

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with

**RALPH PULVER**

Aviation Machinist Mate, Hydraulics Specialist, Navy, World War II

2003

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**Pulver, Ralph L.**, (1924-). Oral History Interview, 2003.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 111 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 111 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Ralph Pulver, a Wyocena, Wisconsin native, describes his experience in the Navy as an Aviations Machinist Mate hydraulics specialist aboard the *USS Salamaua* during World War II. Pulver mentions his father and brothers' military service and recalls being drafted. He talks about boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Training Center, hydraulics specialist schooling in Chicago, staying in the hospital with the mumps, and joining Composite Squadron (VC) 87 in Holtville (California). He discusses pay grades and free entertainment. Pulver describes being mentored by another hydraulics specialist and his duties working on TMB and FM-2 aircraft. He describes *USS Salamaua's* armaments and crew, Captain Joseph Taylor, and his squadron's skipper. He reveals they had general quarters at 3:30 AM every day and mentions brief shore leaves at Pearl Harbor and Yokosuka (Japan). Pulver recalls crawling through the slop chute for initiation and training in the Admiralty Islands. He reports his battle group getting together around Manus and Peleliu and seeing big fires on the way to Luzon Strait. He details being burned when his ship was hit by a kamikaze attack that exploded a bomb, punched a deep hole in the ship, and killed seventeen men, one of whom Pulver knew personally. He talks about going back to San Francisco for repairs and seeing his girlfriend on leave. Pulver talks about seeing two planes hit ships during another kamikaze attack on his battle group. He describes being in a typhoon that scared him more than the Japanese ever did. He mentions entering Tokyo Bay ahead of *USS Missouri*. He talks about taking on a thousand extra sailors and going back to the States, the pressure to reenlist, a short time at Brown Field (California), and getting out of the service at Great Lakes (Illinois). He states the only veteran's benefit he used was a correspondence course and criticizes the difficulty of using a veteran prescription drug financial assistance plan. Pulver shares anecdotes about a plane under friendly fire, a pilot shot down by the Japanese, passing a hydraulics test aboard ship, a nurse's amazement that he got into the Navy with a deformed foot, watching a malfunctioning plane crash into the water, seeing a pilot sink with his plane, eating Vienna sausages for a month after the kamikaze attack flooded their food stores, and having a plane up on wing jacks almost fall on him.

Interviewed by Tom Colby, 2003.

Transcribed by Mitch Parmentier and Joseph Dillenburg 2007.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2009.

**Interview Transcript:**

Tom: This is an interview with Ralph L. Pulver who served with the United States Navy during World War II. This interview is being conducted in his home at the following address: 280 Grant Street, Wyocena, Wisconsin on July the 11<sup>th</sup> 2003. The interviewer is Tom Colby. Good morning Ralph.

Pulver: Good morning.

Tom: Let's start out a little bit about your background. Tell us where you were born. What year?

Pulver: I was born in the township of Wyocena, Wisconsin in 1924, March 19, 1924.

Tom: Okay, a little bit about your mom and dad. Were they from this area? Their names?

Pulver: My dad and mother are both right from this same area in Columbia County and my mother was Marian Curtis and my dad was Melvin Pulver.

Tom: Okay. Your brothers and sisters, you mentioned as we first started that you had some brothers. Tell me about your siblings. How many?

Pulver: I have three brothers and two sisters. Two of my brothers have passed away now.

Tom: Was your father in the service?

Pulver: No. We had an old draft card of my dad's but Dad had real poor eyesight and so he was never in. He had a draft card for World War I.

Tom: What about your brothers and sisters? Did they---

Pulver: All my brothers were in the service. My older brother was drafted in the Navy at the same time I was. My next younger brother, younger than me was in during the Korean War. And my youngest brother was in rather kind of between the Korean War and the Vietnam War. He was in the Marines.

Tom: He was a Marine.

Pulver: Yup.

Tom: Where did you go to school then Ralph, growing up here in Wyocena?

Pulver: I went ten years to school right here in Wyocena and my final two years were in Portage.

Tom: Okay. Did you have the opportunity to go on to college after high school or vocational school?

Pulver: I never went to anything further than high school.

Tom: Okay. As you were growing up what occupation was your father in?

Pulver: My dad was a just plain farmer.

Tom: Uh huh. Okay. You graduated from high school and then what happened?

Pulver: Well I spent a year at this job and that job and anything that I could make a dollar at because that was during the draft times for World War II and no one would hire you for any length of time at all. So I always had a dollar in my pocket.

Tom: What was life like during your high school years? In terms of what was available for recreation?

Pulver: Well my last two years in high school I worked at a hotel for my room and board in Portage. Consequently when you are doing that there is no time for sports. You went home from high school and you went to work and that was it.

Tom: In terms of rationing and that sort of stuff how did that affect you and your family?

Pulver: Well rationing didn't affect me very much at all. Gasoline was the main thing that would of effected me I just couldn't travel around like I might of but as far as food was concerned we always had plenty, never really bothered.

Tom: You mentioned Draft. So did your number come up or did you volunteer?

Pulver: My number came up. I got my greetings from Uncle Sam.

Tom: Tell me about that.

Pulver: Well, I don't know just exactly what to say about it but my older brother and I and a buddy had gone on a trip. We had an old 1921 Model T and we went from home out through Montana, down through Yellowstone Park and back home. Shortly after that my buddy enlisted in the Navy but brother while we were in Montana stayed there. He got a draft notice at the same time I did but he could have stayed out of the service through a deferment for the rancher that he was working for in Montana but he said as long as I was going he was going too. So we both went in at the same time.

Tom: What was the process back then? You received a letter in the mail from the government telling you that you are going to be drafted and then what happens next?

Pulver: Well they gave you a notice of so many days and I don't remember what it was, and then we just met in Portage on the date that we had to be there and we were taken to Milwaukee for our physical. And after my physical was over, I told you this before, the fellow asked which branch of the service I wanted to be in, Army, Navy, or the Marines. I said, "Army" He said, "You're in the Navy". They told my brother the same thing. It was probably a blessing.

Tom: So how long did you spend down at the Milwaukee station?

Pulver: Well I think we went down one day and were back home that same day, that same evening. Then we had so many days before we had to report and went to boot camp at Great Lakes.

Tom: When you came home how did the folks react?

Pulver: They were just happy to see us, that's all. There was nothing out of the ordinary at all. Just knew we were going that's all.

Tom: So you needed to report on a specific date. How did you get down to Great Lakes then? How did that whole process work once you had been certified fit to go?

Pulver: I don't just remember how many of us were in that company for boot training but there was approximately a third of us from Columbia County, a third from Kentucky, and a third from Chicago. We just met in Portage again, they took us by train to Milwaukee and we went from there to Great Lakes.

Tom: When you went to test and all that for your assignment, which they obviously put you in the Navy, did you get an opportunity to indicate a preference once you found out you were going to the Navy, what job you would like?

Pulver: Somewhere in the last part of boot camp they gave us tests, and then asked what we preferred to do. Of course I put in for the aviation department; my brother did too but he was put in diesel mechanic school and I went to Navy Pier in Chicago for my first schooling of my aviation training.

Tom: So you made the aviation billet?

Pulver: I made it yes.

Tom: How long was boot camp?

Pulver: ---Don't ask me that (Laughs) I don't believe it was much more than eight weeks but I don't just remember, it was short. Of course after my schooling at Navy Pier then they sent me to an advance schooling in Chicago for hydraulics specialists. That was at 87<sup>th</sup> and Anthony in Chicago. Boy that was a good place to be.

Tom: Why was that?

Pulver: Civilian cooks. Where you even had a sort of preference for breakfast even.

Tom: Really?

Pulver: Yup.

Tom: So you were at advance school, you finished boot camp; what was your official billet, your Navy title?

Pulver: I think after I finished boot camp then I was a Seamen Second Class. After I had finished Navy Pier they made me Seamen First Class. And then after I finished my schooling at 87<sup>th</sup> and Anthony I was an AMMH, Aviations Machinist Mate Hydraulics Specialist Third Class.

Tom: What did that title provide you in pay?

Pulver: I don't remember pay at all. I don't even remember exactly what we first made once we went in but I think it was fifty-one dollars a month.

Tom: Fifty-one dollars a month.

Pulver: I think that's what it was but I don't remember. Let's see Apprentice Seamen, Seaman Second, Seamen First, Seamen Third. That was the fourth pay grade up but I still think it was under a hundred dollars a month. But I don't just remember.

Tom. Okay, when did you actually go into boot camp? Do you remember the month and the year that was? Maybe even the day?

Pulver: I don't remember the day at all but it would have been in May of 1943.

Tom: Okay so then you finished up your training and you did what next?

