RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE R. WELLS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

RICHARD G. O'CONNOR

ITHACA, NEW YORK
DECEMBER 2, 1995

TRANSCRIPT BY

KATHLEEN PLUNKETT

Richard O'Connor: This begins an interview with George R. Wells in Ithaca, New York on December 2, 1995 with Richard O'Connor. Could you tell me a little bit about your father, his childhood, and his general background?

George R. Wells: Well, my father was born in 1889 in New Jersey, Hoboken, or somewhere around there, and he became the youngest registered architect in New York State a number of years later, when he was about twenty, I guess, or something like that, and he worked in New York City in a big architectural office. I was born in … Hackensack, New Jersey. We lived in Oradell, New Jersey, which is sort of upstate from Newark, and I was born in 1919. I didn't attend any schools there. We moved to Florida when I was five, and I started going to school there. … When I was eight, we moved back to White Plains, New York, and I stayed there with my family until I was about, until I was seventeen. Then we moved over to Plainfield, New Jersey, and I graduated from high school at Plainfield and attended Rutgers a year later, for two years. ... I was interested, always had been, in the sea. Well, my mother was from, born in Manhattan somewhere, I'm not sure where, but she was born in 1895. … She had met my dad at my grandfather's summer place in Asbury Park, New Jersey, and they were married and lived in Oradell. When I finished my second year at Rutgers, I was interested in going to sea. So I went to New York City, [where] my father knew the head of the Maritime Association there, and I consulted with him about getting work in maritime service or going to the Maritime Academy. I was then too old for the Naval or Coast Guard Academy, but he suggested that the Navy was taking in college people who were interested in joining the Navy and becoming commissioned in the Navy, so he told me where to go, and the new program the Navy was starting was called the V-7 Program in the Reserves. The object was that you would take this training duty for three months and a month's cruise on a ship of the Navy and then be commissioned and serve for one year and be then placed on inactive duty. So I signed up and attended the midshipman's school on about 125th Street in New York City on a old battleship, I think it was called the *Illinois* at that time, and it was the first midshipman's class that the Navy ran before the war. During the war, there were a number of others started throughout the country.

RO: When you were growing up, how would you describe your childhood? Did the Depression affect your father's work?

GRW: Yes. When I was twelve, my father, as I said, was working in New York City at the big architectural firm, and they started laying off workers and he was one of them. He had always wanted to travel overseas, and he'd saved up his money to that end, so he decided he was going to make that trip, at that time. So he took the whole family, and we went by a liner over to France. The day out, there were five of us in my family, so there were only four to a room, and so I was assigned to a separate room with three other men. On the first day out, [laughter] my younger sister contracted one of the childhood diseases, measles or one of them, and so they were placed in quarantine, and I made the trip all by myself. [laughter] It was quite an enjoyable trip. Maybe that's where I developed a flavor for the sea. … I was only twelve, at that time, and we traveled around France and Germany and England. My father's family had come from England, so we stopped to see some of our relatives over there.

RO: What did your father tell you about World War I?

GRW: He had not been in World War I. He had, I guess, been studying to become an architect, at the time, and if they had a draft, whatever the cause, he did not serve. … After the war, he came down with a serious case of the flu, which was prevalent in that country in about 1918 or so, and that's probably what caused his death later on, when he was about fifty-two or five, something like that.

RO: Did the Depression change your outlook in life?

GRW: The Depression?

RO: Did you sit there at age fifteen, sixteen, seventeen and say, "This country's in big trouble. I don't know what I'm going to do."

GRW: Well, I was only twelve when it started …

RO: But right before you went to Rutgers, did you think the country was going to rise, or did you see a continual problem?

GRW: No, it seemed to be pretty stable, by the time I went to college, and my father, I guess, had sufficient funds. He never, we never discussed it, but he was willing for me to go to college. … He was working then for a family whose originator had been the president of the New Jersey Central Railroad, and his son had owned a big estate in Plainfield on Front Street. They no longer lived there, having moved on, but they decided to develop the land there and build houses on the back property. So while I was in high school, I worked for, during the summer, for a civil engineer and [was] not only surveying our property there but also other places in and around Plainfield. He, my father, built a number of back roads in the property and put in a number of houses. The place is still there, it's called Meadowbrook, or it was at that time, anyway, and it's in North Plainfield, actually.

RO: How did your parents feel about college? Did they feel it was really important?

GRW: Well, it's not like it was when my children were going to school. It was, for us parents, very important, but I don't believe that I got the feeling from them that it was. … I knew … to get anywhere in the business world, and that's what my aim had been when I attended Rutgers, I was in the liberal arts program, the business school, I think, and I had my eyes on getting a job in banking, and I knew you had to go to college to do that.

RO: Were you interested in the Navy before?

GRW: Not the Navy per se, but anything to do with the sea, Navy, maritime service, whatever. I just liked it, and I read up. From the time I was about twelve on, I started reading all the *Horatio Hornblower* books [by CS Forester] and things like that, that I could get my hands on out of the school library. [laughter]

RO: Without that war, do you think you would have finished college and just gone into banking?

GRW: Yeah, probably, yeah. … At the end of my second year, I wasn't doing too well in economics. [laughter] In fact, I think, as I remember, I flunked my course in bookkeeping, or accounting, I guess it was called. However, later on, after I retired from the service, my jobs have always been connected with bookkeeping, and, in fact, I set up the double-entry system of bookkeeping for the Ithaca City School District. [laughter] I guess it was a matter of not … wanting to learn so much when I was that young, but it came to me very easily when I was older, so I don't know what caused the original failure. [laughter]

RO: Could you see yourself without college? Did you have any other plans?

GRW: … When I finished my second year of college, I was determined to get to sea somehow, and I could have ended up as just an ordinary seaman, depending on what the fellow at the Maritime Association had told me. ... I wanted to go to that maritime college over in Long Island, I can't think of the name of it, but there's a big college there that leads to a degree in engineering for shipboard experience, but he suggested this other route, and that's what I took. [laughter] The war, we were not [at war], at that time. The United States was [not at war], at least President Roosevelt would not have you believe that we were in any way intentioned to get into the war, [laughter] so that nobody thought we were. It's just unusual that after I got in that we finally ended up [at war]. [laughter]

RO: What made you pick Rutgers?

GRW: It was close, and it was a state college, and it had a good reputation for business and agriculture, of course, but I didn't want agriculture. [laughter] I didn't want to get my hands dirty.

RO: Did you apply anywhere else?

GRW: No, no. I just went over there [and] put in my application, I guess. I was working in Macy's in New York City, at the time, and they had offered me a couple of chances to go to college, and when I got out, I joined Macy's, but I decided I didn't really want to do that. So I that's why I went to Rutgers.

RO: How did you pay for it?

GRW: My father paid for it. [laughter] No state aid or anything. I don't even know if they had any then.

RO: Probably not. Fraternity-wise, was it just the thing to do?

GRW: Yeah. Well, it was, but I lived in the dorm for the first, at least, six months, and I'm not sure whether, maybe it was the whole year, but that, of course, was pretty noisy and not as conducive to residential-type living as a fraternity was. Of course, we got, all got, freshmen always got approached by the different fraternities, and I considered a number of different ones and finally

decided on Phi Gamma Delta, and mostly because two friends of mine had joined, friends I met in college.

RO: Is that right on College Avenue?

GRW: No, it was on the avenue that goes along the river there.

RO: Yeah.

GRW: It's right on the tip of my tongue. I'll think of it in a minute.

RO: George Street. How did you feel about Roosevelt's policies? Were you a Republican then?

GRW: Oh, yeah, yeah. My whole family was, my grandfather particularly … I'd been brought up that way, so I just assumed that anybody in business was automatically a Republican and the Democrats were all the workers. [laughter]

RO: That's true.

GRW: [laughter] We were not too much in favor of Roosevelt's policies, and, of course, some of them have led to our present position of being dependent on big government, which may or may not be good. But, at that time, we didn't think too much of him, and, as I said, we got a lot of our input from my father and grandfather, who used to discuss it quite a bit.

RO: … What would you say the mood was in 1939 and 1940 about the war in Europe? How did students feel about the war?

