RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RUSSELL N. COLLINS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Russell N. Collins on March 24, 2014, in Palmyra, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and …

Molly Graham: … Molly Graham.

Daniel Crowley: … and Daniel Crowley.

SI: Thank you very much for having us here today.

Russell Collins: You're quite welcome.

SI: To begin, can you tell us where and when you were born?

RC: I was born in Camden, New Jersey, 1925, born and raised in Camden, went to Woodrow Wilson High School, played in a band. When I came out, I married the head cheerleader at Woodrow Wilson. [laughter] We had two children, Douglas and Debra. She died in '04.

SI: I am sorry.

RC: My daughter, she lives in Mt. Laurel. She has three children. My son, he lives in Galloway. He has two children. That's about it.

SI: Can we ask you a few questions about growing up in Camden?

RC: Sure.

SI: For the record, what were your parents' names?

RC: Russell and Margaret Collins

SI: Were they originally from the area as well, roughly?

RC: Yes. My father was born in Mt. Holly and my mother was born in Philadelphia, yes, and she was born and raised in Riverton here. My father, he was born in, I guess, Mt. Holly, yes, around there, near Bordentown.

SI: Do you know anything about your father's family background, where the family came from before Mt. Holly?

RC: Not too much, no. His father, I think, married a squaw, a Lenape, yes. He worked, I understand, he worked in the circus. He traveled the circus around. So, I don't know what he did or if he was a clown or what--I do not know that. We didn't talk much about him, for some reason. I don't know. Well, when you're growing up, you don't ask questions. You don't say, "Hey, Mom, where were you born?" No, you didn't ask, but, now, you're sorry you didn't. So, that was their, more or less, history there. Matter of fact, they both worked in a watch case in

Riverside. Yes, the building is still there. He was an inspector, I guess, on the assembly line. She worked probably on the assembly line, too.

SI: This is your father's mother and father.

RC: No, this was my mother and father. Well, they got married in Riverton. They had two children, myself and my sister.

SI: Was your sister younger or older?

RC: She's older than I am. She's six years older than I am, yes.

SI: What about your mother's family? Do you know anything about how they came to Philadelphia?

RC: Grandmom, she came from Ireland, yes; Grandpop, no idea, no idea. I don't know if he was born in Philly. I know they lived in Philly, since my mother was born in Philly. I don't know how long they lived there. It was out in West Philly, I understand. Matter of fact, both of them was buried out there. Then, they moved over here, I think to Elmer, New Jersey. Then, from there, I guess they moved up to Riverton and spent the rest of their lives up in Riverton then. It was an ice plant up there and he was a fireman for the ice plant, tended the boilers and all, yes. I, more or less, grew up there, too. Like I say, I was born and raised in East Camden and I could remember getting on the trolley car, 37th and Westfield, and getting off at Riverton station. I was only a kid, yes, [laughter] but it was a major treat for me. Every holiday, we always--every Fourth of July--all the families went up to home to Riverton. We went down the river, the yacht club--it's the oldest yacht club on the river, Riverton, working yacht club--spend all day at the river and all and it was a big day, Fourth of July. Parade, I was in the parade, three-wheeler, [laughter] all red, white and blue paper on it and big deal, but that was a great time. Even after we got married, why, we still did the same thing, yes.

SI: Why did your family, your mother and father, move to Camden? Was it because of your father's job or for some other reason?

RC: I believe they moved to Camden because of my father's job. They bought their house new. It was twenty-two hundred dollars, [laughter] yes, three-bedroom bungalow, with a garage, a corner lot, a big lot. He worked on the Ben Franklin Bridge or Walt Whitman--no, Ben Franklin, yes. He worked on there for four years. Yes, he helped build it and I think that opened 1925, year I was born, yes. [Editor's Note: The Benjamin Franklin Bridge opened on July 1, 1926. The Walt Whitman Bridge opened in 1957.]

SI: You said he was a crane operator.

RC: On that crane, he was, yes. Then, he continued to be what they call a licensed steam man, yes. Then, he worked, he put all the poles up, I think from Philadelphia to Washington, for the electric lines, for the electric trains, setting those big poles up, yes, there and he worked out of Philadelphia out towards Pittsburgh. So, he worked here, Washington and all, yes.

SI: Was he away often when you were growing up?

RC: Yes, he was away quite a bit, which means Mom had to raise us or [say], "I want you in by nine o'clock," or eight o'clock. You got playing and you forgot [the] time. You'd come in and [she would say], "Where you been?" [laughter] but, yes, it was a good life then. It was a good life.

SI: Did you say you lived at 37th and Westfield or was that where the trolley station was?

RC: We lived at 37th and Jersey Ave. Yes, that's called East Camden.

SI: Okay. What was that neighborhood like when you were growing up there?

RC: Well, I hate to say it, but that was the best neighborhood in Camden.

SI: Okay.

RC: I don't want to brag, [laughter] but, no, I was talking to a cop in a lodge, a couple of years ago, and he said, "Where'd you live?" "I was born and raised in East Camden." He says, "Oh, God." He says, "That was heaven out there." He was a cop, Camden cop. He says, "Went out there," and he says, "nothing ever happened. It was quiet." Well, it's not like--Camden was divided. You had North Camden, East Camden, Parkside, Little Italy. Then, you had Polacktown. It was in sections, yes, which was no disgrace, where you lived, "Where you from?" "Italian." "Oh, down along the river? Okay." Well, that was it. Everybody went to the same school, your friends and all, where they lived, all lived in East Camden or Parkside or somewhere, yes. It was a good time.

SI: When you were in Woodrow Wilson, the students would be from all over.

RC: Yes. This was back in the early '40s, late '30s, yes.

SI: When you were growing up, was that neighborhood a melting pot or was it mostly Irish, German or another ethnicity?

RC: Well, you've got me. No, it was, I guess, a mix. I would say yes. I mean, being a kid, you don't know what they are. You didn't ask. Yes, you didn't ask.

MG: How do you think Camden has changed from that time to today? How is it different?

RC: You want to rephrase that? [laughter] Oh, it was awful. I mean, we used to--I guess everybody did--the courthouse and all, we would go down there, all the high schools would go down the night before, and we would have a pep rally in front of the courthouse. Then, we would have what they call a snake dance. Everybody get a hold of the other guy's hips or the girl's hips and, on the corner there, there was a [J. C.] Penny's. There was a big cigar store. Well, Penny's was, I think, three floors high. That was a big store, three floors, yes. Then,

alongside of that was a big five-and-ten. Well, we used go in the five-and-ten and weave in and out the five-and-ten, then, come out on Broadway again and go back in again, just raising the devil, but nothing ever happened. No, you never heard of stabbings or shootings, no, no. You didn't have it. No, it was quiet.

SI: Among your neighbors--again, you might not know--did you get the sense that a lot of their fathers worked for either Campbell's or RCA? Were they the two big employers?

RC: Yes, yes, Campbell's Soup, Shipyard [New York Shipbuilding Corporation], the ferry. We had a couple of guys, their father worked on the old ferry, down there, yes. Then, right there, there was a big--I don't know if you ever heard of, I think it was H. B. Van Sciver's. If you bought H. B. Van Sciver's furniture, you bought top. Everything was made there, in Camden, everything, mattresses, china closets and all and they mostly had, I guess, foreign cabinetmakers. It was beautiful. I mean, like I said, when you bought something there, you bought the top. It was good, and then, you had RCA there. A lot of guys, when they graduated, girls and all, went to RCA. Then, we had Campbell's Soup and we had--I guess you never heard of Esterbrook Pen, made all pens, yes. Camden was very industrial. We had the big shipyard and our big movie was the Stanley Theater. Every Sunday night, they had a Big Band from [elsewhere], they'd come over there, and then, from there, they would go over to what they called Earle Theatre in Philadelphia. It was always a good live band, name band, yes. I used to take my girlfriend then, yes, and you would walk out of the theater and you would walk down Broadway, which is about ten or fifteen squares, to Kaighn Avenue, which was another lively area of Camden, and then, cross the street and walk back again. In that time of night, eleven-thirty, quarter to twelve, there was people out on the [street]. You almost had to walk double or single to get [by], people would be walking double, yes. You could leave your house unlocked and just go away for a couple days, which we had already done, yes. I remember my mother saying, "Russell, did you lock the door?" "No, I thought you did." "No, I didn't." Well, we come home and the house was still there, door's still there. [laughter]

SI: Yes, not today.

RC: Yes, no, you can't do that today, but, yes, it was a good neighborhood growing up. Camden today, it's a shame. Well, I worked at the shipyard, I guess all, part of, 1942, most of '42. Then, I went in the service in May of '43, yes.

SI: When you were growing up in the 1930s, obviously, the Depression had set in. Did that have an impact on your community?

RC: Yes, had an impact on everybody, yes. That's what was formed then--I don't know if you remember that--was called the WPA. My father worked on that, where Cooper River--you ever hear of Cooper River? [Editor's Note: The Works Progress Administration, or, after 1939, the Works Project Administration, was an agency that was part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and employed millions on public works projects like buildings and roads, as well as in specialized areas, such as the arts, from 1935 to 1943.]

SI: Sure, yes.

RC: All right. That was right next to Camden Airport and that was nothing but a swamp. It was just awful. Well, I guess the WPA, or whoever got it, they brought barges in and my father worked on a barge, what they call a clamshell. A derrick would go over with the clamshell open, pick up a load of dirt, pick it up and put it around and put it on the barge. Then, they'd tow the barge away and dump it somewhere. Yes, that's where [he worked]--that was the WPA. They made a nice job of that, really nice, because, today, I mean, all the rowers are over there now, yes. They have big races there. Matter of fact, I got my first pay there. My father was what they call a fireman. He was supposed to [perform] what they called boiler watch, because everything is steam, and you had to light the fire and heat the water, and then, you could work your crane. It was a Sunday and his fireman didn't come in, so, he took me. So, he sent a letter in to the, I guess his boss, saying, "My son helped me out." So, I got my first paycheck, two dollars and fifty cents. [laughter] Yes, so, he worked there. Oh, that was quite an operation there, yes. Then, it went around on what they called Kaighn Avenue. He drove all the pile needed in there and they put a dam in there now, which Cooper River can only come up so high to the dam. If you have a flood tide, because, sometimes, the Cooper River, it's a lake, overflows into Collingswood, it was about four houses down at the end, nice homes, but about a foot above high tide. Well, when this happens, it doesn't happen too often, but they get flooded out and you can't open the gate, because the river's the same as you are. So, you can't open the gates and let it drain out. Yes, that's where he worked, there, for quite a while. The other one, at that time--well, I'll say, I guess, '29, '30, '31, wasn't too much going on around there, yes.

SI: Was Camden the kind of place where you would see bread lines or people selling apples on the street?

RC: I can't remember that, but Campbell's Soups, all the farms around here were all tomatoes. They would go down 130, which was Route 25 then, horse and buggy, old trucks with tomatoes stacked up, stacked up this way. I understand they used to go along Front Street in Camden and line up there, we'll say three and four o' clock in the morning, because they would keep going up into Campbell's Soup and the guy would examine the tomatoes and all. If they looked good and all, he'd say, "All right, you go ahead and dump." Then, sometimes, the guy just said, "No good; reject." I understand some of the kids down there along the river used to go up and steal all the tomatoes or pull the one basket out, and then, the whole thing would fall, [laughter] but that's hearsay, yes. That's where that used to all line up. Well, matter of fact, this was all--this was Hubbs Farm right here, around here. It was all peach trees, all in this whole district, yes, but, further out, it was all tomatoes.

SI: Would you ever find anybody coming to your home to ask for food or ask for work in exchange for food, anything like that?

RC: Yes, I remember, once, because, next to me, next to our house, was a dirt road and the other side of that was called Pennsauken. Then, there was, I think that was about, I guess, sixty or seventy acres, nothing but fields and woods, where all of us kids used to play over in there then, yes. Well, there was a big railroad over there, still there yet, and, yes, I could remember a man coming over and I was home. He knocked on the door and asked my mother for a handout and she gave it to him, yes. I remember him saying, "Do you need anything done?" and she says,

"No, that's it." She just packed him a sandwich. I don't know what she [packed him], packed it up, but, yes, he took and left, but that's the only one I remember. Well, they're hobos and they ride the freights and he lucked out there, yes.

SI: Did your mother ever work outside of the home again after the family was started?

RC: The lady in the back of us, Mrs. Schissler, she used to make all the big drapes for the Philadelphia movies, the big curtains. Then, they would go up and the screen's there, yes. Well, she used to make all those curtains in the back of us. She had a big house and her kitchen, I guess, was about as long as this house and she had a huge table in there. My mother used to go up and give her a hand. Three and four o'clock in the morning, I can hear Mrs. (Schissler?) coming down and saying, "Margaret, will you ride over to Philadelphia with me? I've got to deliver these to Al," his name was Al, on I don't know what street it was over there. Then, Mom would ride shotgun, but it was a deadline. So, she'd roll the curtains up and put them in the car and drive them over to Al's, yes. She did that, I guess, a couple years there, yes, I don't know, until the movie industry ran out or whatever.

SI: You mentioned this theater that you would go to frequently in Camden.

