

Reginald and Geraldine Johnson

*Brooklyn Navy Yard Oral History Collection*

Interview conducted on February 12, 2009 at the Johnsons' home

in Norwich, Connecticut

by Sady Sullivan and Daniella Romano

Verbatim Transcript

[00:00]

Geraldine Johnson: And here he is.

Danielle Romano: And here's Dad.

Geraldine Johnson: Here is Dad.

Danielle Romano: Oh wow! Ooo -- he's really handsome.

Richard Johnson: He had been there since 1940.

Danielle Romano: An intimidating character -- since when? He  
doesn't look very -- he looks very nice. I mean not very -

-

Geraldine Johnson: Right, very friendly person.

Danielle Romano: Very friendly, yes.

Geraldine Johnson: And he would sit there reading the paper  
with uh a big tall glass of iced coffee there and --

Richard Johnson: Down this little building right here.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah.

Danielle Romano: In 313?

Richard Johnson: 313.

Geraldine Johnson: And if you had a problem, first time you met him, he -- I had just come home from school and had on the saddle shoes and socks and the plaid skirt and the sloppy Joe sweater and the house is being painted, so there were draped fabrics, sheets, all around. He knocks on the door or rings the doorbell in the hallway and "[inaudible] in here?" I said, "No. Do you want to leave them a message?" He said, "Oh, if I could." So I got a pencil and paper and he's up there on the wall writing the message and um when dad came home, I gave him the message and he said, "Oh, I knew all about that. It's all taken care of."

Danielle Romano: [Laughs] Yup.

Richard Johnson: He had a knack of knowing -- he was, he was smart, sharp.

Geraldine Johnson: Madison, should I move the recorder over here?

Danielle Romano: No, you don't want this stuff.

Geraldine Johnson: OK.

Richard Johnson: I can just leave things out.

Danielle Romano: Well we want all of it, yeah, actually.

Sady Sullivan: These are the kind of personal details that we --

Geraldine Johnson: Well pick up the table and let's go.

Danielle Romano: Oh the plug will --

Geraldine Johnson: It's plugged in?

Sady Sullivan: Can you plug in?

Danielle Romano: It is plugged in. It's nice looking at things.

Sady Sullivan: Oh it can plug in over there.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah, just plug it over here.

Sady Sullivan: OK, I will move it.

Danielle Romano: I'm going to grab my notebook too, just in case I have things I need to write down. Sorry. OK. Well now I feel like we should --

Richard Johnson: There's an outlet here if you need an outlet.

Geraldine Johnson: You have to start all over again.

Danielle Romano: Yeah, so to save yourselves from start -- I mean I don't want -- this is great, but I want Sadie to be able to record.

Sady Sullivan: Yeah, so we'll start formally and then --

Geraldine Johnson: That's what I thought. Ask for the questions you need to ask.

Danielle Romano: But then let's just roll the way that we are because this is the way that --

Geraldine Johnson: [Inaudible; overlapping dialogue]

Danielle Romano: I'm just going to go through -- So you also noted Dry Dock 7. So would you go out to Bayonne?

Richard Johnson: Once in a while.

Danielle Romano: Yeah?

Richard Johnson: Once in a while because -- mainly because some of the ships [inaudible; audio drops off] I think the Queen Mary [inaudible; audio drops off]. We went there one time when the [inaudible] France went in and a few others. Bayonne is an annex. They had a repaired [inaudible; audio drops off].

Danielle Romano: Uh-huh.

Richard Johnson: To the big Dry Dock.

Danielle Romano: I kind of heard that there was some controversy with the French ships. I'm curious if you had heard anything about that? We had interviewed a women very early on who talked about um the French got uh offended or because there was -- the, the U.S. couldn't -- the Brooklyn Navy yard didn't want to take in the -- this is just a story I heard -- that the Brooklyn Navy Yard didn't want to take in some of the French vessels because they weren't --

Richard Johnson: Well they took in the --

Danielle Romano: -- very clean.

Richard Johnson: -- the French battleship.

Geraldine Johnson: Richelieu.

Richard Johnson: Richelieu.

Danielle Romano: Oh yeah.

Geraldine Johnson: We had them at our house. All the officers came to our home.

Richard Johnson: That's how I officially --

Danielle Romano: Really? Oh gosh, this is great.

Richard Johnson: That's how I officially met her because this -- here's the, the uh, that's probably the main gate and there's a group of three row houses down here. She lived in the middle row house.

Danielle Romano: In that H?

Geraldine Johnson: You have to understand the Battleship Richelieu, they had no soap and they had no medical uh equipment. So they had to reuse what they had and they used -- that's why, I think, they were disappointed we couldn't help them.

Richard Johnson: But it was friendly base where they came in.

Geraldine Johnson: They were very friendly people.

Richard Johnson: Richelieu was there for nine months.

Geraldine Johnson: And you know they had, they had bandages hanging up to dry.

Danielle Romano: Oh gosh.

Geraldine Johnson: And it was a very difficult time for them. And we'd, uh you know, they just came in and uh I'm sure they were disappointed because we didn't have supplies.

They didn't know they needed them and that's probably where this story started.

Danielle Romano: Uh-huh.

Richard Johnson: It probably compared to an American ship --

Geraldine Johnson: Does that make sense to you?

[05:00]

Danielle Romano: Yeah.

Geraldine Johnson: Yes, yes.

Danielle Romano: That does make sense.

Richard Johnson: It wasn't as clean and as neat as they would like, but his -- one Sunday afternoon -- I guess I don't know, it was about toward the end of the week, he saw me and he said, "Oh, can you come to house at three o'clock Sunday." I said, "OK."

Geraldine Johnson: This is my father.

Richard Johnson: And I didn't know what it was all about. I figured it must be a meeting of the group that's there because he had quite a number of people. Uh, so I got in a little early and went down to do the [offsets] and said, "What's the big deal at the commander's office?" and [Hoke] said -- before I knew it he said, "Oh, you must be -- it must be your turn," he said, "When he has a gathering or a social event, the ones that live there -- there aren't too many seniors -- they have a, a gather -- a social event and

they have teenage daughters that find it monotonous and so they said we've got to get some young bachelors to come up and keep them happy [laughs] in one part of the bellow room while the rest of the party goes on."

Geraldine Johnson: There were an awful lot of young people and we all banded together and uh like buddies and you know we'd go to the theater, to dinner or we'd start off at our house and then we'd all shoo off to New York, but we always sort of started the party there and then partied after in New York. We would go dancing. We had Xavier Cugat, [Von Monroe] and so many wonderful bands --

Richard Johnson: All those big bands were in New York all the time.

Geraldine Johnson: -- big bands to go to.

Richard Johnson: They'd stay there in the hotels, yeah, but that's how I officially met her and then went from then on.

Geraldine Johnson: At the house, yes. I didn't --

Richard Johnson: Then we started dating.

Geraldine Johnson: Right. We had to wait two weeks for a date. I was busy.

Richard Johnson: [Laughs]

Danielle Romano: [Laughs]

Richard Johnson: And then we got married about a year later in 1944.

Geraldine Johnson: But um, yeah uh and then my sister got married in the chapel --

Richard Johnson: June.

Geraldine Johnson: -- at the hospital and then because she was chosen to be a Woodbury Bride, um they were advertising Woodbury Soap in those days, and she was chosen to be a Woodbury bride. So um her husband was in an out at sea, so one time when he came in he said, "Well we need an official picture." So they had a group of young fellows got together to have the Arch of Swords and my husband was one of them and I grabbed the picture to show you at least the front of the house. You want to see the front of the house --

Danielle Romano: Oh wonderful!

Geraldine Johnson: -- and what it looked like. And it shows the uh window is different.

Danielle Romano: Yeah, oh that is an unusual window.

Geraldine Johnson: The screen. The screening. The screening on the window is different --

Richard Johnson: It's basically the --

Geraldine Johnson: This gives a very good view of the railing.

Danielle Romano: That one's [inaudible] and he's smiling.

Geraldine Johnson: He's showing how he pulls his sword in [laughs].



Danielle Romano: Mhmm.

Geraldine Johnson: But I thought you might be interested in uh  
looking at the architecture because all of the fronts of  
the buildings looked like this, you see.

Richard Johnson: Now most of the --

Danielle Romano: It was quarters H, right?

Geraldine Johnson: It was standard.

Danielle Romano: Were you H?

Geraldine Johnson: F. No F.

Danielle Romano: OK, sorry.

Richard Johnson: Most of the senior officers in the shipyard  
portion of the whole organization, they were Korea, uh,  
naval officers that had gone, probably gone through Naval  
Academy and then went to MIT for graduate studies in, in  
naval architecture and marine engineering and --

Geraldine Johnson: Another [inaudible] picture.

Danielle Romano: OK.

Richard Johnson: -- that was a two or three year program and  
then they were diverted to the uh duties uh applied to  
design, construction, repair of ships uh and it was called  
engineering duty only officers.

Danielle Romano: Engineering; say that again.

Richard Johnson: It's the -- the category is a, for the  
career is an engineering duty only.

Danielle Romano: OK.

Richard Johnson: And they still only use the same terminology and I think, right now, there may be -- I saw -- I asked somebody in oh about a year ago, it's about 800 in the Navy in that field and a lot of them are down in Washington in the design phase or the early stages and they're in navy yards. Some of them closed down and they have

[10:00]

uh supervisor ship buildings scattered all around called private yards and have monitored that sort of work.

Danielle Romano: So did we have supervisory ship building in the Brooklyn Navy Yard too?

Richard Johnson: They had part time.

Danielle Romano: Did we have supervisory ship building in the navy yard?

Richard Johnson: No.

Danielle Romano: That was just for private yards?

Richard Johnson: That was uh supervisor ship building covered uh ships, the shipyards in their limited jurisdiction -- oh, if you want to turn that off, the noise?

Sady Sullivan: No, I was just seeing if -- it's on low and so that's good. I can hear it a tiny bit.

Richard Johnson: I could -- if we can just turn it off.

Sady Sullivan: OK, do you mind if I turn it off and then we'll -

-

Richard Johnson: No, the right knob -- just go up to the middle on the right one. It will turn it off.

Danielle Romano: Yeah, I'll let you guys get started. Just this is because I knew that we had sup ship offices.

Richard Johnson: Supervisors ship buildings uh is independent of the yards. Uh there's us -- there was -- there still is in, in New London or Groton rather -- there's a supervisor ship building because there's a big shipyard, private shipyard, electric boat building submarines, and the supervisor of ship building would cover that. They probably make -- there's a little tiny yard on the New London side and they may cover them if there's any Navy contracts there.

Danielle Romano: So that was, OK, so that was the -- this was the Navy command for uh at private yards though? So in a private yard was doing a government ship?

Richard Johnson: Well your supervisor ship building only, but engineering duty only, back then, they reported up the line to uh the Bureau of Ships. Now the Bureau of Ships is common phrase. It's been superseded by Ships Systems Command now, but it's the same structure and they've been in this. Then with the limited number of uh careers coming

along, they kept bringing reserves in and they brought people like myself, who was right from straight from college, and in my case, they sent me down to an app list of the Navy Post-Graduate School for about eight months.

Danielle Romano: Uh-huh.

Richard Johnson: And every eight months they'd pump out -- we were about sixty in the class -- they'd pump them out and go to where the needs were and they kept grinding them out for years. And then after the war a few of them stayed on the make a career of it and uh we've kept up -- we did see a few of those that did make a career of it and they made out very well.

Danielle Romano: Do you want to?

Sady Sullivan: So I've been recording just now and but I want to officially start. So since this is going to be -- just so you know, this will be archived at the Brooklyn Historical Society and also at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and um we have release forms. It's your interview, so you know anything that you want closed we can close or you know you can close for a certain period of time, but um other than that it will be accessible to the public through the library. Not yet, but --

Richard Johnson: Before you -- do you want anything to drink?  
He's drinking water, is that it?

Sady Sullivan: Oh yeah.

Sady Sullivan: I've got water.

Sady Sullivan: We just --

Richard Johnson: We've got lots of stuff.

Geraldine Johnson: They just finished lunch, they said, so they're OK. Before you start again, where is the white book with all our pictures? It has the clipping of uh Regina in the Arch of Swords.

Richard Johnson: The white book?

Geraldine Johnson: There's, yeah, sort of a white --

Sady Sullivan: From the Woodbury Bride.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah, it has the Woodbury Bride pictures in it.

Richard Johnson: Give me a minute. I think I know where it might be.

Geraldine Johnson: Because I looked under the bed and it's not there.

Richard Johnson: Not there.

Geraldine Johnson: No.

Richard Johnson: OK.

Geraldine Johnson: But it would show you more of the house because it was, you know, four stories.

Danielle Romano: Oh, wonderful.

Geraldine Johnson: Half a basement and it was four stories,  
counting the basement.

Danielle Romano: How many of you were living in the house?

Geraldine Johnson: Four of us.

Danielle Romano: Four.

Geraldine Johnson: And then my mother had it um, uh refurbished  
so that we had a very large room in the back. They built  
it out from the porch.

Danielle Romano: Uh-huh.

Geraldine Johnson: So I don't know if it's still there.

Danielle Romano: Yeah.

Geraldine Johnson: Then we had a greenhouse out in the gard --  
out in the back.

Danielle Romano: Uh-huh. I don't know if it is still there.

Geraldine Johnson: I don't know if it's still there.

Danielle Romano: Quarters F porch. OK.

Geraldine Johnson: We looked out on tennis courts and I don't  
know if they're still there.

Danielle Romano: Overgrown, but still there.

Geraldine Johnson: Overgrown but they're still there.

Danielle Romano: Still there, overgrown and vested up a  
little bit.

Geraldine Johnson: And then they had uh a handball court on the left, if you go out the backdoor. Your tennis courts are straight ahead

[15:00]

and on the left there was a handball court and I used to go there and practice my swing.

Danielle Romano: Uh-huh. Did anybody play handball too?

Geraldine Johnson: No, not that I knew of. They didn't play handball at that time, but there was sort of a subtle line so that you knew where the tennis net was so you could practice your swing to get it over the net.

Danielle Romano: [laughs] And I'm looking at his book right now. It's wonderful just to read the notes and see what I recognize. There's that notebook too.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah, one time he had the duty and he was on his feet for 24 hours. I don't know how many ships he docked and undocked in 24 hours.

Danielle Romano: He's going to have to explain what that entailed, his work.

Sady Sullivan: While he looks can we -- can I ask you some background information, like um --

Geraldine Johnson: If I can help you.

Sady Sullivan: OK.

Geraldine Johnson: I was a schoolgirl, so you know it makes it a little diff --

Sady Sullivan: Well yeah, no, this is background about you, just so that we have --

Geraldine Johnson: Just the background of me?

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm. So I'll start formally so for the archives so that they know today is August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008. I'm in Norwich Connecticut. This is Sadie Sullivan with the Brooklyn Historical Society and Danielle, if you would introduce yourself so that the recording recognizes your voice.

Danielle Romano: Danielle Romano at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Sady Sullivan: And if you would introduce yourself so that the people transcribing recognize your voice and also introduce yourself however you'd like.

Geraldine Johnson: All right. I'm Geraldine Kiernan and I married Richard Johnson. So I'm now Geraldine K. Johnson.

Sady Sullivan: And how do you spell your maiden name?

Geraldine Johnson: K-I-E-R-N-A-N.

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm and where were you born?

Geraldine Johnson: I was born in Norfolk, Virginia in August 8<sup>th</sup> -- August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1925.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, so this month is your birthday month.

Geraldine Johnson: Yes it is. We already had a birthday cake.

Sady Sullivan: [Laughs] Very good.



Richard Johnson: No I don't know where it is right now.

Geraldine Johnson: I don't know. It's too bad.

Sady Sullivan: OK. And is family from Norfolk, Virginia?

Geraldine Johnson: My mother is from Dorchester, Massachusetts  
and Boston.

Richard Johnson: Oh that's another thing, right there.

Geraldine Johnson: And uh my father is from White Plains, New  
York.

Richard Johnson: [No skin] on this book a little while ago.

Sady Sullivan: And since it was previous in the recording, we've  
been speaking about your father. Will you introduce him to  
us, his name and date of birth?

Geraldine Johnson: Oh, this is him.

Richard Johnson: This is.

Sady Sullivan: Oh that's fine.

Danielle Romano: Sorry, she's --

Richard Johnson: This is a source of lots of stuff. I mean  
it's -- some good pictures in there. 10 -- page 105 is a  
launching of the Bonhomme Richard.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, it's OK. Well will you introduce your father  
first?

Richard Johnson: All right. This is uh James Eugene Kiernan,  
my father, who comes from White Plains, New York. He was  
one of eleven children and the parents died in the flu

epidemic and so the family was all split up and he went to live with his Aunt Wilson on Staten Island and she was the one that helped get him into Annapolis. He graduated fourth of his class of class of 1990.

Richard Johnson: Yeah.

Sady Sullivan: Class of what?

Richard Johnson: Graduated in 1918 or the class of 1919.

Geraldine Johnson: Yes, they -- because of the war, they got out early.

Richard Johnson: He got out in 1918. Yeah.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, I see.

Richard Johnson: And he went to sea right away on a destroyer [inaudible].

Geraldine Johnson: And then from there he went to, uh, MIT in Boston and that's where he met my mother.

Sady Sullivan: Oh and how she was from Dorchester, but how did they meet in Boston?

Geraldine Johnson: Oh, well apparently there was a gathering of the family and uh he happened to know one of the cousins and was invited to come and that's how he met her.

Sady Sullivan: And so you were born in Norfolk, Virginia. Did you -- how long did you stay there?

Geraldine Johnson: Well, as an infant I don't -- I really don't know, but I would imagine several years.

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm, and then when did you -- what was the --  
where did you live --

Geraldine Johnson: Progression? We ended up, uh, in, um,  
Foxhole Village, near Washington, D.C., and from there we  
went out to the Philippines from '33-36.

Sady Sullivan: Wow.

Geraldine Johnson: And he was on Governor General Murphy's  
staff

[20:00]

because it was a territory of the United States at that  
time and uh before he left, we were able to drink water out  
of the faucet instead of these fifty gallon drums that the  
Army issued to you for water supply. So that was one of  
the projects I know my father worked on was, uh, fresh --  
the water system.

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm.

Geraldine Johnson: Out there and then we had six months  
vacation before he had to report back to the United States  
and that's when we toured China and Japan. Then we landed  
in San Francisco on our way to the East Coast for his next  
duty station.

Sady Sullivan: And was his next duty?

Geraldine Johnson: Camden.

Richard Johnson: Camden Shipyards.

Geraldine Johnson: Shipyards.

Richard Johnson: They built cruisers at the time.

Geraldine Johnson: And then he was transferred from there to  
the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Richard Johnson: Brooklyn.

Sady Sullivan: So what year would it have been that you ended up  
at the Brooklyn Navy Yard?

Geraldine Johnson: Uh, about 1940.

Richard Johnson: About '40 for him I think.

Geraldine Johnson: It was 1940 for him, but I didn't show up  
there uh until probably '41 the family moved. I had to  
finish school in Garden City.

Richard Johnson: He had to get space available too.

Geraldine Johnson: Right and he had to get the space available.  
He commuted until quarters were available.

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm.

Richard Johnson: And then he -- he uh -- his duty, when he  
was there, was the hull superintendant for the shipyard,  
which uh covered new construction of all the new  
construction and all the repair work going on.

Geraldine Johnson: Right.

Richard Johnson: And he stayed there until '40 -- well he had  
that duty until '43, 1943, then he went to uh -- he moved  
to a -- stayed within the boundaries of the yard, but he

was overseeing these private shipyards in the area, uh the construction, and then at -- shortly after V-E Day -- still fighting with Japan -- he was sent over to Europe to control the whatever German coastal shipping there was uh and whatever other duties they got, but that was his assignment until --

Geraldine Johnson: Then he retired.

