuff, so.

TS: So, around here in Greensboro?

JE: He was self-employed here in Greensboro.

TS: So, what did you and your siblings and friends do for fun growing up here in Greensboro? When you were—

JE: Sports; we played sports. I was a big Girl Scout too. I loved girl scouting and camping. I actually went to the last Girl Scout round-up they had for the girl side. It was called Apple Tree Encampment and it was in Nantahala National Forest in western North Carolina. I can't—It must have been like 1960—it was 1968. So, I was in scouting from the time I was a brownie all the way up until the time I graduated from high school. And then I was involved in the—actually in the council I helped scout—potential scout leaders work on their camping skills, and, like, how to build a fire and, you know, put the three inch log on there first and stuff like that. So, I taught them camping skills as someone had taught me and then they would take their troops out, and I'd sometimes go with them; make sure that everything went well. But it was fun. I loved scouting.

TS: So, what was it that you liked about it; that you enjoyed?

JE: I liked—I liked the camaraderie probably and I loved being outside and doing outdoor things, so it was just—it was a great fit for me. It's probably why I ended up in the military, actually.

TS: Yes?

JE: When I think back on it. I like things neat and orderly [chuckling]. Probably everybody says that, but I do. I—

TS: No, everybody does not say that.

JE: I liked things neat and orderly, and I liked Scouting and the military were similar in the fact that if you put forth an effort you received a tangible thing, and, you know, whatever motivates you, right? So, a Girl Scout badge like camping made me want to be the best, you know, camper that I could be. Same in the navy; if you did a good job you got a navy achievement medal, so.

TS: To get a badge and different things like that?

JE: So.

TS: Did you—

JE: Excuse me.

TS: Oh sure, let's pause for a second.

[recording paused]

TS: Okay. So, you enjoyed playing Girl Scouts. What was it like growing up in Greensboro at that time as a young girl? I mean, like, the place where you lived was it—were you in town or was it rural?

JE: Well, I was fortunate I grew up over in Starmount, and we joined—or mom and dad joined the country club for us so we could go swimming. I was very fortunate and I had a lot of advantages that—you know, that other kids might not have had. So—But I enjoyed—My childhood was great and scouting was great. I wasn't so fond of school but—

TS: No?

JE: No.

TS: Why not?

JE: I was not a good student.

TS: No?

JE: I—

TS: Where did you go to school at?

JE: I went to Brooks Elementary School here, and then I went to Kaiser Junior High, and then I graduated from Grimsley [Senior High School] in 1970.

TS: Okay.

JE: So, you see I didn't join the navy until 1979.

TS: So, you had a little gap of time?

JE: Yes.

TS: When you—when you were growing up in Greensboro—So, you were a little girl when like the Civil Rights movement was coming through in the south.

JE: Oh, I remember that very well. There was no Friendly Shopping Center when I grew up here. Every—You went downtown, and that's why I'm in this house; because the grandparents could ride the bus downtown, you know, and I've been in that Woolworth's a bazillion times.

TS: Where the sit-in was?

JE: Where the sit-in was. My grandfather owned a shoe store right across the street; a little Florsheim shoe store. It's hard to say. And my grandmother was the credit manager for—ya'll—people would remember it as Thalhimer's but it originally was Ellis Stone; was the name of the store.

TS: So, that was right across from Woolworth's?

JE: That was right across the street. Everything happened downtown. There were no—there were no shopping centers, so I remember that quite well. And I remember my grandmother and grandfather talking about it. And I also remember in 1970—I think it was '70; the clash between the [Ku Klux] Klan and somebody else; I can't even remember. But I do remember the National Guard being on the top of Grimsley High School. That I do remember.

TS: You mean the '79 shooting?

JE: It was—yes, it was shooting.

TS: Where some, like, four or five people were killed?

JE: Yes, exactly.

TS: Yes.

JE: So, I do remember that. Otherwise it was—We weren't—My family wasn't raised that way. My—I do recall, and I hate to even say it out loud that this even went on, but I was probably one of the first Girl Scouts to have my tent mate—one of my tent mates was an African American and we were just the greatest of friends. I was not raised in a—just because I'm from Greensboro and the south and that particular event happened here in Greensboro. It could have happened anywhere in the world. It could have happened anywhere in the country. It didn't just have to be here in Greensboro. But I was not raised—I was not raised that way. We did not discriminate against anybody.

TS: Did your grandparents—did they have any—When that sit-in was going on, though, would they have any concerns about business or anything like that, because that was a pretty contiguous time?

JE: I don't—No.

TS: Because you were little; you were, like, nine or so.

JE: I recall—I recall more fear in my family from the Cuban Missile Crisis than that going on. I mean, they were afraid that we were going to nuclear—that we were going to go to war—nuclear war.

TS: So, what do you remember about that?

JE: I remember thinking to myself—my sister and I were playing in the backyard and I remember thinking that's the first time I've ever seen my parents scared. That's what I remember.

TS: Yes.

JE: I was at Brooks [Elementary] school. I was just trying to think of things that popped up when I was growing up here. I was at Brooks school. I remember in elementary school when—I was down at the principal's office picking up paper to take back to the teacher for something and I heard that President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy had been assassinated. And I remember I went back and told my teacher that what I—what I had just heard. Things like that that I remember growing up; like, I saw my mother cry. I remember when the first man on the moon. We actually took a picture of the TV set. I'm sure everyone else's mother did the same thing [chuckling].

TS: Well, I don't know.

JE: But we were—It was a great—you know, it was a great childhood. I was afforded every opportunity, you know, and I loved my family. That's pretty much it.

TS: Did you—so, as a young girl what—and you didn't like school so much but you enjoyed the outdoors.

JE: Yes.

TS: Did you play sports or anything?

JE: Yes, I played softball in school.

TS: Did they have many opportunities for girls for playing sports?

JE: Yes, oh yes. We were—had finally advanced past the dribble three and pass.

TS: So, you had five-man teams?

JE: Yes, yes. And so—but yes, we played—I played volleyball and softball; just intramurals. I never played, you know, teams. I was too busy. Scouting was really my—was really my thing. I loved it.

TS: Yes?

JE: I did. So, that was my primary—that was my primary interest. And I needed to get away from a couple of girls that mom said were a bad influence on me [chuckling].

TS: Really, were they a bad influence on you?

JE: No, I think I was a bad influence on them.

TS: Oh. [chuckling] But your mother wouldn't say that [chuckling].

JE: Mom wouldn't say that but it's true. We just—

TS: How were you a bad influence? Let's talk about that.

JE: No, let's not.

TS: No?

JE: No, we won't talk about that, but you know, I grew up, and I'm thankful that I didn't go into the navy when I was eighteen.

TS: Why is that?

JE: I went when I was older because apparently I was a very immature eighteen year old. I didn't have any idea what I wanted to do. Well, I wanted to be either a professional Girl Scout or a forest ranger; those were my—my two career goals.

TS: Why is that?

JE: I didn't like—I went to college and right away I lasted—I lasted one semester only because of sports. I played—

TS: Where was that at?

JE: Montreat-Anderson [College; now Montreat College] in Black Mountain. I played field hockey and volleyball and everything up there, and I just felt it wasn't for me. So, I moved to the beach.

TS: Oh, yes? What beach did you move to?

JE: I was down around Emerald Isle, Morehead City, and—for a while. We'll just leave it at that.

TS: How long were you there?

JE: Oh, let me see how long—

TS: You were gaining life experience, right?

JE: Yes, I was out gaining life ex—that's the truth of the matter. Maybe a year; maybe.

Anyway, I came back to Greensboro and I lived in this very house with my grandmother. And then I started going to school and it just was hard. I was working and going to school and I was like, "Oh, this is just not going well. I'm never going to graduate. And I'm not going to ask mom and dad to do it for me again."

TS: Was this the period when you went to UNCG [University of North Carolina at Greensboro] for a little—a few classes?

JE: Yes—actually this is before.

TS: Before; okay.

JE: Because I thought, "Well, I'll just get a fresh start," and I had a friend who was moving to Pittsburgh, Kansas, so, "I'll go." I'd do anything once almost. So, I packed my bags and I went to—I thought, "Well, I'll just go to school out there; get a fresh start. So, I went to Pittsburgh State University for a little bit, and she didn't like it out there and we were sharing expenses. There was absolutely no way I could afford it; you know, going to school, so I came back to Greensboro, then started going to school at UNCG in 1977. And then I joined—I joined the navy in—I actually joined in July but I didn't go to active duty until November.

TS: And that was '79?

JE: Seventy-nine. So, I'm just working, going to school, spinning my wheels, going nowhere fast.

TS: So, what made you think about going into the navy?

JE: I can't explain it. I might have to chalk it up to divine intervention because I had never thought about going into the military ever.

TS: Was there any history of any of your family; your father?

JE: Well, my father served during World War II in the navy.

TS: Was your grandfather?

JE: No, no, not that I—just my dad. It just came to me, seriously; it just came to me.

TS: When it came to you what'd you do?

JE: I went down to the recruiter and I said—Well, I couldn't decide. I thought—when I said “it came to me,” it came to—the military came to me. I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do.

TS: Not necessarily the navy?

JE: Right.

TS: Okay.

JE: Whether I would go to the air force. I knew I didn't want to go in the army.

TS: Why?

JE: I didn't really want to be—It just didn't seem as fun to me. Now, being flying or being on a ship I think would be way more fun than being a ground pounder.

TS: So, really you were looking at the navy and the air force?

JE: Yes.

TS: What about the Marine Corps?

JE: I never thought about the Marine Corps. I don't know why. I have very good friends that are retired marines and they're amazing women. But I—The Marine Corps never crossed my mind.

TS: So, how did you pick the navy over the lovely air force?

JE: The lovely air force. This is true. Now, the recruiters may deny this.

TS: Okay.

JE: But the air force requires a photograph for women on their applications in 1979 or '78, or whenever I started looking into it, and I thought, "There's absolutely—there's absolutely no way I'm sending you a picture of me, okay."

TS: Okay.

JE: I'll go in to the office and we'll interview, but I'm not sending a picture on an application to wherever their bureau is so somebody can look at it and decide whether they like the way I look or not. So, it was navy.

TS: After that?

JE: Yes. I'd kind of been leaning that way anyway because of—just because of dad, but yes, that was it for me.

TS: So, did you know what your job was going to be in the navy?

JE: I had no clue.

TS: No?

JE: I had no clue what I wanted. When I initially started talking to the recruiter he started talking about hospital corpsman and that's really not for me.

TS: Medical?

JE: I don't like—no, I don't like that kind of thing. So, I said "Well, what else do you have?" And he said "Well, we have office work."

