

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
John Yetka
Engineer, U. S. Navy, World War II

2006

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Yetka, John, (1918-). Oral History Interview, 2006.

User copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

ABSTRACT

John Yetka describes his personal experiences while in Navy service before and during World War II as engineer aboard the *USS Louisville* and the *USS Cape Esperance* and subsequent work experiences in Wisconsin following the war. Yetka, growing up in Milwaukee during the depression years, rose to senior foreman in Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) before joining the Navy in 1939 (following in his brother's footsteps). He attended basic training at the Great Lakes Training Center prior to assignment on the *Louisville* as an engineer in the "black gang." Yetka touches upon *Louisville's* goodwill cruise to Recife (Brazil) and Montevideo (Uruguay) in time to see the *USS Graf Spee* scuttled. Following a mission carrying gold and platinum bullion from South Africa to New York, Yetka's brother came on board the *Louisville* prior to shipping out to the Philippines. Yetka reflects on providing escort for civilian transport ships from Philippines to American Samoa while not knowing that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Yetka speaks of their surprise returning to Pearl Harbor and the people's joy on seeing them. After a refit in the States, Yetka mentions his experience at the Battle of Guadalcanal, the *Louisville* being hit with a dud torpedo in the fire-room and standing watch as the torpedo bounced around while returning to Hawaii. He talks about Japanese activity in New Guinea and some boiler work he did for the British cruiser *Sydney* before the *Louisville* was sent to the Aleutian Islands to close the channel (sinking all Japanese ships and transports) and his thoughts on the Tarawa (Gilbert Islands) Assault. Yetka mentions his transfer to the *USS Cape Esperance*, encountering a storm that sunk escorts and destroyers, how *Cape Esperance's* commander was a southern bully only thinking of Dixie, and Yetka's reaction to the Japanese surrender. When on Mare Island (California), Yetka saw a sign on a civilian residence reading, "Sailors and dogs, keep off," after which he mentions his impression of Americans at that time. After his discharge in 1945 at Walt Chamberlain Field (Minnesota), Yetka describes subsequent work with the Conservation Department, Goodyear Aircraft and General Motors where he gave the final approval for the mechanical portion of the guidance system used on the Apollo spacecraft. He concludes the interview mentioning additional anecdotes about the *Louisville's* history, naval family life and his family.

Biographical Sketch

Yetka (1918-) born in Cloquet (Minnesota) and raised in Milwaukee, joined the Navy in 1939 and served as an engineer with the *USS Louisville* during the Battle of Guadalcanal and Aleutian Islands. He was transferred to the *USS Cape Esperance* and made chief engineer before being discharged in 1945. Yetka worked in Arizona with Goodyear Aircraft before returning to Wisconsin and General Motors.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2005.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2005.

Transcript edited by John J. McNally, 2006.

Interview Transcript

- Driscoll: This is John Driscoll, and today is January 12, 2006, and this is an oral history interview with John Yetka, who is a veteran of the United States Navy in World War II. And we are at the Veterans Museum in Madison. John lives in Madison and, John, thanks a lot for coming down here and agreeing to the interview. Why don't we start at the very beginning. When and where were you born?
- Yetka: August 28, 1918. In Cloquet, Minnesota.
- Driscoll: Cloquet. Okay. Early family?
- Yetka: Well, I was one of twelve kids. And my father, at the time I was born, was the date of the great fire in Cloquet, Minnesota. It wiped out the town. And my dad had a good cabinet making business. He lost everything. In them days, they didn't believe in insurance or stuff like that. So, for a few years, my parents suffered there, moving around up north. Then they eventually came to Milwaukee. And my school days there were in Milwaukee. And I went to the grade school, parochial school, and eventually there, during the depression years, I ended up in the CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps.
- Driscoll: Okay. Okay. Sure.
- Yetka: During that time I spent two periods there in the CCC. I rose to senior foreman. And, I don't know, my time in there, there was kind of limited there. I could feel that what the heck is the future in there?
- Driscoll: Yea. Sure.
- Yetka: It's just a temporary job. So I thought about the Navy there, and in 1939 I entered the Navy, following in the footsteps of my brother who went into the Navy in 1929.
- Driscoll: Oh, wow.
- Yetka: So he was a veteran and he served in China, on the Yangtze Patrol.
- Driscoll: Okay. Sure.
- Yetka: Well, I signed up for the Navy and from the CCC's, I went into the Navy. I went to Great Lakes Training Center. And I ended up being assigned to the *Louisville*, a heavy cruiser.
- Driscoll: Okay. Where?

