

Milton L. Greenfield, Jr. (MLG)
Narrator

Ken and June Hunter (I)
Interviewers

Interviewed on August 26, 2003
Albany, New York

I: This is Milton Greenfield Jr. who served in the U.S. Navy November 1956 through August 1976. This is August 26, 2003 at the Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany, New York. The interviewers are Kenneth and June Hunter. What is your full name and when and where were you born?

MLG: My full name is Milton Louis Greenfield, Jr. and I was born in Albany, New York, 1938.

I: What was your prewar education and occupation?

MLG: I went to the Albany public school system. I graduated in '56 from Philip Schuyler Senior High School.

I: What caused you to enter the Navy?

MLG: Family, all my family comes from the Navy. The only ones that were other than Navy married into the family. I had three brothers and a sister, and all three brothers were in different services, and my youngest one was in the Navy too. In fact, he was in Charleston when I was in Vietnam, and he wanted to transfer, but the government said the senior – I was senior at the time – could stop the transfer. So, I figured my mother had enough to worry with me being over there; as the oldest, she didn't need the baby of the family over there too. He was very upset about that, but such is life.

I: Was there a lot of rivalry between the brothers at all, ribbing each other?

MLG: Oh no, only me because being the oldest, and being what they called a gator sailor in the amphibs, I used to transport a lot of Marines and soldiers, so that one kid that was [unclear] in the Army and I used to bust on him a lot. The next one was in the Air Force and he was down in Texas so I didn't get to see him too much. And, the baby, he was Ronnie, he was in Charleston. It was ironic because when I joined the Navy I was in mine pack and he was in mine land, and that's why he was trying to transfer from one coast to another.

I: For the benefit of the people that don't know these military acronyms, what was mine land and mine pack?

MLG: Mine land was Atlantic side, minesweepers and mine warfare. Mine pack was the Pacific side, which is where I was at, and mine land was out of Charleston. Mine pack was out of Long Beach, California.

I: Now what was basic training like when you went in the Navy?

MLG: Cold. It was in November, 1956. My company was the 1st 191. Mr. Lovelady was our company commander and used to take joy in getting us up at daybreak and marching us through the fresh fallen snow. Being from New York, I was used to snow, so it didn't bother me. The only thing that bothered me was when they cut all my hair off and the only thing I had military was a knit cap. And naturally my clothes didn't fit at first, but we filled them out.

I: I take it this is up at Great Lakes?

MLG: No, Bainbridge, MD.

I: It was that cold there then?

MLG: It was cold. I was at Chicago, or Great Lakes, after boot camp, because I went to Class A school. I was told when I joined, I was going to be a machinist and I wound up in electrician school. Needs of the service. Needless to say, I didn't pass the... I passed the physical, but fooling around I flunked out of it and I wound up back at sea, but I wasn't in any trouble, it's just that I wasn't interested in being an electrician. Later on in life, I became an electrician, primarily from the Navy's introduction.

I: Now, when you were through with basic training, where was your first assignment?

MLG: First assignment was Great Lakes Class A school. When I joined, I was what they call a high school senior recruit and after I took a battery of tests, I became an engineering mate. So, I was fireman going to electrician school and after I blew that, then I went to sea and I became an engineman. I followed through that the rest of my life.

I: What ship were you assigned to?

MLG: The first ship was the USS Loyalty MSO 457 – wooden ships, iron man, when the fleet goes, I was already bent. The theme was that if we ever get hit by a mine we'd be pulling toothpicks for the rest of our lives. The ship was made out of wood; it was oak and cherry and ash. We didn't have the old holystone. It was after the... they had them on battleships and cruisers.

I: The holystones for the uninitiated, were the cleaning.

MLG: We cleaned the wooden decks on the battleships and the cruisers and they used to have a stick that was a square stone and they used to move it back and forth to keep the burrs off the wood and keep the wood smooth and spotless, and

if you didn't do it right [unclear]... I've only seen pictures of it, I never did it actually. It wasn't a course they taught in boot camp.

I: Now, what was a day on that ship like, an ordinary day?

MLG: On a minesweeper? Well, first thing you got to remember, it's only a hundred and some feet long, forty to fifty feet wide, and if a liberty boat went by, or what we used to say, if a rowboat went by, we were underway. It was small, thirty-eight men to a ship including officers, and we usually had a lieutenant commander or a senior lieutenant as a CO. In fact, when I went on board the ship, Chief Boyle – forty years I remember his name – he was on the quarterdeck and he asked me what was I striking for, and I said, "Machine repairman." He said, "You're an engineman now," and he showed me where the hole was. But it was nice; food was good, we were compact and you knew everybody, naturally, there were only thirty-eight men and there were Fairbanks on some ships, the one I had was Packards. The only Packard I knew was a car but I became an expert on Packards IT 500 and 1500, which is a 12-cylinder diesel with variable pitch for a screw propeller. If the captain wanted more speed, the speed of the engine stayed the same, the pitch turned – similar to an aircraft when the propeller's pitch is turned, the blades bite into more air, in a ship it bites into more water. Top speed was eighteen knots with a good wind behind you.