GRW: Well, I was in the ROTC, and there was always that possibility that we would be called, but it didn't bother us, because we were patriots first, which is something that's been lost in today's society, I think. But, in those days, you just automatically assumed that you would support the government, no matter what they decided to do, as far as something like that went, anyway, and it wouldn't have bothered me when I had gone in with the ROTC if there had been a war.

RO: Was there a change in environment at Rutgers when the war started in September1939?

GRW: Well, in Europe, yeah.

RO: How informed was the campus? How informed were you about what was going on?

GRW: Not very, no. I don't think, as a young fellow, I read the papers very much. Nowadays, I do, but [laughter] I don't recall that we were unduly concerned about the war. It was going on, and we all felt or believed that we should help the British, particularly in my family, because of the fact that we were descended from, we had British relatives over in Britain, and it was just a natural thing to be supportive of your family, old time or new time.

RO: Did you know of Hitler in the '30s?

GRW: Oh, yeah, we didn't like him. In fact, my next door neighbor happened to be German, and his grandfather there, the father of the adults, of course, had come over from Germany and settled in New York City and then his children had moved upstate to White Plains, where I was at that time, and they didn't like Hitler anymore than the rest of us. We were all against him right from the beginning, I believe.

RO: … Was there any event that made you enlist in 1940?

GRW: No, there was no particular thing. I just decided I wanted to go to sea [laughter], and what I had planned, at the time, was to take a year or so off and go to sea. … What I had first thought was to go to sea as just an ordinary seaman on a cargo ship or a merchant ship of some type, but I didn't even know how to do that. That's why I went to see that gentleman in New York City, and as a result of his interview, of course, he steered me in the right direction, fortunately. [laughter] Of course, if I had gone in the Merchant Marines, I might have received double pay and all that during the war. [laughter]

RO: How did your parents feel about you dropping out of school and enlisting?

GRW: Well, I think they were sort of non-communicative about it. They didn't mind at all, particularly when I was going in as a commissioned officer.

RO: Did you think you'd ever come back to school?

GRW: Oh, yeah. … Sure, yeah, yeah. I thought I'd just be in for that year and be back out the following winter, of course, it would have been, because we didn't start our year until December of 1940, and I thought I'd be back out again in a year and could go back to school, but that never happened. [laughter]

RO: Did you always want to be an officer?

GRW: Yeah, oh, sure. I read *Horatio Hornblower* and those stories. [laughter]

RO: Basic training, did you feel you were …

GRW: In the Navy? Yeah …

RO: Can you discuss that?

GRW: Well, of course, I had two years of ROTC, so I was pretty well used to military terminology and drills and things like that, physical drills with guns, rifles, and ... so those things did not come new to me, at that time, when I got in the service. … Basically, the first month was spent aboard an old battleship, and we cruised down to, I can't even think of the name of the battleship, but we went to Cuba, Guantanamo Bay, spent a few days there and enjoyed time in the sun, sunbathing as much

as we could. … After that, we spent three months on another, older decommissioned battleship, I think it was the *Illinois*, I'm sure it was, at about 125th Street. It was moored on a pier there, and there was a school. They used the space on the ship for the birthing of midshipmen and classrooms for teaching, and the naval officers were there … teaching the various subjects of ordnance and navigation and things like that, so that you'd be prepared, be commissioned, and at least have a basic knowledge when you went to sea. [laughter]

RO: Did you feel prepared?

GRW: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. When you think back on it, you wonder how three months can substitute for four years of the academy … [laughter]

RO: After the war started, and with all the new enlistees, did you feel they were as prepared as you? Were they rushed in their training?

GRW: Well, not as far as the officers were concerned that came into the active duty. … I was harbormaster for a while in Okinawa, and some of the captains of some of the smaller vessels that came in, LSTs and that type, were experienced businessmen who had been given a commission and sent to command the ship without even any schooling practically. [laughter] Whereas I started out as an ensign and worked up on a battleship to being officer of the deck, and so I had quite a bit, two, a couple of years of experience in that regard before I was given any command. I wasn't given command until after the war. But here were these new officers [laughter] who had never been on a ship [and] hardly knew one end from the other. Now, some of them were former sailors of sailboats and motorboats and things like that in private life, so they had a little sea experience, but [laughter] most of them didn't have any. It was quite something to come across them.

RO: Had you traveled much before?

GRW: Only that trip to Europe.

RO: Was it a shock?

GRW: Well, we had, my family … had moved to Miami from New Jersey and then moved back to New York, and at times my father had to work in Miami and my mother had taken us aboard a ship, passenger ship, and traveled down there a couple times. That's probably, again, where I learned my love of the sea, [when I] was going down there, because in those days, they'd let passengers go up on the bridge with the steering mechanisms and all that. You couldn't handle them or anything, but you could see what they were doing, so you familiarized yourself with what was going on.

RO: So it wasn't a shock.

GRW: To travel?

RO: Yes.

GRW: No. In fact, my mother had driven us back and forth to Miami a couple a times, when my father had some work, all by herself, with just us kids.

RO: You just had one sister.

GRW: No, I had two sisters. Yeah, there were three of us, three kids in the family.

RO: When did you feel war was inevitable? Was it Pearl Harbor, or were there months before Pearl Harbor when you felt the war coming?

GRW: We were getting closer all the time, yeah, but I didn't think it would come. Well, I guess nobody anticipated it would come this quickly. I've read a number of naval history books since then, and apparently those in higher fields of command were aware, more or less, of what was going on, but at my level, we had not much experience with the details. … Of course, being, for the few months before the war, from like July of 1941 to December 7, I was on a battleship, where we didn't even really see newspapers, and at that time, I don't recall that battleships were even publishing any newspaper-type information. What you might have heard was over a short-wave radio or something like that, but there was not much connected with newsworthy events of the time. So we weren't really informed of the situation, [not] enough to make a decision that we were close or not close to war. We knew we were probably going to get in it, because, at that time, my battleship was on escort duty, escorting convoys from the East Coast up to Iceland. That's where we happened to be when the war broke out, when we entered the war. … During that cruise, those [cruises], I think there were two different cruises, on one of the cruises, one of our destroyers was torpedoed by a submarine not far away, which created quite a furor against the Germans, because they weren't supposed to sink us. [laughter] I don't know how they could miss, that's why they were there, but, anyway, they weren't supposed to, and so we got all excited about that and so we knew that things were coming to a head, one way or another. … Another ship had, I think, suffered severe damage from another submarine, so we were not unaware completely of the dangers of what was going on in Europe. However, we didn't think that our country [was going to war], and, at that time, Lindbergh was spouting off about pacifism, and it seemed that the mood of the people was more on the pacifistic side then than going to war. It was only the suddenness of the Japanese, I mean, that changed everybody's mind.

RO: Where were you when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor? Were you on leave?

GRW: No. We were watching the movies every night … When you'd go into port, they'd rig a big tarpaulin, a piece of canvas, over the deck in case it rained, or in bad weather, it would keep out some of the wind and rain, didn't keep out much, but it did keep out some, a downpour, for instance, and we were all watching the movies back there, when all of a sudden they stopped the movies and announced what happened, "Pearl Harbor's been bombed." We immediately darkened the ship, stopped the movies, we never did see the end of whatever that was we were watching, and from then on, we were at wartime status, even though war, I don't think, wasn't declared until the next day. Of course, this was at night up in Iceland and it was only seven o'clock in the morning out in Hawaii.

RO: Do you remember how you felt, anger or excitement?

GRW: Anger, of course, that the Japanese would do such a terrible thing, not excitement, I don't think.

RO: Did you have a preference where, once it started, where you wanted to serve? You were in both theaters.

GRW: … Well, as the war wore on, eventually, in 1942, in the spring, I signed up, and at that time, before I signed up for submarines, I had been undecided between submarines and small boats, PT boat service, and for some reason, I elected submarines as being a more permanent, lasting affair than PT boats [laughter], and so I chose that field. Then I was later assigned to go to Connecticut to submarine school, eventually, submarine duty.

RO: Did you have any idea how long you thought it would last, the war?