I thought, "Well, office work doesn't really thrill me but when you say office work helping other sailors doing, you know, like, reenlistments and extensions and discharges and all that;" then I was interested. So, I said, "I'll take Personnel A School. So, that's why I had to wait till—from July to November.

TS: For a slot to open up?

JE: For a slot to open up. So, I quit my job.

TS: Where were you working?

JE: I was working at Sir Pizza down here on High Point Road, and I quit my job and I quit anything else that I was doing and I said a proper farewell to my buds here in Greensboro for about four months. [chuckling]

TS: You took a leave of absence.

JE: Yes, I did.

TS: I see.

JE: From all responsibilities.

TS: So, did you enlist for a certain time period?

JE: Yes, I enlisted for four years.

TS: Okay.

JE: Never dreamed that it would turn into anything else. As a matter of fact, at the end of my enlistment I was just getting ready to—I was home on terminal leave. I had already told my chief that I was getting out because—I was a third class and—yes, I think I was third class. Anyway, he called me when I was at home and he said, “You were advanced off the last advancement cycle.”

TS: Oh, you mean after your first four years?

JE: Right.

TS: Okay.

JE: After our first four years. And so I said, “Well, now I’ve choice to make. Do I stay in or get out; go back home?” I thought, “Okay, it was a great four, five years. I’m thinking we probably need to do this again,” so I reenlisted after he let me know that. I pulled my request to separate and reenlisted. And then the next thing I knew it was—you know, they say where you reach a point after ten years where it’s really difficult to decide

whether do you—you know, do you go forward or do you get out? You're half way to retirement.

TS: Right.

JE: So, ten years; boom. I thought, "Well, this is going really well now." I'm getting advanced, and you know, it's a good life. I've got good friends, great benefits; I'm happy. So, that's why I stayed.

TS: When you initially enlisted what did your family think? What kind of response—

JE: They were—I would have to say that not much; I did surprise them. So, I don't think they were surprised.

TS: No?

JE: No. I think they were actually, "[sighs]. Finally she's decided on something."

TS: Yes.

JE: I think.

TS: They weren't concerned at all?

JE: No.

TS: No?

JE: No.

TS: How about your friends?

JE: Oh, they thought it was pretty cool, and—yes, and I told them, you know, it was hard to leave. I'd been here all my life and I had no idea where I was going to be stationed. I had no idea what was going to happen, but I knew I had to change the course of my life.

TS: Why did you think that?

JE: Because I was—at the rate I was going I—I’d probably just be graduating this year. I mean that—it was hard; I worked a split shift. So, I—I would have to get up and open the store, cram a class in, and then go back to the store at four and close it. It was like I knew that I was—that’s not what I wanted to do the rest of my life. And I thought the military would be good. It’s a career you can be proud of. Besides that I thought you can retire in twenty years. So, that’s why. I mean, there was not one reason not to and every reason to, really.

TS: So, you were like twenty-seven?

JE: Yes, twenty-seven.

TS: Okay.

JE: Yes. I turned twenty-eight in boot camp. But I had a baby face thankfully and I didn’t have this gray hair; you saw it. It was not gray always. So, I looked pretty young.

TS: Yes.

JE: And that was—that was helpful. No one ever really—no one ever really knew that I was, you know, significantly older than—

TS: Nobody? No?

JE: I mean, they wouldn’t have think—unless I told them they would—they would not have known.

TS: Well, so in boot camp; what was that like? What was that experience like for you? Were you—was it—Did you know what to expect? Did anybody prepare you for it?

JE: I got off a plane in Orlando, Florida; me and about twenty something other recruits, and this lady just started yelling in the airport. And everyone was turning around looking at her. We’re like [makes gesture]. Apparently she had the duty that night and her duty was to pick up all the new recruits and take them back to RTC [U.S. Navy Recruit Training Center] and she was not a happy woman. We all just—So, they herded us onto a bus and took us to Orlando, and meanwhile she’s yelling the entire time. And I’m thinking—Did think to myself, “Is she ever going to shut up? What is her problem?” And then I discovered that everybody was like that; everybody yelled and that’s just the way it was.

When—And I—So—but it was a little hard for me to have someone in my face who I knew was younger—who was younger than me.

TS: Right.

JE: But you know, you got to get over that. It's like going to a doctor and he could be, you know, your son; or daughter for that matter. You know, you just have to get over the age thing. And I did because, like I said, I didn't look my age, so. But boot camp was—I was glad to get out of boot camp. It was a wonderful experience. I really didn't find it that horrible.

TS: Not that challenging, you mean?

JE: No, it was definitely challenging.

TS: Okay.

JE: But some people cried every night, you know. They were homesick or whatever, and I didn't have any of those issues. I was just, you know, there to do—At this point it wasn't like a lark for me as it was for some, which are weeded out, you know, through the different processes you have to go through. But for me I was all business. This was I decided to do as my career. So, I really—you know, I liked to have fun, too, but it was serious for me. I mean, you could be set back. How embarrassing is that? You know, your folks are getting ready to come to your graduation and you call them and tell them, well, you're not going to graduate because my flip-flop was going the wrong direction in my gear locker. So, I mean, it was—I didn't have time for anything but what I was supposed to be doing, and that meant folding your bras and underwear and things had to be going a certain way. That's the way it was.

TS: What was the most challenging part about it?

JE: It wasn't the physical. We had class. We had class a lot. I would say the academics were fairly challenging to me.

TS: Because you didn't like being a student much anyhow, right?

JE: I didn't—yes, not—exactly; not being a big fan of that. But this—yes, I would say the academics probably. There were a lot of things that you had to learn that I just simply had to memorize because—you know, parts of ships and chemical warfare—

[speaking simultaneously]

TS: Foreign language pretty much, right?

JE: —and all this kind of stuff. Yes, so—but I would say that probably.

TS: So, emotionally you realized that you had to just, kind of, deal with it?

JE: Emotionally it didn't really bother me.

TS: No; after you got over the initial yelling?

JE: Yes.

TS: Okay.

JE: I thought that's just the way it is. They're just yellers and they're doing their job. And then I thought, "Wait until I get back here as a company commander." [chuckling] I never—I never did a company commander tour.

TS: What did you think about the first time you put the uniform on? Do you have any—

JE: Oh, I was—It was awesome. It was—but you know, I'll have to refer back to my Girl Scout days. It was—I mean, I wore a uniform even in Girl Scout camp at Old Mill [Camp] that I went to here so many years ago. And we wore a uniform but that uniform was—This uniform meant—It was awesome. It meant and showed the world that you would die for your country. That's what it said to me, you know.

TS: Yes.

JE: Yes. So, it was fun. It was a beautiful uniform too. I remember.

TS: What about your first—you went to training first and after that for the personnel?

JE: Yes, I went to Meridian, Mississippi for A-School.

TS: How was that?

JE: That was hard. I mean, it was a hard school; it was self-paced.

TS: It was? Okay.

JE: What's your motivation? Okay, well, if you hurry up and get through A-School or I can drag it out and pick up cigarette butts on the base for—well, no. So, I studied really, really hard and I got out of A-School in six weeks, and you have to test your way out. And so, when the folks finished they submit their names to the detailers for orders coming out of A-School. When I finished the instructor came in the room and he announced where three or four of us were going. Now, I had filled out my dream sheet that said I wanted to go to Hawaii, and then I said any ship was my second choice, and I was told that I was going to—the long acronym is—it was called then COMNAVMILPERSCOMco, or BUPERS, which is basically the [United States] Bureau of Naval Personnel in Washington, D.C., and I was so disappointed. I had sold my car thinking I was going somewhere really fun. And then they said Washington, D.C. I'm like, "Really?" But it turned out it was a great tour. I loved it up there. It was just not—I had great—great friends. I played on, like, three softball teams, and of course there was a shore navy now. You know, you go to work just like a civilian, but when I first got to Washington, D.C. we could not wear our uniforms but one day a week.

TS: Why is that?

JE: We were still winding down—believe it or not, even though it was 1979 into '80 there were still Vietnam [War] protests going on about—Vietnam protestors protesting the military, and the military being war mongers and so on and so forth. They would throw—still throw pig blood on the steps of the Pentagon. So, to maintain a lower profile we only wore our uniforms one day a week; on Wednesdays. I was giving—given a significant clothing allowance to go out and purchase—

TS: Civilian clothes?

JE: —civilian attire—appropriate civilian attire for the work place. So, then when [President] Ronald Reagan—he changed—Ronald Reagan changed all that, and military got a—like, a twelve percent pay raise for the first time in—they hadn't gotten pay raises in years and years and years. When I joined the navy it was like—it wasn't a really good time to be in the military. Pay had remained the same. People didn't—hated the military. They thought that, you know—I don't know what they thought. But they weren't real fans—they weren't big fans of the military.

TS: Do you mean there was a preconceived notion about the type of people who joined the military?

JE: Yes, and gradually the perception changed and we went back to, you know, wearing uniforms when we were at work. So, that did go away but it was there in 1980. We didn't wear them, so.

TS: What was a typical day like for you at work in Washington, D.C.?

JE: Early, early rise. Get on the highway to sit in traffic for—or you could live in the barracks there. I was assigned to Fort Myer, which is a army—but they provided the housing at Fort Myer and I lived there for a little while and then I moved out in town with some friends. It was really—sometimes you had to remember that you were in the military because it was, basically, a nine to five job there; it really was; nothing exciting. I stood duty, like, maybe once a month and did the runs—guard mail runs from the Pentagon back to the navy annex, but it was—you could forget you were in the military if you weren't careful.

TS: Did you forget?

JE: No, no, I loved it. I didn't forget. I never forgot.

TS: So, you didn't have a lot of extra duty at that time?

JE: No, no. It was just like a job; regular J-O-B; nine to five. That was it.

TS: What was it that you were enjoying the most about it; your job in particular, not necessarily—

JE: It wasn't a huge office—

TS: Okay.

JE: —for one thing. I liked being around a lot of people, and I—my job was help the sailors in the fleet. We did corrections to their service records. So, the ships would send in a letter to the bureau saying, "So and so's advancement is showing wrong," and we would fix it with key punch cards. [chuckles] I know, key punch. It's old. But I was fast.

TS: Yes?

JE: Yes. And so, I enjoyed that; I enjoyed helping the fleet. And that's what we were there for. They would call or send us correspondence; one way or the other, so.

TS: So, you were support for the fleet?

JE: Yes.

TS: Okay.

JE: So, I liked my job. That was very important.

TS: What was it that you found at this time—Okay so you are—You were kind of drifting a little bit in your life before the navy?

JE: Yes.

TS: Would that be accurate to say?

JE: That's accurate, yes.

TS: And then you got in the navy and you got this job. Not necessarily the place you wanted to go.

JE: No.

TS: Like a civilian, but what made it navy; what made it military? How did you stay connected?