Richard Johnson: Retired 1946 I guess, when he came back. He came back around Christmas time in '45.

Sady Sullivan: So where did you -- when you, as um -- when you moved with your family to the, to the Navy Yard -- I know you two were talking about this a bit, but where did you move to when you, when your family moved to the Navy Yard?

Geraldine Johnson: We moved right into the quarters house because we were out in Garden City, Long Island, and we commuted by Long Island Railroad until the quarters were available and when they were available, then we moved in.

Sady Sullivan: And so which quarters -- where were the quarters located in the yard?

Geraldine Johnson: On Fulton Street.

Richard Johnson: Fulton, yeah.

Geraldine Johnson: They faced Fulton.

Richard Johnson: Uh, Flushing.

Geraldine Johnson: Flushing is it?

Richard Johnson: Flushing Avenue.

Geraldine Johnson: I'm sorry, Flushing. They faced Flushing.

Richard Johnson: Uh this is a real schematic of it.

Sady Sullivan: Yeah.

Richard Johnson: Here's the main gate.

Sady Sullivan: So this is the [printing of eight].

Richard Johnson: The main gate right here and he's the um, those little blocks, there was maybe a couple in here and then they had a group of three and she was in the middle of the three and then a single up here. The single was for Admiral [Candy], manager of the shipyard, general shipyard.

Geraldine Johnson: Facing Quarters F, on the right was uh where Commander [Garchadwick] lived with his two sons.

Richard Johnson: Yeah. He was --

Geraldine Johnson: Daniel Garchadwick.

Richard Johnson: He was, he was um correspond to your father for the machinery portion of the -- he was the machinery superintendant for the yard and he had a group and while these people were in that part, the top floor of building 313 and as use[ment], as time went on, more people come in, they built that building 292 -- was that it?

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm.

Richard Johnson: And the top floor there was officers.

Sady Sullivan: OK.

Geraldine Johnson: Chadwicks is on our left. Who was on our left? They had two daughters.

Richard Johnson: Angus? Would that be it?

Geraldine Johnson: Angus? Maybe it was Angus.

Richard Johnson: I don't know.

Sady Sullivan: Why did the -- did they move over to 292 [25:00] just for space or for any other purpose?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Sady Sullivan: To move to 292, the officers?

Richard Johnson: The officers had -- they were people that worked for either him or uh Chadwick, the machinery superintendant. There were a few small people in -- uh I'm not sure jurisdiction that took care of uh gunnery and electronics. There wasn't that much electronics. They just called them -- just starting in I guess and both Chadwick and Kiernan reported to the production officer of the yard. When I was first there it was Captain Shultz and later it was replaced by Captain [Krucker] and I left Bob [Krucker] was in -- and then I guess he reported, probably, to the admiral for sure.

Sady Sullivan: And that was production? Captain Shultz and [Krucker] were production?

Richard Johnson: Production officers. They were in charge of all the production, everything; the shops, the ships, the new construction.

Sady Sullivan: OK.

Richard Johnson: And every week we'd have -- the production officer would hold a meeting that would include the heads of each of the shops or the trades in the yard on the production end of it and all the assistant supervisors, like I was, they would all go there and it would get a little bit informed of what's, what the real problems are in there and uh you just hope uh you weren't responsible to be a problem that week. But it kept people in tune with what was going on and the turnover in ships for repairs and upkeep was horrendous; big volume.

Geraldine Johnson: Well one of your docks dried out. Somebody -- destroyers could you get in one of the larger dry docks.

Richard Johnson: Well the, uh, the four dry docks we had there, for a long while -- one, four, two and three -- these were built during the war years and they were not used for ordinary dry. They were used either in new construction or long term needs.

Sady Sullivan: So that's five and six.



Geraldine Johnson: These two, but four was big enough to take the North Carolina and it put four destroyers in it at one time.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah because I remember -- I think that was the one where the Davidson was in --

Richard Johnson: Well he'd go -- they could go in either two, three or four.

Geraldine Johnson: He could go in, yeah right.

Richard Johnson: Number one was not large enough for the destroyers, but they weren't big enough for the destroyer escorts that come along during the war. And uh I have, in this book and another book -- this one down here -- an article from a -- a reprint of an article from a Brooklyn newspaper of -- one is uh shortly after that dry dock was built and the other one was while it was under construction and a small print didn't show much. But it took -- it's all granite block and it took them, the article said, sixteen years to build it and uh --

Sady Sullivan: Dry Dock 1?

Richard Johnson: Dry Dock 1.

Sady Sullivan: Yeah, it was 1841-51.

Richard Johnson: Something like that, yeah, and they had an article about uh, about that in both of these two things; this one and this one.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, OK.

Geraldine Johnson: And which dry dock did they expand it for the bough to fit?

Richard Johnson: Number four.

Geraldine Johnson: Number four.

Richard Johnson: I've just indicated. It's mostly ahead of the dry dock. It's furthest away from the water. It's just like a semicircle. Well the North Caroline couldn't quite fit in it and so they cut a V in the roadway and they put down a steel plate

[30:00]

when this ship was not needed in that dock. But if they -- if -- I was there one time and I think it was the South Dakota came in, a battleship, and same vintage as a North Carolina, and they have to lift those plates up and the bow sticks right up there. You can reach up and touch it. One end come down on the dock, on the other side, and the case on and tuck the stern end of it. But uh, they used to allow those docks and it could be anything from ships that hadn't had a change to go in and get cleaned up and painted or to where they had battle damage they'd have to go in and out. So it could be short term, long term.

Geraldine Johnson: You know they would repair some of the ships in San Diego so they could get through the canal, Panama Canal, and come up for major or more repairs to Brooklyn.

Richard Johnson: Yeah they would come to several yards. Most of the -- most of the Navy yards were on the East Coast, traditionally I guess more than anything else, and they'd get temporary fix and then come all the way around.

Geraldine Johnson: Well [Caibus] came into San Diego after his ship was damaged.

Richard Johnson: He came in just to, for supplies I guess there.

Geraldine Johnson: Supplies, OK, and then he went through the Panama Canal.

Richard Johnson: Yeah friends of ours that had been on a, had been in the Navy, and he had been on a destroyer escort, The England I think it was, and he pulled into San Diego and I was stationed there after we -- after Brooklyn -- and we went down uh to see the ship and all the, up by the uh superstructure, you could put your hand and just go right through like this anywhere you want and it'd be holes there ripped through it. And a kamikaze had skidded from -- coming from the stern -- skidded right into the ship's --

Geraldine Johnson: Superstructure.

Richard Johnson: -- superstructure and the wardrobe and all that and the bomb exploded there and he survived and he was just stayed overnight with us and then he was going to go around with the ship to Philadelphia I guess to get repaired.

Geraldine Johnson: But he was a nice visitor because he brought us a canned ham and everything was rationed and we hadn't had one of those for a long time. And then he came around the Suez Canal, which base did he go to for major repairs? Did he go into Brooklyn or Philadelphia?

Sady Sullivan: He said Philadelphia.

Richard Johnson: He was scheduled by Philly. I don't know. It was late in the war, so they could have just canceled out that.

Sady Sullivan: So even in the damaged ship, they could said it from -- or they could go from San Diego all the way to Philadelphia?

Geraldine Johnson: Well they would do some repairs there out in Hawaii before they could come across the Pacific.

Richard Johnson: Yeah. They had a, they had uh a lot of -- a few floating dry docks that they could take most anything.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah, he was training for a floating dry dock up in Boston.

Richard Johnson: Yeah, they sent me. I had to go up to Boston for about a month and get briefed on floating dry docks. Uh this is a picture of one here. It doesn't show much except it's a big dock and a big ship and they uh build in sections and I think it's eight sections here and they're towed out by a Liberty Ship or the equivalent and then they can be reassembled out there and they only got a couple of them operating out there, but they were big enough to handle all, any battleship we had. Uh and then they were -- I guess in 1943, I went up to Boston to get briefed on floating dry docks because they didn't have a floating dock at, in New York, and the thought then was it's going to be a long war and you got to go island to island and island and someone says, "Why don't we skip an island and skip and island?" And they did and they left a lot of Japanese held islands selectively, left them there to starve and moved on and wouldn't take combat. They'd take combat with someone further between them and Japan and the dry dock construction didn't keep up fast enough and I never did get out there on that. Uh, I'm not sure what you have

[35:00]

for architecture stuff, but --

Sady Sullivan: No this is great.

Richard Johnson: That's -- I got that -- I used to get that, have them, a couple of those books, during the war time and then the kids used them for crayons and everything else. So I got a new set a couple of years ago, but it gives a lot of information. And for instance, I looked at that, those things there, and they told me that at least this many destroyer, uh battleships were built and constructed at the New York naval Shipyard and that's what the dates were for commissioning and uh, let's see. I'm trying to see if I can see what your interests are. That's one reference I use a lot.

Danielle Romano: Uh-huh.

Richard Johnson: This book I was given recently uh by my new daughter-in-law.

Geraldine Johnson: You have access to this book?

Danielle Romano: No, actually it looks like -- I mean I deal with the Naval Historical Foundation fairly often and that just looks like a great book.

Richard Johnson: Let me show you the one that uh --

Danielle Romano: But these are --

Richard Johnson: One reason why I --

Geraldine Johnson: These, I don't know if there are very many around.

Danielle Romano: Wow.

Richard Johnson: The uh inside cover of the One Victory Edition, it says where I bought it from.

Danielle Romano: Naval Institute Press.

Richard Johnson: Navy uh --

Geraldine Johnson: Maybe you can check in their archives and --

Richard Johnson: So like this one here, it's loaded with a lot of pictures and some really matter. This is Brooklyn Navy Yard June 1944 with aircraft carrier being launched.

Danielle Romano: Wow.

Sady Sullivan: Is that -- no. That wouldn't be the Missouri?

Is that the Missouri?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Sady Sullivan: Was that the Missouri, June of '44?

Richard Johnson: No that was the aircraft carrier, Bonhomme Richard.

Sady Sullivan: OK.

Richard Johnson: Uh, I don't have -- there might be some -- there's some articles that cover a little bit about the Missouri in here. Oh I have clippings.

Geraldine Johnson: Do you have a picture of the bat -- laying of the keel don't you?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Geraldine Johnson: You have a picture of them laying the keel of the Missouri?

Richard Johnson: Uh let's see. I could try to figure out how to tell you all of this stuff. Uh this is what caused me to call you people. My sister lives in New Jersey and whenever she sees something about Navy or she sends it up to me.

Danielle Romano: That's great.

Richard Johnson: And it told us about your organization. Uh this was a clipping, I guess, is that familiar to you?

Danielle Romano: The Commandant's House.

Danielle Romano: Did you spend time at the Commandant's House?

Geraldine Johnson: Very seldom, no.

Richard Johnson: I don't --

Geraldine Johnson: No. He was way up on a hill.

Danielle Romano: Mhmm.

Richard Johnson: When I was stationed there, this little thing -- someone built a uh, tried to build a submarine. That's now in Washington Navy Yard.

Danielle Romano: It's actually in Sea Girt, New Jersey, the Coast Guard took it from the Washington Navy Yard.

Geraldine Johnson: Oh did they?

Richard Johnson: Oh they did?

Danielle Romano: Yeah and they have it inside.

Geraldine Johnson: Where's the Coast Guard?



Danielle Romano: In Sea Girt, New Jersey.

Geraldine Johnson: In Sea Girt, New Jersey.

Richard Johnson: Oh, uh --

Sady Sullivan: No, if we could pause for a minute maybe here  
because I want to ask you some background questions for?

Richard Johnson: Sure.

Sady Sullivan: So first, if you would for the recording, for the  
archive, if you would introduce yourself however you would  
like to.

Richard Johnson: OK. I was, from fourth grade on I was  
living in Newark, New Jersey and I went to college there,  
Newark College of Engineering, mechanical engineering, and  
graduated in 1941 and the winter before that, Navy came  
around to most colleges in the country that had engineers  
and looking for engineering people to sign up, join the  
Naval Reserve. If you passed all the routine they put  
[40:00]

you through, they would offer you a commission upon  
graduating. You had to have your degree first and said  
you'd be called up for active duty for the duration of the  
national emergency and I was -- so we graduated on Friday  
and the following Monday, I was one of ten that went back  
to school and got sworn in and in July I reported to go  
back to school at the Navy Post-Graduate School, which was

then located in Annapolis on the academy grounds and I uh got there two weeks before my uniforms arrived and there were about sixty in a class, uh a mixture of a quarter from the Naval Academy and other people like myself and everything in between. I was there for eight months studying naval architecture and then from there, upon completion, they said basically, "Your duties will be complying with needs of the Bureau of Ships," which was responsible for -- they would be responsible for design, construction, repair of ships and I was green as could be. I didn't get through any indoctrination, but I think for eight months living in town in Annapolis, in a very nice room I had, and going on the academy grounds all the time and seeing the way the academy was, it was impressive and by osmosis I picked up some of it. But uh I reported there in I think it was March 1942 and by September of '44 I was detached and sent to uh San Diego for the Naval Repair Base out there. It was -- it was like a shipyard, but it's all Navy. All the trades were Navy men and stayed there until the end of the war and then I stayed in the reserves and I got called back for two more years in '50-52 and then stayed with reserves until age sixty and they put me in retirement status. So when the enemy invades and by the

time they get halfway up the river here, then I know I'll be called up, but not until then.

Sady Sullivan: [Laughs] And what's your birth date?

Richard Johnson: May 31, 1919.

Sady Sullivan: And were you born -- where were you born?

Richard Johnson: I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, but I don't have any memories of it because the family moved to Leominster, Massachusetts and stayed there until fourth grade.

Sady Sullivan: Oh. I'm from right outside of Leominster. I grew up in Acton.

Richard Johnson: Oh for gosh sakes. And she had a --

Geraldine Johnson: Went to Tyngsboro.

Richard Johnson: But she also had a buddy that lived in Lancaster, Shirley.

Geraldine Johnson: Shirley. Shirley.

Richard Johnson: Yeah, all up there.

Sady Sullivan: So you were there until fourth grade?

Richard Johnson: Fourth grade and when I got there I couldn't understand them and they couldn't understand me.

Sady Sullivan: [Laughs]

Geraldine Johnson: Accents.

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm.

Richard Johnson: [Laughs] Oh and that went on. I was reluctant to change over and I think we went to a high school reunion at the 50<sup>th</sup> and they found out I had moved to New England. They said, "We knew you'd go back there." That's great.

Sady Sullivan: And um, so was your family -- are your parents from -- where are your parents from?

Richard Johnson: My mother was born in Leominster.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, OK.

Richard Johnson: Uh and are you familiar with Leominster at all?

Sady Sullivan: Yeah. I used to teach at a day camp around one of the ponds. Oh, it's OK.

Richard Johnson: [Inaudible]

Sady Sullivan: One of the ponds there I used to teach swimming.

Richard Johnson: Oh.

Sady Sullivan: Do you know where she was from in Leominster?

Richard Johnson: Where?

Sady Sullivan: Do you know where she would have been in Leominster?

Richard Johnson: Yes. Do you know where on Route 12 that go through here, goes through Leominster, going north in the center of town, about a quarter of a mile is a Catholic Church, red brick.

Sady Sullivan: I don't remember.

Richard Johnson: Had a park on the right. She was -- the property -- their parents bought that house 1907 and she was --

Geraldine Johnson: Right next door to the church.

Richard Johnson: Right next door to the church and then she stayed there and then the family stayed there until [00:45] they all died off, really.

Sady Sullivan: And where is your dad from?

Richard Johnson: He was born Oswego, New York and uh he uh had a uh hard thing that decided his whole fate. His father worked at the Round House and the railroads and both parents were immigrants. He uh, his kids, he figured his career was going to be go up to the sixth grade and then they get a job as child labor in the factories -- a lot of mills around there -- and when about fifth grade someone broke his arm up here and up here and so it didn't grow much and so when he got to the fifth grade and sixth grade, nobody wanted him in the mills and when he got to the eighth grade his parents said, "Well you're no good any other else, might as well go to high school." At the end of high school they said, "Well there's a normal school here in town. Go there." Then he became a teacher and he uh, he got engineering training later on and uh when they -

- after the war was over he -- I guess he was probably in war related industries -- they settled in Leominster and he had -- he and his buddy had a little [celluloid] plant that was making novelties and the biggest thing the product was they made fancy combs for women to stick in the back of the hair, the big pugs, but then after the war they had bobbed hair, no pugs.

Sady Sullivan: Oh.

Richard Johnson: No combs. No town. You could pick up a -- you had a complete wipeout before the depression, about a couple years before the depression. So they just -- he and his buddy just locked the door and left town and when I refer to his buddy, it was my godfather and he went down to Washington and got a job there and father came down to New Jersey and got a job in New Jersey and then uh we followed in 1928. That was my fourth grade.

Geraldine Johnson: When did he write the book *Applied Mathematics*?

Richard Johnson: Oh he had written three different times. When he got married he was uh superintendant of the trade schools in Connecticut, in Bridgeport, and he wrote a book, *Applied Math*, for the teaching, for the purpose of the students, and then he repeated it again a little bit later, another edition, and then when he was down in Newark he was

principal of a vocational school and he wrote another book and he finished it in 1939, but unfortunately he didn't live long enough to see the book in print because he died just a few months before it was printed and that was a need because at that stage, when we were -- when I went to school in grammar school, if someone was not very up on the studies, the teachers common threat, well if you don't get going here, you can't go to high school. You'll probably just have to go to vocational school because they didn't get a diploma at that stage. They could learn a trade and they go practice it and he, with books like he put out there helped get people. They upgraded the whole system to make them high school graduates.

Danielle Romano: Wow.

Geraldine Johnson: Right, yeah.

Richard Johnson: So uh I didn't come from military background and she did and of our four kids, we have one that went into the Marines and he put in 24 years with the Marines as a helicopter pilot and that brings us up to --

Geraldine Johnson: And then he talked three of his nephews into --

Richard Johnson: Oh gosh, he said -- he's got --

Geraldine Johnson: Marine Corps.

Richard Johnson: His nephews, his wife's sister's children, had three boys and a girl and I guess and Brian was married and around the family a lot and the first, the oldest boy was pretty sharp in school and very outstanding as a soccer player and uh the father was dreading

[50:00]

going to Ivy League school, the cost and all of that, so Brian said, "Why don't you go for Naval Academy, see what you think." Went over there and they liked his soccer and they said, "We're not going to waste a scholarship on you. You can come in here." He went in. The next fellow didn't go there, but he did get -- after college he worked for a while, he got a commission and then the first one, when he went through the Naval Academy, he signed up for the Marines instead. It's an option they have in the graduation. Then the middle one signed up for the Marines and the third one, when he was this high someone asked him, "What do you want to -- what type of work do you want to do when you grow up?" He said, "I don't want to work. I want to do like Uncle Brian and get in the Marines."

Geraldine Johnson: Now which one is going into the diplomatic service?

Richard Johnson: The oldest one is now. I think he's in transit about now. Uh, he had progressed well and whatever



he did and somehow he got in Navy Post-Graduate School and languages and they found out he was good at anything and they said, "Well, OK. You're good in Chinese. We want you to pursue a year in Chinese studies." And he got that and the Marines said, "OK, now you're an expert in Chinese, but remember you're a Marine first of all, so off to Iraq you go." Then he came back and they said, "Now you can do your specialty and his specialty right now is he's just been assigned to the embassy in Beijing with family. So they're all just about ready to --

Geraldine Johnson: Didn't he spend a year in China traveling around?

Richard Johnson: Oh he spent a year -- oh that's right.

Geraldine Johnson: He learned the dialects of the provinces.

Richard Johnson: When he finished his studies, before -- from then on -- before he went over there, Brian said that, he said that reading the stuff, the characters are tremendous.

Geraldine Johnson: There are over 3,000 characters to memorize.