GRW: Well, we didn't think it would last too long. Well, actually, about November of 1941, might have been October, we were supposed to be discharged in December, and rumors started flying that we weren't going to be discharged in December like we thought we were. … They extended everybody's duty, no matter whether they were Reserves, or actives, or their enlistment was about to expire, or whatever it was. They weren't going to let anybody out for at least another year, and that was just a little while before Pearl Harbor. As far as after Pearl Harbor, how long the war would last, well, I don't know that we really arrived at any conclusions, as to the length. We didn't think it would be too long and probably didn't think it would be as long as it ended up being. We all knew it would be more than a year or so.

RO: Did everybody want to concentrate on the Japanese? Were you wondering why we were fighting so hard against Germany?

GRW: Well, we were in the Atlantic Theater at the time the war started, so we were not, we didn't have any preferences. When we got down to the Pacific, later on, on the battleship and later on submarines, we were concerned that they weren't providing as much support for the Pacific Theater as they did in the Atlantic, and I know they could have used more in the Pacific, but otherwise we were not [concerned].

RO: How would you describe the relationship between Annapolis graduates and non-Academy officers?

GRW: Well, of course, during the war, you hardly knew who was who. The only way you could usually tell an Annapolis graduate was by the ring on his finger. However, a lot of colleges had those kinds of rings, too. [laughter] It was not really a big issue. Now, on the battleship, originally, when I reported there, of course, we were there learning a lot of things, and as a junior officer, that was what you were supposed to do and we did. … The only people to learn from were the Annapolis people who were aboard, because, at that time, I think, we were the first Reserves to be aboard for any permanency at all. I don't recall any other more senior Reserves on the ship. We

were the lowest officer category you could be, an ensign, but all the people that were training us were seniors and they were all Academy graduates, and you just looked to them for guidance and counseling.

RO: How was officer life different than …

GRW: Enlisted?

RO: Yes.

GRW: Oh, quite a bit. [laughter]

RO: Can you describe the differences?

GRW: Particularly on a battleship. Oh, yeah. First of all, when you went aboard the ship, you usually went up a ladder called, I can't remember what it's called now, but you walked up the ladder, and when you got to the top, the bosun would blow the whistle, called a pipe. He would sound his pipe, and you were piped over to the side, and you had to salute. Well, of course, everybody had to salute the flag of the ship, the US flag, and then you saluted the officer of the deck, no matter whether you were an admiral, or whether you were the lowest seamen on the ship, but you were still piped aboard ship. This is pre-war. … Aboard ship, of course, you ate in a regular dining room with silverware on the table and tablecloths and napkins. In fact, I remember, I believe that we each had our own napkin for a period of time, and we kept it in our ring, so we would keep it separate. Now, the enlisted men, I don't even know if they used napkins at all [laughter], or maybe they did. They ate in a mess table, wooden table, with built-in benches on them, and they were cleaned, I know on our ship, the battleship, the mess men used to pour leftover coffee on the tables so to get them to have that nice, polished look [laughter], that stain. So there was quite a bit of difference there. When you got up at twelve o'clock, at midnight, or four o'clock in the morning to go on watch, there was always coffee available in the wardroom, as it was called, dining room, and at four o'clock, it may not be fresh, but at least it was there. [laughter] Of course, if you were fortunate and went up on the bridge watch or to the engine room, each of those spots had coffee machines going, and the quartermaster on the bridge and, I guess, the enginemen in the engine room always had fresh coffee available. One of the duties of the officer of the deck was, or the junior officer of the deck, anyway, was to inspect the food. So you'd always make a trip to the galley and [laughter] be given a sample, and it usually was very good, because it was just freshly made. For instance, they used to make the pancakes they were going to serve the crew later in the morning at four o'clock in the morning. Well, of course, by the time they served them, they were not the best tasting, but at four o'clock in the morning, even the rolls were delicious. [laughter] So it was a pleasure to do that part of the trip. Also, the officer of the deck always received a ration, that whatever the crew was going to have, he was served up there. He might not eat it, but he was supposed to. The theory was that he was supposed to sample it and make sure it was satisfactory for the crew to eat, and he did. [laughter] So that was another advantage, or sometimes a disadvantage.

RO: What about sleeping?

GRW: Well, in the officer's quarters, if you were a lower ranked officer, you usually had two in a room, and enlisted men, of course, initially, I know on the battleship that we had taken a month's cruise on before going to midshipman's school, we all slept in hammocks. In the evening, when you were getting ready to retire, you would string your hammock between two hooks or two stances, or two of anything you could find, and there were regular built-in places for them, of course, and if you were fortunate, you built them so that they went fore and aft, so when the ship rolled, this hammock would go from side to side rather than back and up and down with your head being up and then down. … All the bunks in officer's staterooms were built usually fore and aft. When the ship took a steep roll, you would just roll against the bulkhead, the side of the ship or something, which wasn't bad. … Later on, the enlisted quarters all received bunks, and they were built the same way, fore and aft, but there were, you know, anywhere from ten to fifty or more men in one room, so it was a little more uncomfortable. Now, we had experienced that in midshipman's school, so we were not unaccustomed to it, but it was a little more luxurious when you got to be aboard ship. … Of course, in the, on the menus, there were two wardrooms on the battleship, one for the junior officers and then the senior officers. Now, the officers had to pay for all their food. Enlisted men were given it for free, but being you paid for it, you could have either whatever was available on the ship, or if you were in port, you could have it bought, purchased ashore, and brought aboard, so there was that luxury right there.

RO: What about leisure time?

GRW: There wasn't much difference between what you could do as an enlisted man or an officer. There were certain parts of the battleship, anyway, I assume when you get on a smaller ship, like a destroyer, there's no difference from forward and aft or anything, but on a battleship, the aft part of the ship was usually reserved for officer personnel, on the main deck, and the crew could go anywhere else. The only difference might be that the aft part of the ship was more quiet and you didn't have the wind buffeting you, as you would up in the front part, forward part, so it would be a little more quiet, peaceful. … You could play, I don't remember what we might have played, but you could play something like badminton or something like that on the aft part of the ship, because it was less cluttered. The other parts of the ship all had guns on them and things like that. Now, the aft part of the ship did have guns, but they were those big turrets you've probably seen in movies and things like that, and so they were quite high off the deck and there was a lot of deck room between them and the end of the ship, so there was quite a bit of space there. But other than that, you spent your time sunbathing or something like that in the warmer climate. In colder climates, of course, you stayed down below, and, of course, having a stateroom, you stayed there. There were chairs there, there was a couch of some sort, not a real leisurely couch, but a place to sit, if you wanted to read or study or something like that.

----------END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE----------

RO: How did you deal with the close quarters? It was probably worse on …

GRW: Yeah.

RO: … a submarine than on a battleship.

GRW: Yeah, well, on the sub, when I was on the sub, of course, it was during the war and you were either on watch, or you were eating, or you were asleep, basically. [laughter] If you had any spare time on the submarine, officers would go into … their little mess hall, so to speak, called the wardroom, where there were chairs or benches, couches, and the enlisted men would go into the mess hall, where there were wooden benches, again, and usually you could do your reading or letter-writing. On a submarine, you particularly had to study, because you were supposed to get qualified to be a submariner and to do that you had to know every pipe, every valve, everything about the submarine that there was to know, before you could get qualified, and so you were usually quite busy studying or writing letters [laughter], didn't have much pastime. But when you're out at sea in the war zone, the watches for officers on a lot of submarines were two hours on watch and then four hours off watch, so you never got a real good sleep. By the time you got off watch, you were ready to go back to sleep again, except for maybe one four-hour period during the day, but a good part of that was spent eating and getting caught up on paperwork and things like that. There wasn't much leisure time during the war.

RO: Yeah.

GRW: On submarines.

RO: Could you tell, step by step, about your different stations and assignments?

GRW: Yeah. Well, I started off, in 1940, on the *Mississippi* in the fire control division, which, in other words, controlled the fire of all the guns on the ship. … We had a so-called computer that was mechanically operated, not electronically operated, and we also had optical rangefinders mounted in each gun turret, or in the main battery control center, I forget what they call it, but, anyway, it was way up high, and a rangefinder was nothing but very wide, and I say wide, maybe three feet wide, binoculars with two eyepieces coming together in the middle, so you could look through there, and you would line up the object you were looking at through these eyepieces and determine how far away it was. That's the way you figured out how far you had to shoot. … My job was optical officer, and that was maintaining the telescopes and rangefinders and things like that, initially. Of course, later on, I became the division officer for the fire control division and then I was transferred to submarines.