JE: Well, in order to be advanced in the military as an enlisted person you have to prepare for each pay grade, and that involves a lot of study. Military requirements is only a portion of it and that's all your military side stuff, like, how long can your fingernails be; how long, you know—where—how's—what's the cover properly? Where's it sit on your head? Stuff like that. And then you have the professional side of it where you have to study constantly to keep, you know, proficient in your rate.

TS: Yes.

JE: And your advancement depends on it. So, the studying kept me connected with the military too. I mean, I was in a building where—I mean, admirals—it was not unusual to pass three or four admirals a day in the passageway; different ones. So—but I would say studying—I mean, just being around seeing uniforms certainly would—

TS: Yes.

JE: —hello, jar your memory, but—in that regard I worked and then I went home. So, yes, there was a portion where I was kind of disconnected from, you know, my career. But I always enjoyed learning about the navy, too, so—and reading about it, so that sort of kept me more focused; plus I was older, too, you know.

TS: So, your first five years—well, you spent five years in this—in Washington D.C—

JE: Yes.

TS: —at this first assignment?

JE: Yes, right.

TS: And that would—so, that’s when you were—talked about how you got the call that you got promotion and you decided to stay in?

JE: Yes, and reenlisted.

TS: So, what are you finding about the military aspect that you liked, or was it just a comfort with the type of job and things like that?

JE: Oh, I think the security of it would, you know—would have to be number one. I still stayed in the D.C. area but I went to another command there that—Navy Manpower Engineering Center Detachment. But all the staff jobs—they’re considered staff jobs—in Washington were all pretty much the same way. In other words there was no—I don’t even recall us having quarters in the morning, you know, to pass out military information. It was a very lax military environment—I will say that—in D.C.

TS: So, no formation; no running every morning?

JE: Oh no, oh no. No, none of that.

TS: No? Just your, like—

JE: Not in D.C. You show up with a donut in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other and you're good to go. [Therese chuckles]

TS: Did you have, like, regular P.T. [physical training] or just the—

JE: No. We had a P.T. test twice a year.

TS: Twice a year, okay.

JE: But it was up to you to, you know, make sure you're able to carry yourself across the finish line.

TS: As long as you get across the finish line.

JE: They didn't care.

TS: Then you were good.

JE: No, no. We had no military anything. Don't worry Sue.

[background noise] [comments about dog redacted]

TS: So, did you—you are—you're comfortable in this life, and—

JE: Yes.

TS: —are you thinking about it like you want to do anything different then at some point?

JE: I—well I'm—I am getting a little bit excited because I know that I'm going to leave D.C.

TS: Okay.

JE: And I want a ship. And by now—because after there I went to Bethesda, Maryland; to the naval hospital at Bethesda. The personnel office was located right in the hospital. That was the greatest tour ever; I ever had, because now I've got the best of both worlds. I got a female lieutenant that—well, I knew her when she was an ensign and then she made lieutenant commander. So, now I've got a really military—I thought I was rigid. She's

going to be the officer in charge of the personnel office at Bethesda Naval Hospital. I'm excited because now we're going to have great work and we're going to be military, and we were. We had—we had quarters every morning. We had training. We had softball team. We had volleyball team. We had bowling team. We all liked each other so much in that detachment and there were well over fifty people there.

TS: What was the—like, the spread between men and women?

JE: In my—in my admin rating we were about, probably, half and half. I'm trying to think of how many men. I'd say about half and half in the personnel rating. In the yeoman rating it was mostly women, or women—more women than men. But in the personnel rating it was pretty much even—even keel. But that was a great tour and she was a great officer.

TS: What was her name?

JE: Captain Patricia Miller.

TS: What'd you like about her?

JE: I liked that she'd been to sea before and I admired that because she was an officer and she didn't have to go. At that time women, you know, were only—"Do you want to go to sea?" And if you said yes they might could but most of them said no. Trish went to sea and she got her warfare pin. So, anytime you saw that warfare pin it means been there, done that. I mean, it was a big deal. It was—I don't even know. Nowadays it's not quite as a big deal because you have to qualify within a certain time frame. When I got my pin and when Trish got her pin you didn't have to qualify. It was because you wanted to and it meant you knew everything there is to know about your ship.

TS: So, was that, like, a written—Did you have an oral for that too?

JE: Oh, yes.

TS: Yes?

JE: Oh, yes.

TS: Oral boards?

JE: You have oral boards and then you go before the old man and he gives you the oral board. So, it's—anyway, that's why I respected her so much. And another reason was when she first checked on board she didn't know anything about an officer's dome. Their jobs change so—they can be doing A over here and Z at the next tour. And she learned what to do. I walked into—went into her office one time and she was sitting there doing a Personnelman[?] three and two book as a lieutenant commander. And I remember thinking, “Well that's just about the coolest thing I've ever seen in my life”; that an officer—that this particular officer would care enough to really know what's going on and what we do out there, you know, to help sailors. And she was just a great—she was great. And I was with her this weekend at the Women's Memorial [Women in Military Service for America Memorial in Arlington, Virginia], actually.

TS: Oh, is that right?

JE: Yes.

TS: Very nice.

JE: And so—But that was—that was—Bethesda was my really—It was a good tour. I made first class there. I was Sailor of the Year for Naval District Washington; got my first navy achievement medal. I was Sailor of the Year for—I was actually, believe it or not, Sailor of the Year at every command that I was—that I ever went to.

TS: Wow.

JE: Except for the USS *Vella Gulf*, and that's because I was a chief. So, I had a good career. I'm telling you. I just went in when it was, like, perfect timing because I was so focused, you know, on what I needed to do.

TS: Right. Well, when you went in, too, in '79 and then, like, you're almost to the '90's here at Bethesda.

JE: Yes.

TS: So, about ten years.

JE: Yes.

TS: What—Do you see the culture changing in the navy towards women at all?

JE: When I first checked into the Bureau of Naval Personnel I was called down to—I can't remember his name—Commander Something or another and he gave me the speech. The speech was—I was flabbergasted. “Well, we're glad to have you but I'm sure you've heard that a lot of women in the military are lesbians, and I just want you to—let you know to be on the lookout for that. If anyone approaches you, you need to let me know.”

I looked at him the same way you are looking at me; “Really?” I'm thinking, “Really?” So, that was—I just said “Roger that,” and that was the end of it. But I mean, I never really—even when I think back on it to this day I still don't get that conversation that he had with me. I really don't. But I was never—In my military career I've never been sexually harassed. Maybe people were scared of me; I don't know. But no one has ever been inappropriate with me in any way, shape, form, or fashion, ever, in over twenty years. I was never harassed by—I guess it depends on your definition of harassed.

TS: What's your—.

JE: When I walked aboard the [USS] *Vella Gulf* and there were only four chief petty officers on board, and I was one of them, and twenty-five male chief petty officers. When I walked into the Chief's Mess for the first time I was intimidated, I would have to say. There was not a woman sitting there. It was me and twenty-five guys, and you know, they're looking to make sure that you're—you know, they don't care. They just want you to do your job, you know, and be a part of the team. And if we go to general quarters at sea, to know what you're doing. That was hard. And it was probably harder for me but every one of them was staring at me; trust me, I will tell you that. I was really nervous. And at that moment in time I wanted to be anywhere else other than where I was right then. So, you just have to—I just looked at them and I said “I'm your new personnel officer. Happy to be here.” So, they were—Turns out they were like my brothers to all of us. They invited us on liberty and made sure that we, you know, had somebody to be with and weren't out roaming around different countries, you know, by yourself. But it turned out to be a great thing. You know, there were a lot of guys, I'm sure, that weren't so thrilled to have women onboard ship.

TS: But you didn't personally experience any of that?

JE: Well, no. There—We had an understanding—

TS: What was that?

JE: —right from the beginning. We treated each other as equals or I—I would make you go to the end of the line. Let me just—I'll say that. In the personnel world you go to the end of the line. But they—they didn't care I don't think. They wanted—they wanted a woman to pull her weight; that's all. I mean, when we first started integrating I was one of the first females on board a guided missile cruiser. I wanted to go to a carrier; to commission the USS *Harry S. Truman*, actually, but I couldn't get orders there because they wanted women who'd already been at sea to integrate small ships. So I ended up with order to the [USS] *Vella Gulf*. I was, you know—they had just—the other girls had just gotten there before me.

TS: Do you think your rank made a difference at that point?

JE: Well, yes, rank is—there's a big difference between going to sea as a blue shirt, E-6 and below, and going to sea as a chief. When you go to sea as a chief you get your uniforms on the back of the door, pressed and ready to go. When you're a blue shirt you get uniforms back in a laundry bag in a wad. So, being a chief onboard a ship is—definitely has its advantages; I'll say that. [extraneous comment redacted] So, yes, there were definite advantages and we worked very well together; all of us—all of us did.

TS: When you were talking about Captain Miller you made me think about the idea of mentoring.

JE: Yes.

TS: Did you have the experience of being mentored by—not necessarily by Captain Miller, or by other women as your career progressed, or was there anybody in particular that followed you through your career?

JE: My mentor is Captain "O.W." Wright [Captain Wardell C. Wright, Sr.], retired. No question about it. He saw something in me that I never saw in me. I worked for him when I was at Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet. He was my—he worked for admiral—he worked for the admiral and I worked for Captain Wright, and he was a Vietnam [War] veteran; he was a brown water sailor. Started out as a seaman, got his commission, made it all the way up to captain, and then—I actually worked for him twice. He came to be the commanding officer of N.A.B. [Naval Amphibious Base], Little Creek and I worked—I worked for him twice.

TS: So, what—why do you think he mentored you?

JE: I don't know. I don't know. He liked—

TS: He never said anything?

JE: Oh no, he would never ever say, "I like you." He would never say—the amount that you were tortured was the amount he liked you. It was not unusual for me to go home in the afternoons with an assignment to watch—what's that movie; Denzel Washington and the submarine?

TS: Oh, right.

JE: *Hunt for Red October*.

TS: Right, right.

JE: And write a paper on whose leadership style was correct, the captain or the XO [executive officer], and have that paper written and on his desk the next day. When I reenlisted, he said, "I'll be happy to reenlist you but don't think we're going 'I, Jackie Edmunds;' oh no." I had to repeat the entire thing. He got up there and he said it and then I said the entire thing.

He—he would just—I was say to him, "Why are you"—Attila the Hun; I never knew a thing about Attila the Hun until that was a reading assignment. He had reading assignments that he gave me all the time.

TS: So, what was the answer to the *Hunt for Red October*?

JE: It didn't—well, my answer—it didn't matter what I said; he would disagree with whatever I said. It did not matter.

TS: He played the devil's advocate?

JE: Right. So, even if we had agreed I would have never known.

TS: Yes?

JE: So—But—He was definitely my mentor; no question about it.