Pulver: Well about my last week at 87<sup>th</sup> and Anthony I got a case of the Mumps and I ended up back in the hospital in Great Lakes. Then after I was out of the hospital I went back to 87<sup>th</sup> and Anthony and finished my schooling and I was just alone because all my--- I knew where my orders were, where I was to go and that was North Island in California but I wasn't with a group at all and my records got lost and my clothing got lost and I ended up in North Island in San Diego, and about a week all I had was a few changes of underwear and socks. And I guess they got

sick of me not being able to do anything there and they sent me off to El Centro, California and from there over to Holtville, and I spent a few weeks in Holtville with a squadron VC-87.

Tom: Okay going back to your time at basic and then your advanced courses. Was there anything that stood out in terms of stories from that time in the Navy?

Pulver: I don't remember any particular stories. You just went along with the bunch and did what you had to do everyday.

Tom: What did you do in Chicago for entertainment?

Pulver: Chicago was the greatest city to in during service that you could ever be in. You could find within the city three meals a day and a place to sleep. I was never ever asked for any identification as long as I was in Chicago. We had all kinds of free entertainment. You could go to dances, movies, hockey games, baseball games. Anything that was going on you could go for free all you had to do was know where to get the tickets.

Tom: Ha. Well, so tell me about your billet. What exactly does that title mean? What did you do for the Navy then?

Pulver: When I finally got out aboard ship all I did practically, all I did, was work on hydraulics. The squadron had a hydraulics man and I can thank that fellow an awful lot, a fellow by the name of Belokus. He was from out I don't know, Baltimore or somewhere out east. And of course he and been in and been with the squadron for quite a while and he had went through the same school that I did and through his experience he taught me a lot of things. You can go to school all you want but until you do that work, you don't know what you're doing. He gave me just all kinds of tips and things that we weren't taught in school he could even tell me. Through him I, it was just a blessing with all his teaching that he did to me.

Tom: So you worked on airplanes then?

Pulver: Yeah we, I worked on airplanes. Practically all the work I did was on TBMs the old TBM Avenger, Torpedo bombers. Aboard ship we had TBMs and FM-2s. FM-2 were the fighter the Wildcat. When I didn't have any particular hydraulic work to do then I did work a little bit on the fighters too but very little.

Tom: Your first ship assignment was which ship?

Pulver: I was aboard the USS Salamaua. And that's S-A-L-A-M-A-U-A. It was CVE-96. It was a converted tanker into a carrier. They called them Jeep carriers but I also think they were called the Baby Flattops. When I first went aboard ship it had

camouflage painting but after it was re-worked then it had solid grey painting on it.

Tom: Now where was this ship home ported?

Pulver: Well, I got aboard the ship in San Diego. I think the ship actually came down from Bremerton, Washington, but the squadron had some training up in Washington that's before I got with it. Then they put the squadron down at Holtville, California and that's right out in the desert. Hotter then blazes in the day time and colder then the dickens at night time. Most of the time when we were at Holtville I was on night operations, we'd send a group of planes out. I don't know just what their training was, but then when they came back in we had to inspect the planes and have them ready and another group of fellas would take them out for another few hours. Crickets were so thick out there that I think if you stood on top of them they'd carry you away.

Tom: Really?

Pulver: Oh man they were thick and cold. In the day time you could do your laundry and hang it out and by the time you got it hung up you could start taking it down it was that dry and that hot. But at night I would have my long johns on and my undress blues and my blue jeans over the top of that and my Navy P coat on to stay warm.

Tom: Wow.

Pulver: You wouldn't believe there could be that much difference in the temperature but we were cold.

Tom: Huh. You spent how long then in Holtville.

Pulver: Oh, I would say we must have been there two months or something like that and then while were at Holtville I also went down to Salton Sea and took care of the TBMs down there while they were on rocket practice. And I don't know, we were only down there for a week or so. Went swimming in the Salton Sea once.

Tom: Where is the Salton Sea at?

Pulver: Uh---Hmmm. It's not too far east of Holtville but it's right down close to the Mexican border.

Tom: Okay.

Pulver: I can't just tell you exactly where. We weren't far from the border because a few of the fellows went into Calexico. I think that there were twin cities there



Calexico and something else and they would go just over the boarder for Liberty. I never went in.

Tom: Uh-huh. Now so I'm clear, the planes which you were working on were Navy planes or were they Marine planes?

Pulver: They were Navy planes. The TBM Avenger is what they were. TBM Martin, made by Martin. FM-2 was a Martin and I think before that the FM-2 was the F-4F. But then they-- must be the different company— the what was the F stood for? I don't remember that.

Tom: When did you first see the sea?

Pulver: Well, I spent about a year out at sea. And then a few months back in the States again, what three or four months. But I don't know, it must have been in, had to have been in '44 that I went aboard ship. Yeah, it was in '44 sometime, but I don't—that's so long ago I just don't remember.

Tom: Okay. So you get aboard ship, did you know where you were going?

Pulver: No, we had no idea where we were going. Ah, after we were aboard ship, we know we were going overseas. Ah, the Skipper of the ship made an announcement after we were a few miles out and told us we were going to combat. And ah, he was a great fella. Captain Joe Taylor was his name. And ah, he told us that very day that aboard ship we no longer saluted anyone, not even him. If he came around, he was just another one of us. We didn't pay any attention to him. And we saw him several times down while we were working. That's the way they wanted it. And also the Skipper of the squadron, while we were training back at-- I was up at Brown Field for a while too, and that's just north of the border, ah, a little east of San Ysidro. I think San Ysidro was the last town before, before you get to Tijuana. Ah, the Skipper of the squadron made his pilots do all of our work for a week. All we had to do was tell the pilots what to do. He wanted the mechanics and the pilots to be buddies too. And ah, of course we were allowed flight time and we got extra pay for flight time. Ah, I don't know-- Every so many months we were entitled to four hours of flight and then we'd get flight pay. Oh, one time at Salton Sea, I made a quite a few of my hours on rocket runs. Go out with just me and the pilot and ah, they'd practice at diving at targets and shooting rockets at em. We could call the pilots anything we wanted to call them. By their first name, ah, their ranking or whatever. Just they, he wanted us to be buddies. And ah he was a great fella too.

Tom: What was his name?

Pulver: Heizel(??) was his last name. That's all I can-- He was a, I don't remember if he was a Lieutenant Commander or full Commander. I think he was full Commander. But he was a great guy.

Tom: And did it work? Were you buddies with your pilots?

Pulver: Oh yeah, yeah. And we could talk to them, visit with 'em, no "Sir," no nothing. Just anything we wanted to say to 'em. They were just great guys. Real good guys.

Tom: So when you set sail, were you fully staffed, your ship was it fully crewed?

Pulver: We, we were pretty short on—well especially I know in our department. The chief of our department when we were out there, after we had been out there for a while—I don't just remember where we were—he went visiting a few of the other carriers to see how many people they had in their division. And we were way short. But ah I can remember working—it was nothing for us to be working at One O'clock in the morning. And then get a few winks of sleep, back up for General Quarters at 3:30 in the morning. So you know how much sleep we had (laughs). But, there were things that, at that particular time, that had to be done. Our fighter planes came out with a neoprene seal on the needle valve in the carburetor, and we had to change all of those to just a plain steel needle valve. I don't know, stainless steel or what it was. But our chief—it was supposed to take so many hours for each carburetor, I think there were approximately sixteen planes, sixteen fighters. And he found out that he could get in there with a little piece of wire, and get that needle valve out. And it took a little while, a little playing to do, but ah, we worked for several hours changing those needle valves. It would have taken us many more if he hadn't a—

Tom: --come up with that little gizmo.

Pulver: --a little gizmo to get it out. But you still had to fiddle with it for a quite a—eventually you'd get it (laughs).

Tom: When you left port, where you in a carrier group or a battle group?

Pulver: No we were pretty much by ourselves. We, we went to Pearl Harbor and we were there for a few days. And ah, I think that's when our group finally just got together was at Pearl Harbor.

Tom: Was that, when you say group got—oh the battle group then?

Pulver: The battle group, yeah.

Tom: Got to Pearl Harbor, what were your impressions?

Pulver: Well, there wasn't too much to see then. Ah, it was far enough along in the war. But, ah, I can tell you one thing, that harbor was mighty dirty. But there wasn't

too much to see then, I can't even remember seeing the remnants of sunken ships or anything. I just don't remember seeing it.

Tom: Okay. Did you get much time at Pearl? Where you able to get off the ship for liberty?

Pulver: I think, I think I went on liberty just once of the different times we were in Pearl Harbor. And ah, there wasn't really too much to do. We, a buddy of mine and I, we did walk through town and over to Waikiki Beach and around. Wasn't really much to do then. I often thought I would have liked to have been able to travel around through the island a little bit, but you didn't do that then. No way of doing it.

Tom: Right. Tell me a little bit about your ship. What it was—a short aircraft carrier, how many planes did it hold?