- Yetka: And that was in Long Beach. And I, well, they said about me going into engineering. I said, "Oh, boy, that is a bright future there." Well, I happened to go into the Black Gang. Which was the fireroom. It wasn't that bad, really. I rose quite fast. I took exams, and I rose quite fast. We, on the West Coast, we had our training over there in firing ranges in competition with other ships, getting their E's on their stacks, and that. Well, going through some of the cruises around there on the West Coast, they were short. But eventually there we were told to go on a good will cruise to South America. And so we went through the Canal and the first place we went to was the Recife, Brazil.
- Driscoll: Okay.
- Yetka: And we enjoyed ourselves over there. Not knowing that some of the things that were going on already with the British and the Germans, oh, we had our good times there. And we ended up in Montevideo, Uruguay.
- Driscoll: Okay.
- Yetka: And it was just about the time that we came in there that the *Graf Spee* was scuttled. And we had the feeling there that many of them aboard ship there, and some of the officers too, that the scuttling was because of our ship. They thought we were a battle wagon. And we were out to get them.
- Driscoll: Oh, okay. Wow.
- Yetka: So, instead of being disgraced by the British, they scuttled their ship over there.
- Driscoll: I know they scuttled it, but I didn't know...
- Yetka: And here are some of the pictures.
- Driscoll: Oh, wow.
- Yetka: Let's see. Oh, gosh. See if I can go back. There is the ship. Here is some of the smaller photographs. That was, these two were bought. That one there was taken off our ship, not off our ship, but transcribed. These were taken over there by a guy from the paper.
- Driscoll: That is the *Graf Spee* going down?
- Yetka: Yea. So, if you do want some of the pictures there, you can return them to me. And, well, from there we went down to Argentina. Had a good time over there. And then we were informed to go to South Africa. And South Africa, we didn't know what the heck was going on. But since it was a war with England there, I

should have known better that it had something to do with England. Well, we didn't know it there, but we had to carry gold and platinum on board our ship.

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Yetka: It was over two hundred million dollars worth of platinum and gold that we got from South Africa. And I suppose it had to do with some of the payments there for some of the stuff, goods that we gave them. And we brought that back to New York and unloaded over there. So that to me is the biggest amount of money in any way that any ship has ever taken. And I thought you would like to know that.

Driscoll: Absolutely. I've never heard anything like that. That is great.

Yetka: Yea. I am quite sure it should be in the log. I hope it is. But, if it isn't, there, you got it from me, and this is the truth.

Driscoll: Okay. We got it.

Yetka: Well, from there, we, my brother came on board there. He was kind of itchy there, my younger brother, and he joined the Navy, and came of board ship there in New York. From there, we went to the West Coast and I suppose it had something to do with knowing that there would be a war eventually, we got suited up with some of the guns and that, twenties and forties, and that. Different things there, of board ship. And then we were sent to the Philippines. And that was just about the end of '41, coming in.

Driscoll: Okay. Okay.