I: So, I'm sure that it wasn't like a luxury cruise ship.

MLG: No, you were like forty feet, was the farthest you were ever away from your engine room, so if the [unclear] went or if you had to get someplace in a hurry, you could stand at one end of the ship and yell at the guy at the other end. We didn't have the modern conveniences of air conditioning and stuff like that. Later on, they put them on, but when I went in, it was vents and fans.

I: Did you ever feel claustrophobic?

MLG: Only later on in life. When I went on another class of ship, we had to go in and clean tanks and I think that's what brought on the claustrophobia. But on the ship itself, no.

I: What was the food like on the ship, the sleeping quarters like, describe the general quarters.

MLG: Canvas racks. It was right after hammocks went out. You had to string your own wrap and you had a horsehair mattress that got hard after the first fifteen minutes on it. The food was great. We had a lot of World War II food with emergency rations and such, but the first week out, you ran out of fresh milk and the second week out you started having powdered eggs, but you had plenty of canned vegetables and fresh meat. We had a good refrigeration unit. Fruits and vegetables. We had a good cuisine. We had first class of chiefs for cooks and third class were just starting out, so they learned from experts.

I: How long would a tour usually be before you got to land again?

MLG: Well, you'd get underway – almost as bad as destroyers, the old saying is, “You'd get underway Monday and you'd come back in Friday night.” Being a small ship, we had a special sonar – a lot of times when we were deployed, we would be called to go search for downed aircraft or stuff like that, because the sonar would give you a picture of the bottom of the ocean. I was an engineer so I only know that in passing. But we had all rates on, we had quartermasters, we had for navigation, sonar men for the mine sweeps, and most nights enginemen, electricians, machinists – not too many machinists in respect to above the third class. We had a seaman or a fireman right out of A school because we had a small boiler, but the engineman took care of most everything else on the ship, mechanical.

I: Now people think when they see today's ships that it's luxurious, you have plenty of water and all the cleaning equipment, your clothing washed and so forth, but that's not the case because your experiences...

MLG: My rating, machinist and engine, we used to make the water to use on the ship. When we left port, we'd have full tanks, but after you're out for a week or ten days, you have to be in a diesel-powered ship – it wasn't too bad, but there were times when we were rationed, where we'd get two cups of water and you could do your teeth, shave, or take a small shower. You'd be surprised what you can do with a ten-ounce cup of water. And don't get caught in the shower, or if you were in the shower – they had what they called a sea shower, where you were in five minutes, you'd get in, rinsed, soaped down, and rinsed off. Sometimes you'd soap down with salt water. And, final rise you'd get fresh water. But always the engines came first, and the boilers came first. But we averaged out about a gallon of water a day per man. The evaporators were what they call X12, we called them, but it was an X2. They'd make 12-24,000 gallons a day, if they were working right. And that was a mess when you had to take them apart to clean all the brine out, which is salt water that's been used over and made into fresh water.

I: Did they have roving patrols when the fellows were taking showers to make sure there was no wasted water?

MLG: Oh, yes. It was one shipmate would look out for another shipmate. If somebody thought you were in the shower too long, they would physically reach in and turn the water off on you. And if the engineers were watching the level of water and it got to a certain point, it wasn't uncommon for you to have to go up on the main deck and get washed down with a salt water hose. So, it paid you to pay attention and, like you said, the primary is the engines and the boilers because that's how you propel the ship.

I: What was the general quarter situation like on the ship and what was your station?

MLG: My station was various. It went from being telephone talker in the engine room to lea helm in the bridge – pilot house – and that was a control. The captain would call down and say what speed he wanted and, using the engine ordered telegraph, you would tell the engine room what kind of speed to bank. Like I said, the first two ships I was on, the variables pitch was controlled right from the pilot house. But it could be controlled remotely by the enginemen in the engine room. You'd punch in numbers, or you'd hold a button in until a certain rpm came up. The ship stayed at 250 rpms, and the pitch would change and then you would watch your speed. It was just like a speed boat – you'd know how fast you were going through the water. It would vary if you had a good wind behind you, you'd use less fuel, but there were times going to Japan, that, maybe a day out, we'd have to physically go into the fuel tanks and scoop out the diesel because we were running low. I've seen times when the only fuel we had was [unclear] and we'd have what was in the day tanks which was already fuel for the engines. So later on, they decided to put what they call a blob on the halfdeck, and they'd fill that up with thousands of gallons, I think it was 10,000 gallons of fuel, and that would take us from the States to Japan. We'd stop at Pearl Harbor for fuel, and we'd stop at Johnson Island for fuel and we'd stop at Midway for fuel. The difference was, in Hawaii you didn't have to worry about, well you'd never dump fuel over the side. But if you weren't paying attention while you were fueling, you'd pollute the harbor, and you'd be court martialled if you got to Midway and polluted their harbor because their stills made the sea water into fresh water for the island. So, we were very careful. I only saw one time in ten trips where somebody – not my ship, we never, I never lost a ship and I never lost an engine. We were careful.