Pulver: I think the ship, I think the flight deck was around 680 feet. I just don't remember for sure though. The foc'sle and the fantail stuck out a little beyond that. But ah, it just seems to me it was 685 feet long. And we had sixteen fighters and sixteen torpedo bombers. I think when we were out there, there was a crew of approximately six hundred and some people on the ship too. Now that seems mighty small compared to what these carriers are—what they got five thousand on 'em?

Tom: Five thousand I think, yeah. Absolutely.

Pulver: Ya know, it's funny, if you'd be out in, on liberty somewheres and see a sailor walking down the street, you wouldn't know his name, but you probably knew he was off of your ship. You would see these different people day after day after day, and never know what their names were. But you'd know they belonged to the ship. And then, there were a few bad guys aboard ship, but most of them were real good guys. But you still, you still, anything that you had you kept locked up. (chuckles).

Tom: Yeah. Did you have other armament besides the planes?

Pulver: Yeah. We had one five inch gun on the fantail. We had on the gun sponsons alongside, 20 millimeters and 40 millimeters. I can't tell you how many, but that's what we had.

Tom: Okay. So you left Pearl Harbor in a battle group. Do you remember the battle group name?

Pulver: No, I couldn't tell ya.

Tom: Okay. Who was the commander of the battle group?

Pulver: Well, I don't know. I think it changed different times, but I know at one time we were with Halsey's Third Fleet tankers. But I think that was on our second trip out. And I can't, I can't tell you who the—big guys were.

Tom: So you steamed towards the war from Pearl.

Pulver: Yeah.

Tom: What happened as you steamed along?

Pulver: Well, just—Planes. So many planes would go out every hour, day and night, twenty-four hours a day. Ah, while we were going, ah, we were on a submarine patrol for a long time. I think that was right back and forth across the Equator. I can remember that initiation (chuckles). Ah—

Tom: What happened there?

Pulver: In initiation?

Tom: Yeah.

Pulver: All kinds of slop chutes and everything else. I can remember our division officer, it was his initiation too. And he had a big wrench. I'll betcha that wrench was thirty inches long at least, a thick, heavy wrench with a rope on it. And he carried that around all day long, with a rope around his neck.

Tom: Really?

Pulver: He was a great guy.

Tom: And what happened to Ralph on his initiation?

Pulver: Me? I went through the slop chute. (laughs).

Tom: What is that?

Pulver: Oh I don't know. There's garbage and everything else in it, and they had a long collapsible tube of some kind with all the slop in it. And you had to climb through from one end to the other.

Tom: (Laughs) How many guys had to make it through the initiation?

Pulver: There were a lot of 'em. Biggest percentage of our guys had to go through that initiation. It wasn't anything serious— **[End of tape 1, side A]**

Tom: So your first time over the Equator, was, what happened as you were steaming past the Equator, what happened next?

Pulver: Well, I shoulda told ya too, part of our training was for the gunners, the 20s and 40s and even the second time out we watched the five inch target shoot. But ah, when you would be, like, near Pearl Harbor or anyplace, they'd send a plane out towing a target and the gunners would shoot at it. I only watched our gunners shoot at it once. After that they would have all the ships in a line, but they wouldn't let our gunners shoot at the target because every time they shot at it they tore it off. That was a good feeling too (laughs).

Tom: I bet it was.

Pulver: But we, we would be in line and maybe a B-26 or something would be towing a target. And then all the—all the 40's and 20's on the other ships would be firing at the target. But when we got down—we were—we did more training down in the Admiralty Islands too. Ah, Manus in the Admiralty Islands was a—I think there was a big harbor there, if I remember right. And ah, we would go on little trips out from there. We even went down to Rabaul once. If you knew, Rabaul, they never really took Rabaul over. I think the Japanese were still on that island. But they'd go down there every so often, and shoot the place up just to hold them down. We went on a trip doing that one time. We also lost a—lost a plane and a pilot down there. They were firing at a Japanese plane and they had a mid air collision. One plane and pilot never came back. But the other plane flew over the ship, ah, he couldn't land on the ship because the main part of the wing from the fuselage clear out almost the end of the aileron was torn right out. And he waved at us. He went by and he flew into Manus and landed.

But ah—we did all kinds of little things like that. It was more or less training. And I don't—there wasn't a big group of us down there at that time. I can't even remember how many carriers, but you always, carriers you had destroyers with you and destroyer escorts. But it was all kinds of little things like that. In fact that Christmas, that Christmas when we were in the Admiralty Islands, my brother came and spent a day with me. His ship and my ship were in there at the same time. And, yeah he came over in the afternoon and his boys didn't come to pick him up. When we got up in the morning his ship was gone. But he know were it was. It had gone somewheres for refueling. And then we went up and the guys signaled over after his ship got back there. He was on the *U.S.S. Titania* [AK-55, later AKA-55], that was a cargo ship. And they came over then and picked him up. But they were just getting that group ready then to go up to Luzon in the Philippines. And, I don't know, we went different places while we were getting the group together. And I think it was Pitiliu or Peleliu—

Tom: Peleliu.

Pulver: We had a whole group there at one time. Getting organized to go up through the straits and go up to Luzon.

Tom: So kinda help me put this in chronological order. In your first time across the ocean to the battle zone, your first experience with the enemy was the submarine patrol or--?

Pulver: I think that's the first thing we did was submarine patrol. And as I understand it, we were supplying air support submarine patrol for convoys of ships that were going into the Philippines. We'd take one group in, go back out for a day and bring another group in. I don't know a real lot about that but I know that's what we were doing was submarine patrol.

Tom: So you had aircraft up then 24/7 then?

Pulver: Yeah.

Tom: What was your shift like then? How long did you have to—what was the length of your day?

Pulver: The length of my day, we were up at 3:30 every morning for general quarters. And 8, 9 o'clock at night, like I said, when we were real busy, one o'clock in the morning. Two, three hours of sleep, back at it again. There was just no specific hours but that was day after day.

Tom: General Quarters, what did that mean for you specifically?

Pulver: Well, usually at General Quarters in the morning, we didn't start work right away, we just kind of sat around and rested for another hour or so and then it would be chow time. And then right after chow, well then you go right back to work again. I can't remember that we had anything rushing that we had to do from that 3:30 until 5 o'clock or so in the morning. But we just kinda sat and rested. We had a coffee pot (laughs).

Tom: General Quarters means what? My take was that that was sounded when there was a, gonna be—

Pulver: Well, just before sunrise you know that or at sunrise, that's when they like to hit ya know. And you had to be prepared for 'em.

Tom: Ok, so routinely you went to General Quarters just before sunrise. It wasn't a drill it was just a normal—

Pulver: It was just a normal thing that you did every morning.

Tom: Where was your General Quarters station?

Pulver: Well we had a small room right off the hanger deck. And it wasn't very far from my fire station. There were three of us assigned to this fire station. Foam, hoses, water, all that, we were right near that.

Tom: Okay, so you had firefighting responsibilities.

Pulver: Yes, yes, during General Quarters.

Tom: When you ferried across did you do a zigzag pattern or was there any sort of—

Pulver: I can't remember zigzagging at all, at any time. I just don't remember doing that at all.

Tom: And as you went across, did you encounter the enemy at all?

Pulver: No, not when we first went across. Not until we got up into ah—Oh wait, the submarine patrol, they would sight submarines, but as I understand it, the way they worked that, if they had an idea that there was a submarine there, they'd just follow that submarine hour after hour. And that submarine had to be at a certain spot on a certain day, if it was there, it was ours. But we never did any firing or dropping bombs or charges on anything then at all.

Tom: How was the weather crossing?

Pulver: Well, when we first went across and got out toward the Equator all I wore was just a pair of light coveralls, long sleeves. No underwear, no socks, no nothing, just the light coveralls. And I was quite troubled with little water blisters. I wasn't the only one. But just from the heat ya know, your skin would just blister all over. There was a lot of fellas that had that problem but it just itched, that was all. You put up with it.

Tom: Fair seas?

Pulver: What?

Tom: Did you have fair seas then?

Pulver: Ah, when we first were out there it got a little rough at times. Most of the time though we didn't get into anything rough until the second time we went out.

Tom: So your first time you did the sub patrol and then after you got closer to the war area, what happened then?

Pulver: Well, as I was telling you, they—Manus and Peleliu they got the group together and I think there were thirteen Jeep carriers and I don't know how many

battleships and cruisers and destroyers. I think there was even a British-- one of those carriers was a British carrier. We were anchored somewhere, that must have been Peleliu. Where they were just off a ways from us. Australia or British, I don't know. But we were near the front end of that line and you couldn't see the end of it. We were on the way up to Luzon. Course we caught a kamikaze up there, you know.

Tom: Well, should we get to that part now or—

Pulver: Naw, you can go later.