TS: Did he follow your career? I mean, did you hear from him periodically? Did he check up on you?

[coughing in the background]

JE: Oh yes. I worked for him—we—first at CINCLANTFLT [Commander-in-chief, Atlantic Fleet], and then when I went to the USS *Vella Gulf* he followed my career. He—he—actually, he tried to get me orders to the [USS] *Harry S. Truman* because—oh, by the way, he made me write a paper on [President] Harry S. Truman and why I wanted to go there before he would go to bat for me.

TS: Right.

JE: So, he followed me and then when I came off the ship he was the C.O. [Commanding Officer] at N.A.B., Little Creek so I went to work for him again, so.

TS: So, it kind of went—

JE: I don't know. He just—Yes, he just liked me or something. I don't know; we just clicked immediately.

TS: So, when you were thinking about yourself as a leader did you mold yourself after some of the things he did or did you pick up from different people? What did—what did you do for that?

JE: I would say I probably took a mixture from different folks because even though he was my mentor and I admired him greatly and would do anything in the world for him, he—he used more intimidation than I would ever do. He—he was a scary man, really. I mean, really scary. But I just tried to be fair. You know, I always treated people the way I would like to be treated and fair is paramount for me.

TS: Yes.

JE: So.

TS: Well, did—did you have any other people that you mentored that—like, how this Captain Wright picked you? How did you pick other people to mentor, yourself?

JE: I don't—I think you—probably just folks—a couple of people that you meet in your life you just are drawn to more than others, you know. I did mentor several sailors throughout my career and—that I remembered at retirement and such but—just—we don't like

everyone the same. We may see—I may have seen something in someone that, you know—and another person might have seen something else. But I had a lot of great sailors work for me, I'll say that, and they told me that they liked me, too, as a supervisor and leadership style, so whatever I did I guess it worked.

TS: Now were they both men and women?

JE: Oh yes.

TS: Yes?

JE: Yes.

TS: Well, I've had some people say to me that sometimes they were given a job and they thought there was no way that they were capable of doing that job. But the person, like the mentor or whoever who picked them knew that they were capable of it and they were. Did you ever find yourself in that situation where you were like put in a place where you felt like very challenging you just never knew that you were going to—.

JE: I would say the USS *Vella Gulf* tour because that was independent duty for a personnel-man. As the chief I answered directly to the XO and to the CO. I was responsible for manning on board the ship and in particular their workups that are required prior to deployment. So eighteen months out you start this and it's called a PERSMAR. I can't give you the exact—Personnel probably something readiness report it has to do with the readiness of the ship. In the—You know there's all kinds of readiness. There's personnel readiness and then there's also mechanical kind of readiness things. But I was responsible for all that. I was responsible for advising the captain on like with the—We didn't have a legal officer for instance and there was several masts that were conducted when we were underway. I should say. But anyway the PERSMAR is a huge deal and very complicated. And not a lot of personnel-men have ever done a PERSMAR. That was the hard—I didn't think I could do it. So I would always call you know back and just make sure I was going in the right direction. I mean that was my responsibility to make sure that was done correctly. So I wanted to make sure that it was. So I referred quite often back to Captain Wright you know and his staff and he would have somebody—he would make someone available to help me even though I was on a ship and he was still on shore duty. He was—I mean that's what he lived for was the fleet. I mean everything—everything exist in his mind, excuse me, to support the fleet and that's the way it is, so.

TS: Did you find that you had adequate training for the jobs that you were given?

JE: Yes, I did. You're not advanced in the navy unless you're proficient in your rating. And that is reflected both in test scores and evaluations. So if you're not cut—I have not seen anyone who wasn't prepared to be in the pay grade that they were in and ready for a next pay grade.

TS: Yes.

JE: I have never—I really think the navy's rate training manuals and everything and also the A-Schools and you know just on the job experience is very good.

TS: Did you think the navy was good at maybe making people leave the navy that didn't quite pull their weight or were—.

JE: Oh yes that's a beautiful thing. The navy can get anybody out who's not—who's not doing the job. It's the civilian sector that that becomes an issue.

TS: Yes.

JE: But the navy, nope, nope.

TS: Was there any particular place that you served that—You were talking about Bethesda and why you liked it—Was there any particular place that you didn't like serving?

JE: I didn't care too much for the Engineering Center Detachment because we did staffing standards and our—what we did was we'd go around and we counted work basically, slashing billets and you know that kind of thing although it did have some interesting—interesting things with the job. But they saw—the fleet saw us when we came as billet cutters and that's exactly what we were.

TS: What does that mean?

JE: That means we're cutting jobs to save money because you know we spend too much on defense. I've heard that all my life. So we went out to verify whether or not—for instance does that personnel office need twelve PN's to run it or can we run that office with ten. So we go in and count work. How many advancement cycles? How many reenlistments? How many of this did you do and well I'm sure there's some fancy name for it because I

remember I went to school for eight weeks and the regression analysis about killed me. So there's a formula that's involved.

TS: So like a mathematical—.

JE: Yes.

TS: Figuring out how many people can do what particular job?

JE: Exactly. So people weren't really thrilled to see us. You know it's only time ever in uniform were I felt like nobody was happy to see me when I was in uniform.

TS: Right.

JE: So I didn't care for that job. And as a matter of fact the command was disestablished in two years. Which I was glad about because I spent two years away from home. It was a neutral duty tour for me and I spent—actually those two years I spent in Pax River [Patuxent River Naval Air Station], Maryland doing an efficiency review at the strike directorate which is all the jets down at Pax River. So I was interviewing mathematical and electrical engineers you know and I'm a Second Class Petty Officer. "How many what's do you do? I don't know what you do."

TS: So it's hard to—.

JE: They all have pocket protectors and—.

TS: Hard to evaluate what they could or couldn't do if you weren't—.

JE: If you don't know—That's why you ask certain specifics. How many SF what ever's have you done in the last week? You know that type of thing. So it would even—Anybody could you know go in and ask those particular questions. So that was good. It wasn't based off—it was no speculation involved what so ever. We were only measuring things that were hard you know—I can't measure how long it takes someone to think up an engineering theory. That would be impossible. You have in one hour you know so—.

TS: [chuckling] right.

JE: So, but anyway that was the only job that I didn't really care for so much.

TS: But that was like a temporary duty?

JE: No it was a regular tour.

TS: Assignment?

JE: It just thankfully went away. The funding went somewhere.

TS: So was that between which—

JE: That was the Navy Manpower Engineering Center. That was a two year tour.

TS: Okay, '85 to 87 and then you went to Bethesda. And then you got on the U.S.S. Yellowstone no that was your first ship that you were on.

JE: Yes, [U.S.S.] *Yellowstone* was my first ship and the [U.S.S.] *Vella Gulf* was my second ship.

TS: So what about the [U.S.S.] *Yellowstone*? What was it like being on a ship? That's something I wanted to find out more about.

JE: It's like a huge bustling city. It never stops on the ship. It was six hundred and eighty-one feet long—six hundred and forty-one feet long and eighty-five feet wide had about thirteen hundred people on board. So it's huge. I mean it's huge. Never—Something going on all the time at sea, always. It's loud. It's dirty.

TS: Now you weren't a chief petty officer here?

JE: No, I was a blue shirt then. My laundry came back in a wad and needed to be ironed.

TS: And so what were your living conditions like there?

JE: We had—In my berthing compartment we had about ten little quads you walked down. At each little quad were six women. I could go like this—

TS: She's sticking her arm out to grab.

JE: Yes.

TS: Yes.

JE: And—.

TS: So you could almost touch them from the other side.

JE: Yes, you could touch them. Getting ready in the morning was the hardest because there weren't that many sinks or you know toilets available. I usually showered at night. That way I didn't have to get in the shower line in the morning.

TS: That probably took a while.

JE: But, yes, oh yes. But nothing made us any angrier than to get behind the little nineteen year old who's applying makeup in the mirror in the morning we're all trying to get ready.

TS: Did that nineteen year old learn to—.

JE: Yes.

TS: —move along quicker?

JE: Yes she did. It was beautiful thing. I think she was probably glad explained that to her too. Made her life a little easier.

TS: Yes.

JE: But you know you—you only have a certain amount of time. Things are limited you know that. So you have to be considerate of others, you know, if you want to do makeup not a problem. Do it over there not where I need to put in new contacts. But it was—.

TS: So resources on a ship are you know finite sort of.

JE: Yes. Yes. I mean you know you got of a bunch of women on there and all of us trying to get ready at one time it's you know will they had shift work and such. Like I said it was busy constantly. When a ship is deployed it's not unusual for offices to stay open twenty four hours and that's what I did in my office. I stayed open twenty four hours and then I left a duty person when we pulled into port. That way everybody could enjoy liberty and if something came up then we would get back—go back and deal with it if somebody

needed to be transferred you know people would turn up pregnant all the time. Somebody needs to go back to the states because you can't stay on the ship when you're pregnant. So or humanitarian or assignments there could be any number of reasons why you would need you know personnel-man.

TS: How was that handled as far—I don't mean handled logistically for pregnant women but what was the attitude about on the ship with pregnant women because you hear about that all the time on the news?

JE: Well it pisses me off. I'm sorry to say. I'm sorry this is being recorded now that I said that but let me throw this one out of you. You know that I'm—I loved families and children and all that and I think it's a beautiful blessing but—and accidents do happen. But if you are a sailor and you plan a pregnancy to be right in the middle of a cruise then there's something wrong with you, okay. Because some work places on board ship are port and starboard. There's only two people in the office what if one of them is female who's now pregnant and we have to send her back home. That leaves the one person in the office. Could be a male so now he's got port and starboard or it could be another female what if she got pregnant? And now you have zero. And it's not like the temporary service where you call up and go "Oh well you know what I just lost my PN1 can you get one out here for me." It doesn't work that way. You're gone without that person until you return to port.

TS: You don't—can't add on somebody?

JE: You don't get a—you don't get a replacement immediately.

TS: Why—?

JE: You get one eventually but not immediately.

[sounds of running water]

TS: Yes. But they have to immediately leave? Is that—You're nodding your head yes okay. They can't hear that on the tape.

JE: Sorry.

TS: That's okay.

JE: I forgot. Yes they're immediately off the ship.

TS: Okay.

JE: Because for their own health and safety. It's not because you know the captain thinks they have the plague. It's because if the ship were to take a roll or a turn while you were underway and—and the woman fell she could you know she could injure herself and her baby. So it's really a safety concern. Now and shore duty—When the ship is in port a woman can stay on board up to a certain number of weeks before—but she can't get underway. So it's just basically for their own safety.

TS: So you think in planning if—.

JE: Planned parenthood rocks.

TS: What about the men who get the woman pregnant? Does there—any—.

JE: Should smack them too.