Yetka: So, we didn't know what was going on, but there seemed to be kind of a fuss over there in Cavite and that, and Manila, transporting of guns and different vehicles going towards Bataan. So, then I seen something that was unusual. MacArthur came on board ship. And this was unusual. What the heck was going on? Well, a couple days later, after MacArthur came on board, they were still busy on the dock with ships and stuff like that, transporting stuff. And we were told to go. And we said, what the heck, where are we going now? And during this time that we were there, we had an initiation on board. My brother happened to be one of them that got initiated there, for going across the Line. So through all the battering and everything that the guys took, and that, we got underway. And it was the morning of, I forget the day there. But we didn't know we were going to escort something, somebody else. It happened to be a big transport ship with all civilians on board. And to this day I think what went on with the bombing at Pearl Harbor, I can't understand why we didn't know it. I cannot understand, and I never will. To me, it seems kind of ridiculous there that we didn't know, when MacArthur knew it, and he certainly, I am quite sure, the general would have reported this stuff in.

Driscoll: Sure. Sure. That is strange.

Yetka: So what, I couldn't understand why we weren't prepared. Well, we escorted that ship and we kind of jumped around and everything, went around different places in the Philippines and went to American Samoa. And we dropped off the people there, and the ship. And during that time the bombing took place.

Driscoll: Okay.

Yetka: On Pearl Harbor. Well, we came into Pearl Harbor and we just, holy mackerel, I just couldn't understand all the stuff that, what the heck is going on? And the people, the people on board ship and everything that were there were so happy to see us, they thought we were the saviors. But we were one ship. And the whole fleet there happened to be damaged.

Driscoll: Yea.

Yetka: Well, from that time on, there we went back to the States. After a short time in Pearl Harbor. We went back to the States and we got refitted with some more stuff on there. And next thing we knew, we were going down to, down south. It happened to be that we were there to fight a few Japs.

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Yetka: Well, we went down to Guadal and that there, and the fight was already on. And we met the Japs there, and during that time the *Chicago* was sunk right next to us. Well, we did quite a bit of damage while we were there, to the Jap fleet going through there. Although we were just one, we had to jump in and out, real fast, but we did quite a bit of damage, and we, ourselves, got a hit in the fire room, which I was right next to.

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Yetka: And this god-darned torpedo didn't go off. But I had to stand watches in that fire room while that thing was bouncing around, all the way to Hawaii. Well, we did get it out, and they patched it up. And we were back on duty again. And we went back down to, down to the islands, and we, well, there was not much encountered there. There was a landing in New Guinea, and that. There was some instances where we had some encounters with the Japs, but very little. The next thing we knew there, we were ordered to come back to Hawaii, and from Hawaii we were ordered to go up to the Aleutian Islands.

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Yetka: What the hell is up there? Not knowing there that the Japs already took Attu. And

we encountered nothing up there. There were a couple of planes that flew around up there, but they kept away from our ship, because the gunnery, the guns, and that. And I guess to me, they looked more like, oh, observation planes.

Driscoll: Scout planes, something like that?

Yetka: So, but we were ordered to close the channel there. So we sunk everything they had in the damned channel there, all the ships and transports they had in there. Which wasn't much. And there was nothing, we didn't encounter any opposition. But, that was part of it there, and we went back down to the islands again. And same old thing. We were jumping from one island to another. We were in on the bombardment of Tarawa.

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Yetka: And, to me, that was the saddest thing I ever seen. To me it was stupidity, but I wasn't giving the orders. But some of the marines thought it was. And I think there was something like seven thousand, wasn't it, that lost their lives? Or were injured? So that day we jumped a couple of more times there, but then I was given orders to go to another ship. So that happened to be the *Cape Esperance*. A CV. And we were transporting planes to the islands and to the major ships, major aircraft carriers. And we, during that time, I understand the *Louisville* encountered some really serious damage. This I heard over the grapevine and they survived. And I understand that they really got a lot of injuries to their people there. So I still stick with my ship. That was the greatest ship I ever seen. This here was, well, this is something to fill in there. I became a chief, on there. Acting, which is not a permanent rank.

Driscoll: Okay.

Yetka: But we encountered a storm in which our escorts, the destroyers, both were sunk in the storm. I forget, it tells you how many people were drowned, died, in there. They didn't save very many. And we, it was more of the people up on the hangar deck that held the ballast on that ship. Of course, in the fire rooms there I had to do a lot of shifting of tanks and that stuff. Fast shifting.