Tom: Okay. Well continue on your trip up to Luzon.

Pulver: Well, during the night you could look out and see all kinds of big fires. We were going up through the Straits of Luzon and I've looked at the map and tried to figure out just where we went. But the fighting on Leyte had already finished. We were going up to Luzon and-- A little story there too but I can't over that thing [the tape recorder] tell you all the words that were said (laughs)

Tom: No you can certainly use all those words. That's okay nowadays.

Pulver: Well, one night going up through there, we—I don't know—it was dark, probably 9 o'clock or so—I don't just remember what the hour was, but they called us to general quarters. And it happened to be four Marine pilots. And I still don't understand why, because they had IFF, Identification Friend or Foe. Why that wasn't on, what happened? But they started shooting at them. I'm not gonna say what the pilots said anyway, but the one was swearing at the one because he said "shut off their light, your lights, they're shooting at us." Well as soon as they said that, they quit firing at 'em. We could hear that over the radio aboard ship. And one guy said "You're lost. Let me take over." And nothing was said for a few minutes, and well he said "Now fall into formation." Nothing was said for a few minutes and all of a sudden this same guy, same pilot said "That was a fine formation you fell into." And the other pilot says "I never moved the effing stick." (Laughing) But its just little things like that, you know, that keep you entertained. Well we used to listen to Tokyo Rose and everything, had good music (laughs). Well—

Tom: So did you ever figure out what those fires were that you were seeing burning as you were traveling up the straits?

Pulver: No. They must have been fuel dumps of some kind. Something that had been bombed or something. Because they were—and you saw quite a few of 'em. Humongous fires, big fires. Off in the distance. We were going up through a whole group of islands. I often wonder how in the world they did that navigation to know where they were, and how they got up through that, with such a group of



ships. How you get up through all those islands. Real interesting I'll tell you that.

Well, another one, before we got hit with the kamikaze. The skipper of our ship, skipper of our squadron, VC-87, he was the coordinator for a whole group of plane. And I don't know how many he was in charge of but, not only our planes but off of other ships too. Trying to find the targets to shoot at—one day he and his radioman and gunner came back and the gunner had a bullet in his hand, a Japanese bullet. He showed us, in the gun turret, where the bullet came in and circled right on around and landed in his lap. Never touched him, never really hurt anything, but he said they just couldn't find anything more to shoot at, and there was a little patch of woods there. And the pilot, Commander Heizel(?), said "we're going down over that and see if you can see anything, stir anything up." And they fired at him as they dove down over it. Well, needless to say the Japanese shouldn't a never fired at 'em. Because there was nothing left of the woods when they got done. They just couldn't find anything more to shoot up. Well, he'd stirred something up anyway.

Tom: Well, you're traveling down those straits and you're sending planes out, when they return, typically how bad of a shape were they in?

Pulver: Well, ah, we never—I don't think going up through there we, we had anything that was hit at all. In fact going up through the straits I don't think they had planes—yes they did too. But how in the world did we land 'em? They had planes out. Well I'm not gonna say. I just don't remember all of that. But we only one time had planes come back that were shot up.

Tom: Your entire career?

Pulver: Well, we lost a few here and there. But we never really had anything that was shot up at all. I don't think, all the while that I was out there, that we lost over three or four planes. While we were up there around Luzon, this was before we got hit, they sent two TBMs out to sink a Jap destroyer. And one of the planes after he made his run, he came up out and he got hit. And the other pilot, the other plane, they never did see anything of what happened to it. It evidently went in the water. The gunner and the radioman were lost. The pilot eventually came back aboard ship and he doesn't know for sure what happened, but he must have been blown out of the plane. And when he came to, he was laying in the water and he wasn't too far offshore. And so he just stayed there because the Japanese were still there. He just stayed there in the water until it got dark. And then he swam into shore and he said he went right by Japanese barracks with Japanese soldiers in 'em. He got with some Filipinos that took him to the guerrillas up in the hills somewheres. And then a while later they took him and another big Army officer, I don't know who or what, by boat out to a PBY [Amphibious Navy aircraft] and flew him back to Leyte. Now he had a quite a story to tell. Now I wish I had kept that paper, but you know all that junk, I just got rid of it, I didn't save it. Lt.

Lorch was his name, he was from Ohio somewheres. When he came—well he got back to Leyte and he, while he was there—and I don't know which town or city they were in there, he heard that “Whiskey” Joe Taylor was there. And that was the skipper of our ship, that's what they called him, we had all kinds of booze (laughs). So he found him anyway, and Taylor called back to the ship right away that Lt. Lorch was there. And when he came back aboard ship he had a little pair of shorts on and a big Filipino straw hat (laughs). Well we were tickled to see that guy. But the other pilot never saw anybody get out of that plane. I guess he didn't get back there until after we had gotten hit with the kamikaze.

Tom: Let's talk about that. So kind of set up the—

Pulver: Well, we were, that's when we were up near Luzon and they were flying out, bombing anything they could find, like that little story I told you there before. It was in the morning, I think around 8 o'clock in the morning. And we weren't at general quarters or anything—when, why it was right after chow. And I was back up—I don't know what—yeah Belokus(??) and I were working underneath a TBM that had come in the night before with line hammer, tore everything all to pieces in that hydraulic system. And that's one thing, we were so sure we knew what was wrong, but it wasn't. We'd had one other one do the same thing one time, we found that right away. But—hydraulic lines all smashed to pieces—the pump, the hydraulic pump, it was a seven piston pump, it can't get hydraulic fluid and then it starts hammering. Just tears everything right apart. Another little story that goes along with that, there was the gunner, was in the bilge that night cleaning up that hydraulic oil and he had used aviation gasoline, and when we got hit, they had a—it's a big, just like a big fireball, flash, ya know, fire. Set him on fire. And we weren't far from the sponson door, the porch. He ran out and jumped overboard. We never knew what happened to him. He was all on fire, we never saw him come out even, but we knew he was in there. We were up underneath in the bomb bay working at it. (Unintelligible) I can tell you more about him later. But—now where was I at—It was about 8 o'clock in the morning or so, we weren't at general quarters, Belokus(??) and I, the other hydraulic fellow, were up underneath the bomb bay, working on hydraulic system, trying to fix this hydraulic system, trying to figure out what was wrong. And when we got hit in about the—if you gonna be lucky it was about as lucky a place as it could be because it was between the bomb storage and the aviation gasoline. And that Japanese plane came in and how he could come out of that sky, because it was real overcast that morning, and how he could get down and slam right square into the flight deck. And he went down through, I believe, seven decks it went through. Almost went out the bottom. But one of the bombs exploded down in the ship. And the other one tore a hole out through just below the waterline and exploded in the water. I think there was seventeen guys killed in that business anyway. One of my good buddies, that I worked with all the time, a fellow by the name of Stovall(??) had—everybody called him “Pop” because he was 40 years old, and that's an old man, ya know, at that time. He was practically right were that plane came down through, and he was burned bad.

And I was probably one of the last fellows that he talked to. He says, “How bad did you get it Pulver?” And of course I just got blistered good. And he laid there on the cot and he died just shortly after that. But, it went, the plane went down through the small stores and all the pumps that we had aboard ship couldn’t pump the water fast enough. It—they brought a sea-going tug alongside, and they had a big, big pump on it. Oh humongous pump. I would hate to say how big—that pump was almost as big as that porch out there. A great big engine with a great big pump and it had a hose like that. Musta been a—cripes—a foot to eighteen inches in diameter. And that stretched from that sea-going tug, over, down into our ship. And went through the small stores and all the while that pump, every time they would get to pumping good, then it would plug up with clothes, small stores. So then they’d have to tear it all apart and get all that junk out and get it pumping again. So then they decided that was useless. So then they hoisted that humongous pump over to our ship, alongside on one of the sponsons and fastened it there so they just had that short pipe to go from pump down in and then they made some headway. Well before they even got the pumps there we had moved everything that we could from the—the hole was in the starboard side, over to the port side to try to bring that hole up out of the water. We sat on a slant for quite a while until they got things organized and got it to pumping good, then they leveled it off again. They put a temporary patch on the side, on the hole. And then we went from there down to Leyte and got into—while they did a lot of underwater welding in there then. But ah, I don’t now what more I can tell you about that business.

Tom: I had heard that the Japanese pilot was with parachute.

Pulver: He had a parachute.

Tom: Why do you think that was?

Pulver: I don’t know. But we had that—we had that parachute hanging up in the hangar deck drying out. It was there the last time I—

Tom: Was on the ship, huh?