TS: But do they—But is there any repercussion for them?

JE: No.

TS: Should there be? I know that's a real controversial thing. But it's just interesting that you're somebody in personnel having to deal with these kind of issues all that. That's why asking you?

JE: Yes. I would think that they would take more personal responsibilities knowing what would going to happen you know. The only thing I would say to any sailor and I've said it "Having a families great but you leaving the ship because of this pregnancy doesn't mean that you're not going to be going to sea duty" Here's what it means. That once you've had that baby and you've had your six or eight weeks you go into the detailing pool. It's what's known as an immediate avail that means they're going back on the first thing that says U.S.S. Probably leaving for deployment very soon and oh by the way now you have an infant at home. So as a single parent unless you have your mother whose already raised you what makes you think she wants to raise your child to take care of her then you're going to have to give up your career. Because all in an effort to sometimes not always avoid a deployment. I've had girls—I had sailors come to me and say—One in my office that was beside herself because she got pregnant and she was on the pill.

Now sometimes that happens and there's nothing you can do about it. It's like I told her. She'd already been on deployments. I knew—I knew she wasn't trying to get out of deployment. And I was thrilled for her and for her husband. They had been trying for a long time. So it's just a matter of personal responsibility and timing and knowing that you're very career depends on that seems that it would be come foremost in my mind.

TS: Was it something—Is this another issue of rank that—was it more lower ranking women who might be more likely to get pregnant than those who maybe—.

JE: Yes.

TS: —had already decided to make it a career?

JE: Yes. I would say yes.

TS: Okay.

JE: Sadly I would have to—.

TS: Yes.

JE: —I would have to say yes.

TS: Well might just be statistically that's how it is.

JE: Yes. I mean you know. We can and—you know you can make statistic mean whatever you want. I used to keep a mental—Because we used to have to ask everybody their blood type when they checked on board at Bethesda for Geneva Convention cards. We're writing and gearing up of Operation Desert Storm and Desert Shield and most of the officers and I had—I don't have the papers anymore. I didn't keep them. Most officers had—do not—They have an AB—AB something or they're not generally just O's or blood types. Isn't that interesting? What's your blood type?

TS: O negative.

JE: Really.

TS: Yes.

JE: Well see mine's AB negative. Now isn't that weird. We should be switched because you like studying and I don't.

TS: [laughing] Is that right?

JE: Yes.

TS: Okay.

JE: It was—I just think it was all a matter of timing. The navy is really big on family and we really help each other out with you know with things like anything related to babies you know new babies and new parents and the offices we're usually close enough to help each other do that. But I just think timing is important if you're on a ship. If you want to have a family.

TS: Well then that brings me to a question about joint assignments. How did the navy work those for men and women who were married?

JE: Oh that's mandated by instruction. They don't have any choice. If the person puts in to be spouse co-located then the two detailers have to work together and come up with something acceptable. Now the only drawback to that is they could be in the same geographical area like Norfolk. Well one of them is going to be on a ship and one of them is going to be on shore duty. But at least they are in the same area and the ships not gone all the time.

TS: Do they—Can they be on a ship together?

JE: No.

TS: They can't?

JE: No.

TS: Okay. That's something I wasn't—I wasn't aware of.

JE: No.

TS: Now what was it that—The nickname for the U.S.S.—.

JE: Miss Piggy.

TS: And why did—Why'd you call her that?

JE: [unclear] the bull nose on the front of the ship.

TS: Well you showed me some of your pictures of your off duty time when you were on that ship. What was some of the favorite places that you got to go?

JE: Favorite place on the U.S.S. Yellowstone I would say was probably Israel. Favorite place on the U.S.S. Vella Gulf would be Poland.

TS: What'd you like about those two different places?

JE: Well Poland we were the first United States warship to sail into Poland since World War II and anybody within a five hundred mile radius was lined the river that we came up because the Vella Gulf was a small ship and they were lined the river looking at this United States ship sailing to their—sailing to Poland during a non-war time. And would follow the sailors manning the rails and they're just cheered for us the whole way. And they're beautiful people. City is—I was in Gdansk and Gdynia Poland and they're just beautiful, beautiful cities and the people are—I remember thinking the people are very attractive here and nice. And we—there was definitely language barrier. But they were just very, very excited to you know have the United States Navy there and that was great.

TS: So that—You were there about a decade after the end of the cold war?

JE: Yes.

TS: Did you see any remnants of the cold war while you were there in buildings or—.

JE: No. Now when we were in Israel I saw remnants—The Russian tanks and stuff that were abandoned on the side of the road from that conflict. When was it '60s?

TS: The—the '67 the Arab Israeli war?

JE: Yes, I guess it was. It would have had to have been. But I did see tanks and stuff. We did see on the road abandoned but no that was about it. They were like—Both places folks were happy to see us mainly liked our money and you know.

TS: [laughing] And did you—.

JE: But they faked it pretty well.

TS: Did you spend your money there?

JE: Oh yes I did. I sure did. I liked trying different foods and stuff like that because anything—any food off the ship was pretty good.

TS: How was the food on the ship?

JE: They did have one—My favorite was Mexican day. They made a really good Mexican lunch thing but it seems like every time they made Mexican we went to general quarters and I couldn't take my food with me. But they were—and they did good breakfast too. And breakfast—Sunday mornings you could get up and down and they would make you an omelet or something. They didn't—I didn't do any of that during the week but the only day the ship shuts down for work is Sunday. So a lot of times when you're underway they'll have the what's called a steel beach picnic where everybody goes out on the fantail and—and you have grills and stuff. I had some other pictures of the Vella Gulf I need to find for you because I some photos of the steel beach picnic. It's skeet shooting off the fantail and you're underway. That kind of thing is fun. That was on the Vella Gulf or swimming at sea.

TS: Did you get to do much of that?

JE: I only did swimming once.

TS: Yes.

JE: Because they have lookouts with guns and stuff in case you see a shark. Well all I really want to was get in and get out.

TS: [chuckling]

JE: So.

TS: You didn't want to hang out with the sharks at all?

JE: No I didn't.

TS: Were you—One of the pictures you showed me was of your first haircut underway. And you said that's the first time you had your haircut by a barber?

JE: By a barber. I used to go pay a million dollars for a haircut. And when I started going on the ship I thought, a barber does just as good in my opinion and so I go to a barber to this day.

TS: Do you?

JE: I go to the barber over on Lawndale.

TS: Yes. So is that—You were showing me—You just—You were telling me you just show them a picture when you first go to them.

JE: Yes.

TS: And say here?

JE: And I would go “bzzzzz”, and show the pictures. And the first lady who cut my hair in France did a pretty good job.

TS: Yes.

JE: She really did. It's different from here the salons. Or maybe I walked into a foo-foo one but I don't know. But she immediately took me back to this dressing room and I had to take my shirt and sweater and put on this little smock thing. So we don't do that here in the states. At least mine didn't.

TS: No.

JE: But she gave me a pretty good haircut. But the ship was good enough for me.

TS: So what else was it like living on the ship? What kind of hardships did you have to put up with?

JE: Hardship.

TS: Like if you were going to talk a young person going into the navy today and they were going to deploy somewhere. What kind of things would you maybe say? ‘Okay you know make sure you pay attention to this.’

JE: What I’d tell a youngster going to sea? I’d have to tell them—I’d tell them to—This is just so really non exciting but actually I don’t know what I would tell them. A youngster—I would probably start off by saying “This tour will not last forever.” That’s probably how I would start it. “There’s the good news.”

TS: Okay.

JE: “The bad news is you’re going to be away from home and you’re going to miss your family terribly but you can always find something—We’re all in it together.” You know it wasn’t like you were the only person on the ship missing your family or anything like that. You’re all into—you’re all in it together and it will be worthwhile. And it was—I mean it proved that to me when someone told me along the way “well if you want to be a chief Jackie then you’re going to need to get your warfare pin.” And I remember that and that’s exactly what I did. That’s why I made chief the first look. Because I did more than what was expected and I guess I would tell them to “do a little more than what’s expected and you’ll love the tour and it will be great for your career.” But I—I think that would be it. The good news yes. There’s a beginning and there’s an end. Just stay within the lines and you know and it’s not—I mean the navy it’s all sea duty. Depending on your rate some is more sea intensive than others certainly. Some rates don’t stand watches underway. Admin especially. I think they think—I don’t know what they think. Either it’s mostly a girl rate or we’re too dumb to stand watch underway. I don’t know what it is. But we don’t—we do not stand admin people just don’t do that because we’re—we’re usually doing like if there’s a man overboard drill—.

TS: You have other duty besides that don’t you?

JE: Yes. We would have to you know count every person on the ship. So that was really why. A lot of my sailors would go up to the bridge while we were underway just to—I used to go up to the bridge while we were underway just to see you know what it looked like and because I—you know it wasn’t my rate. It was part of my ESWS [Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist] Studies.

TS: What’s that?

JE: My warfare pin study. You had to know every department on the ship and what they did. And draw the basic steam cycle.

TS: Yes.

JE: That was hard.

TS: What does that mean?

JE: Like take a drop of water and draw a diagram of these steam cycle. How we take that drop of water and make steam which makes the ship go. Like I could draw it too. I could draw it and it was like okay this is this and this little part does this. And then you come up here and that—and this part you need because of this and so and so forth and blah. I used to know all that. But I don't anymore. The only thing I remember is the length and the width of the ship. But that was—I mean it was hard. Mechanical stuff—I'm learning all that mechanical stuff that I didn't do on a regular basis. Was difficult and that's where the helping each other part came out. Like a chief in we'll say engineering, I would say "Hey Bob I need to come down and I need to spend a week with you in the evenings and learning about engineering." "Sure I'd be glad to help you." You know, and that's the way the ship worked. You need to paint, if the X.O. came through and said "Your space looks like crap I want it painted out before next liberty call." You went down to the boson mates and you told them "Look I need some paint. I didn't buy any. I will give you head of the line privileges if you give me your paint." That's how it worked.

TS: So you're just trading.

JE: You're trading. You're—exactly.

TS: Yes.

JE: You're—.

TS: Just like Radar used to do—.

JE: Exactly.

TS: —in M.A.S.H.

JE: Because some people have things that you need okay and you don't have them. And we had what they needed which is up to date service record. So—.

TS: So bartering is a good system in the navy?

JE: Bartering is a excellent system. It works quite well in a ship.

TS: Yes.

JE: Very well.

TS: I guess it would have to because you wouldn't always have—like you say the resources that are finite.

JE: Yes.

TS: Well was there anything in particular that was difficult physically for you while you were in the navy?

JE: No. I mean sometimes standing watch in you know a flak jacket and carrying a rifle got a little heavy but really nothing. And when you shut down the ship to go to general quarters the hatches and the water tight doors and stuff you couldn't be a weakling to do that. And no I—physically no, no issues at all really.