RC: Yes.

SI: Is that where you developed your love of Big Band music?

RC: Stanley? yes, and then, there was another one down further on Broadway. It was called the Towers. Yes, they also tried to compete, but you couldn't come up to Stanley. That was the tops, yes. There was one right across the street--well, next block--it was called Savar, Savar Theatre and the Stanley, yes, but, in Camden, no, we had, oh, God, I guess a dozen movies or more. Yes, well, back in the '30s, that was a big thing. That was your entertainment, yes.

MG: Do you remember any of the titles of the movies you saw?

RC: Oh, God, no, but used to be, I think out our way, in Pennsauken, was another nice [one], was called the Walt Whitman Theater. You walked in, it was all marble floors and marble steps up to the balcony and they had a crying room in the balcony. Anybody could take their kids there and they would cry and they'd go up. The usher would come down and say, "Would you?" That's when you had an usher with a flashlight. You used to go down the aisle, you'd follow him down, he'd put you in the seat. This balcony, you would go in and shut the door and they had a big glass and they had a speaker in there. Then, the mother could sit there and see the movie and the kid crying, you couldn't hear the kid then, and everybody was happy. [laughter]

DC: Do you remember your favorite Big Band that you saw in Camden?

RC: Oh, it was all big names down there, Earle Theater, yes. I can remember, well, when we pulled into [California]--I'm getting ahead of the game--we used to go to the big theater in California. It was a big dance place. They had big dance bands and it was right in Hollywood.

SI: When you were in the service?

RC: Yes.

SI: It was not the Grauman's Chinese Theater, was it?

RC: No, no. It was …

SI: The Hollywood Canteen?

RC: No, it was a huge place right on Hollywood Boulevard. We got off the bus or off the trolley and go right on in, pay and go in, yes. I'll think of it later on. That was all, ninety percent of it, was all jitterbug, yes, not too much slow stuff then. It was mostly all jitterbug.

SI: Either in Camden or Philadelphia, or later on, did you ever see Glenn Miller or Benny Goodman, any of them?

RC: Yes, yes. I think they used to be--I think it was seventy-[five]. Sunday night, it was, I think, seventy-five cents. Well, that was a lot, seventy-five cents, yes, [laughter] after I'd go to the Walt Whitman, pay a dime, but that was that. The place would be packed, yes. It would be packed. Of course, like you said, that was our only big entertainment, yes. Other than that, you had the radio.

MG: You played music. What instrument? Did you play in a band?

RC: I played the drums, yes.

MG: Did you ever get a chance to perform?

RC: No, no, I just played in a band. Well, I played in the service, in boot camp, yes. I played the drums in the drum-and-bugle corps, Great Lakes [Naval Station Great Lakes], yes. That was a good thing. You didn't have to stand any inspections. [laughter] If you had an inspection, you'd say, "Sir, I've got a music lesson." "Go ahead," Chief would say, "go ahead over." [laughter] He knew, yes, but, after that, no, I gave up.

SI: Tell us a little bit about your high school, Woodrow Wilson. What were your favorite subjects? What were you most interested in?

RC: I guess machine shop, yes, machine shop. You had cars, print shop, machine shop, drafting, yes. No, I sort of stuck with the machine shop, because, after I came out of the service, I went for a company in south of Camden. It's called S. M. Langston Company. We made corrugated machinery that made boxes and I worked, I guess I retired [after] forty years, yes.

SI: You went to school for a few years. I would guess you left school in 1942. Is that when you went to the shipyard?

RC: Yes, I went, quit there. Then, I went to Camden Vocational, took up welding. Then, from there, I went to the shipyard, yes.

SI: What did you see for yourself in the future while you were in school? We had just come out of the Depression, there was a war on. Did you think about a career?

RC: Well, at that time, there was a lot of jobs open then, yes, a lot of jobs. I mean, well, the pay wasn't great, either. I started at Langston's, after the war, I think ninety-eight cents an hour, because I had some experience, yes. Now, what do they want now? They want something like fifteen dollars an hour now. That's what they're talking about?

DC: Minimum wage is eight dollars, twenty-five cents in New Jersey.

RC: Holy God, people start at McDonald's [at] that?

DC: Yes.

RC: I mean, well, good luck if they can get it, but they don't realize the value of a dollar now, no.

SI: You were in school when the war started.

RC: Yes, Sunday morning, came running down the street, hollering, "Pearl Harbor was hit, Pearl Harbor." "Where is Pearl Harbor? Never heard of Pearl Harbor--where is it?" yes, never knew it, no. [Editor's Note: Japanese forces attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, thrusting the United States into the Second World War.]

SI: Before you heard about the attack, had you been following the news of what was happening overseas?

RC: Not really, no, because, well, they were drafting and they were starting the draft, yes. Some of our older guys we hung out with up in the neighborhood, they knew they were going to be drafted, so, they'd enlisted or whatever, yes, Coast Guard or Navy, but, no, to tell you the truth, I never thought much of it, no. Then, before I started getting eighteen, I started thinking about it, "If I don't sign up or do something, I'm going to be in the Army and I don't want the Army." So, I think about maybe a week or so more, I went over to 13th and Market, signed up for the Navy, yes, and came back, told the guy, my boss in the shipyard, "I'll be leaving next week, going to join the Navy." He said, "Oh, okay." So, that's where it started.

MG: You were seventeen when you enlisted. Did your parents have to sign for you?

RC: Yes, yes.

MG: How did they feel about that?

RC: Well, they more or less had to. I said, "I didn't want the Army. I went to the Navy and you have to sign for it." So, you're going to go in either way. You're going in the service.

MG: What appealed to you about the Navy?

RC: Ships, yes, because I worked on [them]. When I went in the shipyard, I worked them. There was two big ships in there, called the [USS] *Alaska* [(CB-1)] and the [USS] *Guam* [(CB-2)]. They were going to be heavy cruisers and I worked there for a couple of months and I went, got transferred, to what they called the South Yard in the New York Shipyard. There, they built all the invasion barges. You went down there and you worked with the guys building the barges and I think they launched two a day down there, yes. They built a lot of them down there and they also built the *Princeton*-type carrier, which was a small carrier, not like the *Nimitz* or the *Roosevelt* or anything. [Editor's Note: The *Independence*-class aircraft carriers, including the USS *Princeton* (CVL-23), were converted light cruisers that were intended to serve the Navy's needs while the larger *Essex*-class aircraft carriers were rushed to completion. The USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CV-42) is a *Midway*-class carrier and the USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68)is a supercarrier.] They were the smaller ones, yes, and they built a lot of them down there, in what they called the open ways, yes. Then, from there, like I said, I quit there and joined the Navy, went to Great Lakes.

SI: We have a few questions about your time at the shipyard.

RC: Sure.

SI: Before that, had you worked at all, part-time, in the summers, or was this your first real job?

RC: No, my friend and I, we used to work for the school board, yes, go around, help the janitors clean the rooms, sweep them up, dust them and all that, for the summer. Yes, we did that, I think, for two years straight. My friend of mine, his father was a barber. Of course, everybody's got to get a haircut. So, you'd go in there, and then, Old Gil, he used to say, "My son's looking for jobs." He'd talk to them. "Tell him to come down and see me." So, then, his son, John, used to say--my name was called Rip, Ripper--he'd say, "Hey, Ripper." "What?" "Come on, let's go down." So, we went down, we got an interview and they hired us. Matter of fact, that's when I got my first Social Security number, yes. So, we worked. I think I got paid every, I don't know, every three weeks, something, they'd send a check home, yes. That's what we used to do. It was something to do.

SI: When you left school, you then had to go to welding school before you went to the shipyard.

RC: Yes.

SI: How long was the welding school?

RC: I think it was four months, three months, something like that, yes. You had to pass a test, for them even to let you out of school, yes, and then, you had to go to the shipyard and take a test down there. If you passed that test, then, you started down at the shipyard. Everybody started as

what they called a tacker and he worked with a shipyard worker that was putting up bulkheads, steel overhead plates and all that. You'd get them all in place, and then, you would tack them, what they called tack, maybe about an inch long, just to hold them in place. After that, then, the welder would come in and he would weld all the seams up then, yes. Then, after the tackings, why, you would go--you're still going to school in the shipyard--to pass your what they called an ABS, American Bureau of Ships, test. You'd pass that. Then, you become a welder, yes. That's what I was.

SI: Where was the school that you went to?

RC: Camden Vocational.

SI: Okay.

RC: In Camden, yes.

SI: When you were going through the class, was it a mix of men and women?

RC: No, no women.

SI: No women.

RC: No, just [men], yes. It was from twelve to eight at night, yes. I used to ride my bicycle over there, yes.

SI: Could you see changes around Camden as a result of the war, in those first few months or so?

RC: No, it was still good, still good. During the war, we were paying more, the shipyard, than the South was, [as it] was told to me. A lot of your blacks came up and were tank cleaners, cleaners and like that, and they were making pretty good money. Then, when the war ended, they had houses here then, and then, the shipyard closed. Now, everybody's out of a job. You can't go back South, because there's nothing back there to go back to, nothing there. To me, that's when you were starting to see Camden going, yes, because the people didn't have money to fix their houses up. They just let them go and let them go and it was a shame, because, like I say, I mean, back in the '30s and all, Camden was good, a good town, good city. It's a shame, yes. Now, in today's paper, a cop just found another guy--they must be cutting this dope down or something, putting that into it--and they just found another guy unconscious. Who is it? It's not the Camden people buying it--they can't afford it. So, it's you and you. You're driving to Camden.

MG: Not me. [laughter]

RC: No, but that's the individual.

SI: People from outside Camden.

RC: Yes, go to Camden, that's all it is, ninety percent, North Camden, yes, get that and go out. You drive in, get it and go out. If it wasn't for the outsiders, Camden would die, yes. It would die. I still work on the Battleship. I still work two days a week on it, yes. Everybody says, "It shouldn't be here. It should be in North Jersey." No, no, it shouldn't be here. We're in the wrong place--we should be at the foot of Cooper Street, not behind a big pile of dirt, the Tweeter Center. I'll have people come and visit, "Where's the ship?" I said, "Behind that big lump of dirt. Go there and there's the ship," but the reason we got that, I think, is, the guy that owned the South Jersey Port, he was on our board. He probably said to them, "It's all dredged down here, forty foot, dredged down. I can't use it now. How about giving me thirty or forty thousand? You can have it." Beautiful, we don't have to dredge nothing to go, so, we take it. Well, at that time, you say, "Boy, something for nothing--grab it." Well, [it] didn't work out. The aquarium, sometimes, when I go past there on a Tuesday or Wednesday going home, you can't get another car in the lot, jammed, jammed. So, they're saying people are not coming into Camden. They're coming into Camden, yes. They're coming in. [Editor's Note: The USS *New Jersey* (BB-62) was decommissioned in February 1991. In January 1999, she was towed by tug to Philadelphia to be restored at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. In October 2000, the USS *New Jersey* was delivered to the Camden Waterfront and soon opened as the museum ship Battleship *New Jersey* Museum and Memorial.]

SI: Yes, the baseball field and all that.

RC: Yes. They come. They're having good crowds down at the ball field, yes. That's where we should be, right at the end of that ball field. You know why we can't be there? the tram. They were going to build a train; they run out of money. You look over at Penn's Landing and there's two big concrete pillars up. Over in Camden, about maybe a block off of the dock, there's a big coffer dam there. They worked there, I guess for over a year, putting the foundation in. That stops us from pulling in there. So, we just have to wait it out where we are, yes.

MG: What are you doing up there two days a week?

RC: I work in the tool room, yes. I give out the gloves, paint, whatever, yes. Well, after I'm finished, well, then, I go up and help them. [laughter]

SI: I thought maybe you were a docent, but you are actually doing the painting and working.

RC: Yes, I'm volunteering. I'm not a docent, no. I don't think I could be a docent. I would probably hold the line up, yes, talk too much. You can't do that, you've got to [keep moving]. Once you hold it up, then, the whole crowd backs up, and they're saying, "Why can't we go?" "Well, what do you think it is? Collins up there, holding everything up." [laughter] So, no, I do a lot of talking. I mean, for the birthday, I gave a speech, another time, I gave another speech, yes, and I'm there for all facilities, stuff like that, yes. They're going to have this and that and Jack [Willard] will come over and say, "Russ?" "What?" "We're having so-and-so tomorrow--think you can make it?" I said, "Yes, but no talking." He said, "Okay," but, then, he'll say, "We have an original crew member here with us, over there," he says, "standing on the side, Mr. Collins." I just salute, but there's a lot of [events]. We come back to the ship, I think, every three years,

reunion. There's not too many World War II guys left. There's a lot out there yet that never joined, never joined the ship. They're out in Kansas, Washington--they're a distance, yes. It's a shame, because, I mean, the guys that--the only time I go is when it's in Camden. If you go to one in Long Beach, you've got to fly out, you've got to rent a room, and then, for three days, you've got to go on tours with them and these tours aren't free. You're looking maybe around two grand. So, I just hang home. When it's here, yes, I go, I do my part, helping out and all.

SI: I want to go back to your time in the shipyard. You started out as a tack welder.

