

Paul C. Cronin
Veteran

Eric Braman
Interviewer

January 12, 2006
Hudson Falls H.S. Hudson Falls, NY
Hudson Falls, NY

Paul Cronin: PC
Eric Braman: EB

EB: This is Eric Braman, I'm interviewing C. Paul Cronin. It's Thursday, January 12th at 6:30, and we're gonna start the interview now. When is your birthday?

PC: My birthday is 10/15/25.

EB: So how old were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

PC: Sixteen, I think.

EB: Do you know what you were doing at the time?

PC: At the time? I was home.

EB: How did you feel when you heard about this?

PC: I was upset, a little bit. We talked about it a lot.

EB: How did other people feel?

PC: Most people were angry at the Japanese.

EB: What encouraged you to join the military?

PC: The draft.

EB: The draft? That'll do it. When did you enter the navy?

PC: March 2nd, 1944.

EB: What was your training like?

PC: Rope tying, knot tying, swabbing decks, shooting guns.

EB: What was your main job?

PC: One of main jobs was shooting the planes off of the catapults. We were out there for two years. Stopped at Hawaii on the way home, stopped at Hawaii on the way back.

EB: When was the first time you were in any type of combat?

PC: South China Sea.

EB: Was part of it in the Philippines?

PC: Yes, it was. Saigon... Okinawa strike, Tokyo strike, Iwo Jima bombardment.

EB: What'd you do there?

PC: All of them were safe for me. I was in the bottom of the turret. I put six inch shells in a carrier and brought them up to the main turret, where they shot the six inch inches.

EB: So you probably couldn't see where the shells were going?

PC: I couldn't see much. I put the shell in the carrier and up it went.

EB: What was it like in there, while you were firing? While you were inside the turret itself?

PC: I never got to the turret. I was out on the bottom. We just put them on the conveyer to bring them upstairs to the top deck. It was dark, it was miserable. We went there every morning and every night. They'd general quarters in the morning, then we'd go down to the turret. They'd sound general quarters at night, then we'd go down to the turret. After so many hours, we'd come back up. Do duties for the day, whatever they were.

EB: When you were in combat, what would your duties be?

PC: Well, my duties were all in the turret. We just took watches with the five inch shells. They were smaller, you'd push the button and the shells would go off. The worst of it was when we were being bombarded by airplanes. We didn't use the six inch ones, you couldn't use them on airplanes. We could see what was going on then.

EB: Did that add any more stress?

PC: Yes. I had some pictures of it sometime—but I don't know if I still got them—of what the combat was like. They dropped a bomb close to us. Right on the front hall, so we had to keep the water contained on that end of the ship. Then we got it fixed when we came back to San Francisco.

EB: Wow, that must have been a rush. Scary.

PC: In the hallway, there's a picture of the Astoria. You can see the catapults on there.

EB: Could you describe the Astoria, what it was like?

PC: [Grabs picture] This was the Astoria.

EB: What kind of ship was it?

PC: It was a light cruiser. Do you know what the difference between a light cruiser and a heavy cruiser is? We had six inch guns and they had eight inch guns. Otherwise the ships were pretty much the same thing. [Points to picture] This was out back.

EB: Is that where the catapults were?

PC: There's the catapults and there's the crane, we'd pick them up after they landed alongside us.

EB: They were there for scouting?

PC: Scouting mostly, yes.

EB: What type of duties was your ship assigned to, to support the carriers and the rest of the ship?

PC: We were with the USS Wisconsin. With the patrolling group, we had four carriers, ships, eight cruisers, tin cans.

EB: Is that what they called cruisers, tin cans?

PC: No, that was a wall of ships, destroyers. They looked pretty small, I guess they were even smaller. I had some pictures of them, but I don't see any of them right now.

EB: You said you were at Okinawa too.

PC: Yes.

EB: You said you bombarded the island. What was that like?

PC: The bombardment? We still just shot the shells up. They postponed the bombardment for us. We were there for two days. The deck would be covered in—six inch shells. I don't know how much damage it really did, because the marines still went ashore. We still had a lot of fighting to do.

EB: During campaigns, did they let you know where you were going?

PC: Not until we got there. In fact a couple of letters, when I got home, still said classified. This material is not published. It's classified, this information.