I: Can you describe what the minesweeping operation was like?

MLG: Well, first thing was, you learned not to step over a moving line because you had line and cable and certain parts, depending on the sweep operation. If you were using buoys, they had what they called pigs, and they'd run out on a wire and there'd be cutters along the wire. If they hit a mine, there'd be a wire or chain and the cutter had a 45-caliber shell in it, not a slug, just a shell, and that would shoot a chisel out and cut the mine cable. It would surface, and then we would shoot it with either a 40-millimeter or small arms. There are various types of mines. Magnetic minefields, we had what we called a mag tail, which was about two-three six-inch cables wrapped around each other. It would send a pulse to port and starboard, and we had what you called a master and a slave, one side would be master, one side would be slave. The mine would be set off by an electrical impulse, and the electrician could vary the amperage that was going through the wire. It wouldn't electrocute you if you were laying in the water, so there was no danger of it transmitting back to the ship. If you've got to straddle it, you might get a little shock and that would set the mine off and literally, it would explode, and believe me, it's an experience when a mine goes off and you're about twenty feet from it. The whole ship is literally lifted out of the water

even though it's like you said, 150-some feet long and 50-some feet wide. And there's a pressure mine, where they have an apparatus, they hang over the side of the ship. It's a big drum and it sends out a pressure impulse and that sets another mine off. Then there's another mine – they call it a counter – three ships pass and the third ship gets blown up. Depending on the weight of the ship, when the ship goes through water, it transmits a pressure on the mine. And there were times there was so much pressure, a battleship would be so much pressure and that would be what the enemy would be looking for – capital ship. I was in the mine factory for twelve years, so I am pretty well knowledgeable about equipment. And then they had the other ones where there were two or three types of variations on the hammer. One would be a round one, what we call the dead head, which is just a flat – the drum would be on the front and I forget what the side was. There was another one that was an oval type that had the drums on the side. So, it would send out both ways, you'd have both of them over the side, one port, one starboard. It would protect the ship. We were usually light and we were wood, so we were non-magnetic. And then you had the magnetic mine, where a metal ship would go over it and [raises hand up]. The mine would sit on the bottom of the water. Moored mines were ones that hung up that you see in the movies, with the spikes on it. But the other ones, you'd set a little box on the bottom of the ocean floor and, depending on what set them off, whether it was pressure, electric or magnetic, not magnetic, the magnetic signature of the ship, and it would release the mine. You see the movies where the ship literally gets blown out of the water, that mine came up underneath the ship and exploded. Not on contact. Sometimes on contact, sometimes, just the pressure of the ship would set the mine off.

I: What was the next type of ship that you went to?

MLG: Well, the next type of ship was a six-month tour on a cargo ship and we didn't leave country. I transferred off it when it was heading for 'Nam the first time. It was a steam driven ship and we carried cargo. We called it, it was an AKA, auxiliary cargo. Now, I forget what they call them – they changed all the names of the ships, the designations, but we carried cargo and we launched boats and operated off of Coronado Silver Strand in San Diego. That's where the proverbial landing on the beach and the ramp drops and all the ground pounders, or Marines, jarheads, whatever you want to call them, run ashore. The story is, we take these guys to a nice beautiful beach and they'd start a battle. Unfortunately, a lot of guys got killed. For those drills, you'd train them so that they didn't get killed and I pride myself in the cargo ship and the assault craft unit 1, which is another outfit I was with, never dropped a soldier or a Marine in the water.

I: What was the name of the ship and how big a complement did it have?

MLG: Mathews AKA-96 and it had – don't hold me to the number – I think it was 175, this was peacetime. 175 -210 men. It was steam driven. My job on that

ship, besides small craft, was making water. Always made black water for the BT's, which is pure water for the boilers.

I: Then after, you said you were on there about a year?

MLG: Six months on the Mathews. All the other tours were eighteen to twenty-four months, depending on the type of the ship.

I: Do you recall anything unusual from that cruise?

MLG: On that particular cruise? Yes, but I can't tell you, it's confidential. The captain went over the hill. He was a drinker and I didn't tell you his name... Anyway, I was his driver because I was the only one he trusted driving the car, the station wagon, and we were in San Diego and I took him to the Oak Club and, being the driver or the captain's, the gig engineer, I had open gangway, so when the captain went ashore, I went ashore. He decided when he came out, he wanted to take the station wagon and they found it on the Tijuana border. He got reprimanded, but he didn't get broke, he got reprimanded. Like I said I was only on there six months, so there was nothing spectacular except for loading and unloading cargo and the Marines on the Silver Strand. That's where I discovered that I had a fear of heights – when you have to go over the side and go down thirty or forty feet to a small bouncing boat, I decided that I was going to change my rate to something else. I didn't, but I was taken off the craft. Get halfway up the ship and freeze, they couldn't have that. And there was a danger I could have fell, too. The captain liked me so he made me his... That's how I became driver. That's not a big deal either, because you had to go out on what they called a spar – that was a little pole they hung out the side of the ship and you had to go out on that and then drop down and come down a Jacob's Ladder, which is a ladder made out of old broom handles and [unclear] doing some weaving, and you were, here again, thirty or forty feet in the air. So, I didn't go on the gig too many times unless he came alongside. Sorry, I was chicken.