RC: Tacker, yes, called a tacker.

SI: Okay. How long was it until you graduated to the next level? How long were you working as a tacker?

RC: Only a couple months, yes. Then, I went and took the test. I passed it. You got a black piece of steel plate, and then, you had the galvanized plate and it's about a half-inch or so thick. Then, they're cut on a taper and they're putting them together, then, they have what they call a backing plate underneath. Then, you tack that. These plates were about maybe this long here. Then, you do one flat and you do one vertical, and then, you do one overhead. Then, they take those plates and they cut them. They cut two strips out and they put them in a bending machine. This machine comes down and bends it. If it bends up good here, no cracks and all, you passed. If it comes in and it cracks and breaks, you fail, take another test. It's what they call an ABS, American Bureau of Ships, yes. When I finally got this job in Langston's, why, I was the only certified welder they ever had, because they did a lot of steam work and all. I had to go up to another welding shop up the street and take the test up there. I passed. So, yes, I was a welder, I guess, for maybe twenty years. Then, I went into machine repairman.

SI: When you were at New York Ship, what was a typical shift like, when you were a welder?

RC: It was cold. I was on twelve-to-eight shift. Being a young guy, a young kid, back in the '40s, it was cold, especially down along the river. Yes, it was cold. You'd go in there and have long underwear on, sweaters, then, you'd put what they called leathers on. It's a leather suit you get in, buckles, then, you put the jacket on and everything is leather, heavy. Then, the boss says, "Collins, go down [to] the interbottoms," and he says, "there's about (five-one-five-ones?) back in there," he says, "that needs to be welded up in there." Okay, so, you go down. You get your lead, what they call a lead, welding lead. You have to go off the ship, what they call off the deck here, onto a big platform, what they call "jazz boxes," which is like big boxes, and you take your welding and your plug-in and you set your heat. Then, you go on down. You've got maybe a hundred foot of welding rod, the line, to carry. It's heavy. So, you struggle. Now, when you get down there, you're going through a thirteen-inch hole, going through a thirteen-inch hole with all this junk on, dragging your welding line. Then, you're dragging your can with welding rods. You're dragging what they call a blower. You have to have a blower, because, as soon as you're welding, the smoke is there. So, you have to have this blower in here with you to suck the smoke out, and then, you're carrying an extension light. So, you get all set to strike an arc, "Bang." The hot line comes off of that, hits the lamp post, hits the bulb, blows the bulb down. Well, everything's here, darkness--you can't see your hand in front of you. So, you crawl out,

take the lead with you. You try to find an electrician to get a new bulb; get it, put it back in. You go back in there, crawl back in; okay, put the rod in here and strike an arc--no arc, no arc. What happened? Some other welder come up, pulled yours out and put his in. This goes on quite a while, I mean, maybe months or something like that--well, not months but weeks--until you learn the ropes, yes. It was brutal, it was brutal, yes, but you got it done. You got the job done. I was never so glad to get off of that ship and get down [to] South Yard, where it was day work, anyhow, down there. It was day work. Like I say, I was going with my wife then, or my girlfriend, yes, I had to leave her house maybe around ten-thirty or something like that, go home and change and get a bus and go back to the shipyard. I don't know if it was fun or not, but we did it. [laughter] We made out. We made out good. During the war, the end of the war, why, we were sitting in this harbor and a ship came in, and they announced it when a ship came in. Then, they said, "The USS *Guam*." I said, "I'll be darned. I welded on that, baby," yes, back in the '40s. So, the *Alaska*, I think they converted it to another type of ship. [Editor's Note: In the late 1950s, the US Navy considered converting both ships into guided missile cruisers, but this plan proved cost-prohibitive and was abandoned.]

SI: You mentioned the place where they were building the *Princeton* carriers. Did you actually work on the *Princeton* carriers?

RC: No, no, that was the South Yard, but we had a creek run through there, pretty good-sized creek, and they were built on, we'll say on the north side of it, yes. They had, I guess, about four ways they had there, what they call open ways. They were building them. Every time they launched one of them, well, then, everybody would stop and watch the christening going on and you'd go down. No, back where I worked, the landing barges and all, why, a lot of them were a lot of fast work, because these guys, they worked on what they called primo, yes. You get this job done in a certain time, you get so much money. These guys really put out the barges. I know they'd launch two a day there. Then, we had a small tugboat, would come and pick them up and take them down to another area, where they'd get something else, repainted or something like that. We never did any painting. We just built it here and went overboard, and then, it went somewhere else to get painted, but they were a good barge. I guess they held maybe two tanks.

MG: Carrying all this equipment around, is that how you got your nickname Rip?

RC: No, no, I got that from baseball, used to be a famous first baseman, Rip Collins, yes. So, it carried on, Rip, yes. [laughter] Even [now], all the retirees meet at a diner down here and it's the third Thursday of every month and, soon as I get out of my car, a guy, a friend of mine, he says, "Hey, Ripper." "Hi, Smitty." Yes, so, the name still stuck.

SI: When you were at the shipyard that year, did you see them bringing in more women, as younger men were going off to the service?

RC: Yes, yes. Some of them would become what they called tank cleaners, too. A lot of them did cleaning, yes, because there's a lot of dirt in the shipyard. I mean, guys cut up a piece of metal, so much like that, they don't pick it up. They just let it lay in a compartment, we'll say, where they're working in a compartment, yes, and especially when you're welding, why, all the slag comes off. I mean, you already have slag on top and they chip that off and that falls on the

deck. Yes, you do need them. You do need cleaners, a lot of them. I never saw too many women welders, to tell you the truth, no. Of course, another thing, like I said, well, we didn't--I can't remember any at South Yard. I can't remember any, no; even in North Yard, no, tank cleaners, yes. My father, he worked there, too. He was in charge of all the steam cranes and locomotives, yes. He was a leader. Matter of fact, he worked, I guess, maybe a year or so after the war was over, then, laid off.

SI: Was there anything dangerous about this work? Would there be accidents or anything like that?

RC: Well, you always had a chance of falling or something like that, but I never heard of anybody falling overboard or anything, no. I mean, a shipyard's a big place, yes, big place, but, no, I never heard of too many accidents or never heard ambulances or anything.

SI: Do you have any questions about the shipyard?

DC: I hear of accidents with underwater welders losing fingers. Did you ever hear of any of the guys or the other welders having any accidents like that?

RC: No.

SI: Did they have underwater welders there?

RC: No, because everything was out of water.

SI: Okay, yes, dry dock.

RC: Yes. Everything was done [out of water]. After they would leave there, they would go out and they would go in what they call wet ways. They had a dock undercover and they would float a ship up into there. Then, they would continue, finishing working that. You can only do so much here before it's moist. Then, they launch it, go around, put it up in here, and then, they would finish decking and everything else, the superstructure and all that, yes. Then, outside of that, right next to that, they had what they called open ways, yes. If the ship was too high, they'd get under the ways and they would wait and go outside, put it in a wet basin out here, and then, the crane would come along, then, add up, add on, yes.

MG: Shaun asked about women entering the workforce. I was curious what your older sister was doing during the war years.

RC: My sister? No, during the war, she worked in Philly, yes.

MG: What was she doing there?

RC: Secretary, yes, my sister was.

MG: You talked about going with your wife. I was curious how you wooed the head cheerleader.

RC: I don't know. [laughter] No, I don't know. I know there was two other guys after her. I guess I was the lucky one, yes. Well, I knew the combination of her locker, too, and her mother used to make the best potato salad sandwiches. Oh, God, they were good and I'd go around, hit that and take half the [sandwich]--oh, it was [nice], yes. [laughter] Oh, I'll tell you, that was good. Johnny Augelli my friend and I, we weren't the best in school. We hooky-ed a lot, yes. I used to go around and borrow money from the girls, dime here, a dime there, get enough money, "Okay, let's go to the movie." They'd say, "Who you going…" I said, "See, Step, she'll pay you back," my girlfriend, Stepler. "See Step, she'll pay you." "Okay," and she'd never pay it back, no. This one time, yes, we went into the Stanley Theater. We went up in the balcony, the large balcony, and they had a nice, big candy machine there. We had money. So, just by luck, we pulled the thing out, like that, we pull it out and here comes the whole door open. I was looking at John, John looks at me, "God, all that candy there, look at it." [laughter] We took a few bars, then, went down to the main movie, went in. Then, we started passing it out to people, candy bars. Oh, I shouldn't talk about that, no; you shouldn't say that, erase that. One time, the first time my wife hooky-ed, she's standing in line in front of the [theater] with a couple girls from school. They wanted to see this picture and never hooky-ed before. She was a good girl, a goody.

SI: Goody-goody.

RC: Yes, and she's standing there and her mother walked by and she says, "Hello, Helen." Helen says, "I cannot tell you one thing about that show." She said, "I was so scared when I got home." She said, "I know my father's going to…" but Mom never said a word, never said a word, no. That's what keeps you on edge, "When is she going to say something? When's she going to say something?" No, she was a good mother-in-law, yes. Matter of fact, we bought this house, and then, they bought the end house, her sister and her husband. My father-in-law died, and then, my sister-in-law, she took her mother with her. She was a good mother-in-law.

DC: You said in your pre-interview survey that you bought a house with the GI Bill. Is this the house that you bought with the GI Bill?

RC: No. We bought one in Camden, East Camden. I think it was 2730, 28th and 30th, yes, Berkley Street, nice brick double house. The basement was street level and you drove around and up the alley and drove in and the garage was under the kitchen. So, you drove right in, yes, went out of the side door and right around the corner and went in the cellar door. The cellar was hotter than the whole house. I don't know why, but it was a nice brick building. It was a nice home, yes, three bedrooms, big dining room and living room, big kitchen. We lived there, I guess, five, six years, something like that. Then, we bought this. I think we bought this in 1950, yes, been here ever since.

SI: Was there any delay between when you signed up for the Navy and when you reported?

RC: No, sign up one day and reported the next day.

SI: Just that night? [laughter]

RC: Yes. I went over there and there was, I guess, maybe about ten of us. We went in there and they said, "All right, be here at," I'll say four o' clock. This was in the morning, late morning, I guess. "What are we going to do?" "I don't know." So, we just walked, I guess in around Lit Brothers, Wanamaker's or Strawbridge's, killed the time, went back. Then, we went up to, I guess, Twelfth and Market, to the train station, got on the train. Next time I woke up, we were in Chicago. Then, we took the train from Chicago out to the Great Lakes, yes.

SI: What were those first few days in the military like? Was it a shock to go from civilian life to the discipline of the military?

RC: Yes, it's a change, it's a change. You learned fast. Of course, you don't have any money. There's no money, no. There's a chief there and it's an old barracks, bottom, top and bottom, and you have your bunk assigned to you. Then, during the day, why, you did drills. You did drills, until, I guess, maybe two weeks, and then, I found out you could get in the band. So, I signed up, got in the band then, because, every week, they held inspection and all your clothes is rolled and tied. You got pieces of string about that long. You go up and you tie it, your pants and your shirt and all that. It's in what they call the sea bag and everything's laid out and the Chief goes along and looks at it. It's making a man out of you, we'll say, yes. We'd do that every day. It gets--when we were there, let's say May, I was there May, well, in the end of May, the 24th; the ship was christened May the 23rd, 1943--May, June, July, yes, it was hot. It was hot. You would go and you would have a gas mask drill, put you in a room and smoke would come on and they'd tell you to take your gas mask off. Yes, so, everybody starts coughing, everything else and all that. I don't know how many guys you've got in there, maybe fifteen, something like that. Different turns, you'd go in. It's breaking your stuff in. Next day, you've got rifle range. You spend half a day over across the railroad tracks and off to the lake. They put up these big targets and you lay down and shoot at a target, yes. We did that, I guess, for half a day, and then, the next day, you have another indoor [range], twenty-two rifles. I don't know why sailors shoot, because sailors don't shoot guns. [laughter] If you're on a boarding party or something like that on a ship, that's different, but a regular sailor, he doesn't shoot a gun, no. Then, during each week, you get so many shots, too. Yes, you get so many shots. The last one, they give you the shot and it's like somebody put about fifty pounds of lead on your arm. It was just dead and I felt faint. The Chief says, "Go to a corpsman." I met with the corpsman, he says, "Go over and sit on the side here. Put your head down between your legs." If you missed that, it went what they called cat fever. If you got cat fever, you went to the hospital and you missed your graduating class. You would have to go, like, six more weeks with the next graduating class. So, I think we had maybe one or two guys that it hit bad, went to the hospital. Then, after that, they'd give you a rifle, and then, you go out and you do exercise, to try to get your mind off your needles, yes. They'd give you exercise there. Then, you graduate.

SI: Do you recall anything about your drill instructor, if he was particularly tough, unfair or fair?

RC: No, I think he was fair, yes. He was. They're all chiefs. A friend of mine, I work on the ship, his son--matter of fact, he just retired--had thirty years in, chief, yes, and I think they try to

give tours to the chiefs up there, for maybe a year or something like that. I know Scott, he was up there for a year, for quite a while, I guess. No, I think most of the chiefs, they were [fair]. Of course, they know you're a young kid, first time you've been away from home. I think they tried to make a good impression on you, instead of bawling you out all the time, making you feel silly or dopey or whatever. No, I think they do a good job, yes.