TS: How about emotionally?

JE: Nope. Not for me.

TS: No?

JE: No, sorry to say I'm—didn't really—but like I said I tribute a lot of my success in the military was the fact that I had made my mistakes earlier than a lot of the girls. So, but emotionally was it hard, yes it was hard being away from home and you're pets you know. Yeah it was difficult. But it wasn't impossible to do.

TS: Well how would you have things like that taken care of while you were gone you know like where ever you lived and—.

JE: Friends.

TS: Yes.

JE: Yes, when I deployed my first with the Vella Gulf it was around Christmas time. I came home they'd gotten my Christmas tree out of the attic and put it up and took care of my cat and stuff. Friends.

TS: Yes. Now the military is often known for a unique sense of humor.

JE: [chuckling] You think.

TS: Do you have any stories you might like to share that kind of maybe encapsulate military humor or navy humor I should say?

JE: Yes I do.

TS: Yes.

JE: Well one that I was telling you about—I actually have two and I'll make this short. One was when I met the Captain O.W. Wright. You know I told you I admire so much. Oh by the way he went on to be after C.O. of Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek he went to be commanding officer of Recruit Training Command Great Lake, Illinois. And when I went up to—this might be interesting—when I went up he invited me to his retirement ceremony and I went up and he—I heard a knock at my door. I went and opened door and here's a sailor standing there with a bottle of wine and a corkscrew and a bouquet of flowers. "Compliments Captain O.W. Wright welcomes you to his retirement ceremony." I mean it was—He was just fun. But anyway—.

TS: Very thoughtful.

JE: The first—the first time I met him we shook hands and he liked to think that his reputation preceded him although I had not heard about him. I knew a lot of other people who [sound of gasping] "Captain Wright, he's the meanest man on the planet!" So I'm thinking oh, oh okay. I met him in the passageway and right down in the admiral's suite. And he says to me, sticks out his hand and he says "I'm Captain O.W. Wright pleased to meet you." I said "Well I'm Chief Admin Service nice to meet you too." He said "What have you heard about me?" "Nothing, sir." "I don't believe that. People say I'm the meanest man on the planet. What have you heard about me?" "Honestly I really don't

know anything about you. I think I'm going to like you." And then he goes "Pull my finger."

TS: [chuckling]

JE: I—This is how stupid I was and naïve. I thought—.

TS: So you did.

JE: Okay well I know this trick but here we are in the admiral's suite. I'm thinking this is not going to happen. "Oh yes sir." So I pulled his finger. You know what happened. The rest is history. We were friends ever since then because I just started laughing. I thought—I couldn't help it—I thought it was funny. So that was—that was one. The other was when we were on the U.S.S. Vella Gulf. There's four female chiefs and there's one bathroom because we all sleep in the same area. Everything is about the size of this room.

TS: Which is not a very large room.

JE: Right. So, I—yes small. So I go to—.

TS: It's a beautiful room though.

JE: Thank you. I go to—we're having field day on the ship in the morning. I'm thinking I got my coat well I'll just—we're walking by the chief's mess and I'll just run in here and go to the bathroom. So I go in there and the door's shut. I see a pair of black boots and khaki pants like would normally mean you know you look under "Okay occupied." So I go around my business about the ship. Field day and some more [unclear]. Anyway I come back for the second time. Now meanwhile in my adventures there's me and three others. Now I've just seen Susan go down the passageway so I think okay maybe she was in the ladies—maybe she was in the head. So I go back in there. The feet are still there. No noise or anything. I've afraid to say "Are you alright?" I go back out and I go in the chief's mess. Now there's Susan and the other two girls and me standing there. I said "Have any of ya'll tried to go to the head lately?" One of the girls said "Well, yes, well there's shit I thought somebody was in it all morning." I said "Well we're all four here so that means..." We go back in and sure enough. We look under there are the boots and the khaki pants. The male chiefs have been in our berthing area, had gone up under, locked the door. But somebody's boots and pants there to make it look like somebody was in the bathroom.

TS: [chuckling]

JE: So that night—Oh they were laughing all about. They thought they were just too funny. We walked into the mess and they're just snickering. That night we set out alarm. We strategically planned it to where the only one guy we knew had watch and he'd be away. So all the toilet seats are black. So we got out our black boot shoe polish. [laughing] And snuck—I was—No I'm serious. The tears were steaming down my face. I was like—.

TS: [laughing] Laughing as you're putting the shoe polish on the toilets.

JE: Shoe polish all over the toilet seats and we're back out. So the next morning for breakfast—.

TS: [laughing]

JE: We're—we walk into the chief's mess. The chief's mess was the area where you ate dinner and then the men's berthing and the women's berthing were just right off it. So you were awakened every morning by the smell of something burning. But so we go in there and all the men are sitting. They're like [unclear] sitting at the table trying not to laugh. And then—It was just hysterical. Anyway three of them had sat down and—.

TS: Before they discovered—.

JE: Had shoe polish all over—They were like sliding all over the place and stuff. That was one of the greatest tricks.

TS: That was pretty good.

JE: That really was a good one. And then I do have one quick—more one—more—We—Since I was personnel I was responsible for doing messages and stuff and I had a radioman who transmitted who was a good friend. And there was a guy on board who was going to retire and we wanted to play a joke on him. Because he was like laughing that he'd never have to make another deployment. And you know "It stinks to be you two." So we—so I made up a message. "I'm sorry to inform you that the Bureau of Personnel has modified your retirement date to so and so and so and so. To include one more deployment onboard the U.S.S. Vella Gulf. " Or something—something like that. And we got the radioman to release it.

TS: [chuckling]

JE: So it came out looking like an official message.

TS: Sure.

JE: So we're down in the mess hall—went down to the mess hall. Said “Look at this message you got Rocky.” And I put it down there and I looked. He's like [gasping]. Well it was almost a trick that went wrong because he like freaked out and was—He got up and ran out of the mess. We're all looking at each other like uh-oh. So we had to go up and tell the captain, “Okay we might have taken that prank just a little bit too far, Captain.” So he called the guy over the 1MC [1 Main Circuit the term for the shipboard public address circuits] and he finally came out of hiding and actually he was trying to call his wife to tell her—to tell him [her] that his retirement date had been changed. Thankfully it didn't get that far. But we would do a lot of stuff like that. Hang pictures that of submarines if we were doing doing—trying to pass an inspection with the sonar and we failed or something. And that chief nobody really cared for him so much—so when he came into the mess. They'd gone through *Jane's Book of Ships* and cut out pictures and hung them from the overhead with string. This is what a submarine looks like. [laughing] It's really—I was—That was more mature fun on the Vella Gulf I think.

TS: [laughing]

JE: You wouldn't do that but it was that was funny too.

TS: Yes. Well did you—You talked about you—I forgotten it I'm sorry—Your warfare—.

JE: My warfare pin.

TS: Your warfare pin. Your [unclear] warfare pin that looks like a dolphin right.

JE: Right.

TS: Now when you—I mean you've talked about the pride and getting that. Are there any other medals or awards that you earned that you're particularly proud of?

JE: Sea Service Deployment Ribbon. Even though it's lower in the food chain. Not everybody has one.

TS: Yes.

JE: So, That was—that would probably be—Well anytime you get recognized for doing a good job, Navy Commendation Medals, Navy Achievement Medals, are great. But really the—I'd say the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon is once again been there done that kind of ribbon, you know.

TS: Did you feel like you were treated fairly by your supervisors and your peers and your subordinates?

JE: Absolutely. Really I can't—There's not really one time that comes to mind seriously for me.

TS: Yes.

JE: Where I—I was treated fairly I think really my entire career otherwise I don't believe I would have reenlisted and stayed for twenty, almost twenty-one. Because that's what I liked about. You did a good job. You were recognized for it. And here's another beautiful thing. I get paid just as much as the man who does a good job. Isn't that nice?

TS: Yes.

JE: People get equal pay per equal job and it doesn't matter whether you are a man or a woman. It's the same. So—.

TS: So did you see as a chief and in times when you were in a managing, supervising, kind of position where you would have sailors come up to you with problems, you know. Whether it was, you know—Did you ever have any serious problems that you had to deal with that you remember that?

JE: I don't think anything really too terribly serious. I had—I had some issues with some sailors. I did. I had a couple that—I had one that was bipolar that she was true challenge. But she was able to stay in because she wasn't on lithium. She was on something like it but I think that's a drug. She was a challenge. She was definitely a leadership challenge. I think on shore duty because a lot of rates they'd been at sea for you know, they're way more sea intensive. So when they get to shore duty they're kind of looking to kick back a little bit. So I think the challenge is to motivate more while you're on shore duty and encourage them to you know, go to school, take classes, and they don't have duties. So you know, enjoy it. And knowing that you're you know, that you're going to go back to sea. That's the nature—That's what we do. Have green card, will travel.

TS: Right. Well, you were in during the Tailhook scandal?

JE: Yes.

TS: And you know—so, sexual harassment and abuse is a issue in the military.

JE: It is.

TS: Did you ever have to face any issues like that? Not personally, but I mean that—

JE: No. The only one, like I mentioned earlier, I thought that commander—I thought that was, like—well, inappropriate at best.

TS: Oh, you mean when he said that about the lesbianism?

JE: Maybe not—yes, not—maybe not—but it was certainly—

TS: Right.

JE: —an inappropriate remark. I mean, why would you say that to me? Is that because I have short hair and like sports?

TS: Oh, do you think that was, like, a message to you?

JE: Yes, I do; I felt like it was. So, anyway, I don't like any kind of stereotypes at all; none of them. I would say for me, though I was never—I was never harassed in any way; like, having someone—unwanted advances or anything on liberty. And I know it does happen. I know it does. But I'm thankful that it didn't happen to me.

TS: So, on that issue that you said when that—who was it that said that?

JE: Some lieutenant commander or commander; I don't even know his name.

TS: You went from a time in the navy when—before “Don't Ask, Don't Tell,” right, where—and then you went to “Don't Ask, Don't Tell,” and then you got before they rescinded that. What did you think about all that, and did you have any experience with any of the issues of homosexuality?

JE: Oh yes. Well, it—you knew that when you came in, okay. If that was your sexual orientation then you would have to be on your toes. You knew that when you came in, okay. I do know that when I was in Washington D.C., when folks would go out to bars and nightclubs and such, that N.C.I.S. [Naval Criminal Investigative Service] would scrape stickers off the car and try to match them. It was a witch hunt back in those days in 1980. They had N.C.I.S. agents that would pose as lesbians to entrap you, and they would scrape the sticker off your car. Well, all stickers are registered and logged in and—“Well, let me see; let me just look. This sticker belongs to Seaman Sally Brown,” okay. Well, N.C.I.S. is going to go pay a little visit to Seaman Sally Brown and find out why she was at a known gay bar. And they would do that— intimidation.