I: Did you have any shore based...?

MLG: Yes, it was supposed to be shore duty. It was in New London, Connecticut and the tugboat, YTM364, she was underway more than I was ever on the ship. Every time the sub wanted to get underway, I had to get underway with the tug. I was the exec on that; most made chief and I was second class. I later made first class engineman. So, I was second senior. So, we went up and down the Thames River. In the wintertime it was hairy because we had to break the ice between the submarines, and the submariners were a little skittish about having ice form around their hull. Although it never made any sense to me because they went down so many hundreds of feet under the water and it didn't bother their hull. But anyway, 2:00 in the morning it wasn't uncommon to get called on the radio or the phone and say, "Hey, get the tug underway and go up between the piers." Hairy, the Thames River, contrary to popular belief, salt water does freeze. The river would start freezing up and we'd have to run up and down and do coast

guard icebreaking, and we had one tug went literally off the ice, off the water into the ice, laid over on its side and then caved in the ice. After that they never did that again, they said “No more.” If it couldn’t break the ice plowing into it, we’d leave it alone, call the Coast Guard and have them send a cutter up.

I: Now the Coast Guard, did you get any ribbing from them if you called on them for help?

MLG: No, because we were right there in New London, Connecticut and the Coast Guard Academy was across the river. They called it New London sub base, but New London was on one side and Norwich was on the other. The sub base was on the Norwich side. The Coast Guard, we worked pretty close together. We had a couple of torpedo retrievers. They’d find a dummy torpedo floating out in the sound and we’d have to go get it. Normally the ship would get underway – the sub – and they would fire so many torpedoes and the retriever, the tugboat, would pick them up and bring them back to that AUW and they’d rework them. Occasionally one would get away and we couldn’t catch it; the Coastie would find it. Shallow water sailing, they did their job; we did ours, too. We were a white-water sailor, they were green water.

I: I imagine conditions must have been much better than being on a large ship when you’re on the tug?

MLG: Oh yes. Well, like you said, it was supposedly shore duty – they called it preferred shore duty - but we were underway more than we were tied up. We ate well. First, we had a choice between com rates or subsistence. The married guys all voted for subsistence because they got to take their money home, and the guys that were on the boat, we got fed but we didn’t get any extra money in our pay. It was one way or another. When they ate aboard ship or aboard the tug they had to pay so much; much more reasonable than in a restaurant.

I: To go back a little bit, to give our viewers an idea on the pay scales, can you remember how much you received when you were back in basic training and then up to this point?

MLG: Thirty-eight dollars every two weeks when I joined the Navy. The incentive was to make grade, you made more money, and also go to sea and you had sea pay, and if you went into hazardous duty, you got hazardous duty pay. When we were in Vietnam, we got \$110 extra a month plus tax free; that’s how I bought my first house. Every time somebody’d want to transfer back in the States, I volunteered to take their duty, and I’d ship in and out. I was in and out of ‘Nam about nine times; sometimes I’d be in there for six months, sometimes I’d be in there for a week. Officers used to fly over to Vietnam just to get the combat pay, which was alright – they also got their flight time, too. Some of them didn’t come back. When they were in, they had to go in on a combat mission. I never knew any of them personally. First LCU I was assigned to was 1500 – or the 500 –and we were in North Island and I was sitting on my sea bag at the end

of the air strip and this commander came out and he said, "Who's going to the LCU 500?" I said, "Me." He said, "Go on back to the barracks; it just got blown up." So, I was that far from being on that ship. I was in and out of country. We never got fired on. It seemed like every time I showed up, the war would be at a lull. Like I say, except for [unclear] she was upstream and we were on the beach unloading cargo and VC used to take water buffalos, fill them full of C4 or explosives, and they'd float them down the river and we were always downstream and all these coconuts and dead bodies of animals would float up against... We didn't know it at the time, but they'd lay up against the ship and they were electronically set off. I didn't see the size of the hole, but they told me you could drive a semi-truck through it. I was in the engine room on the next ship and it was little hairy. All I heard was a bang. I came up out of the hole, and somebody said, "The [unclear] just took one." After that, they used to put nets out on the side of the ship, so if anything came down river, it would deflect away from us. And of course, you always had the chance of rockets coming at you. But like I said, I was lucky, I didn't see that much combat even though we were in the combat zone.

I: For those that don't know, could you tell us what LCU stands for?