SI: What about the other men in your training platoon? Did you form friendships with them? Did you get to know them very well?

RC: There was quite a few from Philly that stayed with us, yes. No, I never--no, you [never] got their addresses. Another guy, he was in there and his name was named Collins also, yes. No, I never, what would you say? got too friendly, because, after that, why, when you graduate, you might see that guy two years later or something, on the ship. No, that was it. At the end of your what-you-call-it, they gave you what they called "the flying five." They gave you five dollars. That's your first pay, and then, you go over to the canteen and you buy shaving stuff, this, that, that, that. "Any change?" "No, sir, that's it." It's called the flying five--you spent it, yes. So, I think we had a twenty-day leave, came home, then, went back up, got on the train, was on the train, I think three days, from Great Lakes to Norfolk, three days. Normally, it'd take a day, I guess, whatever. I remember, the train had to pull off a couple times because of a freight train with supplies, which had priority. You would pull off and they would go by. This place, I never forget, we were in Virginia, we were stopped and we were blocking the main street. I remember that. I remember, I think it was three or four guys got off and they started to run down the street. There was a saloon down there, a liquor store. Just then, the train started to move. Now, I don't know if them guys are still running or what. [laughter] We got, I guess, a couple miles out of town and we were going slow and here was this supply train that came by us. There was tires, jeeps and all, all over this whole side, just I don't know if it was derailed or sabotaged or what, but the whole train was just [wrecked]. It was, I guess, I don't know, seven or eight cars just on their side, all the stuff just in trees, tires in the trees, yes, right there in Norfolk. So, then, we got there and, of course, you're sleeping there and all your curtains are down. So, we raised the curtain up and looked out and raised our window. There's a Marine. We said, "Hey, buddy, where are we at?" He says, "Norfolk." "Oh, okay." So, you had Marine guards on the [rails]. Of course, you can't get up and take a walk, and got us to a barracks. I got assigned to mess duty. So, I went to mess duty that morning, served on the chow line and came out. There's a big bulletin board outside the chow [hall]. I saw there and it said, "Russell N. Collins, USS *New Jersey*." "Wow, that's good." I'd grew up with a kid that was on it, Charlie Miller. I lived on 37th Street and he lived on 39th. I said, "My god, I'll see Charlie Miller." I was on that ship two weeks before I found him. I was coming around the corner and he was coming around the corner and we bumped, face-to-face, "Charlie." "Hey, Russ, how you doing?" I says, "Where you working?" He said, "#1 Engine Room." I said, "So am I." [laughter] Yes, well, he's an electrician and he's on the distribution board, which is on portside, which is taboo. We don't go over there, yes. We've got nothing to do with electricians, no, nothing. We're machinist's mates, whatever, firemen and all. I didn't see much of him then, and then, like I say, we got on the bus and they took us down to the ship. I guess there was about ten or twelve, maybe a little more, that was assigned to the ship. A picture in here, one guy's a cook, I remember him, he went home with us, because they didn't have a full crew yet, even when they left--see, I'm not what they call a plank owner, is at the commissioning. He's right there at the commissioning. I wasn't

there, I was in boot camp, but I was there for what they call all shakedowns, where you go down to Trinidad. You're down there for a month or more. It's called a hot-water run, because you want to see how your guns work in hot weather. "How do they expand? Can they retract?" and all day long, you were doing nothing but firing, firing. You're firing sixteen-inch guns and you're firing. There's a plane going by pulling a sleeve. They'll say, "All right, all five-inch mounts on the starboard side, fire." So, they're firing at this sleeve, back and forth, back and forth, all day; next day, portside, all day, firing, firing, twenties same thing and forties same thing, fire, fire, fire, fire, all the time, yes. That's when we heard this gunner's mate [was killed]. He was down in the breech and somebody says the gun was set on automatic and it started to raise up. He tried to get out and I understand it caught him from the waist down. It just squashed him, yes. I guess it was maybe about five years ago, I was called up to the quarterdeck and this kid, it was his younger brother [and his son]. He was only a baby then; I guess he [the brother] was, I don't know, twelve, fourteen or fifteen, yes. He wanted to know if I knew his father. No, I said, "No, he was a gunner's mate." I says, "I'm in the engineering." I said, "I did not know him." He said, "All right. Believe me, it's here, somewhere. That's commissioning day, Philadelphia Navy Yard. Here's one of our battles here, all here--we was in every one of them.

SI: We are looking at the USS *New Jersey*'s war log.

RC: No, it might be, I guess, in my other one. I'm trying to find her; where's she at? We had a pin-up contest and she won. She won. [Editor's Note: Mr. Collins is referring to a page in the war log featuring a baby who won the ship's "Miss USS New Jersey" contest.]

MG: She has got a beautiful bum.

RC: Yes, and everybody put their girlfriend in. Even afterwards, everybody said, "Yes, that was that gunner's mate's daughter." No, it wasn't." Everybody thinks that this is his baby and it's not his baby. Her father was, I think, a prisoner of war and they entered her in and she won. Everybody, I think, on the ship donated a dollar or two dollars. My wife wrote to her and she wrote back to us, which I gave everything to the archives on the ship. She went to [college]--that paid her college tuition and she was a teacher. She graduated from a teacher's college in North Jersey, yes.

MG: This little baby here?

RC: Yes, that's her, there she is.

SI: There is a picture in the war log and an article from well after the war.

RC: Yes, and she wrote to us. Like I say, I turned the letter into the archives there. That was it.

MG: Did you think it was a good omen when you ended up on the USS *New Jersey*, being from New Jersey?

RC: Yes, because if you're going to war, you want to be on the biggest thing that can fire back. Well, your first ship is your love, your first ship, you know that, even if it's what they call a "tin can" [slang for a destroyer] or if you're on a DE [destroyer escort] or whatever. Your first ship, that was your love, yes. Well, at that time, it was the second-biggest ship in the Navy, yes, because the *Iowa* [(BB-61)] was first. Any ship built after that was the *Iowa* class. If we were the first one, it would've been the *Jersey* class, but it was the *Iowa* class, yes. When you're out there and planes start coming in and all, we were a beehive, yes. We were a beehive. If you came in either port or starboard, you were done. You just ran into a sheet of steel, yes. Now, you might have had more of a chance coming in from the bow or the stern. You didn't have too much gunpower that way, but, sideways, you were done, yes. So, I think of, well, that one day, we got five. That was called the famous Marianas Turkey Shoot, yes. They sent four hundred planes in on us and, just by luck, we were going to, I think, Formosa and we had a big carrier task force. [Editor's Note: The Battle of the Philippine Sea took place from June 19 to June 20, 1944, and was called "the Great Marianas Turkey Shoot" by American airmen and sailors due to the fact that US forces shot down 550 to 645 fighters while taking only 123 aircraft losses. The loss of aircraft and pilots and the sinking of three Japanese fleet carriers by US submarines crippled the Imperial Navy's ability to carry out significant carrier operations.] Thank God that we did. They got some of our ships, a couple of destroyers and all, yes. They just suicide-ed right in, just, yes, killed them and all, yes. At that time, I happened to be--I was in #2 Turret Handling Room then. You're not going to shoot a sixteen-inch at airplanes, so, we got secured. So, we went up on topside and we were there almost through the whole battle, planes flying all over and, now, when I think of it, we were nuts for standing there. We were on the starboard side and we're between a five-inch mount and a forty mount here. We're standing here watching and we're watching--there must have been twenty-four dogfights, in and out, in and out. Finally, it came over the loudspeaker, "Cease fire, cease fire." "Cease fire? There's planes, enemy planes, coming in on us." Our guys must have radioed back, "Stop firing at us. You're firing at us." We don't know who's who chasing who. So, everybody stopped firing and we just sat there and watched all of the dogfights. Before that, I mean, we're standing on the side here looking and you've got a tin can out there. They always tell you, at, well, the morning, too, but mostly at night, "Do not fire between eleven o'clock and one o'clock," because there's a tin can, a destroyer, out there in that time. "Destroyer, don't fire between eleven and twelve, because you'll hit the *Jersey*," yes. So, what do you think's going to happen if a plane comes between you two? You think this guy's going to fire and stop and, "Oh, wait a minute, go around," and then, fire again? No, they're going to continue to fire. We're going to hit them, they're going to hit us. Every morning after, ninety percent of the time, after it was a night battle--we're standing in the chow line and where we are, there's a huge fan that brings cold air, hot air, down below decks. You'll find a whole part of it, probably twenty-millimeter [shell], would shoot and knock it out, take it out. Within the hour, the shipfitters are up there, welder, burner and all, cut a new piece in, put it in, paint it, never knew it, yes. You must know that we've hit them, too. Every time you would, it would be something hitting, but, like I say, during that battle, we're standing there and they're firing at us, I mean, our own, firing at us, and we're firing at them, because there's planes going in-between us. This one time, here comes a Zero down and right on top of him was a Corsair. I don't know why the Corsair's prop didn't cut this guy's canopy off. That's how close he was here and I think the Japanese thought he had more room under him. I think he looked up and he pushed his stick down and he was only about ten foot off of the water. He just went right in the drink. We all clapped and hollered and the Corsair went around up our fantail, and they

always give you a wave when they go around. We all clapped, yes. Then, after that, why, I think the *Essex* or one that was over here, a carrier, they took a *kamikaze*, yes. You can't get them all, but we lost nine ships in there.

SI: Was that during the Marianas Turkey Shoot or later?

RC: Yes, Marianas Turkey Shoot, yes. That was the big shoot, yes. [Editor's Note: Mr. Collins may be referring to later actions in 1944, when the USS *New Jersey* and the carriers it was escorting were attacked by *kamikazes*, including the USS *Intrepid* on both October 30th and November 25th.]

SI: When you first joined the crew, you said you were assigned to Engine Room #2?

RC: One.

SI: What was your job there? What did it entail? What was a typical day like in there?

RC: Mostly cleaning, yes. Everybody had a cleaning station, even second class, third class, second class machinist's mates, plus the firemen. You had to clean the station, yes. There wasn't too much to clean--well, there was, but not too much to clean--because the ship's brand-new. We used to, probably the firemen, would go down [to] what they called the bilge and that's about--you've got your second deck. Well, we'll say, in your engine room, you've got your top level, then, you have a bottom level. Then, after the bottom level, you've got your bilge, which is about, oh, you can sit up on the bottom deck and sit up, your head, you're all right. That's where all your water goes and stuff like that. Mostly, you're down there Wednesday or Friday, because, Wednesday, you've got an inspection and, Saturday, you've got inspections below decks, yes. You might get the Captain, then, again, you might get the Exec or whatever, but somebody always comes down. There's a yeoman with him with a clipboard and he'll go around the whole engine room looking and looking there at something, reach out, "So-and-So, dust, dirt. That's supposed to be clean." Mine was what they call Broadway. Myself and another man, we had to clean the Broadway, which is like the third main deck above the engine rooms and fire rooms, and that was our cleaning station. You've got big wire ways and all and they go along and you never know when they're going to reach out and touch the wire way and there'd better not [be dirt]. So, you take a bucket of water and soap, wash it down and wipe it clean and all, yes, and everything here. That was your main job, cleaning. You'd better get what they call a "4.0." You'd better get a 4.0. If you don't get a 4.0, then, you go up and you clean another day more, yes. They'll teach you a lesson. "You thought you'd get away with it. No, you didn't. So, you got another day cleaning." That's what [you did] most of the time--the ship is cleaned. Everybody on the ship has a cleaning job, everybody, yes. GQ, general quarters, everybody has a battle station, everybody. We've got one compartment and that's where the stewards stayed, all colored. That's their compartment and they do all the waiter-ing on the ward room for the officers and they work in the officers' galley, which is on second deck. Everything is made there, is put on a dumbwaiter and moved up to the main deck, to the ward room. If you lose something, which I did, I had a brand-new foul weather jacket, because I was--when I first went on, I was a loader for the twenty-millimeter, portside. So, you're out in the weather. So, you had a jacket, especially--well, I'm getting ahead of the game. After we came home from Trinidad,