EB: So when you were writing home, you couldn't tell your family where you were?

PC: They were all censored, they crossed out what they wanted.

EB: How'd your family do, not knowing where you were?

PC: I don't know, they never said much about it. They had my brother and my sister there too. He was in over Europe.

EB: What was he in?

PC: The U.S. army. He was a lieutenant, he got the silver star. He's seen the most combat. My sister was in the WAVES.

EB: What were the WAVES?

PC: They were the women in the United States Navy. That's what they called them, WAVES.

EB: You said you went to Iwo Jima too, was that pretty much the same deal as the Okinawa campaign?

PC: Yes. It was all bombardment. Even Tokyo Bay was bombardment. We went up to the bay, shot shells for a long time, then got out.

EB: At what point was this in the war?

PC: It was late '45.

EB: You said you were on the deck while the kamikazes hit the USS Franklin? Can you describe

that?

PC: Yeah, I saw them hit the Franklin. It was a pretty big explosion. They killed a lot of people, but the ship stayed.

EB: How did you and the other guys on your ship feel about kamikazes as opposed to regular fighters?

PC: That's all we really saw, just a lot of kamikazes. They were trying to get to the carriers, it was our job to stop them from getting the carries by shooting them down. That's what we did. They were coming up to the carriers, we'd try to shoot them down. Our 40 millimeters did most of that.

EB: You fired the five inch shells too?

PC: Not in combat, I didn't. I fired the five inch shells during watch, if I saw something happen. They were radar controlled too. They'd point them, we'd elevate the guns or lower them wherever they told us to, we'd shoot them off.

EB: When you were off duty, no combat, what did you do to pass the time?

PC: I was on watch. I was a helmsman, to steer the ship. That was eight hours off and four hours on.

EB: How'd you steer the ship, how did that work?

PC: It had a big wheel.

EB: Kind of like a steering wheel?

PC: It was called a helm, you steered by the helm. It was a big wheel, you'd turn it. You'd be out for one hour, and another guy would be out for an hour. We'd do that for two hours apiece, that was our four hour watch. We had four hour watches twice a day, in a twentyfourhour period.

EB: So you always had something to do? You never had any downtime?

PC: Well, yes, because if you were off watch you were asleep or you were swabbing the decks. Or doing some cleaning like that.

EB: Always busy?

PC: Yes. We had to keep the catapults up. There was a catapult seaman out back, and he'd shoot it. I'd stand out on the deck with my fingers up, and I'd hold my fingers down to tell him it was all right to shoot. There was an officer there telling us what to do. I'd do it, and another guy would do it on the other side.

EB: And once you came back, you'd recover them?

PC: We floated a net made out of a rope. It was hooked in the center, and had a "Y" coming up to it. They floated it to the back of the ship and the guy would taxi up onto it. He had a hook, and he'd get hooked on, and they'd drag him along the side of the ship and pick him up, put him back on the catapult.

EB: Did your pilots ever see anything when they were flying?

PC: They didn't have guns and they never said anything about being fired at.

EB: Did they do any reconnaissance.

PC: No.

EB: Looking back, do you see World War II as a defining moment of your life?

PC: The whole war?

EB: Yes.

PC: I think so. This gentleman right here [points to picture], the heavy looking guy he was on deck and a guy dropped a shell on him. He got wounded, he got the purple heart out of that.

Probably should've been court-martialed

for being on deck.

EB: He wasn't supposed to be where the shell fell?

PC: He was supposed to be below deck.

EB: That's pretty bad luck right there.

PC: He was the only one I knew that really got directly hit.

EB: So the Japanese mostly focused on carriers.

PC: When we came under attack, they were trying to get to the carriers, yeah.

EB: What were your friends like in the navy?

PC: There was a bunch of them right there [points to picture]. That's the group~we all hung around together.

EB: Did you all have similar jobs?

PC: Most of these people were in the second division, same as I was. There was a sailor in the first division, the head of the deck. He was from Glens Falls. He was a man named Riley. I never knew him before, but I got a tour one day of the bunk quarters. So I asked him where he came from, and that's how I found out Jack Riley was aboard the ship. I never met him before, but I've met him a lot since. He's dead now, a lot of them are dead now.