I mean, people were thrown out for no reason. All it took was somebody saying [whispering] “I think she’s gay.” And you—It could launch an investigation and you could lose your career. It was serious back when I first came in; really serious. And as a matter of fact, when I was riding this ship back, the USS *Yellowstone*, the—some congressional committee sent an observer to meet with all the female sailors onboard the [USS] *Yellowstone* to get our feedback on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” before that policy came out.

TS: Okay.

JE: And I remember that one girl; you asked me who this was and I said that’s Nancy Connelly; she lived right beside me.

TS: Right.

JE: Well, I wish you could’ve heard what she said in the meeting room, and I was sitting right beside her. You—some things you kept to yourself, and in my era of military service you kept it to yourself. There was no reason—I’m pretty much of the mind, “None of your business anyway,” okay? But [phone ringing]—I don’t even if want to know if it’s him. [Therese chuckles]

So, it was bad and they—and then they changed it to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” and I had a lot of friends that would say—one was going to write a book, actually, about what if everyone who was homosexual in the military turned green for a day. What would you see? I mean, what—what—Okay, now that’s it proven that it’s, like, a non—it’s a non-issue really.

But anyway, Nancy Connelly was the first one to step up and say, “Well, I have a—I have an extreme problem with it. And if I knew anybody was on my ship I would turn them in.” I’m sitting right beside her. [background noise] I’m sitting right beside her. So, you learn to—if your livelihood depends on keeping your private life private, that’s

what you do. I mean, it's—to me, it's seriously a no brainer. When I was—When I served it wasn't—it wasn't discussed. You would lose your career.

TS: Yes?

JE: You could—you could smoke pot and stay in, okay.

TS: Right.

JE: But no, it was not—it was a witch hunt. It was an absolute total witch hunt, and that needed to be changed. I don't care what your stance on anything is; that was just wrong.

TS: Right. Well, was—like, did you ever worry about who to trust or anything like that?

JE: Did I? It must have been—well, I really didn't go out that much so I was not really at places where I shouldn't be. Only because people were looking, okay?

TS: Right.

JE: Most of my social activities were at folks' houses and stuff because—

TS: Private?

JE: It was—I mean, seriously, that's like Salem, Massachusetts. All you had to do was point your finger at someone and say—and that could indeed ruin their career. It didn't matter whether it was true or not. N.C.I.S. didn't care whether it was true or not. I had numerous friends that were hauled in and questioned and questioned and questioned and questioned and followed.

TS: Did they get kicked out?

JE: No.

TS: No?

JE: They said nothing; they said nothing. "I'm not going to tell you anything." And so, yes, it did worry me. It worried me that I may for no apparent reason be called in and questioned. But I tried to—I was flying under the radar. That was my—that was my goal.

TS: You think, too, that having the respect of people in high places, so to speak, help protect you at a certain level, you know?

JE: Here's what I think. I think you're—you're more so than that; that your work ethic is way more important than anything else that you could possibly do. You could have the most effeminate sailor that you've ever seen.

TS: Yes.

JE: And if he can whip out—if he's the best personnel man in your office, then you don't care—

TS: Right.

JE: —that, you know—and that's the way—that's how I made my mark. Nobody wondered. Nobody cared. They thought I was—people figured I worked all the time, and I really did. I worked a lot. That was my—Like I said, it was serious business for me.

TS: Right. But even a person who worked really hard could still fall under that witch hunt.

JE: Yes, they just had a unique way of, you know—and I hate to say it but it's true. It's like my sailor who's chronically late, okay. I might overlook that more if when she is there she's busting her hump for the command.

TS: Right.

JE: So, I think I was overlooked a lot because I was valuable. I was valuable to the command.

TS: Right.

JE: They—they could've—I could've, I think, really not done anything. I don't, you know, mean it to that extreme but basically, yes, that was—nobody even thought anything of it. I mean, really, they knew I had a roommate and nobody said anything about it. I don't know what I would have done if they did, but they didn't.

TS: Right.

JE: So.

- TS: Right. Well I've got a question for you about the submarines ever since you talked about the cutouts from *Jane's*.
- JE: *Jane's Book of Ships* [*Jane's Fighting Ships*; an annual reference book of information on all the world's warships]
- TS: Yes. So—now, I know there's, like, the last bastion of getting women into the submarines and they're just starting to do that, I think.
- JE: Yes.
- TS: Do you think there's any place, either in the navy or any part of the military, even combat—ground combat for the army, that women should not serve or have an opportunity to serve?
- JE: Yes, I'm not a big fan of women going on submarines, okay. I'm a big fan of women doing anything in combat. And just for the record there've been a hundred fifty-two women that have died in Iraq and Afghanistan in a non-combat zone, okay. So we know women are dying over there all the time; fifty-two since—in the last five years. And we just lost one more. But I'm not a fan of submarines and this is why—Look, women want to die for—they will die for their country. They will absolutely, positively do it just like any other man. But the living spaces are so close on a submarine it's just—make an all-girl sub[marine], okay; an all boy sub. But I think it's too close.
- TS: Well, didn't they used to say that about the Minuteman Missile?
- JE: Yes, yes. But I—believe me. The women who are married to the guys on the submarine are not happy about it, and oh by the way, the first woman that went to a submarine, her and the command master chief, the chief of the boat, were both—Now they're both off the submarine because they couldn't keep their hands off of each other. It's like being under way and showing a X-rated movie on site TV to a bunch of eighteen, nineteen, twenty year olds. What do you think's going to happen? Go look in the fan rooms after the movie and you—I mean, it's inevitable. So no, I'm not a big fan of that. Not because women can't do it. They absolutely can. But just simply because of the living conditions, and I've—I've lived in some that I thought were pretty—pretty horrible. I'm not a fan, but if they want to go, you know—I mean, women have broken boundaries. Look, we have women who are deep sea divers in the little—My XO was a deep sea diver, Naval Academy Graduate, and she's probably going to be an admiral. So, there's not—It's not that women can't do it but I wouldn't want to live on a submarine; that I can tell you.

TS: Yes.

JE: And so far it hasn't gone so well because—well, you throw the twenty year old ensign in there with the forty-five year old chief of the boat who's been around the block about fifteen or twenty times; she's thinks he's God.

TS: Well, I had one—one woman I interviewed who talked about when they integrated women on ships, that one of the problems was that they initially threw a bunch of enlisted women onto ships and they didn't have any female officers to go along with it.

JE: Yes.

TS: And the men didn't really know who to deal with all these women.

JE: Yes.

TS: Do you think there's something to that? I mean, this would have been in the mid-seventies before you actually joined but—

JE: Yes, that would be difficult to address. Now, I can speak to how women are detailed to ships. And they're detailed by what's known as pink racks. In other words, that's just a detailer term because they have to have a bed for each female on board; there has to be a rack. Not so with men.

TS: Okay.

JE: Because they can—I don't know what the difference, anyway. They're detailed by pink racks, so there's certain officer communities that have—they're going to have requirements to put women on and the enlisted community as well. So, I don't—I don't really—I'm not really sure about that. I've never—my experiences, I've never been on a ship that did not have female officers onboard; never. I—even the [USS] *Vella Gulf*.

TS: Which was a destroyer, right?

JE: The [USS] *Vella Gulf* was a guided missile cruiser.

TS: Guided missile cruiser; that's right.

JE: It had a female ops (operations) officer and female supply officer, and then me; personnel officer. I was the only officer who wasn't commissioned in the—you know, in the department heads.

TS: Right.

JE: Because my shop doesn't require—I usually fall under the navigator of the ship. It's usually his collateral duty unless—Well, I had to get my navigator fired because he just was not passing on the information, and the XO would ask me a question and I'd look at him like, "What in the world are you talking about?"

TS: That was on the [USS] *Vella Gulf*?

JE: That was on the [USS] *Vella Gulf*. The navigator would never—he wouldn't tell me what was going on. He liked to control everything. Well, that didn't last long. I'm sorry. I said "I really don't have anything against you, sir, but you're in my way in the personnel world. You're probably the greatest navigator on the planet and I can't navigate anywhere. So why don't we both stay in our little areas of expertise? You stay over here. If I have anything to sign I will ask you, and I'll stay over here and run the office, and my job is to make you look good." So, he wouldn't even come in my office. He'd stand there and knock. [laughing]

TS: Just right there.

JE: He would knock; "Chief."

"Oh, come on in, sir." But I made him think he was the greatest, you know, guy in the world. But he didn't know about paperwork. He didn't understand that that request for a new ID card needs to be done right now. Because the kid can't get off the ship and on—back on without it. So, we—it managed—it worked out quite well in the end. Well, it did.

TS: Yes?

JE: Well, it did.

TS: Well, that's good. I'm going to ask you some questions now about some things that happened during the time you were in. So, I asked you about the one. Oh, well, actually you talked a little bit about Ronald Reagan, kind of, changing the military.

JE: Yes.

TS: Was there anybody else, like, that—for political or military leadership that you admired during the time you were—well, I mean, up till now?

JE: Well, he—I'm a big Ronald Reagan fan, yes. So living presidents; he's the only one that I—

TS: George—the first Bush?

JE: I liked the Bush's too. I remember when Clinton came to CINCLANTFLT [Commander-in-Chief Atlantic Fleet] when I was working there, and nobody even looked in the direction of the limousine really. It was like, "Oh, there he is." So I think yes, I liked the Bush's alright. I mean, you know, but Ronald Reagan was—he did more for the military—living presidents, okay. Dead presidents, it would be [President] Harry S. Truman.

TS: Well, you had to study up on him.

JE: Well, yes, I did. I've got a big book on him. Yes, Harry S. Truman would be my favorite of all time because he provided me the opportunity to serve my country. He's responsible for that.

TS: For the Women's [Armed Services] Integration Act—

JE: For—right.

TS: —of 1948?

JE: Letting women who came on during World War II; letting them stay on.

TS: Right.

JE: He also had the gonads to end a very nasty war, and it was, you know, quite a decision, but he was my favorite. But I'm a big Ronald Reagan fan.

TS: Okay. What about—So, you were in, also, when the Beirut terrorist bombing [Beirut Barracks Bombing] in 1983. Do you remember anything about that?

JE: No, I really don't. The only thing I remember was at Bethesda when we first go into Operation Desert Storm and [Operation] Desert Shield.

TS: Right, you were at Bethesda then?

JE: I was at Bethesda then and they were outfitting the USNS [United States Naval Ship] *Comfort*, which was a hospital ship there in Portsmouth, Virginia. And so, we stayed opened twenty-four seven in order to do dog tags, Geneva convention cards, page twos, wills, uniforms for all the medical nurses and doctors who, as they were boarding the bus to go to the USNS *Comfort*, can be heard to say, "Wait, I'm on shore duty." [both chuckle] Seriously.