you came back to Philadelphia Navy Yard for an inspection, because, down there, when you're firing off, you've got a lot of shipyard workers with you, because they want to know, they want to check everything, "How was your guns? How were they firing? Did they hang up? Did they freeze or anything?" Yes, you've got a lot of shipyard workers with you. When we came back into Philadelphia, we just started to pull into the dock and the ship went black, dark, low tide. We sat on the bottom. All the lights went out because all your main engines and all sucked what we call mud and all up into the intakes and cut out all your [power]--everything shut down, except the liberty party. Pardon me, "the Old Man," he says--it was a tugboat came alongside--and he said, "All liberty party over the side." So, the liberty party went over and they went. We must have had fifteen tugboats on us, trying to pull us in, and you couldn't budge us. So, we sat there for hours until high tide came up. Then, they floated us in. Then, the next day, went down in the engine room and he says, "Collins." "Yes?" He said, "Strip down to your skivvies." "Yes?" He said, "Yes, you're going inside the condenser." "Okay." [laughter] So, when the boss tells you something, you do it, yes. So, I wasn't the only one in there, we had a couple of other firemen and we went in there and there was--it had sucked all the mud up in there. We had--I don't know how many big trash cans we filled up--mud, fish, all the fish in there and everything, they sucked it up, eels, everything, yes. We got it all cleaned. That was the first and last time I was ever in there, Thank God, but, yes, it happens. I think we had liberty then, too, for I think, I don't know, thirty days we stayed in Philly, getting the inspection and everything. Then, we went [on] what they call a cold-water run, to see how everything works when it's cold, how it shrinks, the metal and all that. We went up to Casco Bay, which is Portland, Maine, cold, yes. It's very cold. One morning, look out, there must have been a foot-and-a-half of snow on the deck. They got it all off and we hoist anchor and went out and there was a plane towing the sleeves. These guys are still shooting and shooting, cold, cold. That's when I got the jacket, for up there. We was up there I guess for a month, and then, went back to Boston Navy Yard. Anybody that lived along the coast, we'll say down to Philadelphia, could go home for Christmas. So, obviously, me, from Jersey, yes; so, wasn't too many of us went down, come home, was home for Christmas, then, went back. From there, we went down to Norfolk. We spent New Year's in Norfolk, us and the *Iowa*, and then, from there, we went down to the Panama [Canal]. There was big submarine nets--they opened the nets up and we both went in. Then, they closed them again. That was around four o'clock, afternoon, 1600, yes. They took the *Iowa* through the Canal and we stayed on the Atlantic side and saw movies. Then, the next morning, I had the four-to-eight watch, four in the morning until eight in the morning. You worked four on, eight off. That was your thing, every time, four on, eight off. As we were going through the locks, why, I was topside almost all day going through the Canal. Yes, it was a good ride. I can remember going by and hitting leaves, trees overhang, hitting the leaves on the portside. Now, I understand it's wider. Now, they're building, I think, a new one next to it, to take these big carriers. Of course, the fantail, our name is on the fantail, USS *New Jersey*--well, you hang a canvas over it, because you're passing mountains and you don't know if there's spies up there, glasses on and passing [information], "Two big battleships just came through." "Who are they?" "Well, the *Iowa* and the *Jersey*," and, of course, there's Marines walking back and forth. You're looking up at them, the next time, you're talking to them this way and, the next time, you're looking down, because of the tide. They empty it when you go in, and then, they fill it up, and then, you go ahead to the next one, raise up. It's quite an operation, yes, and these "donkeys." [Editor's Note: Mr. Collins maybe referring to *mulas* (mules), locomotives on either side of the locks that aid ships in side-to-side movement and breaking.] We had, I think we had,

eight-inch clearance, on each side, yes. We were going through, you could see big scrapes on the side of the concrete, where the *Iowa*, the scuffles, they were starting to knock them off. So, they got them [off], and then, we got over to Balboa and they were welding them back on. They were on one side of the pier and we pulled around the other side of the pier. Then, we started to refuel. We got there in the afternoon, late. I think they only gave--I don't know how much leave they gave. It might've been just starboard or port leave got it, one or the other. The Chief said to me, he said, "Collins," he said, "you've got cold-iron watch." "Cold-iron watch, what's that, Chief?" "You're going to have one engine room and one fire room lit off. The other three are going to be dead. You go down and you inspect them, make sure no fires, no leaks, anything." "Okay." "Go up to the armory and draw a sidearm." "Why do I need a sidearm?" "You're on an armored protection when you're on duty." "All right." [laughter] So, I go up to the armory, tell the Marine, "Cold-iron watch." He said, "Okay," gives me a belt and a forty-five; never had a gun in my life, hands me a forty-five. "What do I do with it?" He says, "Just wear it around. That's all." "All right." So, we go down to the engine room and look around, fire rooms and all, and that's it. So, we go topside and we're going up--we're standing on the bow and these guys are coming back from liberty. Now, you don't know--this might be your last liberty. You don't know that. You're in a war zone now. You're going out and these guys are coming back on hands and knees up the gangway. They're loaded, yes. We're taking on fuel. So, we go back down. In where the stewards' compartment is, there's an overflow from a fuel tank. Somebody forgot to switch the tanks. One tank overflowed, came up through there. Now, this is bunker five, number C [bunker C, No. 6?]. This is thick oil, which we used to burn. It was about that far from coming over into the next compartment. These poor guys' mattresses were floating, their sea bags floating. So, we quick ran up to the quarterdeck, told them what happened and, all right, so, that was it. I went up, returned the gun. I can still see these guys in there with buckets, filling these big trashcans. Now, I don't know how the hell they were going to get rid of these big trashcans full of bunker oil. You're not going to throw it overboard. I don't know what they did with it, but the whole compartment, it was a shame. Everything they had in their lockers was just [ruined], open the bag and throw it out. Yes, that was a bad experience there at that one. That's an experience. Then, the next morning, we both pulled out and we were going out and they said, "We're going to have an air attack, an assumed air attack;" all right, never had that before. I was up here and we're back here. All of a sudden, two P-38s come down alongside of us, two of them, with a smokescreen. You couldn't see from here across the street, and then, all of a sudden, you heard noise and out of this smoke comes four PT boats. They come--I guess we could've thrown a baseball bat and hit them, a ball, that's how close they came to us before they made a turn. That's what could happen in battle, yes. So, you never know what's coming through a smokescreen. That's what they were telling you about, yes. That was quite a show there, but they're more or less getting you ready for, "This could happen to you. As soon as you hear a noise and something like that, why, be prepared to open fire anywhere you want."

SI: Do you mind if we take a break?

RC: No.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: I will turn the recorder back on. During the break, you were telling us a little about your living quarters, which you apparently did not have when you first got on the *New Jersey*.

RC: No, I didn't. Yes, I slept there two weeks. I slept on a hammock in the mess hall. I wasn't the only guy. Then, they found me a bunk, and then, that was it, a locker and all. So, I lost my key to my locker. I told the Chief. I said, "Chief, I lost my key to the locker." He says, "No trouble." He said, "Go up to the tool room and ask for the master key." "Okay." So, being [new] on there, I says, "Where's the tool room?" It's a big ship. "Where's the tool room?" "Oh, you go up here and so-and-so and up here and all." "Oh, all right;" so, went up, tool room guy says, "Yes, what do you want?" real polite. "What do you want?" "Master key." "All right. Sign it out." "All right." Do you know what a master key is?

DC: It unlocks everything.

RC: No, bolt cutters [laughter]--hands me them, I says, "No, no, a key." He says, "Son, this is a key. This is the master key." "Oh, all right." [laughter] So, go down to the ward room, I said, "Chief, he handed me the master key?" and the Chief says, "Yes, that's, it son." His name was Feltes, yes. I had my first beer with Felts in Trinidad. Anyway, he asked, "So, you know how to work it, don't you?" I said, "Not really." So, he says, "Here, put the pair in there," and he says, "Press as hard as you can, like that." That was it. He says, "When that's done, take it back up." "Yes, sir." So, I did, but, then, they sent the other kid up--I was a little more [savvy]--sent the kid up to get a bucket of steam, yes. This kid's green. You know where he's from? Kings Mountain, North Carolina, Wells is his name, Wells. When he came on the ship, I felt sorry for him--no bunks, he had to sleep down in the engine room, right next to the housing gear, right next to it, hot, oh, God, because we're up on the throttle and our decking is a grating. You can see down through it. You always have two guys on JV phones and relaying from the bridge or whatever. I'm standing there, sitting there, and I'm looking at Wells and he's sitting there in his shorts and reading the Bible, yes, reading the Bible. "All right, okay, nothing wrong with that." Well, I guess a couple months later, we [had a] mail call and we had--I think we had, I don't know where the devil we had liberty. We couldn't have had liberty somewhere, because we're never in port. Well, I guess he got a "Dear John" letter--never saw the Bible open anymore, never saw it open. That was it, "Dear John" letter, yes. I know, one time, we're in Pearl Harbor and he hung a pretty good one on. He was sick then. [laughter] Yes, I felt sorry for him, but I guess a lot of guys in the service got "Dear John" letters, sure. That was to be expected; probably each from either end, too, yes.

SI: It sounds like you formed a pretty close bond with the people you worked with.

RC: He stopped in to see me after the war. I guess he went to my--when we first got married, we lived in a two-room apartment in Pennsauken. Well, matter of fact, we [first] lived with my mother and father. We had the back bedroom. We lived with them because apartments, back in '46, you just [could not find], there wasn't any. There wasn't any to rent or nothing. So, we lived home. Then, a friend of my mother said, "Margaret, up at Barnes's, on my same street, Pennsauken, they have a two-room apartment for sale, rent." "Oh." So, we went up, got interviewed, and then, they said, "Yes, be glad to have you." So, I think her and her sister, her and her mother, went down to Van Sciver's. We bought, they did, a nice couch, which you

pulled it out and it was a daybed, pulled it up, daybed, yes. In the morning, you get out and make everything up, put the thing back to a couch. So, one morning, I don't know when it was, might have been a Saturday morning, whatever, I hear a [Mr. Collins knocks] on the door. So, I get up. Here's Wells, Kings Mountain, North Carolina, "Wells, what are you doing?" "Well, I came up to see you." "Oh, come on in." So, I go in, go around, and Wells says, "What, are you shacking up?" I said, "No, I'm married now." [laughter] I said, "No, I'm married." "Oh." So, I think he spent the whole day with us. That's the last I saw him, yes, didn't see him anymore. No, that's about [it]--well, no, the guy that was on our generator watch, too, Paul Mattern. He was a Mennonite. His mother and father had a big farm up in Pennsylvania. We went up there on our honeymoon to Niagara Falls and Lykens, PA. I says, "Helen, how about we stop and see Paul, Paul Mattern?" and I says, "We'll find out." So, we did, we found out. We went up to the farm. It's big. Paul came out and he says, "Yes, you're going to stay all night with us and have dinner with us and all." They wear the white hats, the Mennonites and all that. So, we stayed that night and we went into town somewhere and they had a carnival or something. The next day, I think he took us to his brother-in-law. His brother-in-law made, was a dentist, made false teeth and all, in his shop in Lykens. Then, Paul became a dentist. He went out of the service into Temple, University of Temple, became a dentist and his assistant, which he married, they opened a dentist's office outside of somewhere in Philadelphia here, can't think of the name right now. Helen and I, well, we had Doug then, we went over there and we spent the day with him and all. Before they moved out of Philadelphia, they came over. That's when I was living in Camden--they'd come over and spend a day with us. Then, we lost track of each other for some reason and, a couple years ago, we had a reunion. On the fantail, we have a big tent, on the fantail. I don't know if you ever saw it or not, but, yes, during the summer, we have a lot of functions back there, weddings and everything else back in there, because it's under cover. If it rains, okay, it's good. I'm standing on the side here for the reunion and I see this guy looking. He's talking to his wife and he gets up and he walks around and he comes back up here. As soon as he got about here, I looked; he says, "Are you Russ Collins?" I says, "Yes, Paul, I am." [laughter] So, we had a good talk together. Well, it must have been [since 2004], yes, because my wife had passed away then. That was a reunion. Then, we went out to lunch. That Saturday night, we have a big dinner and I guess I fouled up, because we tried to [get together]. I says [to] Harry, my boss, "I'm going to treat you to dinner, because," I said, "we've got to talk to this man that's running the veterans' thing for the ship. We've got to ask him, because some of the guys on this ship, volunteers, they want to be an associate member." We asked the guy here and he says, "I'd love to, but you can't." He says, "You either served on it or you had a relative that served on it. Then, we could let you in." He says, "We can't let outsiders in." All right, we tried. Well, in the meantime, Paul and his wife are sitting at another table and I'm sitting here with Harry. Like I say, I should've invited Harry to sit with my friends here to eat. Dumb me, I didn't and I guess Paul got PO-ed and I haven't heard from Paul since. Well, he moved anyhow, out to somewhere in Lancaster, but, since then, they said so many World War II guys were gone, they had to build up the treasury. So, they gave us the okay. So, we got about, I guess, maybe about twenty guys to sign and, now, it's twenty dollars a year dues. You get the big book and you get a card, just like I have a card, yes, "You are an associate member of USS *New Jersey*," which these guys are proud of. All of our guys, most of our guys, have been there about twelve years. They started as soon as the ship came over to Camden. They signed up, yes. I'm one of the oldest. I'm eighty-eight. Another fellow, a friend of mine, he just turned eighty-eight and another friend, he just turned eighty-five. Well, we can't do what we used to. We can't do it. Our hearts are into it, but

the legs and arms, that you can't climb the ladders anymore, because we put a big canvas up. We have a private company come in and they put the fantail up, because that's too high. We can't do that, but we put the other canvas up and it's work. It's work. You've got to push it up over the cables, and then, you've got to get ladders and you've got to tie them all to the cables. It's a big job and, last year, I made--when was it, May the 1st, the 13th? We got the canvas spread out on the main deck, portside, because we're going to start putting it over the cables to lift up, takes a lot of men. This man never comes out and helps us, never, never, but he came this one day to see somebody, I understand. He's there and I'm here and there's a ladder between him and me. I see him start to fall and I'm thinking he's coming to me, the ladder's coming to me--I'd better move. So, I back up; I trip, down, "Bang," concussion, laid there on the deck, yes. My hearing aid fell out. Guy ran over to help me, stepped on the hearing aid, crushed it. My boss, he runs over, he says, "Don't move, Russ, don't move. Just stay." I said, "All right, Harry, I'll stay." So, he says, "You all right?" I says, "I don't know." So, he said, "Did you split your head open?" "Yes." So, they called the medics right away from Cooper Hospital. They came right away. I gave Harry, I think, my wallet, my other hearing aid. I think I took my uppers out, yes, my partial plate, give him. So, he went with me. Then, he called my daughter in. She met us there. They said, "Yes, you have a concussion." So, they kept me over night. The next day, I was all right, got up. So, I can't blame it on the guy, because when I looked down, he didn't know it, there's a ruffle. His feet [were] in the ruffle or wrinkle. He doesn't know his feet [are] in a ruffle and he tried to walk and he just fell. Yes, it's an accident. You can't say, "You did it." It's an accident. It happens, but, other than that, why, like I say, we don't advertise. We should advertise for volunteers, but anybody that volunteers is mostly, like our guys, you're going to be past sixty-five. I mean, you aren't going to--where's all the young kids? Well, we're hoping that all the young kids are working. You can't do that, but we need young blood. We need it bad, yes.