Richard Johnson: He said he could read 5,000 characters OK and then they said, "OK. Now you're going to go over there and go in an exchange student basis. You're going to learn a little more about them," and oh and then did some studies and traveled and then he went to Iraq and now he's going over there to the embassy.

Sady Sullivan: Just in time for the Olympics.

Geraldine Johnson: Mhmm.

Richard Johnson: And the other two, one came back from Iraq and one is in Iraq.

Geraldine Johnson: One is in Iraq, yeah. An interesting family we have. Did you see anything in these books you want to ask questions about?

Danielle Romano: Not yet, but I'm learning a lot just reading through it.

Sady Sullivan: Was it -- why did you decide to go get a degree in engineering?

Richard Johnson: Um I don't know. It's hard to predict, but I guess --

Geraldine Johnson: He's very good at math. That might be a good indication.

Richard Johnson: Math was good. English, that was not my favorite subject, and the school was right there in town.

Geraldine Johnson: He could walk.

Richard Johnson: I could live at home.

Geraldine Johnson: And walk to and from --

Richard Johnson: I just walked. I get a bus and walked. It would be just downtown Newark. It's now -- it was Newark College of Engineering then and it had a good reputation and now they have become Newark College of Engineering has

become the founding college within the Newark, New Jersey Institute of Technology and that's what it is now and they've got -- when I went there there was no dormitories, so you lived at home and uh sixty-seven years since I graduated. I'll go onto the other subject beyond [laughs]. Let's see.

Sady Sullivan: And so then, how -- tell me again how you -- when in your career did you end up at the Brooklyn Navy Yard?

Richard Johnson: Oh, well when I -- when the Navy made this offer to people and I accepted and they swore me in, all they said was they had little initials to indicate what category you're in and mine was engineer/volunteer service. There was still before the war, before Pearl Harbor and their needs were a lot of engineers to use in a wide range of places

[55:00]

and when I went in there, it was whatever -- I didn't know what that meant really. It was all foreign to me and I didn't have the -- I'd never seen Naval Academy, which is very impressive if you ever go down there, and uh it seemed to be a uh very choice option. I'm glad I took it, really. I had no regrets about it.

Geraldine Johnson: Was the Brooklyn Navy Yard your first assignment after?

Richard Johnson: Well yeah, we got a few temporary duties a day or two. We were down to the see the launching of the Alabama in Norfolk Navy Yard, just about the end of our course, and that was the first time I saw a shipyard of any kind of consequence. And we spent some time at that and Newport News is right there too. We went some place over there, over in Washington area they had a testing grounds for models, ship models. We'd go to a few places like that, but basically it was a uh, a -- it was a very thorough and heavy study and I was a little bit wary of college at that stage because uh they made no bones about it where I went to college that the purpose there was to learn enough to get a job and then support yourself. And when I first got there, I knew there was a port and starboard and beyond that, they talked decks and I did get sick, minor sickness one day. I had stomach upset and they sent me to the hospital. They said to me, "Where you're living, can you get food, your meals?" I said, "No." "Well you'd better go to the hospital." So I walked in and I went through all the paperwork and they said, "Oh by the way you have head [prevurges]." I though oh gee, [flu] and I've got [laughs] and I have a head [prevurge].

Geraldine Johnson: Didn't know what it meant.

Richard Johnson: All that meant I could find my way to John  
if I needed to go.

Sady Sullivan: [Laughs].

Richard Johnson: I didn't have to stay in bed.

Geraldine Johnson: Well you had duty one time. You came home -  
- after we were married -- you came home very, very tired.  
You had been up for 24 hours. How many ships did you dock  
and undock in those 24 hours?

Richard Johnson: Oh I don't even remember, but they had --  
they had new construction -- a lot of that going on there.  
It took a big supply of manpower at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.  
Generally they had two ways that they could battleships on  
and they built either battleships or carriers and I think  
the first -- they had a little spare time I think after  
they launched the Iowa and they built some big landing  
craft there, just a few of them. But otherwise they had  
that. They had a few -- they've always had some ships and  
they had long term repair work on them, that had been beat  
up badly. Uh, they would have ships -- intermediate might  
be 20 days availability and there would be uh destroyers  
and destroyer escorts, which would be a little bit smaller,  
come in there, partly because they've been coming from the  
Asiatic Fleet or places like that that had not been  
maintained very well and they had to get a lot of work done

and then the rest of them would be ships on convoy duty that have the destroy -- they come in from convoy and they'd unload their ammunition at Gravesend Bay, somewhere down by the mouth of the harbor I guess, and then come up for work and it might be they had things that broke down or um they bumped against something picking up the mail or any craziest thing and there'd be repair work to do or ordinary upkeep. One ship I had was a transport that was an old ship that had been built probably about 1930 and they had a lot of wood on it and they had to get rid of that and they had a lot of things that needed work in it. It was a month's work, but

[1:00:00]

it meant that there'd be the core of the volume were the convoys coming in and there was -- without exaggeration -- I never kept any records, but I'm sure that when they, there would be times that within 24 hours, suddenly, upwards of 45 destroyers would pull in and be parked all over the place and they'd be there for ten days and --

Geraldine Johnson: Be gone.

Richard Johnson: -- next morning you came in, they were all gone.

Geraldine Johnson: And that one particular ship you were talking about that was wood was the Harry Lee.

Richard Johnson: The Harry Lee, yeah, yeah, and I was the hull superintendant on that and it had a lot of things to do and I would stay there long hours. Basically the job was, here's the job, get it done uh. We dare you to do it in eight hours. Don't figure on that. I, once in a while I tried one night sleeping aboard the ship and they gave me a bunk where the doctor had been and there had been so much work done, woodwork that all the bugs had come out of the woodwork and I got up and shook myself at night and these bugs fall all over me and they had a shower and took a shower and stayed there.

Sady Sullivan: What kind of bugs were they?

Richard Johnson: I don't know. I didn't count them.

Geraldine Johnson: You didn't know what they were and didn't count them, but possibly could have been bed bugs.

Richard Johnson: But they were all over. I could feel the itchiness all over me and I had welts. I checked the OD and then going off the deck I said, "Have I got something wrong?" He said, "Yeah. You're all pock-marked." So I just got a hot shower.

Sady Sullivan: It must have been excruciating.

Richard Johnson: Then one night I was there on a Sunday I think it was, before we were married, and I was there on a Sunday and I went over to get somebody at the officer's

club and come back and a fire engine is pulling away. It was near to the end of the building and the, some welder didn't have a fire watch behind him or something and he was down in a bad spot, awkward spot, and when they built this ship they had a chilled area down there and the bulkheads were lined with cork.

Geraldine Johnson: Oh boy.

Richard Johnson: And they had all -- so it was smoking and anyhow, just a couple of days to go and I think we had the availability and I got down there and found two fellows down there scraping cork off and collecting it in a bag and then going up a little hatchway. Fowl air. So I looked around and I saw the fellow in the OD, I said, "Can you get someone to work the ammunition hatch because they were going to use that for storage of ammunition." They said, "Work the ammunition hatch and just stay there and unload the whole thing." They had scrape it all off and put up fiberglass. They got it done, but they would have never got it done otherwise. So the ships sort of pitch in when need be.

Sady Sullivan: So where did you live in the navy yard?

Richard Johnson: Oh I didn't live in it. I lived in, up off of -- I took a Vanderbilt Trolley.

Sady Sullivan: Oh.



Richard Johnson: I went up to Grand Army Plaza and it went up about four or five blocks beyond the Knights of Columbus building there in the corner. About three or four blocks on the fourth street; I got off at Fourth Street and walked over a block and a half.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, so you lived -- what was that neighborhood called then? Now it would be Park Slope.

Richard Johnson: It was on the edge of Park Slope. I don't know whether it's called Park Slope because there was nice -- Park Slope is pretty nice. This was across the street from a schoolyard that was on Seventh Avenue. It was a school on, it would Seventh Avenue and Fourth Street I think.

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm.

Richard Johnson: And the landlord was a teacher there at that school. They were all row houses and I lived there quite a while. When I got ready to leave I spoke to my buddy that took over and he stayed there because it worked out, attractive location.

Sady Sullivan: Was it a single

[01:05:00]

-- what was the apartment like?

Richard Johnson: Well the family that owned it was living in the basement and as you come up the stairs, it was really

only two rooms there. There was a parlor on the left and then the stairway -- you go back and then you make a turn and go up the stairwell and a room in the back and that was the room I had and it had a bathroom there and it had -- I don't know what, but it had a mirror. It was as big as that opening in the wall there.

Sady Sullivan: Oh my goodness.

Richard Johnson: On top of a -- it was just mounted on the wall, but it had just an old long table there. Very nice and a fireplace -- never was working, but it was the style then I guess. And there was some tenants living up above me. I don't know whether it was two or three stories there and they were very nice people to be with. When I was down in Annapolis, it was fabulous there. The town went all out to try to accommodate the uh, the Naval Academy and their needs and their wants and for when new officers come in, like I did, they'd have the homes that I stayed in down there was, we couldn't afford those homes around here and that down there it was a widow and her daughter and uh I had a room and there was a bath between me and another room an officer had and the mother and daughter had two rooms over there and they had a maid in there every day, full time. I guess they got the meals and she got the meals and

cleaned up the rooms and just walked down to the academy from there.

Sady Sullivan: So when you were living in Brooklyn did you -- where did you have your meals?

Richard Johnson: Sometimes, well I had breakfast at the Officer's Club usually and at lunch uh one of the handymen there would see me and say, "Hey, do you want the usual?" And it would be I know, lettuce, tomato sandwich or something like that and he'd go over on Sands Street and come back with a whole pot full of those things. And then for dinner, I tried a lot of places. I tried different places. One uh -- you know where the Columbus building is there at the Grand [Arie] Plaza and Flatbush Avenue comes up and if you go -- if I come down from along uh Prospect Park West, I guess is the road there, and turn left and go by the Columbia Building, there was a restaurant right there. It was quite nice. I ate there once in a while. Somewhere over near town hall, city hall -- it had a name. It was almost like you were going into a restaurant that's furnished, like it had been 1980's or 1880's or something like that. Tile floor and simple chairs that rattle when you pull the things across. It was good food. Oh, the uh, up near --

Geraldine Johnson: [Inaudible]

Richard Johnson: What's her names uh restaurant, with the hot-crossed buns?

Geraldine Johnson: Patricia Murphy's?

Richard Johnson: Patricia Murphy's up in --

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah, she was near the St. George Hotel.

Sady Sullivan: Oh OK.

Richard Johnson: I don't know if you've heard of that.

Geraldine Johnson: Because when Patricia --

Richard Johnson: Patricia Murphy you've heard of?

Geraldine Johnson: Uh my mother died --

Sady Sullivan: St. George Hotel.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah, St. George Hotel because when my mother died, by father married Patricia Murphy and she uh was running a candlelight restaurant at the time, near the St. George Hotel.

Danielle Romano: Oh wow!

Richard Johnson: And went out and she had one in Manhasset.

Geraldine Johnson: Then she had one in Manhasset. He helped her expand her restaurant business. She had two in Florida, one out in Manhasset, Long Island, and one in White Plains, New York on Route 100, yup.

Richard Johnson: And then he died in 1956 I think it was.

[01:10:00]

Geraldine Johnson: She was a philanthropist and a horticulturist. She raised orchids.

Richard Johnson: But once in a while I'd be lucky to have a date and we would go in town.

Geraldine Johnson: And we went by subway.

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Geraldine Johnson: And we went by subway.

Richard Johnson: That's right, yeah. I was the only one that took her by subway and trolley. The others called a cab.

Danielle Romano: [Laughs]

Richard Johnson: I did -- I think we were married once and I called a cab and I forgot what we were going to do. We were going to stay in Brooklyn though and the cabbie said, "Where do you want to go?"

Geraldine Johnson: We wanted to go to Manhattan and you wouldn't.

Richard Johnson: I told him and he said, "You don't have to go to Manhattan do you?" I said, "No." He said, "Good. I'm born in Brooklyn. I'm never going to go to Manhattan." I said, "You're going to die in Brooklyn."

Danielle Romano: [Laughs]

Geraldine Johnson: Yup, he would not go over the Brooklyn Bridge.

Sady Sullivan: That's funny. So I know that you told us before, but maybe would you tell us again exactly how you two ended up meeting?

Geraldine Johnson: Well I had met -- as I said -- him first when he came to the house to speak to my father, who wasn't home at the time, and he left a message on a pencil and paper for me to give to my father when he came home.

Richard Johnson: It was probably seven or eight months later.

Geraldine Johnson: And then the second -- yeah and the next time I met him was when he was invited to the house. He thought it was a meeting, but it was a social and that's how I met him officially.

Richard Johnson: So then I figured I'd try to make a date later on. It took a while, but I got a date out of it.

Geraldine Johnson: Then we went from there.

Richard Johnson: Yeah and we dated.

Geraldine Johnson: And I found out it was very interesting because he was one of the people who talked with me, not to me. It makes a difference.

Richard Johnson: And I got engaged in October.

Geraldine Johnson: Yes, we got engaged in October.

Richard Johnson: Late October.

Geraldine Johnson: And we were married February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

Richard Johnson: Fortunately her parents didn't ask me how much money I had because I had zero.

Sady Sullivan: [Laughs]

Richard Johnson: When I got the engagement ring, I spoke to her girlfriend who was staying with her, visiting for a while, and I said -- I guess the Saturday before -- I said, "I'm thinking of getting a ring. Could you help me pick it out." So she said -- I went out the next week some time and went over to some place in mainland, in Manhattan. I guess they must have -- maybe they sell to the Navy exchange or something like, but the PX on those prices, but anyway I picked up something and I had come back from a time up in Boston, so I got some, a check for my expenses and I call the Bank of New Jersey and I say, "How much is in my balance, in the checking account?" And between the two of them, I paid the whole thing, but then after that I didn't have enough to stop in to have a drink with her. So she said, "Come over to the house," and your mother was there and Connie said it got kind of dark and she says, "Oh Richard! Don't you have something to say?" [laughs]

Geraldine Johnson: I was upstairs. He was talking to my mother.

Richard Johnson: So I told her we just got an engagement ring and I want to get married. And then alter on her father

came in and he had to be cued in and when she came down finally I almost knocked over the lamp and gave her the ring anyway. She decided to keep it.

Geraldine Johnson: I thought you had enough money to buy a soda or something to celebrate?

Richard Johnson: No I couldn't swing a soda.

Geraldine Johnson: You didn't have enough to buy a soda?

Sady Sullivan: [Laughs]

Richard Johnson: I ate all breakfast at the -- all meals for myself at the officer's club because I got signed for it. It was only about three or four days before pay day.

Geraldine Johnson: Oh I see, OK.

Richard Johnson: I figured I could starve that long and then we got married in February. Uh nice wedding and then we lived -- there was Clinton Avenue Apartments just a block up from, a block or two up from the base and then about September I got transferred from there to San Diego.

Geraldine Johnson: But I worked at the bank that paid

[01:15:00]

the uh workers. What was the name of the bank?

Richard Johnson: Yeah, she was paying -- Pay Day.

Geraldine Johnson: Pay Day.

Richard Johnson: They would have uh -- was it inside the gate or outside?



Geraldine Johnson: It was inside the gate, yes.

Richard Johnson: That people got their checks and they'd cash them is that right?

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah, that's right. I'd cash the checks. It was inside the gate and they had uh a temporary place for uh the workers to come in and get their pay. Do you remember the name of the bank? Because they're the ones that gave me the social security number.

Richard Johnson: I don't know. I forgot the name of it. They keep changing on me. Uh, let's see. Let's see.

Geraldine Johnson: Coming back one time from my work we were in the throes of a hurricane and we stopped in the store. I was slowly being lifted up with the wind, so we stopped in the store to buy some supplies to bring to the apartment and I carried them because it weighed me down so the wind wasn't blowing me away.

Danielle Romano: What year was that then? '44?

Geraldine Johnson: That was before we went to San Diego.

Richard Johnson: Yeah, that must have been about September. Yeah.

Danielle Romano: Um, I do have a question about the assembly process in the yard during World War II. We have a large map of the yard that we can show you, right?

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm.

Danielle Romano: Um as I understand it, materials, all materials would be floated onto the yard via the transfer bridge, which was behind building 292?

Sady Sullivan: Here we go.

Danielle Romano: It's a big map. OK. There's a transfer bridge right here.

Richard Johnson: Yeah.

Danielle Romano: And then this is a classification yard where this is how, this is how I tell it to people, so I want to see if I'm on a good track.

Richard Johnson: Yeah, I'm not too -- I know it existed, but I don't know too much about this part of it.

Danielle Romano: Oh, OK. Um, and then this was a sub-assembly shop here and then there were these rail tracks routed around the entire yard.

Richard Johnson: Yes.

Danielle Romano: But you said battleship or um carriers and -

-

Richard Johnson: Battleships.

Danielle Romano: Carriers and battleships were built --

Richard Johnson: I know the Missouri was on this one here.

Danielle Romano: Well, see, well no that's the shipbuilding ways one and two.

Richard Johnson: Building ways, yeah.

Danielle Romano: I'm trying to figure out how the dry docks and the shipbuilding ways work together, like because I've been told also that the Missouri was built in Dry Dock 6.

Richard Johnson: No. No it wasn't. Uh it was -- first of all, it wasn't -- the keel was laid before these were available. I came in in 1942 and the keel had already been made for the Missouri.

Danielle Romano: Really?

Richard Johnson: And uh --

Danielle Romano: That's early.

Richard Johnson: Let's see. We've got something on that.

Danielle Romano: I thought the Missouri was 1944.

Richard Johnson: Well the commission was '44.

Geraldine Johnson: It takes a few years to build it.

Danielle Romano: Wow.

Richard Johnson: Here's the laying of the keel of the Missouri.

Danielle Romano: Well '41.

Richard Johnson: I have all three of these are a little bit different shots. That tell the date of it; January '42, '41. And this was the keel laying of the Bennington.

Danielle Romano: Oh. So then there's your father with Admiral Woodward.

Geraldine Johnson: My father was in -- my father was Kiernan.

Danielle Romano: Mhmm.

Richard Johnson: It's his, it's his [inaudible; overlapping dialogue].

Geraldine Johnson: Old superintendant in charge of construction.

Richard Johnson: And he's here too and this is December '42 they laid the keel for the Bennington and that would have been uh, very probably was put in in building ways number two because the Missouri was on one and from, from uh January '41 to launching in January of '44 was, yeah, was on a building ways. Uh building in dry dock has an advantage

[01:20:00]

to the extent that on the building way, the slope -- these three are all -- the slope is determined about how much of a slope it's going to take to slide out.

Danielle Romano: Mhmm.

Richard Johnson: And if you put up a bulkhead on a ship on a keel way, on a building way, you've got to put it up on an angle, whereas on a dry dock, they can set it to put the keel at the same design, proper design uh straight length of whichever way it's -- up in the bough or something like that and they can put the -- they can work -- hand a vertical -- they can just use a straight edge to get a

bubble of some sort to check when they put a bulkhead here  
in the vertical here.

Geraldine Johnson: In these building ways that you're talking  
about that are on the upper side of the yard, were they  
where all this lumber was buried in the mud?

Richard Johnson: Say that again.

Geraldine Johnson: Were they in the area where all the lumber  
was buried in the mud?

Richard Johnson: Oh, no. Uh.

Danielle Romano: OK.

Geraldine Johnson: What yard?

Richard Johnson: Dry dick five and six.

Geraldine Johnson: Five and six.

Richard Johnson: When they dredged this out, they had to  
dredge it out --

Geraldine Johnson: And put those docks in.

Richard Johnson: -- and kept driving piles down to get a  
firm footing and they came across a pile of timber that had  
been buried there by the Navy when they had need to build  
wooden ships.

Danielle Romano: Had been buried there, deliberately?

Geraldine Johnson: Deliberately.

Sady Sullivan: Because that's a way to save, to preserve it.

Danielle Romano: Oh.