Pulver: Well, until we got back to California it was still hanging there. But we went from there—it sprung one of the shafts for the screw. I don’t know that shaft, that’s a big hunk a steel. That’s, jeepers, I’m bettin’ that shaft is eighteen inches in diameter, from the engine back to the screw. Of course we only had one screw then and they sent us from Leyte, after a bunch of welding, down to Manus in the Admiralty Islands again. And put us in dry dock there and took the one screw off. And then we went from there back to Pearl Harbor. And there were two carriers that had been hit. And ours was in far worse shape than the other one, so they left that one there to be repaired in Pearl Harbor and we came back to San Francisco. We got in there, we were hit on January 13<sup>th</sup> and I don’t know just how long it

took us to get back to San Francisco, but I think it was April 23 when we went back out again.

Tom: January 13<sup>th</sup> of what year?

Pulver: That would have been forty—that have been '45. Yeah, because, yeah it was '45. And then the war was over and I got out in '46. Then in '45, January of '45.

Tom: Was the deck of your carrier steel or wood?

Pulver: Wood, wooden deck. Well it was wood over steel is what it is. I don't know those were pretty thick planks. They must be what, four inch planks I s'pose. Wooden deck.

Tom: How many planes were lost?

Pulver: Our planes?

Tom: Well yeah, from the kamikaze hit.

Pulver: I don't really think that any planes were hit. Oh! Yes there were too. Nothing on the flight deck, down in the hanger deck there was, well, I don't suppose any of those planes flew again because—I know there was one that got hit by the Jap plane and the other ones were all soaked with salt water. So I would bet that none of them flew again. I think we brought those right back to the states with us. We even boxed up all the Japanese plane parts that we could get—

Tom: Really?

Pulver: Other than wings and fuselage and stuff like that. But that Jap plane had U.S. Royal tires on it. And it was, the plane was in poor shape because there were a lot of things wired together on it. It was in bad shape.

Tom: Really? It didn't disintegrate when it hit the—

Pulver: Oh, most of that junk—the wings and part of the fuselage were up on the flight deck but all the rest of it went right down through the hole down in there.

Tom: And how many bombs detonated from the plane, or was it just the plane that detonated itself?

Pulver: Well, I s'pose the plane and gasoline and the one bomb went off down in there.

Tom: Okay, one bomb.

Pulver: But the other one, I can't prove that, but the story is that it went out through that hole in the side of the ship. And one of the destroyers saw it go off. So that's all I can tell you for sure about it. But it had a big hole, in fact I even lost some of my laundry in that hole (Tom laughs). They had mattresses and clothing and everything else stuffed in there to try to hold some of the water out.

Tom: So then when did you make it back to San Francisco with your ship then?

Pulver: Well, I don't know, it was in February sometime but I just don't know the date.

Tom: Okay. Now did you bring back that ship to San Francisco or did that one stay in Pearl and then you came back to San Francisco and—

Pulver: No, the ship came back.

Tom: Okay, with you.

Pulver: Yeah. The two carriers came in there about the same time, but their carrier was in, wasn't in near as bad a shape as ours. So our carrier, all of us, came back to San Francisco to get repaired.

Tom: Okay, you came back from Pearl with the carrier?

Pulver: Yeah.

Tom: Okay, and did you take that carrier out again?

Pulver: Oh yeah. We, everyone-- **[End Tape 1, Side B]**

Tom: Tape two, side A. Your ship just arrived after your first tour, damaged from the kamikaze hit and you were in San Francisco on leave or—and you gonna tell me about some of your leave stories I bet.

Pulver: Well, (laughs) well, tell about leave stories, I can tell you more than one. But this one, after we got back to San Francisco, they made three leave periods and I don't know, I think it was two weeks and traveling time. But I volunteered to take the third one, everybody wanted the first one, but I volunteered to take the third period. And I got my leave, traveling time, just like everyone else did. And when I got back to the ship, they were practically ready to go back out to sea again and I got out of loading all the ammunition and all the food stores and everybody worked their butts off loading that stuff. And got I think one day, I got a little bit of loading the ship. It was ready to go again (laughs). Well I was lucky on that one.

Tom: So where did you take your leave at? Did you come home?

Pulver: I came home, yeah. I came home, I flew home from, well I say San Francisco but I think they took us over to Sacramento and we flew from there—I flew from there to Chicago, a hundred and fifteen dollars. And I took the train back. I had a girlfriend. What else do you do while you're home? (laughs).

Tom: So did you have a girlfriend when you left?

Pulver: Oh yeah. Girlfriend, I think we started going together in 1942 and we were married in '45, October just after the war was over we got married. And then of course I spent several more months—we were married in October and I didn't get out until next March. But she spent a little time with me in Chicago and other than that she was home all the time. We got six kids since then (laughs). But we went back out again. I was about to tell you another little part of that kamikaze deal and that Luzon deal. As we were going up through there the Japanese kamikazes attacked us, a whole group of them. I saw four peel off and come at us, and I can't—I don't know what happened to two of them but I saw two of 'em, one hit the tail end of one of our destroyers, didn't do great damage to it. Another one hit the Louisville which was off to our port and the distance apart that those ships travel—it's so hard to say—but he hit the Louisville a little on the high side and the engine from that plane, they take movies of this all the while, ya know, when all this is happening there's movies going on all the time, and this movie shows the engine from that Japanese plane landing, flying up in the air and landing about halfway between us and the Louisville. They stopped that picture and then they showed movies of it to us one evening aboard ship. Now that's a quite a bang.

Tom: Yeah, I'd say.

Pulver: But, in that—I think that was the same day—I don't know how many Japanese planes flew into the Ommaney Bay, but there was another carrier just like ours. And the reason they attacked that ship so hard was because it was fully loaded with brand new planes, fighters and torpedo bombers. So if anyone of the other carriers lost a plane they could fly one over there, give 'em another plane. But they sank that. The last—we kept on going, of course, and the last I saw of it, it was just a solid ball of smoke. And I got back to school in Chicago, after the war was over even, and I met one of the fellows off of that Ommaney Bay. And so, we had a quite a little visit too (laughs). But—

Tom: Can you give me a sense of what it's like with all these kamikazes in battle, the noise, the pandemonium?

Pulver: Most of the time I just continue with my work. But the day that all the kamikazes hit, I happened to be working on a plane up on the flight deck. I ran back down and got my steel helmet and went right back up. So while I'm workin' I'm watching all of this go on. But it's—I don't know, everyone just stays at their chores, whatever they're doing, that's what you do.

Tom: What's the noise like? Is there anything that you--?

Pulver: Nothing special that I can tell you, a lot of guns firing but—

Tom: Can you put it in perspective with something here back home? Thunder, ah, is it louder than the loudest crack of thunder? Is it—?

Pulver: I don't think so (laughs). I really can't, I really can't describe it. It's—nothing that you can't carry on a conversation with. The 20's and 40's just a booming away and you—I don't know. Nothing drastic that I would say.

Tom: So how many ships did you lose on that morning of the kamikaze attack, the multiple kamikaze attack?

Pulver: Well, the only ones that I know of actually got hit out of that whole bunch was ours and the Ommaney Bay. I know the Louisville got hit, that was a cruiser. And it continued on and I don't—that destroyer that got hit on the tail end, I think they just continued on too. I don't know of any other ships lost in that, in that—ya know, after the war was over in the mail I got a nice book of, all about the Jeep Carriers. And I lent that to a neighbor boy next door, and I never got it back. And that book would have told me—I read it all too—and I just don't remember what all was lost.

Tom: This day of the kamikazes, that was a different day from when you took your hit.

Pulver: Oh yeah, it was a different day. Yah, it was a different day.

Tom: So you returned to the war from San Francisco. Tell me about your passage over.

Pulver: Well, I'll have to think about that, just a little bit. We took—the squadron that we had, VC-87, was taken off our ship and put on another one. And evidently the, the crew, the squadron that was on the other ship had been out there so long, they sent that squadron back home. Because, they emptied the ship anyway and our squadron went to a different carrier and we then took on, I don't remember, it was VC-80 or VC-70 or -71. I don't remember, I think it was 71. They had, in their training up at Arlington, Washington had had a fire, and burned up a lot of their equipment. So their training was behind VC-87, which I was mainly with. That was something different altogether, different squadron, different personality and I had a few little run-ins with them. Only because we were told to do as we saw fit, to get that plane ready and going. And I got chewed out a few times for doing something that I really shouldn't have been doing, but not hurting anything. Well, kind of left me with a few dirty thoughts of that squadron (laughs). It wasn't anything like VC-87 that I had been in.

Tom: Was it the same skipper then?

Pulver: Let's see, no. It was a different skipper of the squadron. Same skipper of the ship, but different skipper of the squadron, he was more Navy. And that's the big reason I didn't stay in, was all the chicken shit afterwards. That's the big reason I didn't stay in. Because I kept going right on up in my pay grades, ya know, and I didn't have very long to go and I could have been Chief. But, when the war was over and things changed like it did, that was enough for me.

Tom: So you're crossing the Pacific again, had you—storms?