MLG: Landing craft utility. The one I was on, the 1610 class, if you remember the war pictures, they showed a floating road going from the ship to the shore. In World War II, the LCU would hit the beach, open up the ramp and the troops or the tanks or trucks or whatever they were carrying would leave the boat, and the backend of it was closed off and that was where the engine room was. On the class I was on, instead of having these causeways where they would lay them on the beach, if the water was too shallow for an LST or an LPD... LST is landing ship tank; LPD is a big dock. It literally sinks down into the water and small craft or LBT's, which are marine craft landing vehicles – I don't know remember what the "t" stands for – anyway it's a marine vehicle. They would put these causeways into the beach so the ship could pull up and either tie up alongside of it or drop its ramp on the end of it and offload cargo that way. When they made my class of the ship, landing craft utility, we could carry three main battle tanks, or 120 troops, fully armed and loaded. We would hit the beach, drop our stern ramp, another LCU would come in and drop what they call a rhino horn, line up, drop their ramp on that and you would have four or five LCU's going out to an LST because the water was too shallow for them to get close enough to have troops get off the ship. Our main goal was to land people on the beach dry. Nothing more aggravating than a soldier or Marine when he's loaded with salt water. Especially if his equipment gets wet. Anyway, that was the primary job. We were cargo carriers. We'd offload bigger ships and be out into the harbor; we could go up and tie up alongside and they would load us or we could go right inside the LST's. There was another class but I forgot what the name of it is. Anyway, that was our transport. There was landing craft and there was utility.

I: Can you tell me if you had any opportunity to take shore leave in Vietnam? What did you do for recreation there? Were there any kind of USO shows?

MLG: I never saw Bob Hope. He was on shore but we were out to sea. In Da Nang we could go ashore. It was a big base. Cam Ranh Bay we could go ashore. And most of the boats I was on, the mine sweeps or salt crafts, were small enough that we could go into the inner harbors. When I was on the LST, we could go in but we didn't have enough time because we were constantly transporting troops and equipment from Da Nang up to Cửa Việt which is where the DMZ was. We carried as much beer as we carried ammunition. You have to have a drink once in a while, not us because you can't drink on U.S. ships, but we carried a lot of cargo from Da Nang, Chu Lai, which is another little village in Vietnam. We couldn't go ashore in Chu Lai because it was in the Mekong Delta and it was too hostile, and our captain didn't want to take a chance on anybody getting killed or hurt or captured or whatever, so we didn't get any liberty in Chu Lai. Going up the Mekong River, we would make our own liberty. We'd hit the beach with the LST, clear out the area and then we could have barbecues on shore. I was on the mine sweep and we had a barbecue on one island and we didn't know it was a prisoner's island. One end of the island had all kinds of Vietnam prisoners and the Vietnam Army had control over it and we just anchored out [unclear] liberty boat, [unclear]boat, transported our beer and steaks and charcoal, and dug us a pit and had us a picnic. A couple of Vietnamese officers came wandering down the beach and wanted to know what we were doing and they looked out to sea and there's a U.S. Navy ship, big war ship, mine sweeper, with a little 40-millimeter pom pom on the bow, and he told us we couldn't stay there, so we packed it up and went back to sea. We had enough time for a couple of beers apiece and steak, but we were planning on being there five hours but we were only there for about an hour and a half.

I: I assume you went to Vietnam after you were in Connecticut?

MLG: Yes. In 1957 I left boot camp and went to Great Lakes. In June, I think it was, I was transferred to San Diego and picked up the first mine sweep, so from '57 to '61 I was in 'Nam. Then from '61 to '63 I was in New London, Connecticut. Then I went back, transferred... I was in New London, Connecticut. I had orders to AKA; didn't know what AKA was. That was the Mathews. Went to the Mathews; I transferred from the Mathews to the Leader. It was another mine sweep. Then I got discharged. We went to 'Nam three times with the MSO-457, twice with the Leader, and like you said, it would be a six-one tour and then we'd come back and then transfer to another ship. And I was always volunteering to go back, not that I was a hero but most of it – I was single and they were married. And one guy, we were on shore patrol together, and he was on the Leader and he was crying one night and whining, and I said, "What's the matter?" We were both second class. He said he got orders to go to Vietnam. I said, "Hey, I just came back and no big deal." We used to operate with all the navies in the world, Koreans, Japanese. We operated with the Russians but it was like they were on

one side of the river and we were on the other. And that was on the Sea of Japan. Then I went to New London. I was on the tugboats and I got on the cargo ship and I went back and I was on that six months and then I transferred to an LST and we got out again, went back, came home, did my ten days furlough leave and re-enlisted. They were going to make me a deal. They sent me to a class C school in Great Lakes, engineman school. That was the only thing they had available. I was already first class. I wound up teaching the class. The chief said, "You know more about these engines than I do." You had to take a series of engines and one of them was a 12567 and the other one was a 248. Well, I knew the 248 was a General Motors engine, and the 12567 was a General Motors engine and the D-9 – by this time they had changed warrants; they made the E-8 and E-9, instead of going to warrant, they still had warrants– but you could go to two more steps as an enlisted man. The E-9 and the warrant officer came dancing down the passageway, "Who's going to the Dixie?" I finally got a big ship, the USS Dixie, which is tender. I said, "Me." He said, "You're going to an LST out of Guam." I said, "Oh well, isn't this nice?" So, they had changed my destination. I took Fairbanks Morse, which helped me when I retired because I went to work for the State and we had two big Fairbanks Morse diesels down on [unclear] Avenue. So, when I applied for a State job, took a test, they found out I had the quals for the diesels so I wound up in the steam plant, which was all right.