Richard Johnson: It got sunk in the mud, basically, and they weren't of a good quality --

Geraldine Johnson: It seasons the wood.

Richard Johnson: -- good quality condition, the seasoning.

Geraldine Johnson: Seasoning the wood.

Richard Johnson: And they -- while they were building wooden ships, that's the way they stored it I guess. But then after -- in this book here, particularly, it talks about the Navy and it mentions when the Navy went to part, to a great degree, in Washington with Graff and everything else and the ships in the system was done, was uh not very effective and they didn't do much building. They just squatted money.

Danielle Romano: That's in here.

Richard Johnson: It's in this book there about it and Ulysses Grant and that was a time when during the -- by the Civil War time showed that steel ships, metal ships, were the thing of the future and they just let that stuff sit there.

Danielle Romano: Uh-huh; OK.

Richard Johnson: I'm not sure uh really uh when New York Navy Shipyard really started being a big yard. I knew it existed in here somewhere -- one of the books talks about it. Forty-five acres was assigned here a long while ago.

I don't know how big was it -- is it that? What sort of acreage do you have now?

Danielle Romano: Just under 300 acres.

Richard Johnson: Well I thought it had grown.

Danielle Romano: Mhmm.

Richard Johnson: This one here is uh -- this is the Navy up through 17 -- 1897 and there's a description near the end here. Let's see if I can find it. And even here the talk about the Navy in decline uh and --

Sady Sullivan: So did they do something with the wood that they pulled up?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Sady Sullivan: Did they use the wood that they pulled up?

Richard Johnson: Did they deliberately what?

Sady Sullivan: Did they use the timber that they, that they pulled up?

Richard Johnson: Oh I think they would use them for dock blocks in the dry dock.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, OK. So they --

Danielle Romano: Oh.

Geraldine Johnson: Oh yeah.

Richard Johnson: They had a lot of dry dock.

Geraldine Johnson: Invaluable.

Richard Johnson: But see here's the new Navy Yard. It's fairly new to them, to the book anyway.

[01:25:00]

That, uh that uh --

Geraldine Johnson: That's when they put in those docks, after they got that wood out of there.

Richard Johnson: I don't how big it is. Here's an article here by uh --

Danielle Romano: I see here.

Richard Johnson: Gleason's Weekly Newspaper in Brooklyn in 1858. It has an article here about the new dry dock number one. So they had some existence to exist then.

Sady Sullivan: Right.

Danielle Romano: There's a copy here.

Richard Johnson: Oh that's it, right there.

Danielle Romano: Oh, wonderful.

Geraldine Johnson: May she have it?

Richard Johnson: That, you can have that, yes.

Danielle Romano: Thank you.

Richard Johnson: Yeah. We have that right here.

Danielle Romano: Wonderful [audio drops off].

Richard Johnson: It's mostly down there for the dry dock, but it covers --

Geraldine Johnson: Down in here.



Richard Johnson: Let's see if I can uh -- do you have any need for something like this, which is uh -- this is a magazine put out by the Navy League and it's a monthly and every January month, January issue is the one that every year they talk about a lot of narrative about the history of the Navy, the mission and this is an article here on that that says that from the issue of 2002, you know a lot of its separate from the Navy, separate from the shipyards, but it starts in with right from the very beginning of the thing and then it gets into the current organization and they talk about the shore establishment.

Danielle Romano: OK.

Richard Johnson: And then within the shore establishment they talk about the Naval Sea Systems Command. That would be your ships before and their responsibility is central activity of design, integrating building and procuring naval ships. So that's where uh the people that got to be admiral uh, um in a really good career pattern, they fit in that pattern right there. And there were a lot, an awful lot of good men they picked up that uh were -- they were -- they ran -- they handled major production and major construction jobs and there were at least a couple in the whole department I know of that were uh -- it was most of these jobs that they could relate to having done equal work

before and they brought them in because people were actually happy to help out. One came from Detroit Edison and he had been in power plant construction. He thought he was going to go into the Sea Bees.

Sady Sullivan: What's the Sea Bees?

Richard Johnson: Uh the construction battalion --

Danielle Romano: Navy construction.

Richard Johnson: -- World War II. It was basically -- there's another -- uh within the Naval establishment, there is a separate career pattern for somebody that's responsible for producing buildings and properties, basically civil engineers, and this fellow was probably civil or at least he was a construction man and he was top of the line, I think. And he filed all sorts of papers because he wanted to go to Sea Bees and he wound up in this department I'm in and he felt -- he was good, but he felt too restricted and he used to complain. He said, he said, "I've got all these people," and he named hotshots of the industries to write a resume for him and bring them in and he got all those papers in and they told him report to Brooklyn Navy Yard and he went there and they walked him to see some high ranking officer, or captain -- I think it was probably Shultz -- and he said, "The first that fellow said to me," he said, "well what can you do?" And he knew that

all that crap that he had put in and no one even looked at it. He started right from scratch. He came in I think as a J-G.

[01:30:00]

Sady Sullivan: What's a J-G?

Richard Johnson: He was good and he got the tough jobs and he was --

Geraldine Johnson: A junior lieutenant; a stripe and a half.

Richard Johnson: At the end of the war, there was promotion time for some people and he hadn't been there long enough to get quite enough time and service to get immediate released -- no I guess he could be released and then, but he got a notice that he's been considered and qualified and he's recommended to become Lieutenant Commander and just go over and get physical to say you're still OK and you'll be sworn in. And Art Clark this was, he got ripping. He refused and he said, "I want out. I can get out now. I want out," and his boss was insulted because he was taking somebody's life over -- the life of this man was a Navy career man, you know, and he kept over for three months trying to convince him and he couldn't convince after three months and let him go and he got out. I got recalled in -- and this is on this machine now?

Geraldine Johnson: During the Korean Emergency you were called, recalled.

Richard Johnson: Yeah I got called and I had duty and I had to go down to Washington once in a while and I found out Art Clark is down Washington. I found him and he was -- he had gone back to Detroit Edison and he was working a nuclear field and he used to deal with this man named Rickover and they used to have equally important, I guess, and scabble over some things and one time Rickover went in there and he said, talked to Art and Art was fuming mad at the Navy. He said, "What's the matter?" He said, "I got a notice to recall, call to active duty." He said, "Well that's good. Where are you going to go?" He said, "They told me to go back to Brooklyn Navy Yard." [laughs] He said, "I refuse to go," and Rickover told him all the trouble that's going to happen to him and finally Rickover said, "Is it because it's Brooklyn or would you want to go somewhere else?" Well it was Brooklyn basically. He had enough of it. Not that he -- everybody was nice, but he didn't like -- it was too confining for him because he was in bigger things, I guess, and so finally Rickover said, "Well look, I could use someone like you. Would you come if there was order to change to come to me?" He said, "Oh yeah, I'd like that." He said, "Fine." Rickover picked up

the phone, called something. He said, "When you get home, all the papers will be there for you," and he went to Rickover and I saw him and the greatest thing he liked about Rickover was because Rickover had an organization down there in Washington in the field, nuclear field, and I guess they already had a contract with Electric Boat to build the first submarine and the nice thing about it, they had to appear to be civilians so no one wears uniform.

Danielle Romano: Oh, why was that?

Richard Johnson: And he liked that better [laughs].

Geraldine Johnson: Though he'd try to keep it very quiet on nuclear fusion.

Richard Johnson: So he was there and he got his -- he was happy to work for Rickover and he respected the man and he said he was a great man, but he didn't want to go -- he refused to go back to Brooklyn Navy Yard because he had been there for long enough. It was just that he had visions of doing what he wanted to do and they wouldn't let him do it.

Geraldine Johnson: And nuclear at the time was top military secret.

Sady Sullivan: What was the social atmosphere like in the Brooklyn Navy Yard and as a workplace and also a place where you were living?

Richard Johnson: Say that again now.

Sady Sullivan: What was the social atmosphere like at the Navy Yard?

Richard Johnson: Well it's kind of limited. Uh they had dance, was it once a month or once a week or what on Saturday nights?

Geraldine Johnson: Well Saturday night was a social, yeah.

Richard Johnson: Every night and every week or just once a month?

Geraldine Johnson: No, just occasionally. It wasn't regular. That's why we would always go in town and we had the big bands to enjoy.

Richard Johnson: But that wasn't so much the military.

Geraldine Johnson: No.

Richard Johnson: Uh people were coming and going so fast it's pretty hard to say for many of them. Even within -- I don't know how many people report to your father, but  
[01:35:00]

-- anywhere from 50-100 -- I don't know what it could have been uh and there was -- they would -- it wasn't for they stay for -- it wouldn't be to stay there for the rest of the war. There would be a rotation basis.

Geraldine Johnson: No, rotating, coming, going.

Richard Johnson: You had all kinds. You had some that fit in -- most of them fit in very well. Uh, not everybody was off -- not all officers were gentlemen. We had one fellow that was uh very candid man, but he wouldn't fit in any social activity.

Danielle Romano: Why is that?

Richard Johnson: Fowl mouth. He was -- he used to yell like Stevedores all the time [laughs] and he would -- he yelled at the chippers. Now chippers and caulkers generally are a tough job, down there pushing. It's dirty, but he'd yell at those chippers and caulkers and very colorful language and they --

Geraldine Johnson: Unmentionable.

Richard Johnson: -- and they couldn't -- they knew they shouldn't sass back an officer so they reported him and it went all the way up to the shop master and the shop master went to see the production officer and those two got together and then this young fellow -- or not so young. He must have been in his forties anyway -- he got called in and the officer, his commanding, his captain said to him, "So and so says you call these names as such and such. Is that true?" He says, "Yes. That's what they are."  
[Laughs] And they went on and on like that and finally the commanding, the captain says, he said, "Count the number of

stripes on my arm." He said, "One, two, three, four."  
"Count them on yours." "Two." "You're a lieutenant. I'm  
a double lieutenant. What I say goes. Keep your mouth  
shut." [Laughs] So he got back there and they had to -- he  
kept his mouth shut, but they would pay it back. They  
would taunt him, but he was, he was brilliant as far as  
getting job done. It's just that you wouldn't bring him to  
a social event because [laughs].

Sady Sullivan: Where was he from? Do you know where he grew up?

Richard Johnson: There was a fair turnover. Everybody was I  
mean coming and going all the time.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, can I just ask a question about him? The  
officer with the foul mouth, do you know where he was from?

Richard Johnson: No. He used to say he was a butter and eggs  
man. I think he was a wholesale or a -- I don't know even  
what part of the country he was from.

Sady Sullivan: What's a butter and eggs man?

Richard Johnson: Just small stuff he had. To give you a  
line, he said, we asked him, "How do you get along with  
your wife," and he said, "Well," -- I think he married and  
he'd make up stories of it. It must have been. He said,  
"I married her when she was sixteen and the first time she  
cooked a pie I looked at it and told her to open the window



and I threw out the pie and said don't make them that bad again." [Laughs].

Danielle Romano: Oh.

Richard Johnson: He was -- you can't tell when he tells the truth or not. He had no credibility when he got going. He'd make stories and go on forever.

Sady Sullivan: Was there other -- was there -- how did the Navy and the civilian workers get along, in general?

Richard Johnson: Uh, they got along well as far as I know. I don't think that -- well they didn't like everybody. I had heard uh, when I was going to go out to San Diego and I knew quite a few of the workers that I'd tell them where I was going to go and they said, "Oh, I've heard things about San Diego," you know and they all had stories. They said somebody, one of the officers used to -- uh.

Sady Sullivan: That's OK, it's OK.

Richard Johnson: I don't want it on there though.

Sady Sullivan: OK. We can -- I will --

Richard Johnson: He said they know officers that go out there and they are not always happy and I heard it from a ship's force that one time they were saying you're getting transferred and where are you going? I'd tell them there were and they said, "Oh, you're going to have problems." But everybody lives with them.

Sady Sullivan: Can you explain it again?

[01:40:00]

I'm marking that it's off record from 1 hour, 39 minutes, 40 seconds. So like we're off record right now, but can you explain again what you mean, what happened in San Diego?

Richard Johnson: Oh, for me it was no problem.

Sady Sullivan: But what were you saying that they would -- I just don't understand.

Geraldine Johnson: Well for example, was that where somebody had a short leg on a chair?

Richard Johnson: No I'm thinking of one of the workmen said -  
-

Geraldine Johnson: To interview you.

Richard Johnson: Oh no. That's Rickover.

Danielle Romano: What is that? What's a short leg on a chair?

Richard Johnson: Rickover tried to give everybody an ill at ease. Very difficult handler and he would bring in the young officers and he'd make them sit in a chair with one leg shorter than the other.

Geraldine Johnson: So it was wobbly.

Richard Johnson: And he'd be nervous and the thing rocking, he'd get them upset and he'd ask them really abstract questions. Rickover was --

Geraldine Johnson: A brilliant man.

Richard Johnson: He's brilliant and he did an awful lot, but to be -- to manage that brilliance, he didn't want -- apparently he's no good for small talk and he's no good for social uh trying to uh keep track of who I should talk to and who I shouldn't talk to and all that sort of stuff. He had moved up to captain probably due to the war because I would guess he got out of the Naval Academy in maybe 1920 or something like that and he couldn't go beyond captain and if you got passed -- when you get up high, if you're passed over twice, you have to get out before the follow year's end and Rickover, at captain, couldn't get promoted to rear admiral and the normal thing is that the Naval Officers, a group, would uh prepare a list of who they want to become admiral. They send it to Congress to get an endorsement of it and Congress wanted to see Rickover's name on it. So since they wouldn't put it on, they passed a resolution to say you'll go from captain to rear admiral, otherwise they'd lose him. After he had been rear admiral for a while, he was going to go out again because the vice admiral. Congress passed another resolution to make him a

vice admiral because they would be the endorsement of what the resolution would be from the Navy department and they just couldn't handle him I guess, but the guy was a genius and he did --

Geraldine Johnson: They needed him.

Sady Sullivan: But Congress knew that, not -- the Navy department didn't want to advance him, so they were superseded by the --

Richard Johnson: He probably, Rickover, would insult people very easily and Joe Graff dealt with him. One time he told me when he was --

Geraldine Johnson: From Westinghouse.

Richard Johnson: -- civil engineer at Westinghouse and he said he was mixed up with the Manhattan Project and he never told me much about the Project, but he used to have to deal with Rickover some.

Geraldine Johnson: Joe Graff was a classmate.

Richard Johnson: And uh Rickover asked him to do a certain thing. It was almost impossible and they kept trying and they couldn't do it and they came back and finally he said, "I done it," and he had demonstrate it and Rickover was mad because they did it because he couldn't figure out how to do it and they did for him. So he used to show, come to E-B, Electric Boat Division of General Dynamics, where I

worked. He followed them -- he felt that, as far as he was concerned, they were his -- they reported to him. They -- he wanted them to devote all that energy to his work and I've known a couple of people down there that, for some reason, went public to talk about matters that were advancing that uh the knowledge of people in industry and they were devoting it to something that had nothing to do with Rickover. He'd pick up the call, the phone, and call the channel man and say I consider everybody up there available for me. I don't want that phone anymore.

Geraldine Johnson: That was at Electric Boat.

Richard Johnson: So he'd be either transferred to other work or leave the company uh because Rickover was too important to cross-up.

Sady Sullivan: How do you spell his name, Rickover?

Richard Johnson: Uh, R-I-C -- [mumbles]

[01:45:00]

-- try in the back of the spelling. It might be --

Danielle Romano: So you were at General Dynamics?

Richard Johnson: R-I-C-H --

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah, in Electric Boat General Dynamics, Electric Boat.

Richard Johnson: Oh, just under Rickover. That would be --

Danielle Romano: R-I-C-H you think?

Richard Johnson: You would probably see a few things.

Danielle Romano: Oh wait, OK.

Richard Johnson: He was one that pushed to get the Navy to build a nuclear submarine, the first one --

Danielle Romano: It's not in here --

Richard Johnson: -- and he was up -- the story is he was up in Portsmouth Naval Shipyard sometime in the late '40s --

Geraldine Johnson: Try R-I-K.

Danielle Romano: Yeah.

Richard Johnson: -- trying to convince them to undertake the project and I guess he couldn't convince them and he had been talking to other people -- he has a talking acquaintance with Electric Boat Division because they were building subs and he had an interest in the submarines and he called up and said, "Will you take on the job?" They said, "Yes." "Fine, you got it," and he said, told people up there, "Forget it." He went down there and pretty much that handshake followed -- everything followed after that that they agreed -- that phone call, when he said yes to him, he followed through on it and he saw to it that everything had to be done and when he would come, his common -- his way of life is that he wanted to talk to people he knew were important. He'd call and tell the general manager, "I'll be there for a meeting. Let's make

it 3:00 A.M. because I'm busy and can't get there any sooner [laughs]. Then everybody would be there.

Sady Sullivan: Oh my goodness.

Richard Johnson: No questions asked. He said so -- they had a special accommodation somewhere down the yard for him and I knew one man that liked to make sure that -- Rickover liked fresh fruit, fresh fruit was there, whatever it was.

Sady Sullivan: Where was his accommodations in the yard? Do you remember?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Sady Sullivan: Do you remember where in the yard?

Richard Johnson: Not the Navy Yard.

Sady Sullivan: Oh.

Richard Johnson: The --

Sady Sullivan: At Electric Boat.

Richard Johnson: At Electric Boat here in Groton.

Geraldine Johnson: Electric Boat in Groton.

Richard Johnson: And they built uh submarines and most of the submarines and built most of the nuclear subs are built by Electric Boat Division and Rickover was good to them. He just demanding and that's probably why someone in the Navy said, "The sun doesn't shine on him, it shines on the Navy." No, the one fellow that I know of, that some workman talked about said, "When you get out to that place

there, you'll probably see so and so. We used to throw hot rivets at him because he was a ship [super naught] on the North Carolina, one of them anyway and he never could find out who was doing it, but I did see him and by matter of principal I guess they didn't like him and I saw him.

Sady Sullivan: Wait, this isn't Rickover anymore?

Richard Johnson: No.

Sady Sullivan: On the North Carolina?

Richard Johnson: No it was the other subject.

Sady Sullivan: This is someone else, OK.

Richard Johnson: And I saw him and he found I was in the Navy Yard and so we just talked a bit. Others, in the same time, they'd go in -- one fellow that I known from other duties and he said, "I didn't make out too well with that so and so." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well he was -- the man's never married. He's a bachelor. He's all wrapped up in the Navy and engineering and all that stuff." I guess the first thing he did, he threw a piece of paper, he said, "Here; here's a calculus problem. Let's see you solve it."

Geraldine Johnson: This is Rickover talking?

Richard Johnson: No, this is man out in San Diego, one of the officers.

Geraldine Johnson: Oh man out in Sand Diego talking.



Richard Johnson: And the fellow laughed and threw it back at him and said, "I can sing in [Hersey Song], but I forgot all about that stuff." So they didn't make out too well, but that was the fellow out there that I was just lucky. He hadn't talked to anybody from the Navy Yard for a while and I wasn't working for him. It was just that I was checking in, uh. Let me see. I could tell you some more stuff here.

Danielle Romano: OK.

Geraldine Johnson: Well while you're looking that up, I could tell them a story about my father. Um, he used to go around to the little different workstations --

Richard Johnson: Oh yeah.

Geraldine Johnson: -- in the yard at night before he'd come home and go to bed and we had a dog, a cocker spaniel named Flapper and Flapper knew the routine and when the workmen would see the dog come, they'd have the coffee already for my dad when he showed up and he would always check in with them and see how things were going and

[01:50:00]

any problems that might show up so he was prepared for the next day and that's why he could sit at his desk and um wait for the troubles to come to him because he knew they were coming.