Driscoll: Yea.

Yetka: But that didn't help. They figured it was all the human bodies that saved the ship. So from there, I spent the rest of my time on board there, and I was discharged from that ship.

Driscoll: Okay.

Yetka: And I was discharged at Walt Chamberlain Field, in Minneapolis.

Driscoll: Okay. When? When were you discharged?

Yetka: That was '45.

Driscoll: Okay.

Yetka: September, '45.

Driscoll: You got out right when the war ended, then? Well, you must have had tons of points.

Yetka: Yea. Well, there were so many points, they couldn't deny me of that.

Driscoll: Yea. Okay. What was the reaction on the ship when you heard that the Japs had given up?

Yetka: On board out ship? Ah, let's say it this way. Nothing much.

Driscoll: Oh, yea?

Yetka: Not much. I think it was because these guys were such veterans, they were going through it so long, nothing bothered them any more. We were numb. In fact, at the beginning, I was scared. I'll admit it. But, later on, it was just like some of the marines that were fighting on Guadal and that, who cares? No, really, it was just the thing there that we were fighting the war, I'm here today, gone tomorrow. So what?

Driscoll: Yea. I guess so.

Yetka: And, I did encounter one thing. When we went to Mare Island (California). On the lawn of a residence, and that was a civilian residence, "Sailors and dogs, keep off."

Driscoll: Wow.

Yetka: My opinion of Americans at that time was quite low, because all they thought of was one thing, money, and the hell with everything else. And have we changed any? I don't think so.

Driscoll: Not an awful lot.

Yetka: A lot of our boys gave their lives and I feel that World War II was justified. With the exception of, let's say, a little ignorance on the part of our military in letting stuff like that get by. I don't blame, I don't pin this on politicians, no. Military

people should be prepared at all times.

Driscoll: Yea. That's true.

Yetka: And if they were not prepared on Pearl Harbor, it was just carelessness and parties. And that is what was told on shore by some of the people there. We were party, it was out fault. So, I think that just about closes it. I hope I got, you can transcribe that if you want to. And you can get some of these and you can send a letter to me.

Driscoll: Let's talk to the folks upstairs about that. I think if they are interested in that, they'll want to photocopy them and return the originals to you. But let's let them, I don't want to say anything because I don't get into that. But let's take a tour through your album there.

Yetka: Oh, sure. Here, there is a lot of stuff that's loose in here.

Driscoll: Wow. This is absolutely right.

Yetka: I didn't keep enough. I should have, but wartime stopped a lot of that. These are pictures of during the time we were in service.

Driscoll: Now, you said you were in the Black Gang. But the *Louisville* was oil-fired, wasn't she?

Yetka: Yea. In fact, when we were in the Philippines, we loaded up at Borneo, just before we left.

Driscoll: These are great pictures.

Yetka: Is that the initiation?

Driscoll: It must be. Is that the Golden Dragon, when you cross the International Date Line? Yea, I got that. That is something. These are precious pictures.

Yetka: Yea.

Driscoll: What size guns did the *Louisville* carry?

Yetka: Oh, they were eight inch. But they were considered in accuracy just as good as a sixteen. Of course, they didn't have the distance. Their distance, I think, was something like twelve miles, so that is not bad at all.

Driscoll: No. When I was in, I was a forward gunfire, a shore fire controller. We went ashore and called in gunfire on targets ashore, and I remember one time I got to

call in the U. S. S. *Iowa*, the battleship. It was training, it wasn't war. We were in Cyprus, or somewhere, training the British on how to call in gunfire. And I think she was twenty-six miles away, and just dead-on.

Yetka: Oh, yea. Those battle wagons, oh, God. A lot of this is South America.

Driscoll: This is great. What did you do when you came out, John? You got out at Minneapolis?

Yetka: Yea. And, well, let's say it this way. I was dropped off at Treasure Island.