I: Do you have any impressions of Vietnam? Was the country beautiful?

MLG: Oh, the country was beautiful. There was a little sea story. They used to fly me in because I was a refrigeration mechanic, too; that was part of the engineman rate. Those of us that were in World War II, you had the Motor Max and they took care of the refrigeration and auxiliary stuff, and then when they did away with the Motor Max, they made it a machinist's mate, he took care of steam, and the engineman was formed, he took care of the diesels and the auxiliary equipment, so every once in a while, there was Army or Marines would have a base in country and they used to fly me in with a helicopter to repair their diesel. One night I got stuck, because I was working on it and it started to get dark. The helicopter, they tied it down. I said, "What's going on?" They said, "You're going to stay overnight." I said, "Okay." They used to take Conex boxes which were cargo boxes and bury them in the sand when they were setting up the camps. The Marines or the soldiers – the guys I was with, were soldiers – would live in that and it was in the compound and fortunately there were no attacks, they used to get wiped out pretty regularly. This black sergeant was sitting there and we were eating C-rations – I enjoyed C-rations – that was before they got these modern LRPs, there's a new one out...

I: MRE's, ready to eat.

MLG: Yes. But I used to like the ham and beans, so... anyway, I heard this noise outside and I went to open up the hatch and the sergeant grabbed my arm and said, "You don't want to do that." I said, "But there's somebody out there." He

said, "If he's out there he doesn't belong out there." So, I'm thinking somebody put the satchel charges against the thing and everything. So, anyway, we went to sleep and the next morning when I got up, when I went outside, the sergeant said, "Come here, I want to show you something". The biggest cat tracks I ever saw. I didn't know they had leopards and tigers and panthers in Vietnam. He said, "Every once in a while, one would get into the compound, scratching and you open up the hatch and you get a 150-pound cat in your Conex box and we don't want to do that." Anyway, we flew out the next morning and I went back to my ship. That's as close to the harrowing experience... Oh, one other time, I was going the bridge ramp and I went down the tensile ramp, the ship was at bridge ramp, LCU. I took the truck and went down the tensile ramp to get our mail – I was on an LST then – while I was going down the road, somebody threw a rock in the back of my truck. There was always a danger of somebody hauling a grenade at you, so I pulled into a ditch and rolled out, and I had a 45 and I had a carbine, too, but I had the 45 in my hand when I rolled out of the ruck. This sergeant kicked my foot and I almost blew him away. Almost, because I didn't know what to expect, I was stunned from the truck. He said, "Are you all right?" and he kicked me at the same time. He said, "Don't shoot." I released it, put it back in my holster. He said, "We got the kid, but he was just throwing rocks at you." I said, "Well, I thought it was a grenade. I wasn't going to get blown up in the truck with a bunch of mail." You had to make all those excuses of what happened to the guy's mail. At that time, convoys would be going down the road, and kids would be sitting by the side, and there again, the third or fourth truck in the convoy, the kids would close the wire and blow them up. I never saw them, but they always told us, "If somebody throws something in your truck, get out of your truck as soon as you can." Of course, I had to explain to the captain why I dented the fender of the truck, but he understood.

I: What was mail call like? Was it greatly anticipated?

MLG: We got pretty good mail because the Navy hi-lines a lot of stuff when you're out to sea. So, if you're on a convoy or you're on a patrol, and I was on market time in [unclear], you'd pull up alongside the other ship, so our mail was pretty regular. I always got a least two letters a week. I had my mother and my sister writing. Most of the other guys... One guy got a Dear John, but I wasn't sure – I never saw the letter. But I think he was just using it as an excuse not to stand his next watch. We always felt sorry for him so we let him go sit on the fantail and mope. But we worked together.

I: For those that don't know. What do you mean – fantail?

MLG: The back end of the ship. The bow is the front and the back is the fantail. The quarterdeck is usually in the middle of the ship – that's where you come on and off. That's where all the brass hang out.

I: Was there a ritual that you'd have to go through to get on the ship and go off the ship?

MLG: You'd request permission to come aboard and request permission to leave and you had to salute the flag coming and going. Technically, you saluted it whether you were in uniform or not. The Army – they salute with and without their hats. In the Navy, usually you don't salute if you don't have a hat on. It's protocol in different services.