RO: How did that happen? Did you ask for it?

GRW: Yes. No, I asked for it. You had to ask for it, in those days. Now, I understand that later in the war I don't think anybody was told they had to go to submarines. As a voluntary service, of course, you did receive pay-and-a-half, which you didn't get in the other services. They did get something. When you were overseas, you did get some extra pay, and you got the same extra pay on submarines, but you got fifty percent more of your base pay. I don't remember the percentages at all. So, after, on the battleship, I started out on watch. Now, the watches were easily four or eight hours a day, but they were in four-hour periods, and you first started out as the junior officer of the deck, where you were assistant to the officer running the ship. Now, I say, "running the ship," but

don't forget the captain is always the boss of the ship, and when he's around, he tells you what to do, but he has to sleep and eat, like everybody else, and so there's an officer assigned to carry on when he's not there [and] he's called the officer of the deck. … As an ensign or lower grade officer, you start out as junior officer of the deck, and by working with the officer of the deck, you learn all his duties, and they have books out that tell you what you're supposed to learn, too. You eventually become qualified as officer of the deck, and that's what I had done on the *Mississippi*. … When we'd come into port, I know one time, we anchored just outside of San Francisco. A fog had come up, and the admiral in charge of the group decided we would anchor it out in the ocean, so we came into shallow enough water to anchor. … I was the officer of the deck, at the time, and the captain was there, but he let me do all the ordering of what to do, and I just was following the signals of the flagship, which is done by radio, of course, because you couldn't see with the fog, and so I anchored the battleship, which I thought was quite a feat, [laughter] anchoring a battleship. Normally, the captain, or the exec, or the navigator, when you went into port, would be in that capacity, but in this case, I was doing it. After leaving the battleship, I went to submarine school and was assigned to a submarine operating out of Brisbane, Australia, and that was 1943. … On the submarine, I was first assigned as a torpedo officer, the officer in charge of the loading and caring for the torpedoes. Of course, you had a lot of enlisted men that knew a lot more about those details than the officers did, a new officer anyway, and you relied on them a lot of times. Now, you knew the basics of what had to be done and you made sure it was all done, but whenever a problem would come up, you'd have to get together with the people in the know and decide what was really wrong and they'd repair it. I also was the first lieutenant. The first lieutenant was responsible for the cleanliness of the ship and for rigging and mooring lines when you would go into port. On a submarine, you didn't do that very often …

[tape paused]

GRW: … I was the first lieutenant in charge of the cleanliness of the submarine, as well as the torpedo officer. My station, battle station, being the junior officer aboard, was back in the aft, or torpedo room. … When we would fire a torpedo at a ship, the escort vessels in the area would immediately know … the direction that the torpedo would come from and would track the torpedo and start dropping depth charges. So we would wait for a silent running, and everybody would have to not say anything, or do anything, particularly to create any noise at all, because if they were listening, they could hear you, where you were, and then drop the depth charge more accurately. So I used to take mystery novels back with me and sit and read them while we were being depth charged, because the thing about depth charging, you were either going to make it through alive and whole, or you weren't going to know what hit you. [laughter] You [did] have lights and everything, so it was no problem reading, if that was what you wanted to do. Some people slept and did different things. Of course, after a while, you'd get tired of reading and you'd fall asleep, too, but it just kept going on and on. ... When I was on the submarine, we sank three definite ships and one possible, and we made three or four patrols. The areas where we were by late `43 were pretty well cleared of much enemy shipping, so we didn't run across too many. I know one time we had seen some smoke on the horizon, and, unfortunately, it was in the west, and this was late in the afternoon, and as the sun went down, it would, of course, start blinding you because it was hard to look into the sun, if you've ever done that when you're driving. … For some reason, I guess, the enemy had seen our periscope, but we had not really seen them. We tried to keep far enough away,

but you can only get so far or you'll lose sight of them, and all we really had of theirs was the top of their mast and some smoke, occasionally, so you'd try to stay as far out as you can. Well, apparently, they had observed us once, and that was enough to scare them and they must have turned 180 degrees the other way and ran as fast as they could. [laughter] But you don't know which way they're going, so you don't know that until all of a sudden they're gone. Obviously, when you're on the surface, there's usually … three or four on the bridge, two lookouts, way up in the periscope, and then the officer of the deck, and at various times the quartermaster comes up there. Now, the captain and the exec can come up anytime they so desire and look around or see what's going on or whatever, so there could be as many as five or six people up there on the bridge, but otherwise it was an isolated watch. Nobody, you didn't carry on any conversations, or couldn't do anything, and that lasted for two hours on our submarine and then you were off for four and came back on for two. … We ended up, I think, our third or fourth patrol, in Pearl Harbor, and I was transferred to a service squadron and became the operations officer for the service squadron. A service squadron is a group of auxiliary vessels that operate under the command of a commodore, called a commodore. It could be any rank, but normally he was a senior commander, or captain could have had the rank of commodore, which is a separate rank, but he was in charge of provisioning all the combatant ships in the area at the time. So we served in various ports as the fleet moved up towards, closer towards Japan from Eniwetok and Saipan and Okinawa, principally. There were several others in between, I can't remember their names anymore. But wherever the fleet was, or wherever the fleet was planning to go, after they had captured the island, they were going to come back and re-provision, so they could go on to another forward area, [and] we would go there and prepare the provisions, so they could be fully armed when they left to go. … When they went to Iwo Jima, they stopped at Saipan first and re-provisioned there before they went on. We usually went in there the last few days of the occupation, so the Japanese were usually still there. In fact, on Saipan, I don't think we were ever rid of Japanese snipers or firing going on there, because they never completely, all of them didn't get the word that their part of the war was over, so they just kept firing. … After the war, I wasn't there, but I did read that even after Japan had declared peace, or declared, we had signed a peace treaty with them, some Japanese remaining on Guam had kept on fighting a number of years afterwards. … Even though there was no peace treaty up on Saipan, the island itself, the commander, had surrendered, so the island was now under our occupation, but some of them were still fighting anyway.

RO: How did you feel the first time you came under fire?

GRW: Well, I guess the first time I was under fire was down in the submarine, and we were heading from Brisbane up to Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal was under, we were still trying to occupy it at the time, but we were going to the island just across the bay from there to get refueled, so we could go on extended war patrol. … On the way up, we had been assigned a lane, probably about fifty miles wide, in which we could operate. Mostly, we just went down the middle of it, but the lane was supposed to be a signal to all supporting forces, the United States and Australia, in that case, but that was a submarine lane and you were not supposed to do anything, bomb it or anything in that, for a ship that you might see in that lane. … We were in that lane, and one day, on the surface traveling alone, normally, in enemy waters you didn't travel on the surface in the daytime, but we were on the surface in daytime, and all of a sudden, we could see a plane coming towards us. … Anytime a plane comes towards a submarine, the submarine gets out of the way by diving,

and we did, and just after we dove, we did hear a couple of depth charges or bombs go off. The plane apparently was trying to sink us. They must not have gotten the word as to where the safe havens were for submarines, and it turned out later, the admiral sent us a message saying that he heard that we had been bombed, and apparently it was U.S. forces that had been flying up there and had seen this ship, which they had called a cruiser. Of course, it's just a submarine, and I guess the bombs went off fairly close, and, anyway, this thing had disappeared that they were shooting at, so they claimed they had sunk it, [laughter] a cruiser.

RO: Did that change you in anyway at all? Did it ...

GRW: No, I ...

RO: ... make the war become more real?

GRW: Yeah, it sure did. I was brought to the realization that anything could happen.

RO: How much contact did you have with your family? Well, you didn't have a girlfriend at that time, did you?

GRW: No, no. I had gone directly from college. I had a girl back in Plainfield that I corresponded with, but we had been dating up until that time, but I had never gotten serious with her as far as marriage or anything like that.

RO: What about your parents? How much could you contact them?

GRW: You could, but you couldn't write much, and, of course, all the mail was censored, so you didn't write much anyway. There was not much you could say. On the submarine, I know the executive officer used to write his wife every day. Now, the letters only got mailed when we got back in port, but he wrote her every day, and whether he put them all in the same envelope, I never did find out, but every day, he'd religiously write. Of course, I didn't, just my folks, and when I got back in port, I'd drop them a note, tell them I had a good patrol or something. I couldn't write too much, because they censored it.