Driscoll: Oh, that's where I got out.

Yetka: Yea And from there they sent me to Minneapolis. Where I was discharged, there.

Driscoll: Okay. Okay. And then, what did you do?

Yetka: After that, I looked for a job. Basically. But it was kind of difficult because right after the war there were a lot of people who were unemployed. And so I picked up a job working for the Conservation Department as a fire watch. And I was, oh, off and on, I was what you'd call a fill-in there at South Lake. And that was the Forestry headquarters up there. And I sat in the tower. I was married at that time, and we lived in a log cabin up there by the tower. And we had to haul our water from Crystal Lake, near Boulder Junction. And we were there for a while until something I told the people at Trout Lake, there, "You better give me something better than that because I'm not going to have my wife living in a God-darned log cabin during the winter time." So they gave me a place at Plum Lake, near Saner. And that happened to be a big ranger house. And it was quite comfortable. And we scrounged a little there. During the winter time there, or fall of the year, I worked as a warden for the Conservation Department. And I worked out of Conover. And my wife, there, well, she was happy where she was at. And to supplement our income there, we picked pine cones.

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Yetka: And we did pretty good at that. But, I could see, this was no place for me. So, I met a guy up there, in Woodruff. And they happened to have a bowling alley that they owned, and the boys there said, "Hey, John." I was in their bowling league. And he says, "Would you like to go Phoenix?" I said, "What the hell am I going to do in Phoenix?" He says, "Well, get a job at Goodyear Aircraft." So I said, "Well, I might do that." I told the wife about it, and she said, "Go ahead. We're not going to stay in this damned place forever." So I went down there and it was a fast trip. I was hired the next day. And I didn't know what the heck. And they said, "Well, you are going to work on aircraft." Well, the first thing I did was working on hammering out ribs and stuff like that for the wings out of aluminum

there, which was soft SO material, and I had to repound it into shape. It would go into saltpeter tanks and soften again there, and we would work it some more, and eventually it would get hardened, and would be used by the assembly. Well, I did that for about four or five months and one of the foreman over there said, "John, would you be interested a different job?" And I said, "Yea, if it's better than this." He said, "It sure is. Would you like to work in the loft?" I said, "Wow. I'm not no farmer." He said, "No, no, no. It's loft work there, where you transcribe from water lines, buttock lines, and facea lines the position of different items on the plane. It has a lot to do with mathematics, and I see you've got a good background in mathematics." I said, "Sure." So, they, it was in the upper part, inside of the hangars, and below me was the wind tunnels where they tried out canopies, and different items of the plane. I loved the job there, and in fact, they even sent me to school there at Arizona State.

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Yetka: Taking some courses there. It was kind of lonesome for the wife, there. But she got along with it, since I was going up the ladder, she said, "Good." But like that heat in Arizona, women could not take it. It was meant for men and dogs. And my wife just couldn't take it. She said, "I want to go back to the Midwest." So I got a leave of absence for five years from them, which was very generous.

Driscoll: Oh, wow, yea. I've never heard of that.

Yetka: So I think they liked me, a little.

Driscoll: John, hold on a minute. I am going to flip this over, okay?

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

Driscoll: There is a little leader. Okay, there we are. Go ahead.

Yetka: We were, well, I came back to Milwaukee and, "What am I going to do now?" So I went down to Allen-Bradley there, and I asked for a job over there, and they gave me one. It happened to be on a punch press, which was not a very enjoyable job. But, what the heck, I got along. And I stayed with that until there was an opening for an inspector there, at that place. And I thought, well, I would take that. So, from there I went into inspection of aircraft parts and different components there, of planes. And I ended up at General Motors. And that was at the Kenilworth plant. In downtown Milwaukee. I learned a lot about gyros and aircraft, and missiles. When we moved our plant to Oak Creek, and built a new plant out there, it was strictly on missiles. And I was on the Titan, the Mace, the Regulus there. And later on, there, I continued to go up and I became a foreman over there, in inspection. And I was put on the Apollo.