I: From Vietnam, where did you head next?

MLG: I came back here to the States again. I went to San Diego. I was on Guam. That was our home port for the assault craft and the guy came down the pier and he said "You got your orders." I said, "Great." I always used to make any ship, any coast, because being single, I was in the Navy to travel. He said, "You've got orders either to – wherever the boot camp is in Florida, I don't remember – but it was either pushing boots in Florida or going to someplace called 'Poughkeepsie'". I looked at him and I said, "That's Poughkeepsie." He said, "It's a reserve training center about eighty miles down the road here from Albany." So, naturally, hey, you get a chance to get duty in your hometown... I said, "Is it recruiting?" because I didn't really want to recruit, although I was proud of the Navy. "No," he said, "It's a reserve training center." I said, "Okay." So, I went there. I was home... The reserves didn't meet on weekends. They met different days during the week. We had a CV unit down there. And then we had a security unit that was up here in Scotia, New York and they moved them down, and the CB unit they moved down from Troy. They consolidated in Poughkeepsie. It was the halfway point to New York City. I was stationed. I made chief there, E-7. And I had a lieutenant commander who didn't like funerals, so I wound up being CACO, which was casualty assistance. Somebody got killed or somebody died while they had military time or they were veterans, we used to do the military funerals. That was good duty. Then a hairy experience there was – I used to have to go over to Earle's Neck, New Jersey to get the ammunition. We weren't allowed to have rifles on the station. That was when the flower power people were breaking into the armories, so we used the American Legion of Poughkeepsie's rifles. They were O6's and I went down to Earle's Neck and I got a thousand rounds of ammunition, and I didn't think, I just gave him the requisition. Some major in the Marine Corps, he was the CO down there or the supply officer, whatever. They put the can in the back of station wagon. Blank ammunition is no danger, so I had no problem going through the tunnels and that. I came back here and I stopped off to have a beer after hours at the American Legion and the sergeant at arms or the quartermaster or whatever they called them at the legion post, he went out and got the thing and took it upstairs. So, the next day we had a funeral. So, he loaded all the rifles and put them in the back of the station wagon. I picked up a couple of reservists, we used to give them a qual for drill – instead of going to a drill they'd go to a funeral and that covered the drill for the week. We were down in some cemetery near

Bear Mountain; it was in the winter. A gunner's mate was on shore duty with me, he was in charge of the firing squad, and we had a bugler from a local school. They buried – this guy was in the Army. He was a veteran from World War II. I had gotten permission from Washington – instead of playing taps, or firing the rifles and then playing taps, I had them play taps first and then fire the rifles, because people were upset. Especially when they were guys that got killed in the war, Vietnam. It brought them back to life. We'd present the flag and they'd throw it at us. They were mad. And it wasn't our fault, but they were hysterical. So, I told them, the chief in Washington, I said, "If we fire a rifle after we play taps it brings them back to reality." So, we did that. So, I'm standing there in front of this lady and I'm presenting the flag, and it was a World War II veteran, and I hear, "Ready, aim, fire. Ready, aim, fire." Twenty-one-gun salute, and I'm looking out into the distance waiting for the last round and I see these twigs falling – they gave us live ammunition. Nobody checked, even the gunner's mate because the guns were already loaded. They were bolt action. I made the presentation to the lady, saluted, and I turned around and walked over to the gunner's mate and I said, "What was all that noise?" because ball ammunition makes a bigger noise than blank. He said, "I don't know." He said, "I'm looking at the ground, and I'm seeing shells that had misfired," because it was World War II ammunition. It was supposed to be ball and there's two shells lying on the ground with a slug in them. It's a good thing they were firing off into the distance. Somewhere, there was a shell because after its spent, it comes to the earth. I said, "Jesus, I hope nobody got hit." I mean it wouldn't have killed anybody unless they were right at them, but going off at that angle. So, I took the ammunition back to Earle's Neck, New Jersey and, needless to say, and this major wouldn't take it. He said, "You never got it here." I said, "What do you mean I never got it here? Where am I going to get live ammunition?" I said, "Here's the requisition." I had a copy. It said right on it, "ball ammunition". It was my fault in one respect, because I never looked at the can because it said right on it, "Ball ammunition." Just, weird things that happened. You're responsible. If somebody got killed, they probably would have put me in jail. But I was fortunate, all we did was kill a couple of trees or broke some branches.

I: The general reaction from people at that time when you were in Poughkeepsie, when the Vietnam War was going on, what was the reaction – was there a lot of hostility from people?

MLG: Not in Poughkeepsie. When I was flying back from Vietnam, I pulled into San Francisco, Travis Air Force, and when we were going from Travis Air Base to the Navy Base, that was when the flower power people were active. When we pulled into the base – and I saw in the movies years later and I said, "That actually happened," – where a guy would be standing in front of a gate with a rifle at parade rest and they would be putting flowers down the barrels of the gun and they weren't anti-social – kill the babies and stuff like that – they went around with signs outside the base at Treasure Island. But the people in Poughkeepsie

themselves, they were very sociable. They were interested, they wanted to know what I had seen. Most of the guys that were stationed down there were from Vietnam. The local people in Albany and Poughkeepsie were pretty good.