Richard Johnson:       Yeah, I know one time -- I only had one time -- I had to call him later on and say problem. I had to go out and try out the ship and wherever it was they let us off there were some workmen getting off too and we had a ride to get back to the yard again, but I got to a phone and I called up your father and told him what happened. I said, "Everything's OK." He said, "Good, thanks," and sure enough he said, later on he told me in years later, his boss found out everything was OK and tried to pin him down and say something, well you wouldn't know this, and he found out -- your father knew, already knew about it, so one of us -- on one-upmanship that they had with each other. Uh, now we have -- we've kept track with some of the people we know, but they've most all died off. There's one exception and uh I thought I'd raise the point with you uh, when we got married there was one of the ushers was a fellow named Thomas F. O'Grady and we lost track of him. Now I went out West Coast and when we came back at the end of the war I think he had been transferred somewhere else in between and I lost track and uh we had kept track of everybody else we knew in the wedding party, but I did get a book. You may recall some I guess fellow from Brooklyn maybe during the over there in the Slavian countries they were having troubles and the U.N. sent

people in and the United States went in there and someone named Scott O'Grady wrote a book called *Return with Honor*. He was in a plane that I guess got shot down and he was in the hills of the enemy territory or some sort and he had one of these ground position indicators. It was new then. I guess it was secret, but he had it and he was able to communicate to his people, to his friends, and while they were looking the hills for him and getting pretty close, a plane came in and picked uh Scott up and saved him.

Geraldine Johnson: Made a movie.

Richard Johnson: And reading the book, he come to a page -- 127 I put down in this book -- he refers to his Uncle Tom and I kept thinking Thomas F. O'Grady could have -- I don't know whether it was the same person or not.

Geraldine Johnson: That was in our wedding party.

Richard Johnson: The one we know is Thomas F. O'Grady and this fellow had Uncle Tom. It sounded an awful lot like it could be someone, but he said that his Uncle Tom, whom he liked very well apparently, was a Senior Inspector and Drug Enforcement Administration, New York City. Uh if there is --

Sady Sullivan: So with the police department or with the federal, the DEA?

Richard Johnson: I don't know how it is. Drug Enforcement Administration; would that be the police department?

Sady Sullivan: DEA. No that would be federal DEA.

Richard Johnson: Now if you could check if there is such a person around, that would be the same fellow that --

Geraldine Johnson: That was in our wedding party.

Richard Johnson: -- could be in the wedding party and was another, same job I had.

Danielle Romano: OK, good, thank you.

Sady Sullivan: What was your title exactly?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Sady Sullivan: What was the title, your job title?

Richard Johnson: I'm sorry?

Sady Sullivan: What was your job title at the Navy?

Richard Johnson: For all of us we were assistant hull superintendant and because everybody that reported to your father was that --

Geraldine Johnson: An assistant hull superintendant.

Richard Johnson: And well --

Danielle Romano: And how many?

Sady Sullivan: And he was --

Danielle Romano: I'm sorry.

Sady Sullivan: He was just superintendant?

Geraldine Johnson: He was the whole superintendant of the yard  
and they reported to him.

Richard Johnson: Yeah he had one --

Geraldine Johnson: New construction.

Richard Johnson: He had one crew that worked just the new  
construction -- quite a few of them and he had a couple of  
old timers and

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one was -- they both commanders or lieutenant commanders.  
Let's see if I can --

Geraldine Johnson: From World War I reported to him.

Richard Johnson: Uh and this fellow here, and he, he's one of  
them. That's Commander Jack. That's all we knew him by  
and the reason we know him and the reason we're old timers  
-- when I mentioned that the organization back in World War  
II all came under the -- all these shipyards and so forth -  
- come under the domain of the Bureau of Ships. Bureau of  
Ships was a name given I think in 1940 and before that it  
was a couple of uh, a couple of, a couple of other groups  
and uh all those people, including his father, didn't wear  
a star on their sleeve. They had a --

Geraldine Johnson: Oak leaf.

Danielle Romano: An oak?

Richard Johnson: A simple little thing like -- that's about all it was. A couple of oaks, little acorns like.

Geraldine Johnson: Acorns.

Richard Johnson: That's all it was.

Geraldine Johnson: And a leaf.

Danielle Romano: Acorns.

Richard Johnson: Little acorns and it was a staff job, but in 1938 or so they did away with this and put in the star instead. It was limited duty type of thing. And Commander Jack and Commander Schilling both had retired before all this happened and they got called back in.

Geraldine Johnson: And they could still fit in their uniforms.

Richard Johnson: And these guys were old timers, but boy those -- Schilling used to get [Hanson] come in and just for fun he'd say, "Let's go out and go board some of these ships," and he'd race him up and down and have him go up and down ladders all over the ship and little kid, young fellow would be panting and Schilling would -- he could do it all day. Commander Jack, he didn't say much at all to most of us, really. He was given special, tough jobs, apparently, that, that uh I've heard from others were -- he was the only one that could figure them up, but they could assign him a task to get something done or make something or do something and that was his specialty.

Sady Sullivan: Was Jack his last name?

Geraldine Johnson: Yes.

Richard Johnson: He looked like one of the dwarfs from Snow White.

Geraldine Johnson: That was his last name.

Danielle Romano: Oh he was a small man?

Richard Johnson: little tiny fellow and he was happy there, but that's all he was.

Danielle Romano: Um, this photograph is taken in a dry dock, no? Are these keel hold locks?

Richard Johnson: Those keel blocks, yes.

Geraldine Johnson: Yes it was down laying the keel, down at the bottom of the dry dock.

Richard Johnson: Yeah.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah, before the ship is built they have to put it down one piece of metal and it's called the keel laying. That's the beginning of the ship.

Richard Johnson: Uh that little book, oh Gerry, want to pass that book to me?

Danielle Romano: So there was -- I'm just trying to get it straight. So there was shipbuilding in the shipbuilding ways and in the dry docks? Right? There would be shipbuilding in both the shipbuilding ways and in the dry docks?

Richard Johnson: Uh the only ones being built in dry dock were the very big ones.

Danielle Romano: Uh-huh.

Richard Johnson: One of the aircraft carriers I guess, at least during the wartime, yeah. Uh, these are the fixed blocks.

Danielle Romano: Yeah, that's a beautiful diagram.

Richard Johnson: It looked something like this or this is more common and then they have -- they can put in some that are uh like this and they could be fixed or they could be on chains. They could pull them in sometimes.

Sady Sullivan: Those are the blocks that hold the boat in dry dock?

Danielle Romano: Mhmm.

Richard Johnson: Yeah.

Danielle Romano: And would they be laid into the dry dock by the cranes?

Richard Johnson: Say that again.

Danielle Romano: Would they be laid in -- would the whole blocks, keel blocks be put onto the floor of the dry dock with the cranes?

Richard Johnson: There's the one down the center was pretty much there all the time and you just add to the next ones



and you juggle them around to make sure you're not in the way of a, oh a uh

[02:00:00]

some structure sticking down in. Like they had some of the destroyers had sonar sticking below the hull so they could, so their sounding equipment worked properly.

Danielle Romano: And then the crane operators would move the blocks? They're tremendously heavy, right?

Richard Johnson: Uh.

Danielle Romano: So how did they get moved? I mean I see the chain.

Richard Johnson: Moving the blocks -- the one pulling the chains, it's a manual thing. Uh I think uh -- I'm quite sure they're manual. Uh I've forgotten how they go. It might be a crank of some sort, but there's a lot of heavy work though for them.

Danielle Romano: Yeah.

Richard Johnson: Let's see. Scott O'Grady. I've covered him. Oh, the -- you had talked about the hammerhead crane. It's probably not there now. That was rated at 350 tons and in the building of the Missouri, which was the last battleship they built there because of the needs in service, they kept saying we want it sooner and while it was still on the building ways they got the word that they

wanted it sooner and maybe this is something Commander Jack might have tackled. How do we get it sooner to them? They decided that the biggest -- the limiting things is that they would -- this ship would go down not without -- not all structures were on it, but it's probably three quarters ready, 85% -- head of its weight goes down and then they put others on, but in the case of the battleships, they had three turrets that had big barrels and tons and tons and they decided that if they could make a bigger subassembly and drop it on, the main battery, they could lessen the time and quicker delivery and then they beefed up the crane to take, to be tested for 425 tons.

Danielle Romano: Oh wow.

Sady Sullivan: Because that's how much a turret would be?

Richard Johnson: So they could much, they could pick up more and they launched it and I think, before the day was out, they probably started the lifting of pieces -- they had to load up -- they had the subassembly -- I guess you call them subassemblies of the uh, of the heavy weight on the turrets and the side armor that was 14 inches or so thick. Uh and that speeded up the process. That would be something like they might say to Jack, what do we do and what's limiting?

Geraldine Johnson: How do we do it?

Sady Sullivan: So the hammerhead crane lifted 424-5 tons.

Richard Johnson: That's a single lift.

Sady Sullivan: For the Missouri.

Richard Johnson: Picked it up and swing it around, drop it down to fit right in the hole any place. Now they, they've made bigger lifts. They make cranes with big of lifts now, but one of the ways is they build it in dry docks and on really heavy stuff, if the dry dock is this long, they'll build a crane that will go up like this and go right across and they can -- a lot more they can handle.

Danielle Romano: Like there's a crane now at Norfolk, the Grumman Crane that's like that.

Geraldine Johnson: Mhmm, mhmm, mhmm.

Richard Johnson: Oh then the thing about launching -- I'm not sure that they have it -- there's a problem in launching ships that they were always concerned about and that is that the current is quite severe. The tide comes in from Long Island and down and the tide comes in from the Bay at Long and that's where Hell Gate Bridge is located I guess. I assume that's why they call it Hell Gate. I don't know, but in any case, the severe launch, the severe current can pull, haul a ship and take it on its way and allowing the -- I know when I was being briefed before we went for the launching on the Missouri, they -- whoever was giving it --

said it did happen, although I don't know I had ever heard of it before that one of the ships being launched just got picked away

[02:05:00]

and beached itself over in Manhattan.

Geraldine Johnson: Because of the currents.

Sady Sullivan: Before it could like get its motor started or whatever?

Geraldine Johnson: Well it doesn't have a motor when it's being launched. It had drags chains to slow it down.

Sady Sullivan: Oh.

Geraldine Johnson: There's no motor.

Richard Johnson: So what they -- you know they count on strictly the gravity that's held in place and what they do is they, they have ways that are greased and they have --

Danielle Romano: Greasing the ways.

Richard Johnson: -- fixed ways and ways that attach to the ship and when the uh, when they prepare for launching, they gradually transfer the load from these, all the structure that holds the ship up to letting it rest on the ways and then they have some triggers at key points right under the ship and there's a little pit where uh people sit down there and when she hits the bottle, someone down there pulls a slug and uh the thing starts sliding because they

have uh these things up here stopping it and when it goes  
down --

Geraldine Johnson: There's no stopping it.

Richard Johnson: -- if you look at the -- in this book.

Danielle Romano: Is it fast?

Geraldine Johnson: We will show you how fast it goes. Once it  
gets started, if they person standing there with the  
champagne bottle doesn't hit it promptly, it's too late.

Richard Johnson: Excuse me.

Geraldine Johnson: It starts slowly and it gradually builds up  
speed and then when it hits the water --

Richard Johnson: There is stopping, but it is very --

Geraldine Johnson: -- it sort of slows up and then it slides  
right into the ocean water.

Richard Johnson: -- heavy.

Danielle Romano: Were you telling me about the Missouri  
launch footage?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Danielle Romano: Mhmm. I've seen -- I think that we can get  
it through the Library of Congress.

Geraldine Johnson: I don't think so.

Danielle Romano: OK.

Geraldine Johnson: I only know of two films. We have one here and there's one out in Hawaii at the museum. There's only two.

Sady Sullivan: I forget who told me this, but do you know what they greased the ways with?

Geraldine Johnson: I have no idea.

Sady Sullivan: I heard it -- did you? Someone -- I heard that it was [Berzelius].

Danielle Romano: Or [Sulfide] steam.

Richard Johnson: Here's the one, ready for launch. Now they have more than one way of stopping a ship.

Danielle Romano: Oh there's the Sullivan brothers.

Richard Johnson: When all else fails, they have a clump of -- two clumps of chains and here's one. If you look close, see that? See the size of people? That must be 20 feet high and there's clumps, steel clumps of chains, one on each side. So worst comes to worst, they can always drop them and let the ship slow itself down in a dragging.

Sady Sullivan: So those will drag down to the bottom.

Geraldine Johnson: Drag down; that's right, the river.

Richard Johnson: But in the case they had that on the Missouri and if you see pictures of launches, you'll see a clump that will show up once in a while, but in addition, when they launched the Missouri, if this was the launch,

they had buried in the mud going out here a whole row of heavy chains here and here and when the -- so the ship went out through just a bunch of rigging, basically, as it went out it pulled on those chains more and more and it brought the Missouri to a halt very quickly and then after it was halted, they had to make a disconnect from the ship where it was hooked onto and then the ship could be moved around, but they couldn't go with those. And on the Missouri, I was on the port side, below decks, back kind of -- maybe two-thirds of the way back from the bough and I was just there with a couple, with a welder and a burner, or something like that

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and they had to cut a hole in the hull and I had telephones on and those times they have everybody hooked up to one set and only one person could talk at a time, could talk although only one person should talk. Anybody could talk and it could be everybody could talk at once. You could hear nothing, no, but you could hear any messages they tell you about uh the whole progress and they would say cut the -- make the cut. So someone leaned out with a burning torch and cut this clip that was about so big, so long right in front of him, just a reach out, and when that cut, it fell down and had a little, a lot of rope attached onto

somewhere, and there was a barrel that went over the side and marked with a marker for later on. They came around and come to the barrel and haul it in and they'd find the connection and they'd retrieve all the stuff in the ground.

Sady Sullivan: I wondered that. So they don't just leave the chains in the bottom of the river. They pull them up?

Richard Johnson: Yeah.

Geraldine Johnson: Correct. Correct.

Richard Johnson: Yeah and uh that was my first ride on the Missouri. I forgot what I did. I was on the Iowa and I was on that -- I think I had a carrier too. Just there were lots of things. We saw one of the, our friends, oh a couple of years ago, that made a career of the Navy and we stopped in to see him down in Washington. We were down visiting our kids and he'd been in the trigger pit where they pull some lever and it went.

Sady Sullivan: For the launch?

Richard Johnson: For the launch.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, fun. And so you were saying -- I didn't understand that when the ship is launched it doesn't have - - it's not ready to sail yet?

Richard Johnson: No, no.

Geraldine Johnson: Oh goodness no. It's just basically the hull.



Richard Johnson: But it's got most of the --

Geraldine Johnson: And uh um, structure inside the hull.

Richard Johnson: Most of the structure and most of the big stuff is in, but its, it was -- the Missouri was launched in the end of January and they delivered it in May.

Sady Sullivan: OK, so there's a lot of like mechanical stuff that has to be done once it's floating?

Geraldine Johnson: Oh yeah. Oh yes.

Richard Johnson: And none of the main battery is in there because I -- probably because they don't want to put that weight on the ways because they were --

Geraldine Johnson: Right because after a ship is launched --

Richard Johnson: -- they were talking about lifting 400 --

Geraldine Johnson: -- they have all those super structure to put up.

Richard Johnson: -- If they're talking 450 tons, then they were talking three of them, there'd be at least three lifts of 450 tons plus some lesser lifts. So that's over 1000 tons that they didn't have on the ship at launch, but generally it's somewhere around 80-85% completed.

Sady Sullivan: I see.

Richard Johnson: As far as they're concerned, but that may be man hours. I don't know.

Danielle Romano: So there's the keel laying, the launch and the commissioning.

Richard Johnson: Right.

Danielle Romano: And the commissioning is when it's ready to sail.

Geraldine Johnson: And everybody is assigned because the military is already onboard.

Richard Johnson: And then this time it was --

Geraldine Johnson: And they go onboard at least six months before the commissioning so that everybody knows their job because once it's commissioned, it's battle ready and it's off.

Danielle Romano: It's off.

Geraldine Johnson: That's right.

Danielle Romano: So there's -- when is the naming fit it?

Geraldine Johnson: The naming is chosen before the ship is built.

Danielle Romano: Uh-huh.

Richard Johnson: Usually, yeah.

Danielle Romano: OK.

Richard Johnson: Yeah, usually. Depends what politician is at the top of the heap that day, I guess. Harry Truman was there for the commissioning of the Missouri as senator. Yeah he was senator then and he would -- one of his uh

duties, I guess, as senator, he had a uh, they referred to them as the Truman Investigating Committee, but he and a bunch of experts would come around and follow how well the government is spending their money on shipping and the Navy and the Defense Department probably in general. And he made them sweat. I mean there was no -- when he would get on their tail, they knew it was serious.

Geraldine Johnson: Do you want to tell them about the story about the launching of the Missouri and the pictures we have?

Richard Johnson: Say that again.

Geraldine Johnson: Do you want to tell them about Bob McFarland?

Richard Johnson: Oh yeah.

[02:15:00]

Uh this is an unusual thing and I -- the thing I had that was going to help to explain I don't have any more, but one of our friends that we've known since those days --

Geraldine Johnson: A member of our wedding party.

Richard Johnson: He was in the wedding party, Bob McFarland, he used to say he was stationed there and then he went from there to the Canal Zone because that was his next tour of duty before the end of the war and he went back to Oklahoma. He said he was going to go back there and raise

cattle and kids, but that was just a sowing because he only had two children and --

Geraldine Johnson: No cattle.

Sady Sullivan: No cattle [laughs].

Richard Johnson: No cattle, but he raised -- put up an awful lot of buildings and he had I think about sixty tenants -- they were all companies -- no skyscraper or anything, but they were office buildings and things like that. He'd have -- he had about sixty of those, but he died four years ago. About roughly eight years ago, roughly, we used to visit once in a while. I guess we did get out there and they got out here also and he was uh very talented. He got out there, he was very successful.

Geraldine Johnson: He graduated from Notre Dame.

Richard Johnson: Graduated Notre Dame, high in the class. He thought everybody down there at the school must have been top five percent, so I assured him that they are more liberal there because I was in the upper five percent, but in any case, he -- we used to write occasionally and make phone calls and he called up one time and he wrote too, I guess, on the subject and said, "I've got something here I don't know what to do with," and he said, "It relates to the Navy," and he said, "I haven't been associated with the Navy since I got out and you're still in the reserves,

maybe you can solve it and help give me some help." He said, "I've got to come in possession of a film of the launching of the Missouri and it's in color," and he said -- I guess it's unofficial. He said, "I don't want to speak out about it because I might get in trouble, even now." He didn't know, but he said, "But I don't want to get anybody in trouble," he said, "but the Navy could use it, I think. Can you find out who would want to use it at the Navy?" So I talked to somebody at the sub base and he said talked to Washington Navy Yard. They take it. I said, "What would you do with it?" We'd sit it there and have it and reference it and if anybody wanted it, it was there, but nobody had known it had been existed. He said, "Well what else?" He said, "Well the Ship Missouri is setting up a museum," and he gave me the name and a phone number and I called out there. "Great," he said. I said, "I don't have it. I haven't seen it," but I said, "I understand what it was and that it's in color and so it's not official." He said he came into possession of it though, so he doesn't want it. He wants to get rid of it. And so he said --

Sady Sullivan: Oh pause for just one second so we don't.

Richard Johnson: So he said -- I told him, I said, "What do I do?" He said, "Well he shouldn't worry about it." He said, "Things are coming here all the time, boxes that

people are getting rid of memorabilia. I don't know where they came from and no questions asked and all that sort of stuff. So I put the two together, anyway, and had them get together and talk and in due time I got a -- I was given a copy of a letter of a communication. Let's see if -- now I started the whole thing --

Danielle Romano: These notes are wonderful.

Richard Johnson: I started this in 2000, the year 2000, late in the year, and I got here a note that comes from Mike [Wiedenback] and I think he was like a collections man there --

Sady Sullivan: With the Navy?

Richard Johnson: But he said basically, he says --

Danielle Romano: Missouri.

Sady Sullivan: Oh the Missouri.