RO: How much information did you have about the war?

GRW: On submarines, you didn't have much. Of course, whatever you got, it came over on the radio. … I guess you could listen to Tokyo Rose if you wanted to, but I don't recall, we hardly ever did, and most that we found out about Tokyo Rose was when the admiral always sent us messages, which we, when we were on the surface at night, could receive in Morse code, and it was usually enciphered so that the enemy couldn't read them anyway, but every once in a while he'd mention something about, "Well, here's a dot that I picked up in the news by Tokyo Rose about something or another." … Otherwise, we didn't really have much news at all, whatever the admiral [told us]. Well, on the battleship, in those days, we didn't, as I recall, they didn't put out newspapers as they did later on. Later on, they had what they called public information officers, and it was their job to sort of keep the crew informed. … However, we never, in any of the commands that I served in, in

battleships, it was the beginning of the war, and I don't think there was such a thing, I never heard of it, and later in the war, I was on small commands, so we didn't have such an office, but I understand there was that type. … When we traveled back to the States and in different breaks during the war, there were those kind of publications put out, just where they picked it up on the radio and typed it on a regular eight-and-a-half by eleven paper and distributed it to the crew. When I was up in Okinawa, I was on a staff up there, on the service squadron, and they did have an occasional newspaper report that they picked up and distributed. I don't recall them too often.

RO: Do you remember if you received information about D-Day in Europe?

GRW: Yeah, we got that.

RO: Did you receive news of the invasion of France quickly?

GRW: We got that, right, fairly quick, yeah. They did put that out, [laughter] particularly V-J Day, but we did hear about V-E Day, yeah.

RO: Did you ever go on leave?

GRW: Well, during the war, on my way to submarine school, I had some time. … Mostly, I don't remember whether I was given extra time, but they allowed you so much time to travel from one place to another, and the quicker you'd get there, the more time you would have at one end or the other before you had to report in. Sometimes they did give you a week, or ten days, or something like that, leave at the beginning or end of your duty ashore. I was only on temporary duty, well, that once in San Francisco, but that was before the war, and the only other time that I can recall was after the war. Well, I guess there was a time in between there. No, that was after the war, too. Most of the time, I was out in the Pacific. Now, when I was on the submarine, operating out of Brisbane, that was real nice. When you'd come into port, you would have either ten days or two weeks off, and by off, you didn't even have to show up. You could do anything you wanted, but they were very nice about it. You could rent an apartment in town, [and] they would pay for it, or you could go down to the beach and rent a cottage or something down there, and they would, I guess, the military would pay for it. … They gave you all the meals and everything, so you weren't paying for a thing. [laughter] It was very nice. We did eat out, of course. When we had an apartment in Brisbane, there were two or four of us. We bought our own food and cooked it ourselves when we did not eat out, like breakfast and lunch. So, on submarines, we did get some leave, and then when we got to Hawaii, we were given a week, ten days, or two weeks at a Hawaiian hotel, which was very nice. Of course, it wasn't quite the luxury-type of living that it was during peacetime, but it was still very comfortable. From there, you could go out and do anything you wanted to do in Hawaii, on the island of Oahu.

RO: Did you meet any Rutgers men while you were overseas?

GRW: No, not a one. No, not that I remember, no. … I don't recall that we exchanged that type of information very often, unless you were stationed on a ship, but I didn't. There were none on the ship where I was.

RO: Do you feel the general conditions during the war got better? Did the military get more efficient in conducting war, or do you think it got strained and worse?

GRW: No, it really got better. For one thing, it started getting more people, and so that helped ease the ... load, and then during the latter part of the war, I know on submarines particularly, the torpedoes started getting better. At the beginning of the war, they were absolutely lousy, and you'd fire them and they wouldn't hit and they'd go too low, or whatever would happen to them. You generally didn't know unless they got somewhere else than where you were aiming and exploded, go up on the beach or something like that. Later in the war, they got much better torpedoes, and it took a long time for the people back in the States to determine what was wrong, or that there was anything wrong, because they thought they were not wrong [laughter] to start with. Of course, we started getting new developments, such as the radar. On the submarine, we had what would now be called very inefficient radar, but there was radar and [it] worked. At times, we were afraid to operate [radar] for fear the Japanese would pick up the sound waves of the radar.

RO: Did you know servicemen who died in the war?

GRW: Yeah, actually, I can only recall that one person died in front of me or with me. He was the coxswain of a boat, a little boat, I was on when I was harbormaster at Saipan, and a friend of his, up on the bow of this boat, fell overboard, and it was a very good friend of his. Now, the coxswain had on his full foul-weather gear, raincoat and all that stuff, maybe boots, I don't remember, but, anyway, he went straight to the bottom, [when] he dove in to save his friend, because he was a good swimmer and he knew his friend wasn't a very good swimmer, but he dove in to save his friend, and I guess he went straight to the bottom, because he never came up that day. His friend went, we were alongside a big barge and the barge was moving, and his friend apparently had gone under the barge, and because of his foul weather gear or something, whatever, he had floated to the surface and been picked up by a ship on the other side of the barge. But his friend, of course, didn't know that, the coxswain, and so he had dived overboard and then lost his life. That's because he didn't take the proper precautions before he dove overboard. He saw his friend go, so he went in after him. He didn't think. … That was really the only casualty I saw, that I can recall, and that was not really enemy action.

RO: Did you see if the military's treatment of African-Americans got better through your career in the Navy?

GRW: I don't know that it ever got better. They were never treated with disrespect or anything like that, but when I was in the service, they were always the, almost always, now, there were exceptions, of course, but they were usually in the serving-type capacity. They were enlisted men. I never served with a black officer. Blacks on the battleship, they were all in the mess [hall and] in the officer's quarters as stewards taking care of the making of the beds and preparing the food for the officers and things like that. Now, if there had not been enough blacks, whites would have done it. The only reason there was a difference was, I don't know when it started, probably when they enlisted, I guess the blacks were assigned to become the, I'm trying to think of the term, stewards, I guess they were called stewards maybe, stewards, or they were assigned to become a gunner or an

engineer or something like that. Most people were assigned to the duties that they performed, because usually it was on the basis of what they knew, and so I assume that's why blacks seemed to always end up as stewards, mostly because they didn't know much, whereas whites apparently knew more, or maybe the people that inducted them in the beginning [decided]. Now, see, when I first got in the service, the only way people got in the service was by enlisting, voluntarily enlisting, and so when you enlisted, they told you what you were going to do, as they were based on your previous experience or knowledge. ... I've never had anything to do with it, so I don't know why the blacks automatically became stewards, but they did to a large extent. I don't recall that I ever ran into a black in any other capacity, but, of course, there were, as the stories we've heard since described.

RO: Was homosexuality dealt with in any way?

GRW: When I grew up, I didn't know, I'd never heard the word homosexual. I didn't even know there was such a thing. After I'd been in the service for, well, it was during the war, at the beginning of the war, when I arrived in San Francisco, we were visiting various nightclubs, as sailors do, [laughter] in San Francisco, and suddenly we came to this one nightclub and we went in and the stage show was going on, and somebody said, "Those are all men up there," and I said, "Oh, you're kidding me." [laughter] Well, they were, and that was the first knowledge or information in all my young years that I had ever heard of such a thing, and I thought they were kidding, because after the show was over, they came down and mingled with the audience.

RO: Was homosexuality ever dealt with on an officer-level?

GRW: No, there was, no, and I don't think anybody in the service that I knew had ever been accused of being, or was, I mean, I'd never even heard the term. [laughter] There was no such thing. It was only after the war that those things began to come to light, but even so, there was very little of that going on. It was hardly ever discussed. [laughter]

RO: What role did religion play? Was there a chaplain on the sub?