I: Was this your last tour with the Navy in Poughkeepsie?

MLG: No, I went back to sea after three years in Poughkeepsie and I picked up a World War II gasoline oiler, USS Noxubee AOG. They carried out gas, diesel oil, lubricating oil – that was my Med cruise. We sailed to the Med and I went alongside the AS-16 Howard W. Gilmore submarine tender La Maddalena and I knew about ten guys on the ship, so they had a little club if we were going to be there overnight. I had nothing to do with fueling on this particular ship, so we went over and had a couple of beers and tell stories and lied, and I came back and we had to go to what they call the Zumwalt special. This was an officer that was top in his class for navigation, so they gave him instant command. He was a lieutenant Mike, MGM. He had to be the first in everything. So, hurry up, hurry up. Now this was a World War II oiler, so the pumps weren't that good and the valves weren't that good. So, we contaminated a couple of thousand gallons of lube oil for a submarine tender with diesel oil because the pipe that went down the main gallery on the tanker, there's other valves that go to different tanks, depending on what you're delivering. And somehow or other they had put the lube oil on the forward part of the ship, so when you're sucking this high viscosity oil through these pipes and it's cold out – it wasn't snowing in La Maddalena, but it was almost freezing, 32 degrees—the oil was cold and it was sucking lube oil through one line, and it was leaching fuel oil from another line, so it was contaminated oil. When they first started out, we were giving them good lube oil, but as we progressed, the ship was supposed to sample the oil when they came aboard, which they did, but they should have been doing it periodically. So, once they got the first shot of oil, it was good thirty-weight oil, so they said, "Okay. [Unclear]." Well, I'll never forget it. We were sailing down the Mediterranean and all of a sudden, return to La Maddalena, just a message came on. I was sitting in the chief's quarters and the radioman came down for the chief to give him the message and he said, "We're going back to La Maddalena," and he took off for the captain because the captain lived in the front part of the ship and the enlisted lived in the back part of the ship. So, we get back to La Maddalena and we had a four-striper – he made admiral later on, Shelton– he's jumping up and down on the quarter deck and he's pointing to the captain, and my [unclear] chief was in the pilot house. So, he said, "I want to see you in my cabin," and he walked off the quarter deck. The captain put on his hat and went up, came back and he turned around to the XO and he said, "We gave him contaminated lube oil." I said, "We'll just put it in one of the tanks and we'll take it to Cartagena and give it to the Spanish," because you can't separate lube oil and diesel oil. No way of purifying it. So, we got underway and we got to Cartagena, we offloaded the oil. In the meantime, they had a big investigation. They figured out what happened. The captain got a letter in his file which doesn't go over well, but... So,

we left Cartagena and we were heading back to Naples and they mucked the tanks. Muck means they take the seawater and flush out the tanks and dump it over the side. You can't dump fuel, there's still residual fuel, so we have chemicals we put in it that breaks it down, so when it hits the water it sinks. Technically, you're not supposed to do that, but the captain, here again, he was in a hurry, so one of our radiomen sent out a message, illegal, to all the countries along the route— Algeria, Spain, Italy, and whatever, the northern countries – that we're polluting the Mediterranean. He got transferred, he was second class, but he left the ship, he was third class. Captain got another letter of reprimand and we tied up in Naples. Of course, being an oiler, we were the last buoy out. It was an experience.

I: We've only got a few minutes left.

MLG: I could sit here for hours with stories.

I: It would be very easy. It's interesting. If you want to tell where else you were in the service and what you've done since then.

MLG: When I came back to the States, they decommissioned the Noxubee and everybody got their choice of shore stations or whatever, but because me and the captain didn't get along too well – although he admitted later on that I had been right; see officers don't like to admit that enlisted people are right – and my claim to fame, I get assigned to the USS Howard W. Gilmore AS-16 and that's where I retired from.

I: Then what have you done since then?

MLG: Since I retired, when I got out of the Navy, I was sitting on the front stoop of the house and I see all these people going to work and you know, I'm retired, and I stopped one guy I knew down the road, and I asked him, "Where are you going?" and he said, "I'm going to work." and I said, "Well, let me go with you. Let's take a ride down and I can take a bus home," and they worked in this beautiful marble palace they called the Empire State Plaza. I said, "Jesus, I'm going to get a job down here," so I took a State test and I became an engineer for the State. I almost got beat up a couple times standing outside waiting for the bus, and said, "Oh, it's beautiful. They let us work at this beautiful marble palace and pay us too." And then I retired from the State and I drive a school bus now for entertainment.

I: Well thank you very much.

MLG: Thank you.

I: This interview began at 9:30 in the morning and it ended about 10:30 in the morning.

MLG: Well, I hope it was entertaining.