Richard Johnson: Basically he said uh that the gist of it --  
[02:20:00]

Danielle Romano: May I?

Richard Johnson: -- he acknowledged the receipt of the package from McFarland and he thought it was great. He saw the film, thought it was great and thanked him very much and then from there he said, "How about telling me, getting me some more on the details of building of it?" And eventually, after when he wrote that he had gotten, he had

received from this fellow I think a DVD that uh, that Bob had in his possession and the pictures had been enhanced, but they were taken by unknown sources probably from on top of the hammerhead crane.

Sady Sullivan: Oh wow. That's cool.

Danielle Romano: Oh my gosh and you have the DVD? You have the video?

Richard Johnson: No. I had a tape of it and I've shown it here at home to some friends and I tried it two nights ago and it wavered once and something went wrong and I think it broke. Maybe the film -- it wouldn't be anywhere near as good. I had since -- I've talked to Mike [Wiedenback] this week, either this week or last week, and uh Mike is now the curator of the museum on the --

Danielle Romano: I saw that, the USS Missouri Memorial.

Richard Johnson: USS Missouri. It's got a correct title for it too.

Danielle Romano: Curator, USS --

Richard Johnson: He's now -- he's the -- he's the curator, Mike [Wiedenback], USS Memorial Association and here's the address. Here's the email and I told him about you people and he's very thrilled.

Danielle Romano: Good.

Richard Johnson: Because he knows the ship was built there and he would like to uh be uh help out, except he can limit.

Sady Sullivan: What's the limit?

Richard Johnson: The limit is that he's not sure of the limit, but Bob when he got this, he didn't want to get anybody in trouble by getting too public, but he -- as it presented -- and it's on the -- I can't even get the thing to give you anything, but there's a printing on the first page, right in the beginning of the film it tells what this is. It's the launching of the Missouri, certain date, it's dedicated to her father. Let's see and it has something that says copyright, R. McFarland and maybe it says licensed to him for educational purposes and things like that and he has been using it, but he said Bob was so concerned about that, he didn't want to use it to the limit of -- he was thinking of putting it on every day, run it to everybody to show and come aboard. So he's been using it piecemeal uh but uh Robert, talking to me, he knew he got this agreement with them and uh, but Bob has died four years ago.

Danielle Romano: But Bob is passed.

Richard Johnson: I talked to his wife.

Geraldine Johnson: Doesn't hear well.



Richard Johnson: She doesn't hear -- she's had a bad stroke, she's in a wheelchair. She talked on the phone, but we had a conversation and she wasn't hearing me well at all. I'm pretty sure that Bob's had -- he has two boys, they're both lawyers and I'm pretty sure one of them --

Sady Sullivan: Great!

Geraldine Johnson: They'll help you out [laughs].

Richard Johnson: I think he put one of them to work to write the agreement.

Sady Sullivan: OK.

Richard Johnson: And uh of the two lawyers, I could give you the names and addresses of those things.

Sady Sullivan: Yeah, I would like that. Thank you.

Geraldine Johnson: Do you want me to get the address book?

Richard Johnson: I'll get that for her. Yeah the address book I need I guess.

Sady Sullivan: Thank you very much.

Richard Johnson: And uh I don't know how much Bob kept them abreast of it all, but of the two boys, one is at home now and he's home because he is

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been -- he's passed law school, he passed the bar, he's been working as a lawyer and since age one or less he's had cerebral palsy and Bob spent a fortune on getting speech

people and everything like that and he uh and he uh, he's practiced law, but he, he finally -- he was doing one for this work for various handicap societies and Bob would travel around with him once in a while just to be a helper too. But anyway, I think that Mark is the one and I think he's the one you probably have to be speaking with.

Sady Sullivan: Mark McFarland?

Richard Johnson: Uh he's over here. Uh here it is here. Bob died in July four years ago. His wife's name is Joan and the son, Mark, and they relocated from where they were -- they were about 30-acre plot, a beautiful spot --

Sady Sullivan: In Oklahoma?

Richard Johnson: Just outside Oklahoma City in Bethany. Now they're within Oklahoma City and here's the phone number and here's the address. I tried talking with her about it and the connections weren't good and she didn't uh --

Richard Johnson: Couldn't hear you well.

Richard Johnson: She couldn't hear me well and I don't know how much she was privy to the whole thing. Mark would be the one you'd have to talk with, I think, and if -- and the alternative is Sean, the brother, lives within a mile or so and he works for the state as a lawyer.

Sady Sullivan: OK.

Richard Johnson: But uh --

Sady Sullivan: Do you have Sean's information too?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Sady Sullivan: Do you have Sean's information too? Do you have Sean's information?

Geraldine Johnson: Sean, do you have his address?

Richard Johnson: No, I don't know his brothers.

Geraldine Johnson: No.

Sady Sullivan: But I could find him maybe through Oklahoma Department of State? Is that what you said? He works for the state department?

Richard Johnson: For the state, for the state of Oklahoma.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, OK.

Richard Johnson: Because that's the capital there.

Geraldine Johnson: And he's a lawyer also.

Richard Johnson: Uh and he lives somewhere, but uh, yeah.

Sady Sullivan: But start with Mark, you're saying?

Geraldine Johnson: I would start with Mark.

Richard Johnson: Yeah, start with Mark, but I think you might want to talk with Mike [Wiedenback] because he's -- anything -- I think he could compliment you or you could compliment his --

Sady Sullivan: I feel like I've met him. I feel like -- I go to this maritime heritage conferences and I do, we do a lot of work with the Naval Historical Center and um Dr. [Morolda]

and Mike Crawford are both wrote chapters in here. Dr. [Morolda] is on our advisory committee for our exhibition. So I feel like and I feel like I know Mike, that I've met him before. We were talking about the Missouri.

Richard Johnson: He said -- I have never seen him, but he's very friendly to talk with.

Sady Sullivan: Yeah.

Richard Johnson: And when he took a long time -- one time I was trying to reach him because we talked a few times, a few years ago, and he uh had taken vacation and he said, "Oh I was showing people uh, climbing the volcanoes to show visitors what the volcanoes looked like." It was spilling over lava.

Danielle Romano: Oh my gosh. I want to go visit him.

Richard Johnson: He sounded like a Mike [inaudible].

Danielle Romano: It sounds like a fun work trip.

Richard Johnson: This is like, something like that, only a very earlier version.

Danielle Romano: This is wonderful.

Sady Sullivan: I'm going to see, actually if I can ask the center for a copy of that, but the launch footage would be great and the exhibit for people to see a live color launch of the Missouri.

Geraldine Johnson: And the sun came -- in the film the sun came out as it --

Sady Sullivan: That answers about a million questions right there with some video footage.

Richard Johnson: When Bob spoke about it, when he went through it about the pictures and after he took them or took possession of these things, he said, "When it was launched, apparently it was a cloudy day or something like that and as it just hit the water," he said, "it's a big cloud moved away and the sun hit the ship just right.

Sady Sullivan: So this must be 8mm or super eight film, right?

Richard Johnson: It started with something like that.

Sady Sullivan: It's a reel.

Richard Johnson: Because that's all they had back then.

[02:30:00]

Geraldine Johnson: Something like that. It started like that. It was very old film.

Sady Sullivan: I hope that the McFarlands have the original film.

Richard Johnson: He took that and he took it to some repair shop I guess.

Geraldine Johnson: He had it modernized.

Richard Johnson: And he said he found some ex-chief in the Navy with a fellow, babied it and played with it for a long while and got it in a DVD.

Sady Sullivan: Great.

Richard Johnson: And he said that, he said I could give you - - I could send you, if you want a tape I could send it to you right away. I said, "Oh fine. I'd take it." I've had it in the house for five years anyway.

Sady Sullivan: I'll call Mike and see if he can make a DVD for us to just look at.

Richard Johnson: Mike would probably say he wouldn't -- he doesn't want to --

Sady Sullivan: Without permission.

Richard Johnson: He wants to get them, but if you were to say that you've talked to Mike and he's in favor of this and his recommendation and if -- you could say -- Mike could drop them a note to say please help them out in any way you can or something like that.

Geraldine Johnson: You'd probably be better doing that way.

Richard Johnson: Association together.

Sady Sullivan: OK. OK.

Richard Johnson: That was one thing.

Geraldine Johnson: The one thing they respect is their father's wishes.

Sady Sullivan: I think -- it also seems like we've been doing this women in the Navy Yard during World War II project for some time now, but it seems to be such a story of the Missouri, really, because we're getting to talk to chippers and caulkers and welders and I'm now, now an officer.

Geraldine Johnson: And he rode on the ship during the launching.

Richard Johnson: The Iowa was the first of the lead of the class. The Iowa was the lead ship of the class.

Geraldine Johnson: He rode on that one in the launching.

Richard Johnson: Yeah I wrote those things. Let's see, that's Mike.

Geraldine Johnson: Would you like a cup of coffee?

Sady Sullivan: I'm OK.

Richard Johnson: He was -- when they told me about the whole thing he said --

Sady Sullivan: I'll take a cup of coffee.

Geraldine Johnson: Tea?

Sady Sullivan: Coffee, actually, sounds good.

Richard Johnson: He was thrilled because he went through this for years. I was talking to Mike in 2001 and he finally got this in 2002 and I think they opened it up in 2005. Oh and speaking of that, I know I collected these things and try to keep it in order, but I'm jumping order. Here's a

paper about the -- it must have been the Missouri just opened up and the prices they charged to go through there were expensive. They had a bunch of different --

Danielle Romano: Yeah, \$50.00.

Sady Sullivan: No way! Really?

Richard Johnson: You had to stay overnight I think it is.

Danielle Romano: Oh, OK.

Sady Sullivan: You do?

Danielle Romano: Captain's tour is \$49.00. Ninety minute explorer's tour is \$49.00. The encampment overnight is \$80.00.

Sady Sullivan: Wow.

Danielle Romano: We know that Brooklyn Navy Yard built the Arizona and the Missouri.

Richard Johnson: Right, yup. This is another one. This has got an interesting -- I don't know whether it is credible or not. I guess parts of it credible, but my sister sent me this clipping and another one too, but this one is about the surrender, the day of the surrender, and it's an Associated Press write up. It describes the uh, the event and it talks about -- it's only a half hour, or less than 30 -- 25 minutes I guess for the whole story to process, but he was in Tokyo Bay and they had four destroyers that we used to ferry people there. One ferried McArthur in and



his troop and one ferried in the allied people and one ferried in the press and one ferried in the Japanese, the high ranking people I guess. And this is it here and those two articles. This is one of them. This one says "*Eight Japanese, four in military uniform, four in full diplomatic garb, mounted on stairs the main deck on a [pint] board and foreign minister Shigemitsu was the highest ranking.*" He had trouble with it because he wouldn't rank. That's [inaudible] up here. This -- everything seemed to come out of [Barnsbury] Park Press, but this is my sister sent it up. And someone here was interviewed who lived

[02:35:00]

down in New Jersey, I guess retired, and he was on the uh destroyer uh Lansdowne and he ferried over -- they ferried over the official delegation and when they -- in part, it's a long story, but basically it turns out that Lansdowne was to pick up the Japanese people and they were told to follow strict orders to follow decorum. We show respect for all their guests. But the allied military command insisted on some official disrespect. That's why -- it will go across or not. Each year the four destroyers took their passes direct to the Missouri. They transferred from the destroyer to the Missouri. The uh, the Lansdowne went over to the pier and picked up the delegation with Japanese and

they, instead of going direct to the ship, they stopped at a -- it says, "We were ordered to stop a nice distance away and the Japanese delegation was forced to take a small launch to the Missouri. For the highest ranking Japanese dignitary delegation was Shigemitsu, minister of foreign affairs, he had lost his right leg in the Korean conflict in 1932. He had to negotiate a rope ladder to get down," [laughs] to get down in the launch. Then when they pulled up to the Missouri, they had a stairway that came down and they had no problem, but then when it was all over he had to go up the rope ladder [laughs].

Sady Sullivan: That's awful [laughs].

Richard Johnson: Now whether that every happened, I have no idea, but he does acknowledge -- in this one they acknowledge that the Japanese who come in there off a launch and the others came over the destroyer-destroyer. And these fellows, you're welcome to copy -- I don't know how you're going to --

Danielle Romano: Yeah, well we have a camera. I'd like to just take a photograph of a couple of things.

Sady Sullivan: Yeah, it's right over there. Um and then I have a few more questions. Um about sort of life in the Navy yards, um and if you have a minute, I'd like to hear about -- your wedding was in the Officer's Club.

Richard Johnson: We've been in the Officer's Club.

Sady Sullivan: Right. So I'd love to hear.

Danielle Romano: Let me see. I'm trying to see how the flash works on this thing.

Richard Johnson: Is the off --

Danielle Romano: I like this. This is a list of masters.

Richard Johnson: Do you want better light or something?

Danielle Romano: I've got a flash. That's good.

Richard Johnson: It's OK?

Danielle Romano: Yup.

Sady Sullivan: So Danielle, I don't know if you've seen, but in -- there's photos of their wedding in the Officer's Club.

Danielle Romano: Oh, wonderful!

Sady Sullivan: Yes. So will you tell me about it?

Geraldine Johnson: Well, we had the wedding in New York City and because I lived on government property at that time, I was not assigned to a parish. I didn't have a parish, so I chose the parish where my father had been baptized. That's the church that we were married in.

Sady Sullivan: And what church was that?

Richard Johnson: Saint Ignatius Leola.

Geraldine Johnson: Saint Ignatius Leola in New York City, up about 66<sup>th</sup> --

Richard Johnson: About 90<sup>th</sup> -- about 90<sup>th</sup> Street.

Geraldine Johnson: 90<sup>th</sup> Street.

Richard Johnson: And Park Avenue.

Geraldine Johnson: Park Avenue, all right.

Richard Johnson: On a Sunday because --

Geraldine Johnson: Sunday afternoon.

Richard Johnson: -- you figure the only time they could get anybody to come would be a Sunday afternoon and it was a nice day.

Geraldine Johnson: It was a beautiful February day.

Richard Johnson: We packed them in.

Geraldine Johnson: Right. So I put an invitation at school on the bulletin board and invited uh the school classmates to come to the wedding.

Sady Sullivan: What school was that?

[02:40:00]

Geraldine Johnson: The Packer Collegiate Institute on Joralemon Street near Barrow Hall. So that's where I went to school. And after the wedding we came back to the Brooklyn Navy Yard for the reception and I have a picture of us standing at the front door of the --

Richard Johnson: Is that that door?

Geraldine Johnson: That's over there, yes, to the Officer's Club and it was uh three flights of stairs, I think, to go upstairs.

Richard Johnson: Two I think.

Geraldine Johnson: Two? I think it went around. So I'm deducing three. And then at the top of the stairs to the left was a library and I had borrowed books from that to write my term paper/papers. Then straight ahead was the dance floor and to the right, extreme right, was where the lounge and the bar was and so all the tables for the wedding were setup on the dance floor and the band was over to the right and the head table, where we sat with the wedding party and the wedding cake was straight ahead from the entrance. And uh --

Richard Johnson: Then they had a lot of -- their neighbors and friends were military people.

Geraldine Johnson: Oh yes, yes. We have a book of all their signatures when they came in as guests.

Sady Sullivan: So was that -- so what about people who were not, like civilian -- non-people -- people who didn't usually come to the Navy Yard were allowed to come in?

Geraldine Johnson: They were allowed permission through the Marine Corps. Their names were left at the main gate so that they were checked off as they came through.

Sady Sullivan: And what year was that?

Geraldine Johnson: 1944. February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944. So we will be married 64 years come February.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, congratulations.

Geraldine Johnson: Thank you.

Sady Sullivan: And was that -- I can imagine that superintendant of the yard's daughter getting married must have been a big deal for the whole yard.

Geraldine Johnson: Well yes. We had you know people there from the hospital as well as from the uh, we had relatives in the um New York City um in the hall, City Hall in New York City, and they also came. So we had civilians.

Richard Johnson: And I had company from Massachusetts, cousins from Massachusetts and New Jersey.

Geraldine Johnson: Cousins from Massachusetts, New Jersey.

Richard Johnson: And I know they didn't travel far because of restriction.

Geraldine Johnson: Well because of military time. Yeah for war time they couldn't travel far, but --

Richard Johnson: It was a nice day. We packed them in at crossed swords and all that sort of stuff.

Geraldine Johnson: Right and then for, um The Waltz, our first dance together, I asked for the Blue Danube and they played the Blue Danube Waltz.

Sady Sullivan: Did you have a band?

Geraldine Johnson: I had an orchestra. We don't call them bands. We called them orchestras.

Sady Sullivan: [Laughs]

Richard Johnson: Would you be using the Officer's Club building for your display?

Danielle Romano: We're actually going to use the Marine Commandant's Building. There's Building 92, which was a brick building at the corner of Flushing and Carlton and I should have brought a photograph for you.

Richard Johnson: That's I guess probably next to the Officer's Club I think it was.

Danielle Romano: It's a three story -- no, the Officer's Club, well there was the Officer's Club in Building 27 by the Cumberland Gate, but there was the Officer's -- is that where you were or were you?

Geraldine Johnson: We were near the main gate, yes.

Danielle Romano: You were? OK. So that was Building 27 I would guess, right when you come in, right immediate lane on the right.

Geraldine Johnson: The Officer's Club was right, yeah.

Richard Johnson: Then the Marines had -- it was almost next to it, wasn't it?

Geraldine Johnson: It was a little further down.

Danielle Romano: Yeah, exactly. That's exactly where it was, right next to Building 3. Building 3 was the big general storehouse.

Richard Johnson: Yeah and is Building 88 still there?

Danielle Romano: It's right here.

Richard Johnson: That's the newest one.

Danielle Romano: 88 doesn't sound familiar.

Richard Johnson: Building 88 was a fifteen story or more.

Danielle Romano: Oh, 77. Yeah.

Richard Johnson: Seventy-seven is it?

Danielle Romano: Yeah, that's still there.

Richard Johnson: Seventy-seven.

Danielle Romano: That's now foreign trade zone. This uh  
here. This is Building 92 right there and that's Building  
77. That's the fifteen story. You were there when that  
was going up, right?

Richard Johnson: This is -- I was down here.

Danielle Romano: You said 313, right.

Richard Johnson: 313, but we'd come up to the planning and  
I'm sure that high-brass were here. They had planning and  
estimating and design, big design department. And these  
things were a lot of storage stuff.

[02:45:00]

Geraldine Johnson: We used to come up here to the YMCA and wrap  
Christmas packages for the military boys.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, on Sands Street?



Geraldine Johnson: On Sands Street, yes. Boy you get a lot of whistles on Sands Street.

Sady Sullivan: I wanted to ask you, what was -- yeah -- what was that like? What was Sands Street like?

Geraldine Johnson: Well it was very, very interesting because I guess they had a lot of uniform shops and barber shops and it was like a hangout.

Richard Johnson: Even place to drink.

Geraldine Johnson: It was a hangout street.

Richard Johnson: Uh when the workmen get out though at five o'clock or so, whatever the main times the shift got off, they'd walk up Sands Street to go to the Subway Station and they would walk up abreast, building to building right across the street.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah solid, solid people.

Richard Johnson: Just solid.

Geraldine Johnson: I mean they had 50,000 people or more that worked there; 150,000 probably in the Brooklyn Navy Yard and it was just -- I remember they had um the main entrance and I had -- if I was walking home from school, they had a school near there and I used to have to go up on the steps of the school to let this mass of humanity go by.

Sady Sullivan: [Laughs]

Geraldine Johnson: Is the microwave still? Would you like more coffee?

Sady Sullivan: Yes please.

Danielle Romano: I'll send you a packet. I'm going to send you a packet with a photograph of the building now and a rendering for the new design and some materials on what's going on in the Navy Yard now.

Richard Johnson: Now the uh, in the -- I don't know the numbers, but where she lived is three row houses there, then toward the main gate there was a space and then there was a single house there. That was the Admiral Kennedy lived there. He was the manager -- I'm not sure of his title, official title.