Pulver: Ah, The Philippines was finished, Iwo Jima was finished by the time we got back out there. We then did a quite a lot of operating in the China Sea, and that was rough. I think the China Sea is shallow, and the water is rough. We then got into a big typhoon and that's worse than kamikazes chasing you. I, if a person was scared, I was more scared in that typhoon than I ever was with the Japanese chasing us. It tore gun sponsons right off, tore 20 millimeter, 40 millimeter guns right off of the ship. It tore the flight deck, made it just like a ski jump on the front end of it, tore it up so bad. Just heaved her right up. We then, we were between Iwo Jima and Okinawa at that time. We then went back to Guam for repairs. We sat there for quite a little while before they even started working on us. They were working on a destroyer or a destroyer escort, I don't know which, but—you know what I'm saying when I talk about the foc'sle? That's the bridge, that's the high part of it. That submarine was torn right slick and clean right in front of the foc'sle. And they brought that, destroyer, not submarine, destroyer was torn off right from the foc'sle. We were anchored there or not anchored, we were at a dock, and we watched them build a false bow for that destroyer, float it out, weld it on and send it back to the States. Now that's a quite and undertaking too. And then after that was finished, then they started working on us. And, jeepers, I can't tell you dates on all of that.

Tom: That's ok.

Pulver: But ah, by the time we got back out there again, there, I think the war was over. We also, at sometime during then, heard about the *Indianapolis* being sunk. We were anchored for several days then in Sagami Wan Bay, that is south of Tokyo Bay somewheres. Without seeing maps you don't know exactly, but I know we were South of Tokyo Bay. And we were anchored just a little ways from the *Missouri*. And *Missouri* was the ship that the peace was signed on. And we went into Tokyo Bay ahead of the *Missouri* even. Ships stickin' with their tail out of the water, and Japanese ships there, all shot up. And Yoko—we went, I got to go on liberty in Yokosuka for a couple, three hours one day. And a—bomb craters in there, there wasn't much to see, but I at least got into Japan a little bit. But that was a great sight as we were going into Tokyo Bay. As I remembered it was a rather narrow entrance to go into there, and this big, I don't know, stone, brick building, I think it was a stone building with the American Flag flying up there. That was really, really a great sight. But ah—



Tom: So you were in the Bay when the *Missouri* was there when the peace was signed?

Pulver: Yah, yah. 'Course I'm aboard ship, I don't know what's going on.

Tom: Yeah, yeah.

Pulver: But I think about two hours I got to spend in Yokosuka.

Tom: Then how long did you spend in Tokyo Bay, the ship anchored there?

Pulver: We were there several days. We then—I don't know where all these sailors came from, but they were fellas that had signed up for further duty. Oh boy they put on a big, big program to get everybody to sign up for regulars, you know. 'Course ole Ralph didn't but—all the leave they gave you and all the extra money and everything. Plus there were a lotta guys that had actually time enough in to get out. We took on about a thousand men, sailors that were due to head back to the States. They had cots set up all over the hanger deck. Nice thing about that is I met one of my old Chiefs that had been with the squadron and when we went back aboard ship, he went another place. He went to a seaplane tender. But, Chief Estes(??), of course he was right at home when he saw all us guys that he'd been with all that time. He was with the squadron training from the beginning and then when we went aboard ship, why he was excess baggage and put on this seaplane tender. So Estes(??) got next to me and I found him an extra bunk and we had three meals a day, the rest of the fellas only had two. He was one of us.

Tom: So then you took a bunch, as I understand it, back from Tokyo Bay back to the States?

Pulver: Back ta—we came back to Treasure Island. That's were they all got off and then I got off too. My engineering officer, he got to be a buddy of mine, that guy I was telling you, with the initiation with the big wrench, he was a full Lieutenant. During, I don't know, I was Third Class Hydraulics man and I wanted to be Second Class and I had time enough in and all I had to do was pass my tests. And I asked Mr. Fisher(??) if he could give me the test. And he said, "Well I don't think there's a test aboard ship." Well I said, "Mr. Fisher(??), I think there is." And so he went and hunted it up and he evidently read it over and he came to me and he says, "Pulver, I found the test, but I don't think you can ever pass that test." "Well," I said, "I wanna take it, so at least I'll know what's in there and then when I get a chance again I'll know what I'm gonna be tested on." Well, I took the test, I'm in this little room that I told you, just off the hanger deck. And there was another little kid there, Greninger(??) was his name, he knew Minnie Pearl (laughs), from Missouri. But there was one thing in that test I just could not remember, and I know now it was about accumulators. And I says, "Greninger(??), get my book out." It was up on the shelf over there, and I told him about where in the book it would be and what I wanted. I went on with the

rest of the test. He read it for me anyway, when he found it of course. I marked it on my test, and then when Mr. Fisher(?) came and got the test, he took it and corrected it and came back. And he says, "Pulver you had just one wrong on that test." I said, "Mr. Fisher(?) I wanna know what it is." Accumulators! You can't tell me that he wasn't around the corner, knew what was going on, somewhere (laughs). I said, "Mr. Fisher(?) That answer is right, I know it's right." He says, "Pulver I can't give you a 100 percent on that test." You know he came to me, I passed my test, and they had a lot of other junk you had to go through, like Morse code and semaphore and flags and all that junk, recognition. You had to pass all that besides this hydraulics test. And I got lucky there, I passed all that. And I got my rating. But he came just a few days after that and he says, "Pulver, I'm gonna work for you for a week." He says, "You tell me what you have to do, and I'm doing all your work for a week." And he did. He says, "I'm supposed to know all you know, and I don't." So he worked for me, I didn't lift a finger for a week. One thing that I did, it wasn't hydraulics, I had to tighten the cables on a fighter because the—let's see that would be for the, for the rudder. It was too sloppy. The cables were loose and you gotta get in the bilge and that. Whoa! Hotter than blazes in there. He's just a sweatin' in there. He came out to get a breath, fresh breath of air, and I said, "Mr. Fisher(?), let me do that for a while." "No Sir," he said, "I'm doing it." And boy he pulled a lot of strings for me after that. You gotta get lucky once in a while.

And it was through him, after we got back, it was through him—I was supposed to, the war was over, I was supposed to get off at Pearl Harbor. And he told me to "get everything checked out, be ready to get off, but I don't think your getting off." He says, "You're going back to school in Chicago again." A lot of guys went back, after a period of time because there was a lot of new things to learn. See. I knew guys when I went through it first that were there for their second time. But, he told me to get ready. I checked everything out, ready to get off. He went to the Executive Officer, he went to the Air Officer, the Air Officer took him right up to the Skipper of the ship, he came back down to me all smiles. "Pulver," he says, "you're going back to school." If it hadn't been for him I'd a been off at Pearl Harbor and who knows what would have happened from there on. But then I got off at Treasure Island and eventually got back to school in Chicago. But they wouldn't let me go through school because I didn't have enough time left in. So then, what do I do? I end up right back out to San Diego again. And where do you wanna go when I got out there, what is that Eleventh Naval District I think? "Where do you wanna go?" They gave me a choice of a place in Texas or Brown Field in California there. And I'd been at Brown Field and it was a beautiful place to be, up on a ridge up there. New movies every night, you even had stage shows from Hollywood. All kinds of stuff to do. We played Pinochle and I don't know, did very little of anything. Practically everyone that was there was a First Class or a hardship case, everybody was due to get out. And we had a few planes we worked on, very little did we have to do. Spent a lot of time playing Pinochle, just waiting to get out. Great place to be. Just hurry up and get home. And the worst part of that was, I don't remember the

name of the place we went from San Diego, they took us way north, and it was an old Marine base up there somewheres. We traveled for several hours by bus. And then they gave me a list of guys from the letter L to Z. And somebody else had from A to L. And I had to muster those guys twice a day, and there was two guys that never ever did show. And then, when we were ready to leave there to get on the train to come back to Great Lakes, that's were we got out, they gave me two boxes of all these guys records. And I'm telling you they were that square and that deep. And I had to keep track of those all the way back. And then after we got back to Great Lakes I had to carry them way the heck back up. Well I just corralled three other guys and they stayed with me all the while. Man I was about dead when I got those boxes carried up there. Why they weighed a ton. But, that was the end of it.

Tom: So you got out in when, 1946?

Pulver: '46, in March of '46. I don't remember the date.

Tom: You were asked to stay in I assume?

Pulver: Oh, yah.

Tom: Probably pressured pretty heavily.

Pulver: Oh yeah, that's before the atomic bomb was dropped, just days before that. I surmised something was up and oh did they put the pressure on. And a few guys did. I can remember one guy ended up, up to Brown Field and while I was there he left Brown Field to go home on this big leave they promised him. He was pretty sick boy, because he wanted that big leave, ya know, and this extra money. And then when the war was over he wished he hadn't signed. Fergusson was his name. He was from Texas. But they put the pressure on and quite a few guys did sign up. They didn't get me.