GRW: No, there was no chaplain, no doctor. There was, on the submarine, there was an enlisted man who would, in civilian life, you might call him a nurse-type. Whether you would call him a registered nurse or not depended on his rate. When he got up in the higher rates, he would probably qualify for a registered nurse, but when he first got in the service, he was just an orderly-type, or a practical nurse, who had to take temperatures and collect bedpans and things like that. … On the submarine, I'm trying to think, I don't even know that we had a hospital corpsman, as they were called then, but destroyers on up did have them. … Every third or fourth destroyer would have a doctor, so when, destroyers were divided into squadrons, and every squadron had a doctor, and there were, I think, eight destroyers in a squadron, so that cut the amount of doctors. Now, there was always a pharmacist's mate who would consult with a doctor by telephone, or radio, or whatever, if somebody got really bad. You've probably heard about the submarine that had an appendectomy performed right aboard the submarine. I think the pharmacist's mate did that, but, of course, they were getting a doggone nurse doing a doctor's job. [laughter]

RO: What about religion?

GRW: Religion played no part during the war, at all.

RO: Were you religious at all growing up? What was your religious background?

GRW: Well, I attended the Congregational Church, and I went to Sunday school and church every Sunday until I got in college. [laughter] … Then I don't remember ever going, except when I was back home and then the family would all go to, we went and joined the Presbyterian Church in Plainfield, so we always went to church, but never Sunday school.

RO: Was there a chaplain on the *Mississippi*?

GRW: Yeah, there was a chaplain, and we did have services there and I probably went on occasion, not too often, though. I don't recall, I don't remember, particularly, any activity by the chaplain. Maybe we didn't have one; I don't know.

RO: What can you tell me about commanders who you served under?

GRW: Oh, yeah. Well, the first notable commander I served under was in, he started out as commander, rank of commander, three stripes, and on the battleship *Mississippi*, he was executive officer. The captain left up in Iceland, and he became the captain of the ship. … It was also around that time, he was promoted, just before, or just after, to four stripes, named Jerauld Wright. Later on in the war, he became an admiral, too, and he did some big shot things. I don't remember what they are now. Every once in a while, his name would crop up in the news or one thing or another, [and] you'd just hear about Admiral Jerauld Wright. Then down in Australia, when I was assigned to a submarine, the commander down there, I can't remember his name, but he was an admiral, and he received quite a bit of publicity and is even now still spoken of quite highly for his submarine-type work down there. He never went out on a submarine, he stayed in Australia, but he directed them and he was the one that told you about enemy ships and where they were and things like that, kept you going in the right places to catch the enemy and did a good job at it. … When I was in the service squadron, we served usually with captains. They were our bosses, four stripers, they were, and they were all, I guess, they were all Academy graduates, except possibly my last one during the war. He was the commander, and then he got promoted to captain near the end of the war. I served with him, and I don't think he was an Academy graduate. They were all well deserving of their rank and performed their duties in a good manner and treated their subordinates in a very fine manner. I never had any problems with them.

RO: Did you hear of Nimitz and Halsey and the other admirals during the war?

GRW: Well, we heard of Nimitz, Halsey and all them. They were actually, I was on, when I was on submarines, of course, we didn't hear too much about them. We didn't hear too much about anybody then, [laughter] except the admiral back in Australia. … When we got on the service squadron, we did hear a lot about their different commands and the things they were doing. Of course, since the war, I've read quite extensively some of the histories, and they were quite involved in that. … We did know, during the war, first one would become overall commander of the force,

task force, and then the other one … Admiral Spruance and then Admiral Mitscher, but they kept alternating back and forth. One would take it once and then the other one [would take command]. I don't know why that was the way it was set up to alternate, but that was the way it just came out.

RO: Did you have any contact with prisoners of war at all?

GRW: No.

RO: At any point?

GRW: No. I'm trying to think, on the submarine, they never came aboard, I guess not, no, no.

----------END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE----------

RO: Did you get the sense that air power ...

GRW: ... Was coming on?

RO: Could you tell that there was a major switch?

GRW: No. It was hard for me, as a battleship officer and on a submarine, to come around to the fact that they … were really the ones that you needed to control the seas. Of course, half of the battles that went on there, it was strictly air battles, basically. Down in, initially, down in Guadalcanal, there were a good number of sea battles, and we lost quite a few of our ships down there from other enemy ships. We sank a number of theirs, too, but what I'm saying is that after that, I think, most of our [battles] were waged in the air, pretty much so anyway, and what we would hear in the front lines, so to speak, was that the aircraft was becoming the weapon of the future. We weren't happy with it. … Of course, one of the choices we could've made instead of submarines had been aircrafts, but we had chosen submarines. We're glad we did. I say "we" because my friend and I both, when we were down there in the South Pacific together, we had gone ashore on leave together, down there in the Fiji Islands, nice beaches down there. … We had talked it over and decided we would put in for submarines. We had debated between submarines and sub chasers, at the time. I would've liked submarines. They're lighter than air. I don't know why we had. My friend, who was Frank (Springer?), my wife's first husband, was from Brooklyn, and he had been in the Naval Reserve in Brooklyn, so he was quite familiar with naval matters, but not in aviation matters. That probably influenced his decision, doing the submarines, and I dare say he influenced me.

RO: How did you feel then and how do you feel now about the atomic bomb being used? Did you have any reservations whatsoever?

GRW: Well, I'm trying to think how we even heard about it before, because there's been so much publicity about it since. We were up in Okinawa, at the time, and, of course, I had been on Saipan, which is about twenty miles from Tinian, where, I think, the plane was going, so I was familiar with that area. … The news up in Okinawa was very scarce, and I don't recall that there was much to-do

about it. I know we knew it was a big bomb and it had done a lot of damage. We did get that fact, and I guess we did get the fact that it was atomic. But it didn't convey much to us, at the time, because we didn't know what atomic was. But, no, we were, at that time, we were glad to hear that the war was going to close because of this, and, of course, subsequently, I'm a firm believer that it was the right choice, because I've read how many casualties the Navy was anticipating. You know they never anticipated as much as there usually, actually were in a battle, and so the numbers, even anticipated numbers, were astounding, I think. … Millions on both sides, more of the Japanese than the Americans, but still the Americans would've lost a lot, but the Japanese would have been almost annihilated. At least, probably forty percent of their population would have probably been [killed] had we landed, as we were trying to do. We were all ready to go. Of course, I didn't know that then, on Okinawa …

RO: Do you know where you were on V-E Day and V-J Day?

GRW: Both places, both times, I was on Okinawa in Buckner's Bay … I was the harbormaster, and, initially, when I became harbormaster, I had been on the flagship, which was a nice auxiliary repair ship, nice accommodations and everything, but my work was on the other side of the bay, mostly where the combatant ships moored all the time. I didn't have anything to do with the off-loading, or anything like that, or assigning ships to berths ashore, though I did have, the rest of the harbor was mine, and I anchored the battleships and everything, the destroyers and all that, when they came into re-provision or whatever. … To be closer to the scene, we found a merchant vessel, a Liberty ship, that had been torpedoed in the engine room. The rest of the ship was sound. It had two holes, I believe, two aft of the engine room. … It looked like nothing had ever happened. The ship had been abandoned by the Merchant Marine, and so it was just sitting in the harbor. So I got together with a couple of enlisted personnel, chief petty officers, who knew what they were doing, and we rigged up a generator in the hold of the Liberty ship, so everything would work on the ship. It was electric, everything, almost, was electric anyway, and so everything would work with this power, and we moved aboard and lived there. That was our headquarters for the harbormaster. … The tugs could come alongside, and I could tell them what to do and what I'd planned. We actually put moorings in for the bigger ships, when they would come in, or even some of the smaller ones, and after the war, we were grateful that we had, thankful that we had done that, because we then had two typhoons that came along and devastated whatever was afloat in the bay there, I mean, really devastated it. The first one was worse, because there was a lot more shipping there then, and I was on this engineless Liberty ship and had to protect myself.