Danielle Romano: You said he was the shipyard.

Richard Johnson: The shipyard manager.

Danielle Romano: Yeah. Captain? He was a Captain?

Richard Johnson: No, he was a rear admiral.

Danielle Romano: Oh, he was a rear admiral.

Richard Johnson: He shows up in the picture here as being a rear admiral stripe, but when I got there he was uh a rear admiral. And there was a, near Sands Street Gate there was a uh, a commander's -- and it was A to the Commandant up there on the hill I think.

Danielle Romano: Yup.

Richard Johnson: He had a big family of small children.

Sady Sullivan: And his house was on Sands Street?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Sady Sullivan: He lived on Sands Street?

Richard Johnson: No, he lived near the gate.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, near the Sands Street Gate.

Richard Johnson: Inside, inside.

Danielle Romano: He lived inside the Sands Street Gate.

Richard Johnson: Inside the yard, yeah.

Danielle Romano: OK.

Sady Sullivan: How did -- when you were coming home -- when you would come in and out of the Navy Yard, how did you -- did they just recognize you and so you were allowed?

Geraldine Johnson: No there was a station in front of the Officer's quarters, a Marine was stationed at that location and uh he would let me in.

Sady Sullivan: And he would always be the same? I mean he would know you?

Geraldine Johnson: No, there would always be somebody on duty. I didn't always know the Marine that was there. They changed, but I had my pass.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, so you did have a pass.

Geraldine Johnson: I had an ID pass, yes, and he'd open the gate and let me in and I could walk to my house.

Sady Sullivan: Were there other people who were leaving the yard -- other officer's children who were leaving the yard to go to school?

Geraldine Johnson: I have no idea how they did their procedures, but I usually came and went that way. Uh in the morning I would get on the school bus and we'd go out Sands Street on the school bus and go to -- they'd bring me to school and then um I would walk home or take the bus, depending upon what activities I had after school. So that's how that worked for me. Any other questions?

Sady Sullivan: Thank you.

Richard Johnson: None for me now, thank you.

Sady Sullivan: Um --

Richard Johnson: Oh and uh another thing, in reading some books, my son used to get me lots of these nice, good books through the

[02:50:00]

same place that puts this stuff out uh. One about from Admiral Spruance called *A Quiet Warrior*. Here's the spelling of it.

Danielle Romano: Admiral R-A --

Richard Johnson: S-P-R-U-A-N-C-E I think. He talked about the Navy in Depression times. It was interesting for me, at least. He tried to point out that things were tough all

around. Congress uh passed or imposed a 15% pay cut on all labor personnel, for one thing, and because in the worst of the Depression there were 25% unemployment with no unemployment systems at all, they -- everybody wanted to join the military and they only accepted one out about every twenty-eight applicants to come in the Navy and apparently nobody wanted to get out because the food was good; better than nothing. When the Class of 1933 graduated from the Naval Academy, that must have been a bad year. The budget didn't have enough money for them so the lower half, from their rating of top man to bottom man, the lower half were, uh got a handshake and honorably discharged because there was no room at the inn for them and they uh, I have -- I think, to the best of my knowledge, that I traced a couple of those medal of honor winners to [inaudible].

Sady Sullivan: To where?

Richard Johnson: The mid to lower half of the class so it wasn't good or bad. I'm quite sure, without getting into politics, you can say that McCain was in the lower half too because he -- I've read other books about uh where he was -- it was incidental in the book. I forget what the book was about now, but around Reagan's time there was a lot of books written about people and when he went through the

academy, his -- he had a father and a grandfather, they were both admirals, and he was uh, he was uh -- when the admirals were living in Washington and he was around the house, congressman around the house and they knew this is a young kid, McCain and when he got to the Naval Academy, as everybody expected he would, he still wasn't -- he was a little bit of a maverick in some respects, and he struck up with another fellow that was a like kind who happened to be the son of the commandant of the Naval Academy. So they couldn't really throw him out. They had to throw two of them out.

Sady Sullivan: They're not going to throw out the commandant's son.

Richard Johnson: It never got that far, it probably didn't, but they kept breaking all the rules and they were happy to see them get out. But once he got -- but they said whenever they had summer cruises and things like that, McCain rose to the top as being the one with all the brain power and knew how to handle himself and was a credit to the whole thing. But just he just didn't go for some of the blarney that he has around.

Danielle Romano: Yeah. Do you mind if I photograph these? And also the one with Captain Jack in it too? But these are wonderful. I'm really familiar with the Woodward Keel

Laying photographs and to meet you and know that your father was the whole superintendant standing right behind him is very interesting now for me.

**[END OF AUDIO FILE 1]**

[00:00]

Geraldine Johnson: Why don't we come over here?

Danielle Romano: OK. Like sunlight.

Sady Sullivan: I heard from a couple of people that there was, at one point there was difficulty retaining people working -- civilian people -- working in the Navy Yard because some of the commercial private shipyards were paying more and there was -- and so then someone told me that they, in order to stop that, they made it so that people who -- they made it so that people would get drafted or something? They made it so that if you --

Richard Johnson: They would lose their exemption there [inaudible].

Sady Sullivan: Yes, yes. Did that? Can you tell me about that?

Richard Johnson: I'm not aware of it, but I can see where they could threaten it.

Sady Sullivan: Yeah.

Richard Johnson: Because the [inaudible] was the only way they could stay working there.

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm. Mhmm. So did you -- did either of you see the --

Geraldine Johnson: Did it work out all right? Did you get good ones?

Danielle Romano: Mhmm.

Geraldine Johnson: OK. Because they're so old I didn't know if they'd come through.

Danielle Romano: It's perfect.

Sady Sullivan: -- women that were working?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Sady Sullivan: Did you see the women that were coming in to work in the yards?

Richard Johnson: Did I?

Sady Sullivan: Would you see the women that were coming in to work in the yards?

Richard Johnson: Oh I worked with them a lot.

Sady Sullivan: Oh you did?

Richard Johnson: Oh yeah, I'd go aboard and my problem was to make sure that when a ship would come in and have -- I'd be concerned with making sure that anything involving the hull area, which is the water-tight integrity, anything structural, living accommodations, certain handling gear, like the uh rudders and the anchors and a few other things like that in the way of machinery, that it was done in a



timely manner and done to satisfactory. And so I'd go in and spend my time with the workmen to see if they're staffed, if they're not getting help from some department. If the shop isn't supporting them, I'd go over to the shop and tell them, look, you got to do it because the schedule, you'll hear from somebody that means something later on if you don't. And I could -- when I do the dry docking, I'd go over the dock master's office first. We look at the plans and make sure it applies to the ship and then go down to the dock with the workmen and they'd measure all of the blocks that show in the plans or where they are and right size and stuff like that. Then I'd be there for the flooding the docks and the riggers, I guess, took care of some of the, a lot of the line handling. So I got to know the riggers and then I'd go aboard the ship and tell the ship when they're scheduled and what we need in the way of help from the ship and what the yard will be doing and then if I had to I'd call the pilot that's going to be in the tugboat to pick thing up and then after the ship gets in, I'll be there to see it when it comes in and try at -- the critical time is when it just hits the blocks. Is something going to get a surprise, a tip or a something or something getting in the way. You know it, so I'd be at the line of sight where they've -- to check the thing

coming down vertically and then before and after check that and then go down on the block and check it all out and make sure nothing, no surprises down there -- a piece of crushed wood or something like that. I've never had any of those things, but we had one man that he could do it all just as well accepting. Just as it land they'd find that they didn't tell him that they put a new gizmo. They cut a hole in the hull and they had something hanging out and when it hit the blocks, the thing, the whole thing twisted on them and they had to start all over again. And then uh any of the workmen -- I could talk to any of the trades, ask anybody. I could go up in design if I wanted to to ask them. I could sit down with -- with most case I'd sit on the destroyers it would be the first lieutenant and he would be my counterpart. He'd be dealing with the livability of the ship and I make sure that he was happy and that the captain was happy because if the captain wasn't happy, he could say at the end of the day I'm not ready to go to sea because you didn't do such and such. And then everything, whistle blows and they'd go double time. And for most part it worked out well.

[05:00]

I don't think -- I didn't really have any serious problems. A few times I couldn't get everything done, we wind up

going out for the day while they're have sea trials and get the workmen finish up something, but I could -- I got to know the men well. I spend more time with them, talking with them than with the officers, probably. Probably spent most the time aboard ship, tied up in the pier. Very little paperwork.

Geraldine Johnson: You didn't get sea sick.

Richard Johnson: No [laughs] and if I had gone -- if they ever said you're going to sea, it would be because I would be qualified to go aboard a dry dock somewhere and that would be my sea duty sitting in a dry dock, floating dry dock. I did have -- in anticipation of it -- they had some play around, learn a little bit more about -- learn about diving. They have a diving tank over in the corner.

Geraldine Johnson: You did dive into the river.

Richard Johnson: I dived -- yeah, got on a suit and dove in the tank and then dove in the river for a week of it.

Geraldine Johnson: Was that the East River?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Geraldine Johnson: The East River?

Richard Johnson: East River, yeah, and then later on when I -- in the book here -- I took two weeks, about 1948 or '49, I took two weeks of trained duty at a salvage school over in Bayonne.

Danielle Romano: Mhmm. I saw that.

Richard Johnson: They had a regular salvage training school.

I went over there for that because it was the same line of interest. But it was nice and I learned a little bit about welding. I learned it's not easy, but I did some of it.

Geraldine Johnson: This was all when your duties were part of the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Richard Johnson: Yeah that was all -- when I came back from Boston after getting my dry docking uh training up there because they had dry docks, floating docks up there. We had no floating docks in New York. So then if the war had gone like everybody thought, it was going to drag on longer, I'd have been on and I did talk to at least one of the fellows that I went to school with down in Annapolis -- oh it's raining already.

Geraldine Johnson: Is it? Oh they're car will get nice and clean.

Richard Johnson: Yeah he was on the floating -- they only had -- I think only one of those big floating docks out in the -- it had a year's worth of work and he would come out to the house overnight. He was really beat from just um working day and night I guess.

Danielle Romano: Can you tell me a little bit more about the diving? Do you know, would there have been any women who would have dived?

Richard Johnson: No.

Danielle Romano: No?

Richard Johnson: Well not in my time anyway.

Danielle Romano: No, OK.

Richard Johnson: And it was just to know how to dive, to know what the diver did and what could do and would do and don't expect certain things of him, but if you understand what the divers can do and what their limits are, when a damaged ship comes in you can --

Geraldine Johnson: Them instructions.

Richard Johnson: Yeah. Now one came in, one destroyer came in, or a DE -- I've forgotten which, where a hole 50 ft or more the stern was gone. It had been cut off cleanly. It didn't disturb the -- I forgot the name of it.

Danielle Romano: Was this the Murphy?

Richard Johnson: No, no Murphy.

Danielle Romano: The Menges. There's the Menges and the Holder.

Richard Johnson: Menges maybe.

Danielle Romano: And that was battle damage?

Richard Johnson: Uh I don't know. I thought -- Murphy I was -- this was Brooks here. I left a bunch of the ones I docked or ship super for. Well it's the other book I guess.

Danielle Romano: There was the Menges and the Holder that both had damage to their hulls and they were attached. They were -- they were --

Richard Johnson: Oh, it's the same thing you're talking about.

Danielle Romano: It is?

Richard Johnson: Well I had -- I was knowledgeable about the one that uh -- one of the ships had the tail end cut of considerably. Let's see

[10:00]

if I could just do a guess. Everything after the living quarters was gone.

Danielle Romano: And that happened in battle?

Richard Johnson: In battle, yeah, over in Europe somewhere and at the same time uh or maybe a little, a few weeks before even, a ship was in at -- I know it's Anzio or Italy somewhere and they were hit by a dive bomber and the bomb come down and went through the deck into the machinery space, out the bottom and then exploded and blew in and the machinery space was a wipeout and they put the two of them

in dock in either five or six and they had to set up -- and they cut them, they cut them so they slide one -- one had no stern. They cut that out, the good one and pushed it over and put it together and had one ship. I don't know which name survived and then they had this other thing that three-quarters of a ship, but no -- machine space was wiped out. And I was in the machinery space and uh they had uh - - I think they had diesels -- I'm not sure -- but big engines that are probably twelve feet long and six feet high and something like that and they were tossed around like it was a pinball thrown off one corner of the compartment and they had gotten temporary patch on the ship to bring it in and I think up I might have put it -- I know I went on to work on it and there wasn't much to do on it except get it in dock and I think I probably put it in Dock 2, but uh -- I don't know -- but they went in to Dry Dock 5 and it took uh -- I don't know if it was 30 or 60 days -- something like that. They had to put bigger building ways just for the tail end to be cut off and slid across. Now that was something that Commander Jack might have played with and said here's how to do it.

Geraldine Johnson: Here's how to do it. He had the ingenuity.

Richard Johnson: Used to be the type of thing he would relish in. Yeah that was one of the specials and then of course

when they got done, near the end, the very end, they had damaged ships that surplus. The uh -- I went over for one undocking in Bayonne. It was the USS Lafayette. Does that ring a bell?

Danielle Romano: Mhmm, the Normandy.

Richard Johnson: The Normandy. It had been on The Hun River for a long while and they used it, among other things, to train divers. They would bring a diving school there for one while and I met one of the fellows I knew from college. He graduated a year or two ahead of me. He had gone there and he had then been assigned to work over in Europe clearing harbors in Italy and Africa and places like that where they had -- the enemy had sunken ships down to block the entrance. He was cleaning that out and he had finished there and he was going over to the Pacific I guess for more of that same, but it would have been right about there, something like that I say. One came in and this is machinery space or the rudder space and maybe even oil. I don't know -- oil tank, I don't know, but the living space was intact, but this was cut off completely.

Danielle Romano: You can keep your finger there. OK.

Richard Johnson: I think it was about there. It could have been back here, but the living space, with everything being on -- but there was quite a neat job they did.



[00:15]

They did it pretty quickly.

Danielle Romano: Pretty famous repair. Um did you deal with the Franklin at all?

Richard Johnson: No, we were out in California then.

Danielle Romano: That was after? OK. I love your notes. They're great.

Geraldine Johnson: Do you want to take some more pictures.

Sady Sullivan: Would you see the women coming in to work in the yards?

Geraldine Johnson: Not very often because I was off to school, so I didn't see them very often.

Sady Sullivan: Did you hear about it? Like was there any sort of, I don't know -- was it a big deal when women starting welding in the yard?

Geraldine Johnson: No, really they just were accepted. They were welcomed because there was so much to do and they needed so many people to do it and they were qualified. I know they were trained as welders and they climbed all over everything and everywhere to do their job and they were very well appreciated.

Sady Sullivan: Did your father ever talk about that?

Geraldine Johnson: No because, again --

Richard Johnson: His was like a day and night job.

Geraldine Johnson: He was 24 hours a day job so that when he'd come home, he'd just put his feet up and was glad to have time to sit down and to be with us. Otherwise he was always out in the yard and he knew all the workmen and all of the workmen knew him.

Sady Sullivan: Would you ever go -- would you ever go find your dad in the yard?

Geraldine Johnson: No, I never needed to do that. He knew where we were and when he had a chance to come home he did and that was the military life.

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm. And were there other people living in the yard who you had uh been with at other military spots as a family?

Geraldine Johnson: No, not that I knew of. Maybe my father knew of others in the yard, but I don't recall --

Richard Johnson: You mean Don [inaudible]?

Geraldine Johnson: No, uh people that he might have been stationed with earlier before he was assigned to the Navy Yard.

Richard Johnson: Oh no, but he -- by then --

Geraldine Johnson: He knew people.

Richard Johnson: He knew an awful lot because --

Geraldine Johnson: But whether he had duty with them before, I don't know.

Richard Johnson: And speaking of that, the one reason you're doing a lot is that I speak of this career path he's been on engineering duties. It was small, but I've got a page here listing the kind of strength that they had in numbers. For instance, in 1930, 92,000 in the Navy; 84 were enlisted, 89,000 were officers of all kinds. In 1936 the numbers only went up to 102,000 combined in everything. In 1940 it was only 157,000. 1944, 2 million 800,000.

Danielle Romano: Oh my goodness.

Richard Johnson: And they peaked at 3 million, 300,000 and overall, I mean when it's all said and done, there were 16 million in the armed services in World War II with a population of 140 million. 16 million out of a 140 million, so everybody was -- unless they were crippled.

Geraldine Johnson: Even 4-Fs were called in later in the war.

Richard Johnson: It grew so fast. I remember being in someone yard and hanger mass for some reason and a small landing craft had -- that could self propel -- had come in and this fellow was a lawyer. He had been in Navy one week and I guess he was officer in charge of the ship because they didn't rate the title of being a commander officer for some reason. Anyway, uh he had been in for one week and they were moved, had to move from one place to another and he said the only instructions they gave me was that the

tugboat said, "Just follow me. Just don't lose me. I'll take you where you're going to go." So many -- and the people came in the Navy had a need at that demand. Our friend Walter [Kabas] I mentioned, when he went in, they needed armed guard crews and that was putting up for convoys, a lot of merchant ships out there were sitting ducks,

[20:00]

so they put either one or two guns aboard the ship and a Navy to man the guns and take shots at the -- because the subs could come up and surface and sit there and shoot, pick them off one by one otherwise. He got that, which was nice if you were going to mild waters, but when you're delivering goods to Russia and you had to go up Murmansk Run, would be targets and the weather was terrible too. He enjoyed -- he never got sunk, but some people got sunk sometimes. They had a few cases of ships, brand new ships built so fast that they weren't checked out too well and they broke in half. Not many, but --

Geraldine Johnson: Well talking about that, when my dad was coming back from Germany after his assignment over there for port to port shipping, North Atlantic was extremely rough. Do you remember the name of the ship he was on?

Richard Johnson: It was a cruiser.

Geraldine Johnson: It was a cruiser and it started to break up  
and he knew the ship and its structure and he --

Richard Johnson: Because he had been in Camden Shipyards, the  
same class ship.

Geraldine Johnson: He knew how to prevent its further damage.  
So whatever he did saved the ship from breaking apart in  
the rough seas and all of a sudden he hears man overboard  
and he had to be out on deck and they thought that he had  
been washed overboard, but he had grabbed a handle on the  
forward hatch and after the waves subsided, he pounded they  
opened it up and dragged him in. That's how my dad came  
home from the war.

Danielle Romano: Wow.

Richard Johnson: When I was out in San Diego, there was one  
commander I had as a boss and he had been in -- I think it  
was like in World War I he stayed in [inaudible] and he was  
in command of some kind of a ship and he was in the Pacific  
and I think he hadn't seen the United States for 30 months.  
Anyway, he was in a combat zone and he was zigzagging and  
he saw a torpedo coming straight for him and he had just  
sort of zigzagged into the position to get hit. He said it  
was just a matter of he couldn't help it at all and then  
all of a sudden, some little ship got out of position and

got in between him and got blown to smithereens and he didn't get hit.

Danielle Romano: Oh.

Richard Johnson: He got missed barely.

Danielle Romano: Wow.

Richard Johnson: Yeah a lot of stories of things that happened.

Sady Sullivan: What was the -- in terms of people working in the yards, both Navy people and civilian people, what was the background, like the ethnic, racial background of people?

Geraldine Johnson: I think you had more of the ethnic groups, like um average Americans in those days.

Richard Johnson: There was typical.

Geraldine Johnson: You'd have Italians and French and the German.

Richard Johnson: You're talking about the civilian or the military?

Geraldine Johnson: The civilian?

Sady Sullivan: Yeah.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah mostly the civilian workers.

Richard Johnson: The civilian workers, just typical of the area.

Geraldine Johnson: Typical of the area.

Richard Johnson: Yeah, you get all kinds.

Geraldine Johnson: All nationalities.