Tom: But you said you were close.

Pulver: Yah, I was close. If I had been—I think I had two months to go yet before I could pass my test and be Chief. I mighta stayed in then but, cause Chiefs, they had it pretty good too.

Tom: Did they?

Pulver: Yah, they had their separate quarters, they had their separate chow line, chow. They were all separate from us. But—

Tom: But life saw you coming home. So what happened once you got home?

Pulver: Once I got home, I think I had a little job here and a little job there and I even farmed with my uncle for a year. He and I agreed to disagree. (Laughs) And then a second cousin of mine put me on to a job with Oconomowoc Canning Company and I worked for them for 37 years. That's where I retired. They had a pretty good retirement program. Grass always looked greener on the other side of the fence, but I stayed right with 'em. Good retirement. We don't live high, as you can see, but we're happy.

Tom: That's what's important.

Pulver: Can't complain.

Tom: And then when you come home, after the war you got married? Or did you get married between that leave period between the two sailings?

Pulver: No, we—I don't just remember the date when the war was over, maybe you do. We were married October 20<sup>th</sup> in '45. And set up housekeeping when we got home.

Tom: And you were married here in Wyocena then?

Pulver: We were married in Portage, yah.

Tom: In Portage. (Pause) So looking back over it, a good decision not to stay in or?

Pulver: Yeah, after I was out I had chance of a job, I think it was down in Indiana somewheres and it was an education job, but Indiana, that's a long ways from home. Heck with it (laughs). I was just glad to be home.

Tom: What kind of veteran's benefits did you receive once you got out, take advantage of?

Pulver: Well, the only thing that I really took advantage of was a mechanics course. It was a written course and—what do I want to say?—by mail.

Tom: Correspondence.

Pulver: Correspondence course. And I finished it, all the way through on it. And well, actually how much good it did me, I really don't know, because the work that I had with the canning company really didn't pertain to what I had done. But I got some more education anyway. One thing you know that really ticks me off with this whole business?

Tom: What's that?

Pulver: I got the Purple Heart out of that whole deal.

Tom: Well, I was gonna ask you about your medals. What medals did you—let's, let me flip the tape over here. **[End Tape 2, Side A]**

Tom: This will be tape two, side B. You mentioned the Purple Heart.

Pulver: Well, when we were hit with the kamikaze, I was about thirty feet from where it came down through. And as I told you before all I had on was this light pair of coveralls and no cap, no gloves. Well, my job you couldn't work with gloves on anyway. But we were told, we were warned, keep all your body covered as much as possible all the while. And that's why we wore these long coveralls. They came clear down. Well when the Japanese plane hit, there's a big flash, like a big fire. Flash burns is what it is. I had no eye brows, no eye lashes, my hair is singed, face blistered, my hands were solid blisters clear up to my sleeves. Well that's—

Tom: Second degree burns.

Pulver: Everybody doesn't get a Purple Heart for being shot at but, that's what I got it for. And I noticed a little article in the paper here a while ago, year or so ago. Purple Heart veterans are entitled to a help with prescription drugs. That's a bunch of horse crap. I gotta go take a physical, see if I'm entitled to it. If I got a Purple Heart and I'm entitled to, why do I have to have a physical? And it has to come, the medication has through the veterans, the V.A. hospital in Madison. Well, if I go to the doc and he says I need a prescription, how long have I gotta wait, what kind of monkey work do I gotta go through, to get that prescription? Well, I spend probably seven or eight hundred dollars for prescription drugs in a year. Which—the V.A. would pay for part of it. Is it worth the damn monkeying around to go and get it? When a prescription is changed, how much time you gotta, how much time lags before you get it. That is a bunch of baloney.

Tom: Yeah. Yeah.

Pulver: I don't really think they want to give it to ya, that's what I think. It's something that somebody said you're entitled to, but yet they don't wanna give it to ya.

Tom: Yeah.

Pulver: Oh well. It's neither here nor there. It won't break me, what I pay.

Tom: No, I know what you're saying. It can be frustrating.

Pulver: I gotta go to Baraboo first and well, they might okay me, if they don't okay me then I gotta go to the vet. hospital in Madison. I'm not the kind that likes to do all that junk.

Tom: Yeah, sometimes it's more hassle than it's worth. When you got home, did you have any problems adjusting from military life? From the high stress, the fast pace?

Pulver: Naw, I, it was some nights I might wake up in the night doing a little shouting, so my wife tells me. But it was minor, I mean, it didn't take me too long and I'm back to normal.

Tom: Still have, do you have any problems now? Flashbacks or--

Pulver: No, none whatsoever.

Tom: Good. Good. Other medals or citations that you received?

Pulver: No, I didn't have anything other than that.

Tom: Okay. And we talked, I think, a little bit maybe before we started, friendships that you made in the service. How you spoke with one guy or you wrote and you learned of his, from his wife that he passed. Any other—

Pulver: I didn't keep track of any other fellow. Oh I had one fella from Wisconsin here, Oshkosh, he was a aviation electrician. He and I got back and forth several times. We visited one another. But I don't believe he was out of service more than a year and he had a heart attack and died. His wife sent me the obituary, and I tried calling her once and I have never heard any more.

Tom: Do you belong to any veteran's organizations?

Pulver: No, I never have. No.

Tom: How about reunions?

Pulver: None.

Tom: No former service reunions?

Pulver: None whatsoever.

Tom: Are there organizations that you're aware of that that include your unit?

Pulver: I have never heard of any get-togethers or anything.

Tom: Looking back, about your time in the war and that sort of stuff, what impact has that had on your life and your--?

Pulver: Well, I don't know, things might have been a little different had I not gone into service. But, I wouldn't take a million dollars for the experience I had, but I don't want to do it again. But I did, in service, have—I have real good treatment. I mean, I went from bottom to, six pay grades up. All real easy. I met a lot of good people. I don't, I can't really say anything bad about it. Other than when the war is over you got right back to that chicken stuff again. But other than that I had good treatment all through. I don't know how much different it would have been, but I still think the Japanese took three years out of my life (laughs).

Tom: Oh, I imagine, yeah.

Pulver: Probably wouldn't be any better off than I am right now. Ya know, talk about being in service, my younger brother passed away now, three years ago probably now. That guy had sight in one eye, yet he's in the Marines. How?

Tom: I have two sons in the Marines. They're a different breed.

Pulver: How, with one eye, can he get into the Marine Corps? He actually, he was an instructor, that's all he was. But he had ROTC while he was in university down there. And then that's the way he spent his time. He was out in San Diego for, I don't know, a couple years. I don't know what was.

Tom: The Korean War came about, you'd been out of the service for four years. Where you at all contacted or pressured to come back?

Pulver: No, not at all. What was that? When I went in they, I was in the reserves for the duration and six months. And I never ever heard any more about it. Brother, my next younger brother, he was in during Korea more. But, what he, I suppose that was a two year deal. And there again, that guy couldn't see from here to that porch door without his glasses. He was in the Army. He was, went to school and he was a welder. Ya know, that's one thing about me. I told you that I had the mumps. I went back to Great Lakes, in the hospital. I'm laying there in bed, nothing but skivvies on. Nice and warm, my bare feet sticking up. And this one nurse, I don't know, she was from North Dakota, that's all I can remember about her. She looked at my one foot and she says, "How did you ever get into the Navy?" Well I says, "Why?" She says, "That's a deformed foot you have there." Well I says, "They never looked at it." I have five big scars on it. When I was about so high, about 3, 4 years old, I stepped on glass and I got blood poisoning in that foot. And I was in the hospital for weeks at a time up at Portage, up there. And I ended up in a home down in Rio because the doctor lived in Rio. And he stopped at this house everyday to see me. But, I have two short toes, the tendons are short and it's about a shoe size smaller than the other one (laughing).

Tom: Really? Huh.

Pulver: I often think of "How in the world did you get in the Navy?" She said.

Tom: They were different times, different standards.

Pulver: They wanted me then, I guess (laughing).

Tom: Yes, indeed.

Pulver: No, I, I won't say anything against having been in there. I mean it's what we had to do and things worked out good for me.

Tom: Is there anything else that we haven't discussed that, reflecting back on that you want to say? Any other stories that come to light?