Driscoll: Okay.

Yetka: And I gave the final stamp on the mechanical portion of the guidance system. And that thing went up, well, we prayed when they shot it up there. But it did hit, go up to the moon and came back, so it was really an accomplishment.

Driscoll: Yea.

Yetka: And, during that time, all that time, there, three children were born to my wife and me. The oldest one was Dennis. Second one was Dianne, which I lived with. And my daughter, Corrie, who lived in Arizona, and now lives in Chicago. And my son, Robert, who followed in my footsteps, and is now at Raytheon, in Tucson, and he is an engineer. And he heads quite a few projects over there.

Driscoll: Super.

Yetka: But, mainly, his interest is in missiles, and that. God bless him.

Driscoll: You mentioned that Kenilworth plant, in Milwaukee.

Yetka: That was Kenilworth. That was General Motors.

Driscoll: That is now, the state owns it, and they just use it for a warehouse. But when I was working, before I retired, I had several projects to replace the plumbing in the bathrooms, replace the windows, things like that. But that building is still there. Big building.

Yetka: It is? Yea, I remember some of the restaurants across from there.

Driscoll: Yea. Yea. Good restaurants.

Yetka: Frenchy's.

Driscoll: Yea. There is good restaurants right around there.

Yetka: So we, well, I.

Driscoll: So, did you retire from General Motors?

Yetka: Sort of. I took a separation because, well, politics got into it and Proxmire, God bless him, he did a good job at being, keeping the money down, and that. But eventually the politicians got back at him, and they got back at General Motors, in Milwaukee. And they cut back on a lot of projects. Even though we had great successes, it didn't matter. They said, "Well, we'll get back at you." Well, I was given the choice of going to Flint, General Motors plant over there, or taking

separation. I flew out to Flint and, you know, I took the separation from General Motors, and eventually that would lead to a small retirement. But I looked for another job. I had a choice there of working at Harley Davidson as a foreman, or a place in Plymouth, Wisconsin, at Gilson, which made rotor-tillers and stuff like that. Outdoor equipment. I worked there for about ten years, and I became a general foreman over there. But, I could see that plant was going just like General Motors was, downhill. It had to do with some of the management there. But, I said, "Well, I better get the heck out of here." I was sixty-two. So I thought I'd retire. And during that time, that I was working at Gilson, we built a little place up north, which I later transferred over to my daughter. And we said, well, we were going to retire up there. And we did.

Driscoll: Good.

Yetka: And I enjoyed the outdoors, and that. And that was really it.

Driscoll: Okay. That is great. When you got out, John, you had the GI Bill. Did you ever use it, for education, or housing, or anything like that?

Yetka: Ah, partially.

Driscoll: Partially? It got a lot of guys started after they got out.

Yetka: My son did. And my older son, from when I was working at General Motors, he took an exam for the Military Academy, for the Naval Academy, and he was accepted. And he served. And he left the Naval Academy there, but he had to serve his two years, so that was in Viet Nam. He was never the same. He, it, I don't know what it was over there. I have no way of telling. But he was never the same and, well, he was kind of reckless. He got into an auto accident when he went to see a friend of his in Atlanta. And he, shit, his car burst into flame and he was burned. So we just got, he's buried in Milwaukee.

Driscoll: I see. Wow. That's tragic. Yea. How about reunions, and that? Do you ever get together with any of the guys you were in the Navy with?

Yetka: Sadly, no. I was told, by brother who was on board our ship, the *Louisville*, he later got transferred to submarines, in New London. And, but he said, he was approached by some of the guys from the *Louisville*. And he said he didn't do it, either. He said he wished he would have. And I now, well, last year I joined the American Legion. I thought maybe this would be advantageous. And knowing some of the stuff that goes on. But, I had a wonderful captain, and it was a wonderful crew. On board the *Louisville*. The *Cape Esperance*, I can't say the same. We had a bully of a commander. He was a commander, not the captain. The commander. He was a southern bully, and all he could think of was Dixie. It is a sad thing that some of that stuff went on and was never taken care of. But I

understood that he was brought back into service, there. He was retired, and brought back into service. He should have stayed out.