EB: How'd you feel about the use of atomic force against Japan?

PC: Good.

EB: Good?

PC: I'm glad we dropped it.

EB: What would you say to people against the use of the bomb?

PC: They weren't there. They don't know what it's like to sit there in the damn water and get shot at. They bombed the deck and the hall. If it had been a little bit more, we'd have went down. I was glad to get out of there.

EB: Where were you when you found out about VE Day?

PC: Same as any other day. I was aboard ship, and they announced it. We saw the general quarters every morning, every night, because the allies figured the Japanese might not know it was over with. So we stayed like that until we got back to Hawaii.

EB: So there was really no change in feeling on board after you figured out about the defeat of the Nazis?

PC: The defeat of nazis, we didn't do anything with that. We just kept fighting, because that was a different division.

EB: How about when you found out about [unclear]?

PC: We were aboard the ship and they announced it. But they said we had to continue to do our general quarters, man our guns, and do all that stuff.

EB: Did you still feel relieved by it?

PC: They were always afraid that someone wouldn't know about it, or that somebody wouldn't care about it and still shoot.

EB: You hear about those guys, who forty years later are still the islands.

PC: Yeah. They still bombed at [unclear], but I don't know anybody that really got hurt. They had to surrender on the Missouri. That's when they relieved us.

EB: What were you doing during the surrender?

PC: I was aboard the Astoria, we weren't near the Missouri. We just saw pictures of it, were told about it.

EB: When did you leave service?

PC: In '46, 04/23/46.

EB: So you were in for four years?

PC: Two years. Two years, two months, and a day, something like that.

EB: What'd you do after you left the navy?

PC: After I got home, I went back to school and graduated high school.

EB: You joined the service before graduating?

PC: I was a drafted~I didn't have a choice to go. I was a senior then. When I came back, I completed my senior year again.

EB: Did you go college after that?

PC: No, I didn't. After that I went to work.

EB: What did you do after high school for work?

PC: The first job I had when I got back was the job I had when I left. Harrison's Department Store. Then I went to David's shoe store, selling shoes. Then I got a job at a paper company. I stayed there for 35 years and retired

EB: When did you get married?

PC: The Korean War day. June 25, 1950. That one I remember.

EB: Did you have any kids?

PC: Yes, I had four. Two girls and two boys.

EB: Now you're a grandfather, a great-grandfather even.

PC: Seven grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

EB: How do you feel about the Japanese people today?

PC: Today? Not as bad as I used to. I still won't buy a Japanese car.

EB: I was reading in class, the guy who dropped the bomb actually drives a Toyota now.

PC: People have different feelings.

EB: During the time you were in the navy, did you ever see any commanders?

PC: Commanders?

EB: Any high-ranking people?

PC: I don't remember if I'd seen Admiral Halsey or not. We were in his division one time. That was another one of those navy things. The fifth navy, the third navy, we were all the same navy. They just changed the names on them.

EB: You kept getting assigned a different task force and everything?

PC: We were assigned different task forces, but we were all the same group. The worst one we had was—they sunk a cruiser—we had to go replace it. We had to go through the open sea as fast as we could go, and that thing shook the ship. We really moved that time, because there was no protection around. So we were a little scared.

EB: In one of the letters you showed me, you talk about the typhoon of [unclear].

PC: We were in the typhoon. We went in the wrong direction we ended up in the typhoon. I was the helmsman at the time.

EB: So you were on the deck?

PC: The helmsman was inside—way up on the top of the ship. The waves were right over the top of us. Right over the top of the ship.

EB: How high was the ship?

PC: Must've been sixty feet or so.

EB: Big waves.

PC: The captain went out the deck, went out the walkway. He got drowned and he came right back in again. He didn't stay out there very long after that. He thought he could climb and see more, but he didn't want to see that much. Then we had a second class man, he disappeared one night. Never did figure out what happened to him. I don't know how he got sent overboard. He was a miserable man.

EB: Were there any times when people got shellshocked?