[tape paused]

GRW: So I had, before the typhoon had come along, way before, one of my ships there, the tugs that were operating with me, had a salvage vessel, and it had a lot of salvage equipment aboard, so we had rigged up moorings for my ship. No, I'm wrong. I had put down two anchors, and during the typhoon, the first one, we had dragged halfway around the bay, and ended up alongside this particular salvage vessel. As we drifted by, he said, "Do you want to hang on to me?" and I said "Sure." … The alternative was to go and hit the reef, which a lot of ships had done, and they had sunk, because the reef was, there was about four feet of water on top of it, and a ship had gone anywhere from eighteen to twenty-five feet depending on how loaded it was, and when you hit the

reef, the reef put a hole in them and they just sank alongside the reef in twenty-five, thirty-five, forty-five feet of water. So I said, "Sure," and so we passed lines back and forth, and we got tied up to him and stayed there all night. The next morning things were quieted back down, so he said, "I'll put you in a mooring." So he took three huge anchors and put them at three different sections of the compass, so that there was one every 120 degrees, I think, of course, 360, one there, one there and one there, and then he put a chain up the middle of the three and a buoy at the top, and I just hooked into the buoy, tied into the buoy, with my chain. … When the second typhoon came along, I was there, and, unfortunately, during the middle of that storm, another merchant vessel was cruising around the harbor. … When you're on a vessel like that, it's very difficult to turn up into the wind, because the wind keeps setting the other way. If you've ever been in a sailboat, you'll know what I mean. Well, this ship was [being hit] with one hundred, 120 mile per hour winds, I didn't know, we didn't have a anemometer, so I didn't know how fast the wind was blowing, but he tried to turn up into the wind and was not quite able to make it, and so he came heading towards my ship. Well, fortunately, he got headed up part way before he hit us, so that we hit broadside, like that. Well, no damage was caused, except to the little railings and stuff like that, nothing major, but he had his propellers going, and that was fine while he was alongside of me, but then his motion took him up ahead of us, and that's where my anchor chain was down to the buoy. He chopped it in half with his propeller, which not only cut my chain but, of course, wrecked, I'm sure, his propeller, and he ended up on the reef, but he cut us loose. … Fortunately, we were able to get another ship to catch us before we got going too fast and slow us down and stop us for the night. After that, I said, "No, more of this." So I got all my tugs and put them alongside this engineless ship, and we just rammed it up onto the little beach that was there, the beach was only one hundred yards wide, the rest was all reef, all around, so I rammed it up on the beach with no ballast or anything, and so it was way up and high. After I got up on the beach, I put wires up to the shore with great big anchors, and then I flooded the compartments that we sat on, further, harder on the bottom, so that thing could never move … So I never lived through a third one, so I don't know what happened to it after that. We were just fortunate. … A fellow that had served with me, an ensign, when the first hurricane, typhoon, was coming up, he had had a friend on a yacht that had been taken over by the Navy and used for survey or something, and he came up and asked me if it would be all right if he went over there while the typhoon was supposedly coming up, and I said, "Sure, go ahead." It didn't matter to me. Well, he went over there, and his vessel was unable to keep itself from dragging and he dragged against the reef and sank and he lost his life. I wished he'd stayed with me in my little home. He was afraid of my engineless behemoth, which it was, just a hulk, but yet it stayed, and nothing ever happened to it.

RO: You received a bronze star and a sub insignia.

GRW: And a what? Sub, yeah.

RO: Could you tell us about that?

GRW: Well, a bronze star, well, the submarine insignia, you have to serve on a submarine while it was sinking ships, and I had two stars on the submarine. So on each patrol, when you sank an enemy vessel, you got another star. The first time, you got a pin, and you got stars for the next patrol. The same thing happened with ribbons. If you got more than one ribbon, you'd get stars to

put onto indicate double or triple or whatever. … Then the bronze star, I'd been out on, I saved a man's life up on Eniwetok. We were off together on the reef and he got swept into the bay, and I went out and brought him back, and so they wrote me up for it.

RO: Yeah, I read the newspaper clippings.

GRW: Yeah, right.

RO: How would you say the war changed you? If you could take a look at your life, at yourself, how do you think the war changed you?

GRW: Yeah.

RO: Obviously, it changed you.

GRW: Well, that's right. I was going to become a businessman, and I ended up a naval officer.

RO: Well, obviously, you matured.

GRW: Yes. Oh, you had to, quite a bit.

RO: Looking back, do you notice any other major changes that your life took because of your service?

GRW: Well, I met my wife. Yeah, that was a big change. [laughter] … The girl I had gone with several times while I was in college, I met her brother first. He and I … graduated high school together. They were twins, so I guess she must have graduated, too. … Anyway, we double dated and he took out my sister and, eventually, married her, but I never married his sister, but we double dated there for a while. My sister was two years younger than I, but they didn't get married until after, during the war, several years after I had gotten in the service. … Later on, this girl that I had double dated got married, so I didn't have any connections back in Plainfield at all. My folks had moved away, my mother, by the end of the war, by the time the war was over, because my father had died. No, that was before, that was after the war, yeah, it was after the war. Other than that, we had no family connections other than my mother back in Plainfield, so I never even went back there. I was in the service and I went wherever they sent me, and they never sent me to the East Coast until I got married.

RO: How would you say the war changed the military?

GRW: Well, I think it has made it a more relaxed service. Now, when I first got in, on the battleship, you practically didn't do anything without permission from somebody, and everything was very formal. Every fifteen minutes or so … when you wanted somebody on the ship, or wanted something to happen, they would blow the bosun's pipe and tell you whatever the command was, or whatever was going to happen, or for So-and-So to report to quarterdeck, or whatever, and I don't even think they use the bosun's pipe anymore. Also, we had bugle calls. Every time you did

something, the bugle would play a particular tune. If it was time to get up, reveille, it was time to eat, that was mealtime, and there was taps to go to bed, and there was, when you raise the flag, you blew the, either the band played, or the bugle would play, one of the two, and the bugle played for everything. You went to general quarters, the bugle played. Nowadays, they don't even have, I don't think they even have a bugler aboard ships anymore. Now, on destroyers, instead of buglers, they have whistles and still use them. When you'd pass another ship, I don't even know if they do it anymore, but during the, before the war and even after the war for a while, when they'd see a more junior ship, [the senior ship would blow its whistle]. Now, every time the two ships meet, one of them is senior to the other, just automatically, either by date or rank, or if the ranks are the same, then by service number, or what they call assigned number, and, anyway, one person is senior to the other, so you had a (red horn blower?) … and they always saluted the other ship. The senior provided honors to the other ship, and, of course, they don't do any of that anymore. So things have become a lot more informal. Now, I don't know the extent that it is anymore, but I know when I was getting near the end of retirement or to retire, there was a lot more informality than there had been. … Of course, admirals, when they were at sea, or were in charge of command facilities near the sea, always had a boat assigned to them. It was called a barge, no matter what kind of vessel it was, usually in the neighborhood of thirty-five to fifty feet long. The admirals always had a barge. Well, when we got to Puerto Rico, the admiral had outfitted his barge so he could go fishing, [because] his wife loved fishing. She used to go quite a bit. The admiral got so he would allow officers to go deep-sea fishing on his boat, his barge, when he wasn't going. I don't know that they would have done that before the war.

RO: How did the birth of your children affect your career? Did it restrict the things that you could do?

GRW: No, I just took it in stride. My wife says that I abandoned them at times by going to sea.

RO: Do you think it was good for them?

GRW: Probably not.

RO: Like moving, I guess they didn't move that much.

GRW: … It didn't seem to have affected them in any manner. Most of the time, when they came, after they came, except for one three-year tour, I was always on shore duty or with them, either overseas shore duty or shore duty in the United States. It was only about one three-year period when I was really away from them, on the destroyer. Well, and then there was the year in the tanker, yeah, that I left them.

RO: Can you describe your postwar assignments?