Driscoll: Yea. You wonder how some of them just get in.

Yetka: I just can't understand it, because after being on the ship I was on. Well, I got to say one thing about the *Louisville*. They were almost all Annapolis men. They were gentlemen and they knew their stuff.

Driscoll: Okay.

Yetka: I'm not bragging up my son. But, they were sharp.

Driscoll: That's great. Well, you enlisted in the Navy, but still, you spent how many years?

Yetka: Well, actually, six years. Now, this happened, well, see, this was in January, of '45.

Driscoll: You had six years taken out of your life as a young guy.

Yetka: I don't mind that.

Driscoll: Yea. That is what I was going to ask.

Yetka: I liked it. It was good. It was an education. And I won't say nothing bad about being in there. I liked it. My brother, older brother, retired as a commander. And he went up the ranks. So, that to me is admirable.

Driscoll: Yes. Sure.

Yetka: How many people, you know, go up to commander from the ranks? Well, he had knowledge, there, and he used it. He was in the medical profession in there, and he ended up in charge of prosthetics. I mean Bremerton. He was formerly, when I came out, one time when the *Louisville* came into Pearl Harbor, or came into Hawaii, he was then sanitary commissioner of the Hawaiian Islands.

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Yetka: In the Navy. So, he went up.

Driscoll: He did all right. I have a nephew who joined the Navy, and he ended up as a corpsman, a medical corpsman. And after four years, he said, "I'm not coming out till you make me a doctor." And they didn't make him a doctor, but they sent him to school, and he became a nurse, a male nurse. And now he is a lieutenant (j. g.) and he has got twelve years in, and that. And he is just, you know.

- Yetka: See, they could do it. In medicine, you could do it. My brother told me that. He said, "You can do it in medicine. Some of the others, no." And he said, one thing about it. Six years I became, he said, "You could have had it permanent, as a chief." And I could have gone, like he did, through the ranks, and go up. He said, "You got a better education than I have, and you could do it, easier." When you are married, I felt that was not the place for me.
- Driscoll: No. And especially in the Navy, where you are going to have so much time at sea.
- Yetka: Yea. You're not home. And what is the day, my brother Joe said, he spent thirty years in there. He said, "You are lucky, on board ship, with the background you have in engineering and that, other than being in the deck force. You are lucky if you get six out of twenty on base." Otherwise, you're going to be on board ship all the time.
- Driscoll: Yea.
- Yetka: He said it was no place. He was divorced twice. First two divorces, they were away from the United States. One in China, and the other one was in the States. He was on board ship, see.
- Driscoll: Okay. Wow, this is a remarkable story. This is fantastic.
- Yetka: I wish I could say more, and remember more. But it is so hard.
- Driscoll: Yea, I know.
- Yetka: Some of the things that happened on board the *Louisville*, like we lost people. We lost two people on the way to South Africa, during a big storm. And we were going around the Horn, there. That Patagonia area, and that.
- Driscoll: Yea.
- Yetka: And we lost two of them overboard there. And they couldn't see nothing. They said, where are they? And there were examples there where forward fire rooms were hit. We had to peel out bodies there, which was not the pleasantest thing.
- Driscoll: No, I can imagine.
- Yetka: Because steam can do a heck of a lot of damage.
- Driscoll: Oh, yea.
- Yetka: But, you're taking a gamble, either way. War is a gamble.