PC: Not when we were there, I don't know of anybody. But when they got home... We came home to San Francisco, where they repaired the ship. Then we went back to Hawaii, and picked up some army men. We brought them home to Long Beach, which was near Los Angeles. We did that two times—maybe three. Shortly after that, I got sent home. When we came back, we were the second people to get leave. Half the ship went the first time, and the other half the ship went the second time. I flew back aboard the Tiger Cargo planes. There were five of us flying the planes. We flew right up with sailors. When I got back there was only one. I asked what happened to the other four, and was told they all crashed. Nobody from the ship was aboard them.

EB: They lost all four planes?

PC: I don't know if they lost people, but they lost all four planes.

EB: When you were getting your ship set up, did you have to shut all the hatches?

PC: They all had handles up, and they were all water type. You'd just shut the door and pull the levers. The control division did damage control. They had to do that. They were trained to do that stuff.

EB: What were the sleeping quarters like on your ship?

PC: We had three bunks a row. We all had a small locker for our clothes, and there was a bed off to one side. For a shower we had to go up to the middle of the ship.

EB: Where on the ship were the sleeping quarters?

PC: We were right there on the first deck, below the main deck.

EB: Was it hard to sleep?

PC: We were tired enough to sleep. We used to do the four to twelve watch. Twelve at night to four in the morning. Then we could sleep in during the afternoon for a few hours. Otherwise, the bunks were hooked. We put them up.

EB: What was the food like?

PC: Institutional food. It was all right, you could eat it. We had doctors and we had a sick bay and we had a place where we could go down and get some candy.

EB: They took pretty good care of you on board?

PC: Oh yeah, they kept us in pretty good shape. Down below we had k-rations.

EB: What were k-rations?

PC: Terrible, but they were eatable. We weren't as bad as the soldiers were. They had to live off of them. We just had to have them for a day or two.

EB: How often were you stuck eating k-rations?

PC: During combat. You had to stay below all that time. We were in our quarters and we didn't know what was coming. We'd go to general quarters and we'd just stay there.

EB: What's general quarters?

PC: Everyone on the ship had a job to do. The helmsmen were a different group than the watch helmsmen. They all had to go to a gun position, or something like that, from general quarters.

EB: You said you were part of the second division.

PC: Second division. First division, second division, third division, other side was fourth division.

EB: What were the differences in the jobs you'd do?

PC: Because of where you were you had different jobs to do. We were the ones with the airplanes, the catapults. They were the ones with the anchors. Other departments in there, they had things to do. There were forty millimeter guns, twenty millimeter guns in the back of the ship. I think there was a couple in the center.

EB: How many men were on the ship, total?

PC: Five to six hundred.

EB: How many of those were marines?

PC: Maybe fifty sixty. They were all in their own little group. They never mingled with us.

EB: So they had separate quarters and everything?

PC: They had their own marine uniforms and everything else, yes.

EB: You said the forty millimeters were for antiaircraft?

PC: Yes, they were the antiaircraft.

We had four guns in a turret, we'd shoot one at a time. We also tracer shells, and you could see the shells going right up. I think every tenth shell was a tracer shell. You could follow where your shell was going, so you knew how to move your gun and get it to the plane.

EB: What were the specific jobs for each type of gun? Like the five inches and the six inches and the twenty millimeters?

PC: The forty millimeters were the main guns. The twenty millimeters were the smaller guns. The six inches were as big a gun as you could get. They had six inch shells.

EB: And you loaded those?

PC: No, I loaded powder going up. The next deck was the shells. Then there was another group on the inside the turret itself, they'd shoot them. That was pretty much radar controlled. I was in one of the first crews above this ship [points to picture]. I own a gangplank on that. We let the ship go to Argentina. The British sunk the ship during the war, in the islands.

EB: How did you feel about that?

PC: I didn't know about it for years... a little sad maybe.

EB: Did it become a home away from home for you?

PC: It did—well, it was for two years of war. I never got together with anyone after that. That's

why I liked talking to Riley. He wasn't in the same division I was in, but he was on the Astoria too... Here's the ninety, you can see it [points to picture].

EB: The mighty ninety?

PC: They called it the mighty ninety, yeah. One of the officers or something named it that. They had a little book... they used to put out these... there it is, the mighty ninety [shows booklet]. Made 17 August '45. All these cartoons. We spent all our time doing this.

EB: It's 7:07, that's it for the interview.

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