TS: Really?

JE: Yes, so—but that was—that was—that was a huge evolution. Getting that—That was the first mobilization thing I had ever seen.

TS: How did you think it went?

JE: Like, quite well; like a well-oiled machine actually. And they were detailed—we had a lot of hospital corpsmen with—like, they have specialties; psych[iatric] techs, orthopedic techs, and so on. And each specialty has a number that goes along with it. We were sending guys that were psych techs out left and right. Those were the first people to go believe it or not. And then the hospital was staffed with reservists who wouldn't—well, I remember one reserve—one reservists was a pilot for U.S. Air[ways] or something, and was a hospital corpsman in the reserves, and everybody was recalled and they were not happy about it either. You know, "What? I have a private business. I make 1.2 bazillion dollars a year. How am I supposed to do that if I'm on—you know, if I—"

"Oh well, I guess you should have read the fine print. We're mobilized and active duty people are now going to the front lines, so reservists are coming to fill their spots."

TS: Right.

JE: So that's how the hospital was staffed then. There were bus loads that left to go to the USNS *Comfort*.

TS: And so, that's what you say they said; "They're on shore duty and—"

JE: Some of the nurses were heard to say, “I heard it myself.” Because I’m a personnel man, they ask me, “How can they send me to sea? I’m on shore duty.”

TS: How would you respond to that?

JE: “We’re at war.”

TS: [chuckling] Okay.

JE: Hello? “Did you see the news last night?” You know, I’m thinking, “Really?” “We’re at war. You’re going where you’re needed.” So.

TS: How about—well, I have to ask you now then if you remember when Ronald Reagan was shot?

JE: Yes.

TS: Do you remember where you were?

JE: In [Washington] D.C. somewhere; no telling where. But I do remember when he was shot. And I was—I thought, “Really? Again?” you know. I remember thinking that; that I hoped he would—I really thought he was a great man. He might not have been the greatest political leader ever, but as best as I can recall our country was doing pretty well during those years; feeling pretty good about ourselves. But I know it wasn’t a perfect time for sure. But Ronald Reagan—I went to his—I don’t know what you call it; when you change a command or whatever.

TS: Inaugural?

JE: And at Andrews Air Force Base. Oh, I was there, too, when he was inaugurated. I was standing out on Constitution Avenue in parade rest, and it was about thirteen degrees outside. Well, you were volunteered for that kind of thing. Look, you do not want to be a sailor in Washington, D.C. during an inauguration year. You will be—you’ll be part of it. So yes, I did line the streets for two things that—

TS: So you did volunteer or you were volunteered?

JE: I was volunteered for that.

TS: Okay.

JE: I was also volunteered for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from Vietnam. I participated in that ceremony in D.C. as well. So, that was—that was pretty cool. But yes, you don't—inauguration is January, it's freezing cold in D.C. You do not want to be—you don't want to be out there.

TS: Well, let me ask you about when you decided that, you know, your twenty years was enough, or how did it come that you decided that you were going to leave the navy?

JE: Well, it was actually decided for me. I already had thyroid stuff and then I hurt my wrist at—actually we were at general quarters and I was following my fire party, and I had stuff wrong with my wrist, but anyway I messed it up and, you know, long story short I was sent before a physical evaluation board because I couldn't go back to sea. They won't let you go back with a wrist that only works half way. Like, it won't bend further than that. Like, if I was to fall or something I couldn't—

TS: Catch yourself?

JE: —catch myself. So, I was actually permanent disability retired list, but I had over twenty in so it just sort of—I guess it was just the right time, because Captain Wright was the CO there and he called me in his office and he wanted to know what I was going to do when I retired. I said, "I have no idea, captain. I have no idea"

He said, "Do you want to stay here and work?"

And I was—I said, "Well, yes sir. I would love to work for you."

He said, "Go write a position description, rate it out for your job, and bring it back in here to me." And I did and he—I don't know. I don't know why he liked me. And I still know—you know, I still correspond with him and we send Christmas gifts and such, but I don't know. He just, like—I mean, I had no idea what I was going to do. I'm getting out; what am I going to do. I've been in the navy. I don't know what I'm going to do. And so, I worked for the federal government as a GS [General Schedule]-11 for another eight years.

TS: How was that? Like, a same kind of job?

JE: Same desk, same phone, same computer, same password. The only difference was now I'm in appropriate civilian attire as opposed to my uniform. So, I retired on Friday and went back to work on Monday.

TS: How was it different? How was—How was that transition for you even though you were going to the same job essentially?

JE: It was very different.

TS: How?

JE: More respect as a military person for sure—

TS: Yes.

JE: —at a naval base. Now I'm, like—unless they knew your background, which was important to plaster all over your office, because I'm advising sailors about their career. They don't—If they see me in a—

TS: Civilian clothes?

JE: —you know, civilian clothes, they don't—they don't know my background.

TS: Right.

JE: So, it was important to tell them, “Look, I'm a sailor too. I'm just a civilian now. And—But generally, as a whole, if you go into a meeting and I'm with military personnel and I'm in civilian clothes, the military personnel in Norfolk, Virginia are treated better than the civilians. I can't speak for any other place other than Norfolk.

TS: Did that rankle you?

JE: Well, just a little bit. Only because, like I said before, I'm all like all about fair. If you're—if you're there because you've done it and you need to—I don't understand why we have to treat one person different and—I mean, aside from the obvious ranks structure “Hello, Admiral,” and “Get me a broom, Seaman,” you know.

TS: Right.

JE: It did bother me just a tiny bit because, technically, now a GS-11 is an O-4 equivalent, okay. But when I was a chief I was a E-7 but I was treated better than I was as the O-4 equivalent. So, go figure.

TS: [chuckling] Okay. So, how was your adjustment then to civilian life in general since you'd spent all these great years in the navy?

JE: I'd say it took me all of, oh I don't know, a weekend.

TS: Oh really?

JE: Yes.

TS: You transitioned very—

JE: I did.

TS: You transitioned in easily and out easily.

JE: I did. I did.

TS: Would you recommend the service to men and women today?

JE: Absolutely. If you're not sure what you want to do that's a great place to find out. You can also get a great education. You can—I mean, there's just all kinds of things—opportunities now. One of the women that spoke at the memorial this weekend flies fighter jets. I mean, you can do anything you want to do and the woman general from the United States Marine Corps. A woman general? She was amazing. So you know, the skies the limit. That's what I used to tell them; skies the limit. You can do whatever it is you want to do in the United States Navy.

TS: Do you think your life has been different because of the time you spent in the military?

JE: Well, different how?

TS: In any way?

JE: Like—

TS: If you had not gone in the military?

JE: What would I have ended up doing?

TS: Yes.

JE: Yes. Probably a job I wasn't really liking unless it was with the Girl Scouts which required a college degree. I didn't want to just work for the council; I wanted the entire council.

TS: You wanted to be in charge of it?

JE: Exactly. So, I don't know that—you know, just little spurts in my life, like jobs that I had that I didn't like; retail, can't do it; proofreading checks for some check company, just a snore. I think the navy was just a great fit for me. For me it was definitely a great fit. And it might not be a fit for twenty years but it's a great thing for four years. You get that Montgomery—It's not Montgomery GI Bill anymore it's—whatever they're using to go to school. My nephew and his wife who just out of the navy—both of them—She was an air traffic controller. They're—she's at UNCG [University of North Carolina at Greensboro] right now and he's at Greensboro College, and they're both getting checks that they paid—you know, they've put aside their money—their education money. So.

TS: If you had a civilian sitting here that didn't know much about the military, what would you talk about as, like, one of the, maybe, misconceptions that people who haven't experienced the military have about either the military itself or about the people in the military?

JE: That—I would say that a lot of times folks think, and it may be true to some degree, that the military is a last resort before you're homeless or on the streets and are begging at the corner, you know. Not all military people are dumb, okay. There are a whole bunch of young sailors that I've seen that have college degrees. They come in after college because they just, you know, can't figure it out or whatever, like me. Like why it took me so long. That's it really.

TS: Did you ever use—I know we talked about this off tape, but for the GI Bill, did you ever use the GI Bill or any veteran's benefits?

JE: No, just the home loan.

TS: No.

JE: And I may use that Montgomery GI Bill; you never know.

TS: What about the VA [Veterans Affairs]? Have you had to use the VA for your wrist?

JE: No, it's too far away. I don't go to the VA—

TS: It's too far away?

JE: —for treatment. I—yes, I go—I try to go here. So, the medical care is—it's not the best, it's not the worst. You know, they will take care of me if I'm unable to afford any co-pay whatsoever. I can go to the VA hospital or the VA clinic in Winston-Salem and be seen, you know, priority one. I'm a disabled veteran, retired, so I could go the VA should I want to. And if one day I end up in a nursing home or something then that's where I'm headed. Dump me off there in Gulfport, Mississippi. The navy has it's very own little nursing home down there.

TS: Do they?

JE: Yes; Gulfport, Mississippi. It's called the Navy Home [Armed Forces Retirement Home].

TS: How about that, okay.

JE: Yes.

TS: What does patriotism mean to you?

JE: Oh brother. Okay. Oh I'm just checking to see if I had enough time. Patriotism? Well, for me, I'm just going to give you just a little short version. I could go and—I can expound on that subject.

TS: Take as much time as you need.

JE: But for me it's like being in uniform and—and being so proud to know that I—I love my country enough to die for it with a smile on my face, and that's not to say that somebody wouldn't—is not patriotic; because they are. There's all levels of patriotism. You don't have to—you can—you know, be a good citizen is being a good patriot, you know, or snapping—removing the cover when our national anthem is played; you know, stuff like that. But for me it was just, “Wow,” and I would have to refer back to Poland, and thinking how awesome it was to be representing my country and these people are just—love us. And I would just die. I think—I would think to myself, “I can die this very

moment and be fulfilled.” So, that’s kind of what it means to me at this late in the day [laughing]. It’s coffee time.

TS: Well, I don’t have any more formal questions but is there anything that you—that we haven’t talked about that you might want to talk about at all?

JE: Let me think. Any—you’ve really uncovered for me stories that I haven’t remembered in a long time, I would have to say, because I haven’t talked about it for a long time, you know. No, but I reserve the right to get back to you if I remember one. Is that alright?

TS: Sure, that sounds good.

JE: Because I would like to give you a picture of my other ship. I think it’s important that you have a—you’d see what the [USS] *Vella Gulf* looks like.

TS: Okay. Alright.

JE: Because you don’t know.

TS: Well, I’ll go ahead and shut the tape off then. But thank you so much, Jackie.

JE: You’re welcome, it was my pleasure.

[End of Interview]