SI: Can we go back to when you served on the ship in World War II?

RC: Yes.

SI: I have been looking through the war log. It mentions some of these earlier engagements that you listed, but it says Truk was the first time you were really involved in combat.

RC: Yes.

SI: Can you tell us more about the period before Truk, all these other islands you visited?

RC: No, our first one was at, I think, the Gilbert Islands, when we left the Canal. We got there and you could still see them fighting on the island. You could still hear gunshots and everything else. That's how close we were in there. I don't even think we anchored. I think we just were standing still there, because I think two PT boats came up alongside of our starboard side. I think we gave them loaves of bread and buns and stuff like that. We gave it to them. I can remember seeing this LCM, landing craft, come over and I think it tied up to the stern. I don't know why, but I remember guys going over the side, down the ladder, down the back. I think they were going to souvenir hunt, get in there, the guy was going to take them over, drop them for souvenir hunting. "I'll give you, like, fifteen minutes, and then, I've got to pull out of here

again," or whatever. I can still see these guys--they got, I don't know, maybe half a block from the ship and, "Bong, bong, bong. General quarters, general quarters." So, we started up right away. Now, I don't know where these guys--I don't know if they're still going one way or the other. I don't know where they are, but I can still see that, yes. It was probably what they call a bogey. It's probably one of our planes that didn't identify itself coming in. Now, all we see is an object coming in. We don't know who it is. It's an object. He didn't radio or anything, friendly or whatever. So, [you must assume] that's a Jap coming in. So, you can't be a sitting duck. So, we get underway and we pulled out of there. Then, I think we went to one of the Marshalls or something, where we picked up another admiral there.

SI: Was it Spruance?

RC: Spruance, was it? no.

SI: Was it before Truk?

RC: Yes, before Truk.

SI: Okay. It says, at Majuro, you picked up Raymond Spruance. [Editor's Note: The *New Jersey* became the flagship of the Fifth Fleet under Admiral Raymond A. Spruance on February 4, 1944, in Majuro Lagoon.]

RC: Yes, all right, but things didn't seem to happen until us and the *Iowa* go out there. The old battleships can't go to speed. The best they can get, maybe, is twenty knots and that's their tops, where we could go thirty-one or thirty-two knots, yes. We can go and your cruisers could go that, too, but you didn't have any heavy armament like we had, us and the *Iowa*. Like I say, things didn't start to happen until we got out there, and then, Nimitz or one of them--Nimitz, he was the head guy, and then, I think Halsey was under him--that's when we started having these what they call fast task forces. We were Task Force 58, then, we were 59, and then, we were different numbers, because each one, we had a different admiral on, yes. [Editor's Note: To confuse the enemy, command of the US fleet alternated between Admiral Raymond Spruance and Admiral William Halsey, Jr. Under Spruance's command, the fleet was known as the Fifth Fleet and the Fast Carrier Task Force was called Task Force 58. While under Halsey's command, these designations became the Third Fleet and Task Force 38.] To me, that's when things started to happen--we started hitting different islands, fast, fast, get in fast and get out fast, yes, get in and out. I mean, the old boys, they did their trick down there at San Bernardino in the Philippines. I understand they formed what they call a "T" battle formation. When the Japs, understandably, are coming from the China Sea, was coming up through San Bernardino Straits in the Philippines there, we had them nailed, because we had radar. They didn't and you could just [get them] and these guys, they did their job. Some of them got sunk, but most of them, they didn't and they sunk the fleet there, yes, a lot of them. They did their job. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Leyte Gulf was fought from October 23 to October 26, 1944, near Leyte, Samar and Luzon in the Philippines. It was the largest naval battle in history and the first time *kamikazes* were used in battle.]

SI: Once you were in the task force with the *Iowa* and the other ships, what would you mostly be doing? Would you be at general quarters during operations?

RC: Yes, you got general quarters, five to six [AM]. Japs come in early. Then, you've got sundown. You've got two general quarters during the day. They'd come in at night for the sun, so, you're ready for them, yes; not too much night. Down around the [New] Hebrides, or somewhere there, we had what they called, we called him, I think, Jap, "the lamplighter." We were down there one night and I was on a twenty-millimeter, second loader, portside. We heard him coming and he got off of our port quarter, I guess, and he dropped a flare. Well, first time any of us all saw a flare and we thought, "Oh, God, there he is." We could've knocked him out with a twenty-two. That's how close he was. There was a five-inch mount right next to me here with a door open and you could hear him in there hollering, "Hold fire, hold fire, hold fire." "All right." This Jap must have dropped it and he kept looking, probably over to the portside here, looking. If he'd have just glanced over here, he'd have hit us. It's in there, I think about maybe fifteen, twenty minutes later, the whole horizon lit up. He hit the other task force. He dropped a flare and they opened up on him, yes, and the whole horizon just was on fire, lit up, antiaircraft. So, I don't think he got back to report anything. He got knocked right out, and then, further up, they dropped another one on another invasion or something, yes. That's a little scary when you're there, and then, they'll drop it and, boy, you could read a newspaper. Like I say, that's the first time it ever happened to us. Yes, something like that, it scares you. You think, "Oh, my god, why didn't he see us?" So, yes, every morning, every night, you had general quarters.

SI: During these island invasions that the *New Jersey* was supporting, would you be in a position where you could go out and see the island, see what was happening?

RC: Yes, yes, because we probably laid off them, let's say, maybe fifteen miles, if we're bombarding and we're just lobbing sixteens [sixteen-inch shells]. It would always be us and the *Iowa*. Well, at Truk, we were the head on and in the back of us was the *Iowa*. Like, again, I was on the twenty-millimeter then. There was [an enemy ship], I guess it was a large ship, it was trying to go into the harbor and the officer was out here. He went inside the turret, and then, when he shut the door, you think, "Oh, God, here we go." Five-inch, you never heard a five-inch gun--they're sharp. If they rapid-traverse, what they called, fire, we're standing and there's two twenties, one here and one here, and you're standing, we'll say, on maybe a three-eighths or a quarter-inch decking. We had also another five-inch mount over here. We're in-between two five-inch mounts and, when they rapid fire, because you've got cotton gloves on up to here, you've got a hood on, cotton hood, with a face over it, then, you've got a helmet on--this was there for flashback--when they rapid fire, you're like a rag doll. There's nothing you can do. You're standing there and you're actually jogging. You're just [jogging] and you've got dungarees on. That's your main dress of the day, which is the best one, dungarees. They just unbutton you, just like you would do. They just unbutton you and you stand there and you couldn't fire a twenty if you had to, loud, no earplugs, oh, deafening. You could hear a sixteen-inch all day long. That's just a big roar, but a five-inch is sharp. Oh, they are. Well, anyhow, this ship's going in and the whole portside, all five-inch mounts--now, that's ten, that's ten five-inch guns--shooting at that ship. It just massacred it. It just blew it out of the water, yes. You could see the guys running around, putting jackets on, life jackets, didn't mean anything. We just demolished it, yes. In the meantime, I guess the men, the guys on the fantail, reported a torpedo

wake between us and the *Iowa*, which we speeded up and got out of there. Both of us speeded up and got out, but, if we'd have slowed up, that's what they shoot for then. They shoot either to knock your rudders out or your propeller, your screws. Now, you're dead in the water. Now, the only thing you can do is stand there and fight back and forth, but you're not going anywhere. So, that's what they shoot for, a rudder, to knock you out, but, yes, that's the first time. Well, then, [at] that same time, we never had lookouts laying [down]. We had lookouts, looking over here, here, here, here--never up here [toward the sky]. Here's a plane flying from the *Iowa*, flying up. *Iowa*'s firing at it. We're firing at it and he's just cruising right along. Nobody hit him or anything and he just flew up. Well, that's when they started having lookouts lay down, so many look down, look up, yes, because we never even heard him on sonar or anything, but he got away. Yes, at Truk, we always got something back at Truk, every time we got there, yes. We hit there a couple times, I guess, but, after every raid or so, you went back to what we called Ulithi, it was called, and that was our R&R. Our R&R was called Mogmog. You'll see it in there, Mogmog, yes. It's a coral reef. To me, this is the harbor. It looks like there's islands here, looks like the top of a volcano to me. That's what it looks like; one way in and one way out. So, you go in, you anchor. We always anchored off the hospital ship *Hope*. We would be here and the *Hope* would be over there, because every night, permitting, you would have a movie on the fantail. They would turn #3 turret around and we could show it against the turret. Everybody got back there before sundown, sat down, because right underneath of our three-inch guns on the #3 turret, we had nine twenty-millimeters. We had, I guess, about a four-foot fence, solid fence, around it. Then, you had twenties in there. Everybody would sit on the other side of there. Then, the officers had their chairs there, and then, the Captain would come down. He would always have one or two nurses with him from the hospital ship, come over, yes. Then, when they would come down, why, the orderly would say, "Attention," everybody stand up until they got seated down there. Then, we all sat down. Then, they would show the show or, sometimes, you would have an entertainer come on and put a show on, on top of the turret. I don't know how much room they had, because we had a forty-millimeter machine gun. You know what forties are, quads, forties, yes. There was a quad up there. So, I don't know how much room they had up there to [perform], [laughter] yes, because we used to have a band. Our ship, we had a twenty-two-piece band, our own ship. Yes, they were good. Today, that's the only original thing left on the ship, is the band room, where they used to store all the instruments, and that was on second deck. They would go there and practice. You could hear them practice, but, sometimes, underway, if we were just patrolling with the carriers, they would come up topside and play. Some days, that ocean would be like a lake, like a lake. As far as you could see, it'd be green, green algae or whatever, yes. The next day, you go up there and flat as a pancake and it would be, like, bluish, change color, yes, but, then, other days, why, you always had two or three-foot waves then. They were going to tell you if they're going to make a turn to port or starboard, if they were going to make the turn to port. So, a lot of guys would sit--this one time here, I remember, I was on portside, coming aft, and a friend of mine was sitting in the corner of a five-inch mount, main deck, had his shoes off and they'd play acey-deucey. You ever see acey-deucey? They'd have a piece of canvas here and they had fees in it and they'd roll dice, be that. He's sitting there, another guy's sitting here and they're playing acey-deucey and they've got their shoes off, because they're in the engine room. When you go topside to get air, fresh air, and sun and all, yes, it's a treat. This is right near a lifeboat. They were making a turn, making a turn to port, and it was a little rough that day. I'm walking down and, sure enough, here comes about two foot of water on the main deck. So, I'm right underneath, right next to, the whaleboat. It