Richard Johnson: I had one ship called the Earl and I took the fellows -- they kept a straight face when he said it because he came off ship and he said, "Oh, hi. I'm going down to the shop. I'm going to get some Earl to bring to the oil."

Danielle Romano: [Laughs]

Geraldine Johnson: It was hysterical, yeah.

Richard Johnson: [Laughs]

Sady Sullivan: Did the -- was there any -- did the ethnic groups have particular jobs, like the chippers and caulkers tended to be you know --

Geraldine Johnson: One ethnic group or another?

Sady Sullivan: Yeah.

Geraldine Johnson: Do you recall that?

Richard Johnson: I don't know. You could see the little shop masters. You could see names of all the very back that the names.

Geraldine Johnson: It will give you a clue in that regard.

Richard Johnson: Oh one thing that probably would have --

Sady Sullivan: A lot of Irish.

Richard Johnson: -- never went public before. When Pearl Harbor occurred, of course

[25:00]

there was a dozen people or hundreds of people that made mistakes and should never have happened maybe the way it did, but aside from that, they had a horrendous job because they had six or seven battleships basically sunk, but the water was so shallow they could look like they were still there. There were all sorts of wrecks and they were overwhelmed obviously and I didn't know it for a long while, but they come -- somehow or other right after Pearl Harbor, they must have scoured at least Brooklyn Navy Yard -- I know that for a fact -- and got a lot of volunteers, yard workmen, up to quartermaster -- they'd be supervisor and then quartermaster and then master -- up to quartermaster level anyway, to volunteer and just go to move to Pearl Harbor for two or three years and I didn't see them come back until -- I didn't even know about it in the beginning, but I did hear about it.

Sady Sullivan: Did they move with their whole families?

Richard Johnson: No, I think just the workmen. I think they just went there with, to just help construct it, do work, fix things up. And they were very much talented men and they came back uh -- it seems to me -- I'm guessing, but it seemed to me it must have been, maybe as late as 1944 even -- it had been late '43 or early '44 -- a number of new supervisors showed up in various trades and I realized that



they had been over there as they were the top of the line basically available to send over there and they were sent there for a couple of years and I'm sure there must have been dozens and dozens. I don't know how many went out over there, but uh there never was any credit made. Never anything public about it that I know of.

Sady Sullivan: And so those would be skilled tradesmen that were not available to work in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Richard Johnson: No, but they had so many -- they had -- Brooklyn had a much reservoir to draw from when Pearl Harbor was locked into it.

Sady Sullivan: Right.

Richard Johnson: Just what they had. They must have got it from other yards too.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah they had a number of other yards there because Hazel and I were sponsors for some of the boats they built in another yard. We launched.

Richard Johnson: I'm sorry. This is not going to do me well.

Geraldine Johnson: We went to -- Hazel and I sponsored the launching of some boats in another yard.

Richard Johnson: Yeah.

Sady Sullivan: Is Hazel your sister?

Geraldine Johnson: No, she's a friend that was in the wedding party.

Sady Sullivan: Oh, OK.

Richard Johnson: After -- that was in '44 after we were married and your father was in what you call field production and he was monitoring shipyards around and someone up in Long Island -- oh, if I looked at a map -- when you go up, it's up -- it was a small private shipyard and they were building little tugboats for the Army, actually, and you went up to sponsor one and she went up to sponsor one too because your father was the man that was probably monitoring them all and they probably said, "Know anybody to sponsor? We're running out of sponsors," because they were making them like flies. When I was in -- that time I was up there in Boston Yard, they had a double launching of destroyers down the road and it was so commonplace that I didn't bother going down to watch it.

Geraldine Johnson: You've seen enough.

Richard Johnson: I've seen enough of them and most of them said oh two destroyers at once.

Sady Sullivan: Wow.

Richard Johnson: But the Navy Yards, uh I don't know how they're going to handle it in the future. They had not only construction, but most of the yards had special talents. Boston had a rope walk where they spun rope

[30:00]

200 years ago and they kept the walk going I guess. They must have improved it some, but it was an old, long building basically to make, make rope.

Danielle Romano: That's cool.

Richard Johnson: Others had -- I think one of the chemicals or paints must have been out in the West Coast.

Geraldine Johnson: If you'd like to see a rope walk, you can come up here to the Mystic Seaport and they will show you a rope walk. They have one there for the sailing ships. It's a historical place.

Richard Johnson: I think I've got a couple more things here.

Sady Sullivan: And will they still be doing it?

Geraldine Johnson: Oh yes. They still make them because it's a historical village that's open to the public.

Danielle Romano: Oh neat. What was Brooklyn's claim to fame?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Danielle Romano: What was Brooklyn's claim to fame?

Richard Johnson: Brooklyn's claim to fame?

Danielle Romano: Yeah, during the war.

Richard Johnson: You mean like the Dodgers?

Danielle Romano: You're saying that they all had specialties and yeah.

Richard Johnson: Oh, I don't know. I'm not sure what it would have been, but they all had -- well of course they

were designated battleships and uh so was Philadelphia, Norfolk, maybe Bremerton Washington. I don't know for sure.

Danielle Romano: OK.

Richard Johnson: Portsmouth, New Hampshire was submarines.

Uh I've forgotten. The back -- that big white book, near the back, they identify some of the -- in fact the probably identify that Navy Foundation they talk about, the Navy Memorial Foundation.

Danielle Romano: Oh gosh.

Richard Johnson: Keep going further back even. There, starting there. The Navy Memorial Foundation and a few other things, other sources, even listing every ship that's now a place to visit because we visited the uh -- we went aboard the Alabama. We went down visiting and this was 20 years ago or so. My son was stationed at Pensacola and we went over to Mobile, Alabama, the Battleship Alabama's place to go aboard to visit. The North Carolina is in Wilmington, North Carolina.

Geraldine Johnson: Yes and it was nice walking into the -- we call it the officer's dining room? The officer's dining room and I said, "Oh, I've been here for dinner."

Danielle Romano: Oh!

Geraldine Johnson: On the North Carolina.

Danielle Romano: Neat.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah, I've been there for dinner. I recognize the area.

Danielle Romano: Do you remember someone -- someone who's father was a tailor in the Navy Yard said that he remembered Roosevelt coming to visit. Do you remember Roosevelt, I think when he was president, coming to visit the Navy Yard?

Richard Johnson: Uh it depends. The words -- I don't know about Franklin Roosevelt coming, uh President Franklin Roosevelt. Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., was on a destroyer -- I think it was the Mayrant, I'm not sure.

Geraldine Johnson: That may be who they're talking about.

Danielle Romano: Oh.

Geraldine Johnson: Not the president.

Richard Johnson: Uh Mrs. Roosevelt would come down -- if I was there say seven o'clock some nights, the Mayrant was in birth, once in a while a nice looking car would come in, pull up there and she'd go down to have supper --

Geraldine Johnson: Her son, with her son and the officers and I think where you have the name.

Richard Johnson: -- and I saw it mentioned that uh -- must been either of these two -- it must be that book there that uh Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. was injured in some way and the

skipper also. He was a gunnery for a while and then he became executive officer, but I think he had four sons and all four were in the military.

Sady Sullivan: But so the president himself, you didn't come.

Richard Johnson: He might have, I don't know.

Geraldine Johnson: It was his son. He may have, but it was kept very quiet. It was a military secret.

Richard Johnson: I don't know. Let's see -- not while I was there and see, he died when we were out in San Diego and that was about in April I think. So we would have known about it probably

[35:00]

if --

Geraldine Johnson: Well that was such top security in the Navy Yard that year. If he showed up it was top security. Nobody would know.

Richard Johnson: You wouldn't make any -- there wouldn't be any fuss, but never anything about --

Geraldine Johnson: Eleanor coming either.

Richard Johnson: Eleanor coming but she came -- she was a regular visitor.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah but there was no -- only very few people knew his son was aboard that ship too.

Richard Johnson: Yeah.

Sady Sullivan: How did news travel within the yard? Like was there like a loud speakers or a newsletter or how would people pass word?

Richard Johnson: I've got something for that too. I forgot. I would have forgotten it otherwise. Uh speaking of the Iowa, not the Missouri, that's the day they launched the Iowa.

Sady Sullivan: Oh.

Danielle Romano: The Ship Worker?

Sady Sullivan: Mhmm.

Richard Johnson: Do you have some of those around?

Danielle Romano: They do at the BHS. They have them on microfilm.

Geraldine Johnson: We have an original.

Sady Sullivan: This drawing is great, or the etching.

Danielle Romano: [Laughs] I have a couple originals too. I um, I don't know about World War II era though, but I have one much later from when the Constellation -- was a big explosion on the Constellation in '61. There's the hammerhead and this is Roosevelt.

Richard Johnson: The uh -- I get this once in a while. It belonged to the Navy Memorial Foundation and they have that facility down there in Washington, Pennsylvania Avenue, and they have within it -- I'm trying to see where -- I don't

have any picture of overall -- oh from that book there.

Yeah, the page you had there near the end -- aerial view of the Navy Foundation.

Danielle Romano: Oh.

Richard Johnson: Excuse me.

Sady Sullivan: Do you see it.

Richard Johnson: There. See those little markers right there? They're bronze. They are. Every once in a while they've been putting in statuary, like here's one representing the Armed Merchant Marine and it goes on and on and one of them here was putting in the engineering duty only officers.

Danielle Romano: OK. Wonderful. What, um -- is that just a stylized representation of a yard or is that a specific yard?

Richard Johnson: No it's just the artist rendition I guess.

Danielle Romano: Yeah. There's a hammerhead crane [laughs].

They had one at Bremerton and at Philadelphia.

Richard Johnson: What brought you all the way from Acton down to Brooklyn?

Sady Sullivan: Graduate school.

Geraldine Johnson: Oh. How long have you been doing this history thing?

Danielle Romano: Four years, since January of '04.



Geraldine Johnson: What got you started?

Danielle Romano: I'm a librarian [laughs]. I got a job and I  
got sucked into an amazing place.

Geraldine Johnson: That's Laura Bush.

Danielle Romano: Say it again.

Geraldine Johnson: Like Laura Bush.

Danielle Romano: Like Laura Bush [laughs] a little bit.

Richard Johnson: Did I give you one of these things? I  
talked about it.

Danielle Romano: No. You gave me the C-Power.

Richard Johnson: OK, this is the one of the [Bogart] with the  
wooden leg.

Danielle Romano: Oh.

Richard Johnson: You can have that if you like.

Sady Sullivan: Was there -- you mentioned the Naval Architecture  
and Engineering Program at MIT. Is that -- do you think  
that that would be -- would we, through them, be able to  
find other people that worked in the Navy Yard?

Richard Johnson: Well the only one I can think of --  
[inaudible] -- one is Tom O'Grady.

Sady Sullivan: But if we contacted MIT and asked for their -- do  
you think that they might have records

[40:00]

of students who went off to, alum, who went off to?

Richard Johnson: I don't know where the records would be.

Through the Navy you mean?

Sady Sullivan: Was there enough people coming from that program at MIT that it's worth checking with them for their records?

Geraldine Johnson: Well like my dad went to MIT.

Richard Johnson: Yeah, but I didn't go that way.

Geraldine Johnson: You didn't go that road, no.

Richard Johnson: No.

Danielle Romano: You went to the Academy.

Richard Johnson: No they only put out a small group a year.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah, but they recruited him from college before he graduated even.

Richard Johnson: You mean looking for them for --

Danielle Romano: For more interviews.

Richard Johnson: Before they shut down?

Danielle Romano: For more interviews.

Geraldine Johnson: Interviews.

Danielle Romano: Talk to more people. I think it's a great idea.

Geraldine Johnson: I think if you went to some of these universities and colleges and asked them for uh listing of graduates in that year or two, '41 and '42, those were the

most prominent years that they were looking for engineers to get them into the programs.

Sady Sullivan: Right.

Geraldine Johnson: Those people really excelled because he's looking for classmates of his and he's heard out of 25 that were alive in his class, he's heard from quite a number of them and it's amazing what they have done with their careers because the world was their oyster. At that time they needed so many of them.

Richard Johnson: Excuse me. I'll be right back.

Geraldine Johnson: I think there is where you should go.

Sady Sullivan: To the Academy.

Geraldine Johnson: To colleges and universities and the graduates of '41 and '42 and find out who was alive from those classes and interview those people and find out if they went into the Navy and I think you will find there are still some alive.

Danielle Romano: That's a great idea. Get into alum newsletters.

Geraldine Johnson: He has two he's heard from and two of them have written books and they've sent him books that they've written. Others have done phenomenal things with their careers and it was just such a fantastic opportunity at that time that it was a gift.

Danielle Romano: Yeah.

Geraldine Johnson: They were a gift to the world really. You can see what he's done with his life, I mean who knew it, but this man's a millionaire and he started with what? A salary of an [inaudible]? Look what he's done with his life. It's phenomenal and this is what's happened with these young men at that time. And how did you get started in this?

Sady Sullivan: I have a background in oral history and journalism.

Geraldine Johnson: Oh I see.

Sady Sullivan: And I started working at the Brooklyn Historical Society, which is where I work, and then we partnered with the Navy Yard on this project.

Geraldine Johnson: Phenomenal. Any other questions you have there?

Sady Sullivan: I think I've covered --

Danielle Romano: I think -- I mean I feel pretty done, but just for Jenny, I know that she's particularly interested in diving, so I'll ask a couple Jenny type questions. What did you drink in the morning before you came to work? You know Jenny is an author who actually started with us on the project. She's interested in women working at the Navy Yard in World War II. So she asks very particular,

meticulous, detailed questions because she's really trying to get a sense of what day to day life was like for particular people and what clothing they wore, what they ate, um so I want to ask you some questions about what it was like to dive? I don't know how many times you dove.

Richard Johnson: Wait a second, let me just answer one question. You were suggesting how do you find out people that come to the Navy Yard some time after I did, up to the time it shut down, is that it? You should be able to go to the Ship System Command and ask for the, somewhere at the EDO desk [inaudible] desk and say can they give you any of the listing of officers that's serviced during the last few years, as far back as they can. Start with '68 and go as far back as they'll go. They'd be a lot better. That would be 14 years

[45:00]

after we left.

Danielle Romano: OK.

Richard Johnson: Because there was still 75 or so [laughs], but they might come up with something that way. Uh, the Navy had, presumably has this course going still up at MIT. It's controlled by the Navy, I'm quite sure, um even the most recent -- the only names I can think of is a couple of

them and DeKenning is one who graduated, but he died and he

--

Geraldine Johnson: He was an admiral when he died.

Richard Johnson: He was rear admiral.

Geraldine Johnson: Rear admiral when he died.

Richard Johnson: He was an [inaudible].

Geraldine Johnson: That's right. That's what I'm saying. They  
excelled.

Richard Johnson: He was Hansen when we had the wedding, but  
uh they still -- EDO is still a definite category and  
someone I talked to no long ago said about 800 active, but

--

Danielle Romano: OK, so on the diving, what kind of apparatus  
did you put on?

Richard Johnson: The canvas suit and the weights on your feet  
and your belt and the helmet you twist on.

Geraldine Johnson: The real old fashion kind.

Richard Johnson: You had -- you uh --

Geraldine Johnson: You had the heavy collar that hooked onto  
the hood.

Richard Johnson: Yeah, but there was no phones. It was just  
a rope and you pull on it or something like that.

Danielle Romano: Rope tugging for communication.

Richard Johnson: And we first went in the tank for a few days  
and then --

Geraldine Johnson: Used to the pressure.

Richard Johnson: Then we went off the barge and when you came  
up you'd stand in one end of the barge and they'd hose you  
down because all the crud that's on the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Geraldine Johnson: A lot of silt in the water.

Richard Johnson: More than that too.

Danielle Romano: What else would be under there?

Geraldine Johnson: Let's leave it at that.

Danielle Romano: [Laughs]

Richard Johnson: All the ships would pump their bilges.

Sady Sullivan: Yuck.

Richard Johnson: They had no holding tank system.

Geraldine Johnson: That's right.

Danielle Romano: Um and the heavy collar, was it an  
attachment for the helmet?

Geraldine Johnson: That's correct.

Danielle Romano: That's for the helmet to screw in?

Geraldine Johnson: That's right.

Danielle Romano: Yeah screw on, yeah. And then the canvas,  
how was it water tight or I mean water secure? Was it  
treated with?

Richard Johnson: It was canvas and then the belts, your gloves you had -- I know there was a rubber band or something like that and you'd have to judge and find out -- you got to learn to control the flow because if you took too long to get too much air you popped up.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah just enough flow of air to keep the water out.

Richard Johnson: Yeah and when you hit the bottom of the Brooklyn Yard at least and you sunk into the thing, then up comes the blackness. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face.

Geraldine Johnson: A lot of silt, yeah.

Richard Johnson: Blackout, basically.

Danielle Romano: And the air was attached to tubing into the helmet?

Richard Johnson: Yes.

Danielle Romano: And so you're breathing air to keep water out of the suit?

Geraldine Johnson: Well no, the oxygen filled the suit to keep the water from keeping in, correct.

Richard Johnson: Right.

Geraldine Johnson: So then the canvas was treated with some uh, what am I thinking of?

Richard Johnson: I think it was Watertite.



Sady Sullivan: Oil cloth?

Danielle Romano: Yeah, oil cloth.

Richard Johnson: They're rubberized.

Danielle Romano: They're rubberized canvas, oh OK. Rubber on the outside, canvas on the inside.

Richard Johnson: I think so.

Sady Sullivan: Was there a strong current under there?

Richard Johnson: Pardon?

Sady Sullivan: Was there a strong current when you were on the bottom of the river?

Danielle Romano: You're talking about the two tides.

Geraldine Johnson: Yeah but I think they timed it so that when they went down it was more neutral.

Danielle Romano: Oh, OK.

Geraldine Johnson: You know before like the tide comes in and the tide goes out and then there's just a little time in between.

Richard Johnson: Well we wouldn't time it because you might as well get used to it. It's going to be there most of the time.

Geraldine Johnson: Well they gave you the least amount of current or you would have been swept away.

Richard Johnson: It was only maybe 20 feet or so. I went in one time

[50:00]

[inaudible] into a pressure chamber that where you went in and sat with somebody and went down. It just, they pressurize it to go to represent down to 75 feet and when you're in there -- and just a little place, round thing about 5 feet in diameter and 10 foot long or less and it was just to see if you had any problems getting exposed to it. But as pressure comes down and your lungs are being pressurized and you're being pressurized, you sound like Mickey Mouse squeaky.

Geraldine Johnson: The oxygen does that to your vocal chords.

Richard Johnson: Whatever it is, you talk to each other and it's like squeaky, Mickey Mouse squeaking.

Danielle Romano: Oh.

Richard Johnson: Now there's one man -- I think he's still alive -- lives here in Groton that is a survivor of the Squalors. Are you familiar with the Squalors? The submarine and it was before the war, I think about 1938 sunk. It was on repair work in Boston Naval Shipyard and they went out for testing of some sort. Something failed and the ship sunk and they rescued most of them and one of them is still alive and he's down here in Groton. I see him once in a while at the base. I haven't seen him in a couple of years, but I knew him when I worked there.

Nobody even knew. He never said anything about it, but it came out later on and he was uh, uh, he was the very last one to be raised up. They didn't -- they had some sort of a, I guess diving bell or something went down and could pick up a few and they saved about 30 of them and he was of the last group and all of a sudden when they got the next to the last group, something went haywire with the bell part and they had to wait a few hours and then the last ride up he was three of them left there. He was one of those three that come up the last one. Can't think of anything else.

Sady Sullivan: I'm done with my questions.

Danielle Romano: Yeah, I'm done with my questions too.

Sady Sullivan: These are -- oh, do you want to turn it off?

Danielle Romano: Sure.

Richard Johnson: Did you get one of these already?

Danielle Romano: Yes.

Sady Sullivan: These are the release forms.

Geraldine Johnson: Oh, all right.

**END OF FILE**