GRW: Yeah. Well, right after the war, I went to what they call General Line School … in Newport, Rhode Island. It's a year's course and it's an intensive introduction to military and naval affairs, gunnery and seamanship and engineering, electricity, and, of course, I had had electricity in submarine school, so I was quite well versed in that, but they brought us up-to-date on everything in

the Navy. … After that, I was assigned as an executive officer of a cargo-type tanker. In other words, it was not associated with the fleet; we just carried cargo from one place to another in the Pacific … After that, I was assigned to a little, small refrigerated cargo vessel, the *Latona*, and we carried cargo in the Pacific. … We only made one trip, [laughter] but it was a long one, from San Francisco to Philippines to Shanghai to Eniwetok. … From there, I was assigned to Charleston Naval Shipyard as executive officer and shore duty there, and we lived on quarters in the station, so that was very comfortable living. … Then we were assigned to duty ... I was assigned to duty as commanding officer of the *Mullany*, Destroyer 528, operating out of Newport, Rhode Island, so we moved up there and I was on there two and a half years. We traveled through the Mediterranean mostly. We spent a few months in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in battle exercises, training, and the rest of the time was either in the Mediterranean or in Newport. In Newport, it was in the wintertime, so it was rough operating, but the Mediterranean was real nice, because that was in the summertime. [laughter] We usually went over around April and got back in September or October, so I missed all the nice weather in Newport. … After the destroyer, then I was assigned as the operations officer of the Potomac River Naval Command in Washington, D.C. and helped set up the defense plan for the Navy, working in conjunction with the Army, in case Washington ever was attacked. We hoped it never would be, but just to be sure, we had the plans. … From there, I went to command of that same tanker that I had been executive officer of a number of years prior, and they, it had been decommissioned and I re-commissioned it and sailed to Venezuela and Labrador and England and Holland, so it was very, and Portugal, so I had a nice cruise on there, all over in one year, so we really went around a lot of places. … Then we came back and I was assigned duty in Puerto Rico, executive officer of the naval station there, so I was there for four years and retired there, and we stayed on another year and lived in civilian rental housing and then shipped up to Ithaca, New York for retirement, where we are now.

RO: What did you feel about the Korean War?

GRW: Korea? Well, I felt we should have gone into North Korea when MacArthur wanted to, but, of course, Truman overruled him. I thought that was a mistake, and I still do. Look at what's happening now. Well, first of all came the incident with the, after that the incident where they captured one of our little ships out there, but it was an electronic survey ship, keeping up with all the messages, they took them captive and kept them there for a while. … We don't know whether they're on our side or against us right now.

RO: Is that the type of war you thought we should be fighting, like containment policy?

GRW: Well, Korea, yeah, I felt we should have been in that, not Vietnam, but Korea, yeah. It was for the best interest of the United States, security-wise.

RO: What about Vietnam?

GRW: I'm not sure that that was in the same category. I think we sort of got hooked into that, like we might get hooked into Bosnia, if we're not careful. The people in charge, mostly President Johnson, made some serious errors in getting us so involved, and, of course, some of the other

presidents, before and after, well, after, I guess, kept it going for a while. [We] finally got out, but [it cost the country] a great loss of life and humiliation.

RO: You served under four presidents, Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy.

GRW: Yeah, and Johnson, I think. Yeah, because when did he …

RO: 1963.

GRW: Yeah, I got out in '62, that's right.

RO: Did you notice any differences from administration to administration? Were there any changes in military policy in the Navy, any noticeable changes?

GRW: No, I don't think any of those changes filtered down to the command of where I eventually was, maybe in the higher-ups around Washington. I do, in Washington, you could sense there was a difference, because I served under, I'm not even sure what years I was there, but, no, things didn't change very much from one to the other, not in the military. … Mostly our changes came about by the chief of naval operations. … There were several there that went sort of overboard, but they were mostly after my time. I was already out by then, but you could see what was happening.

RO: You were supposed to be non-partisan as an officer, right?

GRW: Well, no, you couldn't be non-partisan. You had to act non-partisan, and we never, in the wardroom, you might discuss it, occasionally, partisanship, but usually you didn't discuss that. There was too much else going on to keep your ...

RO: What about your personal feelings? For instance, I like Eisenhower a lot. I thought he was …

GRW: Yeah.

RO: But some didn't like him as president.

GRW: Well it didn't affect us, but, personally, I did, too, yeah. I thought he was a great guy, yeah, good president. Well, I thought Kennedy, even though I wasn't a Democrat, was a fairly good president. I didn't like Johnson or …

RO: Nixon or Ford?

GRW: The one before Johnson, Harry Truman, Truman, yeah.

RO: What do you consider the happiest part of your military life?

GRW: Well, I don't know about happy, but the most enjoyable part was the commanding of the destroyer, because you were the boss, and a lot of times, we operated independently. I know one

time we were, I forget, we were cruising down near, in the Mediterranean in the southwestern part, going from one port to another, all by ourselves, and we were, we had a long time to make a short distance, so rather than waste our time doing nothing, I stopped the ship in the middle of the [laughter] Mediterranean Sea and everybody went swimming. I don't know that very many ships did that [laughter] for relaxation, and it seemed foolish to go along at eight or ten miles an hour, when we could stop and have a little rest and relaxation and then go on a little faster. It was more efficient to go twelve or so miles per hour than ...

RO: How many people were on the destroyer?

GRW: About 300 or 325, whatever.

RO: How hard was it to adjust to non-military life?

GRW: Very difficult, yeah, and you had to always watch yourself, particularly in private business at your language, [laughter] because I was rather free with my language in those days, but also dealing with women in the office. I never had dealt with them. I guess I had in Puerto Rico; we had several secretaries that were women. Other than that, in civilian life, all your help was women. [laughter] One time I had a young man working for me, but most of the time they were women, all clerical types. Initially, it was, I had to be very careful.

RO: Could you quickly explain your post-service career, your different jobs?

GRW: All right. When I got out of the service, I went to work with my brother-in-law up there in Ithaca as a salesman for his mobile home company and had worked for a year, and I saw an opening in the Ithaca City School District for an office manager. I applied and was accepted and later was assigned the job of treasurer of the school district, and tax collector. … After ten years there, I saw an opening at the Board of Cooperative Educational Services, which is a public school paid for by individual school districts for selective training and vocational subjects and special education, principally, and also the boss of the BOCES, for short, Board of Cooperative Educational Services, was also the district superintendent of the small schools in the area. Now, the Ithaca City School District had their own superintendent, but they let smaller schools in this area, all but the Ithaca School District, the other, I think, nine schools, our boss was also the superintendent of the schools, of those schools. Now, that didn't affect us, but he was their boss, not much he could do, but he, technically, was over them in the line of command to Albany.

RO: Did you consider yourself ready for those jobs when you took them?

GRW: Oh, yeah. No, I was right ready. When I, of course, had taken over as office manager, it was not too much different than running a ship, as far as everything except getting underway and stuff like that, but, so there were just six or eight people under me in the office, clerks, payroll clerks and accounts payable clerk and things like that. … Then that job, I became, we were in single-entry bookkeeping at the time I took that job, and I became treasurer. We had an inspection every couple years by the state audit department, in those days. They don't do it anymore. In those days, the state would come through and audit your books to make sure you were right, even though

we had private auditors that came in every year, [and] after I'd been there several years, the state decided we should all go on double-entry bookkeeping. … There was no problem for me, because I had courses in college and at the Louis Hotel Training School after the war in Washington, and I had also taken a private correspondence course prior to having to do this work for the school district, but I set up the bookkeeping system there. … At the time, after we had got ours set up, they then told BOCES, where I had later worked, that they had to set up theirs, so I helped the girl up there set up their bookkeeping, even though I had flunked the course down at Rutgers. [laughter] So then I was very well prepared again becoming the business manager at BOCES. Again, there was not much difference than operating a ship, except it was civilian instead of military labor, and so it wasn't a very difficult transition at all. I got to do a little traveling up there, because I …

RO: Did you enjoy it, your work?

GRW: Yeah, not as much as being on the destroyer, but [laughter] next to that, it was almost as good. It was almost as good as being on shore duty at Puerto Rico, except on shore duty in Puerto Rico, the Navy took care of your house completely. You didn't have to think. [When a] light bulb went out, you called them to come and change them, but that was because the ceiling was ten feet high and you couldn't reach them and you didn't have a stepladder.

RO: What is your view of Rutgers today?

GRW: Oh, I'm a fan of the athletic teams, and whenever I hear news of it, I'm always very happy to see that they won, when they do win. … Sometimes they play up in Syracuse. Now, I have not gone to Syracuse for a game, but I'm always interested in the outcome.

RO: Many alumni resent that it was turned into a big school. Most of them like that it was a small school.

GRW: Well, I did, too, except I saw that change coming, I think, when I was there. I know we were setting up several campuses in outlying areas, I think, Newark, places like that, at that time, and I thought that was, I didn't really, I wasn't crazy about that, but it didn't affect me too much. No, I don't think it bothered me that it got so big. I'm glad to see their name in the paper for something and read about some of the things that their department heads are doing. It's very exciting.

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

Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy 7/10/02
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/10/02
Reviewed by George Wells 10/21/02