was a deck and we had five twenties there. So, you reach up on it there and you pull your feet up and the water just goes out from under you here. I can just see this guy here--the water washed him over to the lifeline. Thank God for the lifeline was up. He held the lifeline. Shoes, everything, just went over the side. Yes, there he goes, just a shame, but, I mean, they told you, "We're going, we're making a turn," but, then, you go along and you kick what we called flying fish. They come on, they've got wings. You just kick them over the side, but in all the waves are these flying fish. They fly through, yes, all of them, but this guy lost everything, just lucky that he grabbed a lifeline, because he'd have been over the side. They tell you, but, most of the times, it don't matter. Well, it matters, [laughter] but, yes, other than that, why, like I say, after every battle, you went back into the harbor and an ammunition ship would pull up, load all new ammunition on, supply ship would pull up, put fruit and stuff on for us and all that. Then, they would say, "Anybody wants to go over to Mogmog?" You go over here, it's an island, Quonset hut, I understand it's full of beer, and there's three Marine guards on it. You've got three things to do. You [could] go swimming, which you can't go swimming [with] bare feet, because this coral'll cut your feet. You learned that the first day you go over. They have a ball field, and then, they have, I don't know where they got it, a shuffleboard. You can't get within three foot of that shuffleboard, because everybody's gambling. Everybody's gambling on this shuffleboard, yes. I don't know where they got the board, but that's the only three things you could do on the island, and you get three cans of beer, warm. Guys [that] didn't drink, they would sell them to another guy, "Give me a buck-and-a-half, I'll give you three beers." "Yes, okay." Now, this guy's got six beers, warm beers. 1600, you go back to the compound here and it's in barbed wire. The LCM would come up here, drop the front end and you get on the ship and go back to your ship. Every time, there was a fight, and I mean a bad fight, yes. One guy'd push another guy, and then, this guy starts and it's a chain reaction. "I don't need this." We probably had one drink of beer, one beer like that, and it was so--I mean, we probably just poured it out, but these other guys, no. Every time, it was a disaster, a disaster, but this poor little guy, he came back to the ship with me. He was a cook. We're sitting, we're at the harbor and they're coming back from Mogmog on this. We've got the lower gangway down. Now, down at the bottom of the gangway, you have a piece of wood about so square, mahogany. That's at the end. The LCM came up, and this is rough, they're roughing, and we're sitting on a nigger--pardon me--a nigger head [bollard], looking down on [it]. This little cook, he jumps off. He slipped and his foot went over the side and the LCM came back in, [Mr. Collins claps his hands], cut his whole heel and everything right off, yes, just like a sheer cut. We sat there and we saw it happen. We heard him scream. By the time they got him up to top, there was doctors right there at the head, right away, took him and I never saw the guy after that, no. I don't know what happened to him. Oh, they probably flew him to some hospital or something, but I'll never forget that. He jumped off. Like I say, it was rough water, rough, and the ship banging in, "Bang," and it'd go out. One minute you go, "Yes, okay, now, I'll jump off." Well, he jumped off and he slipped and it [Mr. Collins claps his hands], came back and, "Bang." It cuts him right off. We had another accident there at Christmas. Again, I have my story, yes. That was the other typhoon we were in. Well, we had a big task force with us then, because we were going over to the China Sea. We were going to go over to Hong Kong and go all along there, I understand, and strafe there, and then, we had a big task force. We got caught in the China Sea. We were there for three days. We couldn't get out. Japs couldn't get out to get us, either, because it was bad. Did you ever read Halsey's hurricane book, typhoon [*Halsey's Typhoon: The True Story of a Fighting Admiral, an Epic Storm, and an Untold Rescue* (2007) by Bob Drury and Tom Clavin]?

SI: No.

RC: Yes, I read it and we lost three destroyers, capsized. The men were in the water for three days. There was so many of them. They'd tell you about different guys, they'd get, I guess, what? hallucinated or whatever. They'd see their old house over there and they'd swim to it. We, like I say, lost three destroyers. Planes, we lost--they were all buckled down or tied down to the main deck, and then, when you take--these are hundred-foot waves. I had just come up from the watch. I went up on 01 [the deck above the main deck], because all your hatches are closed on main deck. You can't go out because of [the] water. So, you had to go up through officers' country, the only time you go up through officers' country, twice, general quarters and storms. So, you go up and you come out on the second deck and myself and another guy were there. We're standing up near the searchlight. We had two great, big searchlights and the ship is only going five knots. You're holding your own and you're going up this way here. Now, when you come down this way here, [by] the time you get down, you don't have enough momentum to come up. Now, when you get down, this other wave is here and this wave comes over you then--#1 turret and all went completely under. I looked at him and he looked at me and we took a nose dive, [when] we're coming out. After a while, you see the bow, and then, three guns come up and, yes, a lot of the planes snapped their mooring lines, slid right off, brand-new planes, slid right off. Then, when you think about it, these bombs and torpedoes that they have, if they break loose, I mean, they're sliding from ship to ship. They could explode. After that, we got out of there. We went back to Ulithi for Christmas. When we got back there, this John Horan, I showed you here, every time the Captain goes on a whaleboat to another ship, he takes his signalman with him. So, John was with him on this one here, John Horan. He went back to this tin can. One tin can stayed behind to pick up survivors and they stayed back. John was talking to one of them there, sailors, because the Old Man, he went in, I guess talking to the Captain, "How many did you pick up?" and all this and that. The guy said, "We had boat hooks," and he said, "You could see the guy here," and he says, "We would pick them up out of the water and, from the waist down, they're gone. Sharks just ate them, yes." I think the guy saved, I think, two hundred-and-some guys they saved, but these guys stayed in that water for three days, three nights, yes, all shark-infested. I mean, they're the heroes, yes. At that time, we're standing in a chow line for Christmas. Nimitz is onboard with us. Nimitz's seaplane is tied on the fantail. Here's a tugboat. We're at chow, standing in line, starboard side. We looked over, through #2, #3 turret, and we saw this tugboat going by. These guys are putting life jackets on. Then, we're starting to see splashes of water, splashes. When the task force comes in to anchor, you're supposed to have target practice. Now, a plane comes along, tows a sleeve and these guys are antiaircraft. These guys are firing and all these five-inch shells are going over and landing in the harbor around these ships, "Bang, bang," yes. That's what we're seeing, splashes over here. One went down through our fantail, went down--kid's down there in [the] mess deck, tore half his calf off--went down through the head. The guy's down there shaving, cut him here. It went down and went into an inner bottom in the head. They called for a volunteer. An ensign came and the shipfitters came and took the top off. The guy went down, picked that shell up and he brought it up. They put it over in front of the portside catapult and the ship's photographer took a picture of it, and then, threw it overboard. That was it, but I thought that I saw this kid, oh, I guess maybe five or six years ago, that he was the one that had the calf [wound]. I says, "I understood they put you in Nimitz's plane and took you." He says, "No," said, "they took me and put me in

another seaplane and flew me to another hospital," and he lives in West Virginia. He says, "No," he said, "I saved the leg," but it's an accident. It happens, yes, it happens, but, during World War II, we didn't lose one man, not one man killed, but Beirut, yes, we did. We had a chief killed. So, I mean, as far as our ship, I think we had a pretty good record, yes.

SI: Does anything stand out about the invasions in the Marianas, Saipan and Guam?

RC: Yes, Saipan, Tinian. Tinian's right next to Saipan and us and the *Iowa*, we spent one whole day in Tinian. Now, they're fairly close, I mean, not blocks away, but miles, but we were there all day bombarding, just us and the *Iowa*. We understand it was fuel tanks, a big radio station or something in there, yes, communications. When we left there I guess around four o'clock in the afternoon, as far as we could see over the horizon, it was still burning. We left it in ruins, yes. So, I imagine we knocked that out first, before they could even land planes or something in there. I don't think we did much bombarding at Iwo Jima there, no, because it was all hilly, all rocky, yes. Now, something like that, we would stay out and patrol the task force, so [that] no ships could come out and they'd sink our carriers, because our carriers, that was our landing fields, and the Japs knew that, yes, "Get the carriers and we won the war." A lot of times, they would go off and one flight would come back and another flight would take off. It was just constant bombing all day, all day--not us, we were just patrolling, with them. You're going maybe ten knots, five knots, ten knots, something like that, back and forth, yes, until everybody comes home and roosts. Now, these planes'd come back and they'd always fly around our portside, around us, and our carriers would be on our starboard. These guys would come back with half the tail shot off the plane and we'd see their pilot and we'd all wave to him. He'd wave to us and he'd go around the fantail and go back, land on the ship. Within hours, they would strip it, take the guns off, whatever they could use and all. After a while, you'd see five or six guys just pushing the plane right off the fantail, deep six it. It's no good, yes. They can't repair it and that's where these *Princeton*-type carriers came in, like supply ships. They would bring a lot of planes in and transfer them onto them, yes, because every time I'd see a plane go over the fantail, I always figured that's one less plane guarding my butt. That's what I always figured. That's one less plane and, yes, these guys were good. They were good, good pilots. Another one, we were supposed to be guarding was MacArthur in the Philippines--we're going to make another invasion. Halsey was with us then and he says, for some reason, they must've got a report, "Up around Luzon, Jap fleet," and that's what he wanted. He wanted ship-to-ship, what I think, yes. He wanted to show that he was superior. We steamed up there, full speed ahead, and, when we got up there, why, then, they radioed, "MacArthur's in trouble. We need you." So, we turned around. Now, these planes went off now. All of our planes went off. This is dusk. They went off and they did get a carrier and a battleship or something up there. They did get them, but they were coming back in pitch black and planes were running out of gas. So, every ship in the fleet, first time I ever saw during the war zone, put the searchlights on, so [that] these pilots could see the searchlights and go head for the ships, yes. We stood there on starboard, I'll never forget it, starboard side and these guys were going by in their Mae Wests [life vests], holding a flare, and we'd holler to them, "You all right?" "Yes." Then, you look on the back of us, now, there's a tin can, sideways, where these guys would float right into them and they'd pick them up, yes. That's the first time in a battle zone [that] every ship put their searchlights on. We picked up quite a few that night, yes. So, we did rescue work, too. [laughter] One time, we brought three Japs on. Then, they brought them over in a boatswain's chair. They handcuffed them, because, if you

didn't, they'd jump out and commit suicide in the water. They handcuffed them in there. Then, they'd come over here, and then, two Marines would take them, one forward, one aft, and they'd walk them back to the fantail. Of course, we'd all followed them back, too, all the sailors, and then, they made them strip, strip down. They'd hit them with a fire hose. They'd throw them a scrub brush and soap. Well, first of all, the barber'd go in--shows you a picture of them there, I think it was--the barber would shave them clean, wash them down, throw them soap and all, dry, and then, throw them a set of whites, and then, take them down to the brig. That's the last I saw of them. I mean, they probably took them up to, I don't know, probably find out, "Where you came from, how many planes you have or what," or this and that. With them guys, they'd probably shoot us, but knowing us, we'd say, "Thanks a lot, we'll let you free somewhere." That's the last I saw of them, but, experience, you'll never forget it, yes.

SI: What would you say was your most vivid memory of your time on the *New Jersey*, whether it was in combat or not?

RC: Well, the only time you're scared was if the Old Man comes on the night before and says, "We're going into an island which we know nothing about." Now, that's a little scary, because you don't know what they have or what they don't have or what. On this one island, we went in, us and the *Iowa*. We stayed off about, I don't know, ten miles, maybe, maybe a little more than that. All day long, we threw--all morning, rather--we threw sixteen-inch shells in. All morning, we'd go up, make a turn, come back. We always fired, for some reason, portside, never starboard. So, we'd go out and we'd make a turn, come back again, make another run, portside, sixteen-inch, "Bang, bang, bang, bang," all morning. Afternoon, [they] said, "We're going to close in for the five-inch practice." "Okay." So, we move in closer; five-inch are firing, "Bang, bang, bang, bang," and I'm on second loader on the portside. We're seeing flashes on the beach. "Oh, boy, we're hitting something," and, all of a sudden, we're seeing splashes on our portside. That means return fire. "Return fire; twenties and forties, secure for starboard side." So, you don't tell us a second time. We ran to the starboard side, sat down there. As soon as we sat down, all we heard was [Mr. Collins imitates an incoming shell]. I don't know how this shell [flew], came in-between the stacks or whatever, but we heard it, [Mr. Collins imitates an incoming shell], and a couple hundred yards out, why, it hit the water and exploded. They held fire, held fire, to suck us in and we came up and we heard that. Then, the Old Man turns, speeded up and we made a turn. The *Iowa* came up and she took one. She took a hit in the fuel tank, portside fuel tank, and that was it. Then, we went back to Ulithi and they repaired it and everything else. You'd never know it was hit then, but I couldn't believe it, all of those shells that we [fired], and our seaplanes was even guarding fire for us. Their entrenchments, they must have had three foot of concrete under them or over them and our sixteen-inch, for some reason, didn't even penetrate, but they held fire and they just [held fire], until we [were within range]. They must have known, "We'll suck them in, and then, we'll open fire." That'll be something for them, "Shore battery sinks a battleship," big deal, but I'll never forget that, yes. No, a lot of times, the Old Man, like I say, once in a while, he'd give us a treat and he'd put the radio on and we would hear Tokyo Rose, yes. She would come on and announce. I don't know where she got it [information for the propaganda broadcasts]--well, they must have intercepted letters or something, mailbag or somebody they got or whatever. Yes, once in a while, he'd give us a treat, Tokyo Rose, but, no, overall, why, it was an experience. Sometimes, you were scared and others, most of the time, well, like you said, no, you're on a big ship, yes. You've got a lot of

metal around you, a lot of guns. These poor destroyers, I mean, we used to get back and we would run out of fuel. We would go back to a safety zone. Then, a big fleet tanker would come out, and then, we'd pull one side up, and then, a carrier would pull the other side and he would feed off both of us. This one time--well, it wasn't then--we were refueling a tin can at sea. All the bigger ships, we held eight hundred-and-some ton of oil, we held. That's a lot of oil, yes. [laughter] That'll last you a lifetime. We're refueling a tin can and, like I say, another plane came in, didn't identify himself and, "Bong, bong, bong." We were on the starboard side and we were talking to the guys on the tin can, "How you doing?" all this and that. You ever hear of the Sullivans, remember the Sullivan brothers? Yes, well, they had a tin can there with a clover leaf painted on the stack, yes. [Editor's Note: The five Sullivan brothers served on the USS *Juneau* (CL-52) and were killed after the Japanese sunk their ship on November 13, 1942. The USS *The Sullivans* (DD-537) was commissioned in September 1943 and named in their honor.] We'd talk to them and all, yes, but the chief boatswain's mate would always stand up there with an axe, with an axe, right up front, where the fuel goes. You're only going maybe five knots, but, sometimes, the ship, the tin can, will come into us. Well, when it comes into us, these fuel lines would go sink in the water. So, you've got about thirty guys on a line and, when them ships come together, these guys run like the devil here to pull the lines out of the water. Then, when the ships go apart, they run the other way to give it slack. They keep going back and forth, yes. So, this chief, why, general quarters, he just took that axe and just cut the line and, understand, this thing, like a snake, fuel oil all over, yes, but you had to get out of there, because a Jap come in and he could get two for one, yes. Accidents happened and you're bound to have accidents when you've got a lot of men together and stuff, yes. Thank God, I mean, everybody knew their job good, knew their job well, everybody.