- Driscoll: I spent twenty-two months at sea. Peacetime. But still, peacetime, wartime, in a big storm in the North Atlantic or the South Pacific, oh, my God. You look, and there is the North Atlantic, up there!
- Yetka: Well, I remember putting on, I had some firemen in the fireroom, they were scared to go up heights. So we had to put the canvas over the stack, so the rain wouldn't come down in there. So I was another second class and myself, I was first class. We had to put the darned thing on there, and the ship was, holy mackerel, was she rolling! But, we did it. And, I wonder some times, I had more guts than sense.
- Driscoll: I remember once, I had to go up. We had an antenna, a radar antenna, stuck. And they told me to go up and hit it. And pry it loose. And I didn't want to. I don't like heights. But I was a marine, and I was on the ship's company, because I was an electronics tech. And the first class said, "Okay, when you get up there, don't look down." And I said, ah. I went up, and I was shaking. And we got it turning there, and I looked down, and there was no ship! The ship is way over here! Because, and it's a wonder I'm not up there to this day.
- Yetka: It just comes back to my brother. He loved to swim. And he could dive like crazy. And he was a show-off. On board the *Louisville* there, we were down in the South Pacific, and they said they had an overboard drill. And swimming. So we all jumped off the side. But that show-off had to go up above, and dive. Oh, God. But, he loved it.
- Driscoll: Well, this is just a remarkable story.
- Yetka: Just a small incident. Dutch Harbor was one place we were at. Up in the Aleutians. And we met a ship, a Russian ship that came in there. And, boy, there was a lot of insulting God-darned people on board our ship. And they called them some names, there. Of course, they couldn't understand, luckily. Actually, they were pig sties, their ships. But it was only a merchant ship.
- Driscoll: I spent a little bit of time on the British cruiser, *Jamaica*. And topside, it was just glistening. And below, it was a garbage pit. They ate, they didn't have a mess deck. They ate in their bunking compartments. And I don't think they ever cleaned the decks. Oh, it was terrible. It was awful. The U. S. Navy, I'll tell you, it is clean.
- Yetka: It comes back. Just like you said. You put the enlisted man of the U. S. Navy with the officers of the British, and you got the greatest navy in the world.
- Driscoll: That may be.
- Yetka: Because them officers in the British, they served from childhood, on.

- Driscoll: Yea, that's true.
- Yetka: They are, they are officers.
- Driscoll: Yea, that is their life.
- Yetka: I remember in that example down in the South Pacific. I had to do some boiler work. I was laying some brick. And it happened to be on the British cruiser *Sydney*. And I was to take off of our ship to go over there, I went on board an old sock, we shot off our ship, with a pilot there and he took me over to the *Sydney*. And I did repair work. But they treated me pretty good, I guess. I can't say that. They treated me real well. And the officers were respectful. And rank didn't mean a thing as long as they could get their job done. But, oh, one thing. The *Louisville* had a history, prior to my going on it. It was commissioned in the '30s, early '30s. And it happened to be on a cruise to Australia, that they went into Sydney, and they were anchored there in the bay, or someplace in there. And a, what do you call it, a ship there that have cruises, like that there, with people on board.
- Driscoll: An ocean liner?
- Yetka: Not a liner but a ferry. Going to. And the wake of a ship came by and tipped it over. Now, that ship, you can look in there. Probably they got the records in Australia, of the *Louisville* saving many lives. Jumping over the side and saving a lot of lives. Now, I was told they have a record over there.
- Driscoll: Wow, that is something.
- Yetka: So, this is something there, good crew. And many of them guys were on board, and they were able to tell me about stuff that went on.
- Driscoll: That is tremendous. What a great story. See, you read the books about World War II and it's all overview. But you and that first class, second class, having to go up and put the tarp over the funnel, this is the real story.
- Yetka: You know, I should have done one thing. I should have contacted a reporter from a paper in Louisville and tell him to do the research on that ship. And to me, it would be a story, and could even turn out to be a movie. Because that ship had a beautiful record.
- Driscoll: It sound like a good ship. Yea. Tremendous. This is great.
- Yetka: I hope it helps you with some research.
- Driscoll: What we will do, I'll transcribe this. It may take a couple of weeks, but they'll send you a copy. And I need to get this signed. I am going to shut this off. If you think of

anything else, I can turn it back

[End of Interview.]