Pulver: Well there're a lot of little things. I can remember one time, I don't even remember where we were, but this pilot radioed back to us that he was coming back for an emergency landing and he couldn't take a wave off. Well, this electrician and I were out on the sponson watching that plane come back. When they'd get right out here, ya know, they'd change the pitch on the prop. He was a electrician and the prop on that fighter plane as an electric prop. When it got out there, this pitch didn't change on the prop and we knew, he knew right away it's an electrical problem. He couldn't radio anymore because the battery was dead. So he came around for a landing and the landing officer gave him a wave off. And he made it, he just made it and that's all. But he didn't have his flaps down, he was coming in too fast. Well, he came on around again and he couldn't, he had his flaps down but he couldn't catch the ship. So he got back, oh I don't know, probably a hundred yards and he just dropped her into the water. He couldn't get enough power to get going again. He had his flaps down, I don't if he'd of had time to get 'em up. Of course they were just mechanical, you pumped 'em up. But, he dropped it in the water, it flipped over on its back, flipped right back up again, and the destroyer's right there and picked him up. And I bet you it wasn't fifteen minutes and he's back aboard ship. But the way they do that you know, they shoot a line across and rig up a breeches buoy they called it. Hoist him back over to the ship. But that's what happened.

Tom: Now would they recover a plane like that then?

Pulver: No. No that's—they're, all of those planes were made so they wouldn't float but just a few minutes. They would sink. I saw one plane come in one time. I'm out on this sponson, it was right after chow in the morning and they were landing 'em. And he missed all the cables and he went in to the, I don't know, 20 or 40 millimeter guns and went over the side. And I'm looking down there and there's that pilot, setting in there with his head slumped, like that. If somebody could had guts enough, or could have unsnapped him out of his safety belt, he might be alive today. But he went right in it. I don't think they stay over a couple minutes. But there it is ya know. You don't, nobody really dared go over the side, you might get sucked right in underneath ya know.



Tom: Oh yeah. So how many friends did you lose?

Pulver: Well, really I only lost that one, Pop Stovall(??). I was telling you, the only one that was really close to me at all. There was another fella but he was, he was in our division, a fellow by the name of Cunningham(??) that had had a heart attack. And they moved Stovall(??) down into sick bay in the bunk right beside him. Of course they knew each other quite well too. When Stovall(??) passed away, this Cunningham(??) that had had a heart attack died too, right there. Just the fact, I think part of the reason for it was, his buddy Stovall(??) passed away, and too much of a shock for him, and he was gone. He was a young guy too. He could have only been in his twenties.

Tom: So does the burial take place at sea then?

Pulver: Ya, Ya. I think we only lost about seventeen guys there. There again, they told us to be as fully covered as we could be. There were still guys running around with their shirt sleeves rolled up. I know one guy, Plimuke(??) was his name, he was in our department too. His arms were just like this. He couldn't straighten them out, he was burned so bad.

Tom: From burns, yeah.

Pulver: There if he had long sleeves on he wouldn't—But they, he said the doctor told him, and we had a real good doctor aboard ship too. Shucks, we had appendix operations everything, you know. Just like you were home as far as the doctor was concerned. That doctor told him that when he got back to the States that they could fix his arms so that they'd work.

Tom: Yeah. Food on the ship?

Pulver: Good food. Ah, my brother was aboard ship with me. I had a cousin, when we were getting repaired from that typhoon back at Guam, I had a cousin. I wrote home to get his address and all. And I went over to see him. In fact I had a brother-in-law that was on *Saipan* with B-29s, he flew over to Guam. And I met him there too. But this Marine buddy of mine, and I went to visit him the day, the day before he came to visit me. Well, tell ya, that meat you couldn't chew it, it was worse than leather. When he came aboard our ship, "Man," he says "you guys eat good." And my brother even, he was aboard the cargo ship the *Titania* he said we ate like kings compared to them. We did have good food, except when, after we got hit with the kamikaze. They tried to get other food from other ships. A lot of our stuff got spoiled. Got flooded. Even had barrels of chicken and stuff, got flooded, spoiled. So we ate Vienna sausages for, cripes, I think we ate 'em for a month. You wanted to sure and eat 'em for breakfast cause you weren't going to get any more until dinner time. And you eat 'em then at dinner time cause you weren't gonna get anymore till supper time. I don't know where

in blazes they found that many Vienna sausages. I suppose ten tin cans. But we still got our bellies full but that wasn't the best of food.

And there, there was another case where we got hit. When I first got with the squadron, I went in and got into Holtville, California, probably midnight. And then this one guy that I saw on the bus took me and showed me where everything was. Colder than blazes--because the barracks had heaters at night and air conditioning during the daytime. But there were two guys back in the corner here from where I found a bunk. I had my pea coat on, and a mattress under me and a mattress over the top of me to try to keep warm. Clear on the end of the barracks. And these, one of those two guys said, "I see we got another one in overnight." Of course me. And those two guys, when the ship, when the kamikaze got hit, they fell down that hole. And they found, found them back in the lockers somewheres. They got, the doors, or hatches got closed and they drowned in there. The two guys were still right together. The same two guys that said, "Well we got another one in." I often kinda wondered about those two guys (laughs). They were, you never saw one without the other one. I can't even think of their names now, of course knew 'em then. They were, they were with the squadron but all the while, but then when we went aboard the ship, then they became mess cooks. That was one thing too that I could get my rating on up after I took the test. When I went aboard ship I was only third class and there was another third class there but he didn't know anything about hydraulics. He happened to be in an A & R shop in San Diego when they handed out this new hydraulics rating, so he got one too. But when he got aboard ship he didn't even practice hydraulics, he was a mess cook with a hydraulics rating. Well, they wanted his, he was in V-1 division and his division officer wanted me to make up a hydraulics test that he could pass. And I said, "No, he can take the same test that I took." Well, Lieutenant Zarsa(??) was his name. He says, "Well that's no more than fair Pulver." So he couldn't pass it, he wouldn't know the first thing about it. And the reason I didn't want him to pass it was because the ships quota called for a Third Class and a Chief. And I was Second Class and if he got to be Second Class, then the best I could get was First Class, see. I couldn't get to Chief because there wouldn't be enough room for me. So, he stayed Third Class. When, that was another thing too. He had a chance to go back to school. And my Division Officer, Lieutenant Fisher(??), went to see him. He says, "No, I got enough points to get out. Let Pulver go." So I got to go back to school in Chicago. I really didn't need it either cause I was getting out too. You had to, you had to wait for enough points, ya know, to get out. I don't know.

Brother got out, I didn't get out till March, my brother got out in January because he'd been overseas longer than I had. He was in on Guam and I don't know how many he was in on over there. He was a motor machinist on a small barge that hauled stuff in to shore. At one time he told me they had a whole load of canine corp. I don't know how many that would be and what else they might have been hauling. Certainly that whole ship wasn't loaded with canine corp. But they had a whole bunch of guys and dogs. He says everybody had their own dog, and he

was his dog. He tells about a little story too. Things that maybe shouldn't happen, but they had this one barge aboard ship, and it was an old one. And they had more troubles with that thing, was hard to keep running and the damn thing leaked and everything else. And anyway after this one unloading they, the guys on that barge, they had a coxswain and a motor machinist with each barge, they pulled the plugs on her and sunk her (laughs). They got back and the skipper of the ship, my brother was telling me, said, "Well, so and so, where's your barge?" He says, "Down about thirteen fathoms," he says (laughs). They got rid of that.

Well I had a plane one time, came in and the tail wheel didn't lock down. And when it hit the deck it actually sprung the fuselage. You could rub your hand along the side of it and you could feel the ripples in it. All the TBM pilots they were feeling that, ya know. Didn't anybody didn't really wanna fly it off again. But the next day I had, had it up on wing jacks and I had the landing gear up and I was trying to figure out, I was about to put it down, I looked back by the tail wheel well, I just couldn't figure out why that wouldn't lock down. Then all of a sudden I felt that ship turning, turning to port getting ready to land planes, and I out from under that thing just as fast as I could get on my hands and knees away from it. She fell over and "kaboom" hit the deck, propellers bent and wing jacks poked up through the wings. Needless to say they weren't gonna use it anymore. And my division officer thought probably we were in trouble. Though at first he had to go up and see the flight officer, from there he went on up to see the skipper of the ship. When Fisher came back down, a big smile on his face, he says, "Captain Taylor says just tell the boys to remember that they ain't in a barn out in Kansas anymore." (laughs). That's all there was to it. Well, then we stripped everything off of it that we could possibly use, you know, the engine off of it and everything. And up on the flight deck getting ready, they had a hoist ya know, hook onto it and throw it over the side the ship, dump it. They had all of the TBM pilots lined up there and when she dropped they all clapped (claps) like that 'cause nobody wanted to fly that off after the first trip. And boy did they catch hell from the skipper of the ship. That's another several thousand dollars gone. But ya know, I don't, they tell, told me at that time that that plane was only worth seventy thousand dollars, that TBM. Today what would that thing be worth?

Tom: I don't know. Can you even put a tire on a plane for less than seventy thousand dollars?

Pulver: I know. Terrible.—I could probably go on with more stories, but that's probably enough (laughs).

Tom: OK. Well thank you Ralph.

Pulver: I hope it's worth it.

Tom: Oh I think it's priceless, personally.

**[End of Interview]**