SI: Do you guys have questions?

DC: Do you remember anything specific about the role of the *New Jersey* during the battles?

RC: Any rules?

DC: Roles; was it supposed to guard anything specifically?

RC: No--guard anything?

DC: Like protecting a certain carrier, or was it just attacking and going back?

RC: No, when we weren't bombarding, we would just do patrol work, yes. Some days there, like you said, [if] we're near an island or something like that and one of them things had to [be done], we were there all day and didn't even see a seagull, yes. Some days, it's like I say, you're patrolling and that's your job, guard the carrier. That's your main job and, on all these raids and all, why, that was your job. I think of one thing there. It must've been early morning. I don't know how the guy--well, these guys are on the guns all the time, more or less. They're on, yes. In fact, they're on four and eight off. During the night, down in the galley, there's a great, big, huge pot, kettledrum-like, coffee. So, these guys come down, they can get coffee twenty-four hours a day if they want, yes. It's on. This twin-engine, what they called a twin-engine bomber, it was called a Betty, yes. Betty was coming along the starboard side and I understand the guy

on the twenty-millimeter saw it and got permission to fire. I guess the bridge said yes and they opened fire and that's the only time a twenty-millimeter shot a twin-engine bomber down. So, yes, they got him that night, or that early morning. Then, from there on, everybody was gun-happy, because you shoot one plane down, you get the next rate. [laughter] Yes, everybody, they were *gung ho*. That was that. Another time, the *Franklin*--you've got a task force and you've got tin cans, like a clock, all the way around you. Every hour, I understand, they drop back one, like that, go around. I guess I was asleep--a lot of things happen at night--and the *Franklin* cut across our bow. It must've been a little rough, because he was probably shooting across to go to probably, like, one o'clock or whatever. He came here and, like I say, it was rough. We must've went up and he came up, and then, he was going down when we came down. Our anchor caught him, our port anchor, killed the Captain, tore the bridge off, yes, did a lot of damage to the *Franklin.* To this day, they still hold a reunion on our ship, yes, still hold a reunion. So, I mean, there's no grudge. I mean, "You did it, we didn't." To this day, every reunion, the *Franklin's* there, their reunion, not ours.

DC: Did the *New Jersey*, at any point, almost get hit by *kamikaze* fighters?

RC: No. Like I say, in the Marianas Turkey Shoot, we got five that day. Then, we got the Betty, and then, I think we got one or two others that came close, yes.

SI: Do you remember when you first saw a *kamikaze* coming in, or even heard about them using that tactic?

RC: Yes, you heard about it. You think, you figured, "They can't get through, because we've got so many planes." If we have a big task force, yes, we've got a couple hundred planes in there. That's when you pray for them, because they're protecting your butt. If they come in--of course, like I said, they'd always go after the carriers. That's the meat. These *kamikazes*, to me, they're only taught to take off. They don't know how to land. You're not supposed to land. You're not supposed to come back. That's a great honor, yes. I mean, they're stupid, but that's the main thing. [laughter] "Your job is to sink a ship. That's your job. I don't want to see you back here." These guys, that's their duty. They're going to save the homeland, yes. Couple of years ago, Tibbets--remember him, Tibbets? He's the guy that dropped the A-bomb. He was on the ship, the *Jersey*, and he just wanted the World War II men, World War II guys, up in the Captain's cabin. Like I say, I didn't know it was a book signing; so, went up there and everybody asked him the same question, "What did you feel like when you dropped that bomb?" He says, "I killed a lot of lives," but he says, "Now, we also saved a lot," which he did, yes, because of the invasion. He says, "Yes," he says, "you feel remorse or whatever, but, when that thing dropped," and he says, "that updraft, that blew us ten miles off course, that updraft, yes." I guess he wasn't too proud to do it, but you've got to give Harry Truman, what-you-call-it--he gave the permission to do it, Harry Truman. He says, "Yes, we're going to do it." He saved us a lot of lives, yes.

SI: Do you remember when you heard about the dropping of the bomb?

RC: Yes, we heard it, that they had dropped the bomb. I don't know where we were. We were in Guam when it came over that they had signed the peace. Naturally, everybody threw their hats overboard and all. Then, the auxiliary captain or whatever, the OD of the day, came on, he

says, "There'll be no more throwing of hats over the side," and everybody, you know what they told him. [laughter] "That's the end of the war, yes. You know what you can do." [laughter] That's where we were when the peace was signed. We heard it then, yes, but we did hear [that] the bomb had dropped. That was it. From there, we got underway and we went to Manila. I think we were in Manila for about a week, I guess. We were in Manila Bay. We had liberty there, but it [was] lousy. Bridges were blown up and everything--I think there's a picture in there--masts and all, all over the bay, Japs, where we had sunk ships, because we went there one time. We had liberty-we only went one time--and we were in a whaleboat or LSM and it just went slow over one of the boats. You could look down, you could see--it's clear water--you're going right over the two masts, yes, but, going in there, why, the Army had I don't know how many barges they had in there, the Army, and whatever bridges that they were [using]. I don't even know how they were using them. They were all blown up and everything. Like I say, we stayed there for a week, because we thought we were going to get the signing, the *Jersey*. We got underway and, as soon as we left the breakwater and got out in the ocean, why, that's the first time I saw it--they started holystoning the decks. That's something to see. There's a picture of it in there. These guys get about twenty in a line, twenty men in a line, and the boatswain's mate, he gives a cadence. They'll do maybe twenty scrubs this way here. They use, it's a firebrick, with a hole in the middle with a broomstick. They put it here and they hold their wrists here, and then, they move, yes, and they all go in cadence. It's nice to see that. They do so many, and then, he stops, blows the whistle, and then, they move up one more board. There's a guy there with a fire hose; washes it away then, yes. That's all he's doing.

MG: Can you describe the *New Jersey*, how it is different from other battleships?

RC: We are the longest battleship, due to Philadelphia's foul up. [laughter] We understand that there was something like eight inches or so left over before they were going to cut it off. The guy, "That's more work, we get it," and they said, "No, let's leave it." So, we're eight hundred and what? eighty-seven foot long, or something like that, yes.

MG: How many people onboard?

RC: Well, there was, I think, around between twenty-three and twenty-four hundred enlisted men. Then, I think we had almost two hundred officers, yes.

MG: Did you find that your experience working in a shipyard benefited you in any way?

RC: Yes, at different decks and stuff, because you're working on decks and stuff in there, other than kids that just got out of school or something, they don't know their elbow from their wrist. Yes, a little experience helps a long way.

MG: For each battle, how did you mentally prepare?

RC: I don't think you did, because you're either going or you're not going. [laughter] I mean, the ship's going somewhere, you're not going to say, "Well, I'll stay. I'll tread water here until you get back." No, you go with the flow, but everybody got off pretty good. I think it was a good experience. Yes, I do. Sometimes, even today, I think these kids need to have some training,

because when you leave Mom's apron strings the first time and you're by yourself, you learn fast. You learn fast, yes, about washing, your teeth and all this. You grow up fast. One good thing about us in the engine room, after each watch, we had what they called a steaming locker down lower level. You kept a set of dungarees, towels, face cloths, soap [there], because after each watch, you went down to the lower level and you got your bucket. You had a cake of soap and you had a penknife and you flaked off soap. Then, you'd fill it up with water, and then, we'd have what they call 150-pound auxiliary steam line come down, which goes in--we had the best joe pot [coffeepot] on the ship. That's the first thing I did when I got on the ship [when it came to Camden], was run down to the engine room and see if the joe pot was there. It wasn't. It was gone, because the Old Man used to come down and the Old Man, the Captain, he'd come down and he'd look at that joe pot, because they had it made in the copper shop, the shipyard. They had all brass wire twisted and they had designs on it and they had a nice brass screw soldered on to it. It was a piece of art. Inside, there was a coil and this 150-pound steam line went in the top. All you had to do is fill it with water and put the coffee in and run the steam line once. It would go out here, and then, it would exhaust into the bilge and it's all you do. You would draw the water or turn the steam on, it would be hot, and take the coffee, take the lid off and you'd pour it once and you had coffee right away. Yes, when I went down there, it was gone. Somebody liked it better than we did, but, anyhow, you would fill your bucket, and then, you would put it under the steam line and turn the steam line, get hot water. Then, you strip. You strip down, because most of the time, it's hot down there. You're sweating and you have to be fully dressed. You have to have a hat on all the time, you have to have cuffs, you can't--nothing, in case there's a steam leak or something. So, if there's ever a steam leak, you're dead, because that's six hundred pounds steam and it's superheated at 850 degrees. So, it would cut you right in half, but you sit on the valve wheel and take your clothes and you wash them, wash them, wash them, go out. Now, we had what you called a drain collecting tank, funnel about that big, and you would take your bucket over there and pour it in there. That would go down into a holding tank. Then, after that got full, you would see, an indicator'd come up, you would call the fire room and say, "Pump out our drain collecting tank." They said, "Okay." So, then, they pump it out. If not, it would overflow and go in the bilges. Well, then, you don't want that, because you're going to go down there and clean it up. So, you saved yourself some work, but, then, you go and fill it with cold water again, wash your clothes out, right, go around your big intake. The intake pipe is about this big in diameter [three feet], from the sea water, comes up from the bottom of the sea, goes in, goes through your main condenser, which is [where] all your steam condenses into water, which we used the water again for the boilers. Like I said, we have a steam collecting tank and there's a rod that comes up, it's a float, but we have no control over it for emptying it. We've got to call the fire room and they pump it out for us, yes. Even the bilge pump, we have no control over bilge pumps. Fire room has it. We call the fire room, they pump out. Well, then, you take your clothes and you go over and you hang them on the line. You're naked. You've got a towel, soap, wrap around you, you go up. You go to a head, take a shower, dry off, go to your bunk, crap out and sleep until you get woke up again, yes. Then, you go back, sometime during the day, which is only a couple hours later, and take your clothes down. Dry, they're dry in two hours, because of the heat, yes. Those guys, during general quarters, it's like a steam bath in there, because there's no--you've got blowers coming down, but it's all hot air, because it's hot outside. If they're closed up and we're shooting a sixteen-inch, that's worse, because these blowers, they suck all the air in. Now, when these sixteen-inch go off, it takes six bags, each one's 110 pounds. It takes six bags to shoot one shell. You know what sets that shell

off, the powder? a shell about that big, that big [like a shotgun shell], just put it in the breach and they hit it. It sets the thing on fire, and then, the powder burns. Then, you get the boom, yes. Well, then, that powder comes out and all that powder is going all over. Now, these blowers are sucking it in, taking it down and you're standing there thinking, "Boy, fresh air," and, all of a sudden, you get a dose of [Mr. Collins coughs], yes. Then, after each battle, that's the worst. You've got to go down, you've got to clean up. The first time we were at Trinidad, first time we ever shot the guns off or anything, light fixtures broke all over the place, all over. You don't know. You don't know. You don't know until you try. I remember, in the mess hall, almost all the lights, they just fell out, they broke. Some of the toilets, some of the drains were fixed, stationary--can't do that, nothing can be stationary. You've got to have a piece of rubber in there, flexible, vibration, yes. You learn. These guys learned, yes. That's why you have all these ship workers on the shakedown, so, they'd know what to do, what to repair, come back, this and that, yes. It's a lot to it when building a ship. What gets me is, that was put on the board in 1937. You know how they built that thing? with a slide rule--yes, no more slide rules--subtract, add, multiply, slide rule, which means we had good engineers then. We had good engineers and that's why, at the launching, they all get together and they all bet, "Is it going to go this way or is it going to go that way?" When that ship goes down, hits the water and it stays flat, we did our job, yes.

SI: All right. We would like to come back another time and do a follow-up interview, but, for today, you have talked a lot.

RC: Yes, I think I thought you were kidding. [laughter]

SI: Thank you very much; we appreciate all your time. Do you want to add anything to this recording?

RC: I can't think of anything. I will when you get out the door.

SI: Whatever you think of, just write it down. We can cover it next time.

RC: No. Oh, you think about things, this and that.

SI: Thank you very much.

MG: Thank you.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/11/14
Reviewed by Russell Collins 1/3/15
Reviewed by Molly Graham 1/21/15