Robert Tidwell: This is an oral history interview with Mr. Stephen Kraus on 17th of October, 2003; Vietnam Center Interview Room and approximately 10:00 in the morning, Central Time. The interviewer is Robert Tidwell. Mr. Kraus, would you state your name for the record?

Stephen Kraus: Yes, Stephen, middle initial A, Kraus.

RT: Okay, and during the time that you served aboard the Evans, what was your rating?

SK: I was a signalman second class.

RT: Let’s begin with your childhood. Who are your parents?

SK: My father was Jess Kraus and my mother, Edyth Kraus.

RT: Where were they from?

SK: My mother was originally born in New York in Rochester and my father was born in actually [Grandforks,] British Columbia. They had lived in the United States and kind of moved around looking – my grandfather – looking for work.

RT: How did they meet since he was from Canada and she was from the U.S.?

SK: They eventually met in Los Angeles. Both families migrated.

RT: Was that where you were born?

SK: That’s where I was born.

RT: When were you born?

SK: I was born August the 5th in 1946 in downtown Los Angeles.

RT: What about your grandparents, where were they from?

SK: My grandparents [on my father’s side] were born – one was born in [Toledo], Ohio, and the other [grandparents] was born in [Rochester] New York.

RT: What kind of work did your father do?
SK: My father was a test engineer for Aero Jet through the years of the space exploration in the '50s and the building of the rocket mission.

RT: That’s what brought him to Los Angeles?

SK: Actually, he came when he was a child.

RT: Oh, okay.

SK: By trade, my grandfather was a plumber.

RT: What kind of education did your parents have?

SK: High school.

RT: Where did you grow up in California?

SK: I grew up most of my memories out of outside of Sacramento, California, in a town called Fair Oaks.

RT: So, you were born in Los Angeles and then your parents moved to Fair Oaks?

SK: Right. My father worked for Aero Jet out in Azusa and then they went ahead and transferred him up outside of Sacramento in about 1956.

RT: Did you have any siblings?

SK: Yes, I have actually two sisters and four other brothers. There was seven of us total.

RT: Wow, two sisters and four brothers. Were you kind of in the middle or were you the youngest?

SK: I’m actually the middle person.

RT: Right in the middle.

SK: Right in the middle and age separation is identical, too; there’s exactly seven between me and my sister and seven between me and my other brother.

RT: Wow, you don't see that very often.

SK: No, that's three that are very close of space, myself, then space, and three more.

RT: What was it like growing up with six other siblings?

SK: Actually, by the time we moved to Sacramento, my older two brothers were already out of the house. I had an older sister and then the other three came like seven years later. It was kind of interesting. My sister kept care of me and I kept care of the younger three, that type of thing. We lived in the outer semi-rural area that was developing outside of Sacramento.

RT: So, you were kind of in the suburbs?

SK: Right.
RT: What kind of childhood did you have?
SK: I would call it kind of an ordinary childhood. It was a lot different from today. We were able to pretty much go anywhere on our bicycles and things like that. It was nothing for us, for instance, to take a bike trip on a day and be gone all day and go miles and miles way out into the country, which is quite different from today where people are; number one, they probably don’t ride bicycles, and then they don’t go very far. We had a lot of, I’ll call it a country-type atmosphere. We played the normal kind of games and things like that that kids usually do.

RT: Did you spend more time with your siblings or did you spend more time with friends or was it about evenly divided?
SK: Probably more time with friends because there was the age difference.

RT: What kind of things did you do when you were a kid? What kind of things did you do in your past time?
SK: I did fishing at the river and we used to do shooting and we used to play sports and play street games; things like that. Those were the type of things that we did.

RT: Stickball and that kind of thing.
SK: All that kind of stuff.

RT: When you said shooting, is that with BB guns?
SK: No, we all had our .22 rifles and we’d go out.

RT: Shoot cans and that kind of thing?
SK: Yes, because you can get out of town relatively easily.

RT: What kind of work did you do when you were younger?
SK: I had a paper route when I was probably, I can’t remember the exact year, but I would say probably eleven or twelve and I had it for a number of years. Then, I washed dishes at a café and it was in a little town, an after school kind of thing before I started driving. Then after that, I had another job in the same café, but in a different town and it was bigger. I progressed up to that. Then, at the supermarket, I was a box boy and that type of people. We actually left Sacramento after my father died and moved back down to LA area.

RT: How old were you when your father died?
SK: I was seventeen.

RT: Then you said you moved back to…?
SK: Actually to Pomona, California, which is down in Southern California again so my
mother could be closer to – actually my older brother and sisters, who lived down here, and the
relatives and everything.

RT: So you had some family down there then?

SK: Yes, we had a huge family there.

RT: I would think so with just your family alone, seven children.

SK: My father had, I think, seven brothers and sisters, but my mother was an only child;
kind of unusual.

RT: That's interesting; your mother an only child and then she marries someone with a
large family. Must have made family reunions very full.

SK: Yes, right. We had huge, huge meetings. One of the things that I remember that
might be unique from when we still lived in the LA area; I was real little. We had once a month, all
of my aunts and uncles always got together at somebody’s house on a Sunday for a project. It was
a monthly project; maybe it was put in a wall or put on a roof, or paint the house; something like
that. That used to be almost a monthly ritual. Then of course, all my cousins used to all get
together. We would play and stuff while our parents worked at one person’s house.

RT: Wow, you don't see that much anymore.

SK: No. It’s one of the things I remember because my cousins and I stayed pretty close
because we had a lot of time spent together and we remember all this kind of stuff and doing those
type of things. When we all got together, one of my uncles, he had ten children, so I mean, there
was a crowd in just themselves.

RT: There was definitely no shortage of people with them to spend time.

SK: Right.

RT: How would you classify or categorize your family? Would you say they were middle
class, lower middle class, upper middle class?

SK: I would say probably lower middle class. Let’s put it this way, we bought used cars.

RT: Okay.

SK: Very used cars.

RT: So, when you got your drivers license, did you drive dad’s car?

SK: Actually, there’s a funny story, a lesson in life that I remember about my father. I was
out in the front yard working, I was doing weeding or something, and my father worked the swing
shift, so he was always there when I came home from school. It was just enough time to get my
assignment for the day and then he’d go off to work. I wanted to get it done so I could go with the
other guys. He tells me, ‘I just bought that Doyle’s car across the street.’ And I knew he had like a
third car and it was real old. I was just turning sixteen and I told him, ‘Oh Jeez, if I’d known that, I
would’ve bought that.’ He goes, ‘Oh.’ I said, ‘How about if I buy it?’ He goes, ‘Okay.’ I said, ‘How
much is it?’ He goes, ‘Well, 75 dollars.’ I said, ‘Okay. I got that.’ He said, ‘Okay. You can go get
the car.’ I go over there and I find out that he just paid $50 for it. Then he [my father] said, ‘Let that
be a lesson to you that you might want to ask and inquire before you jump on any kind of deals or
things like that.’ I had to pay $75, it wasn’t like, ‘Okay, well, you can go ahead and do it for $50.’ It
was kind of an interesting lesson in life. Anyhow, I had gotten a real old Plymouth that looked like
somebody spray painted it through a car wash.

RT: But it got you through high school.
SK: Oh yes.

RT: Did you spend time kind of doing your own automobile maintenance and work on it?
SK: Oh yes. I piddled around with it and piddled around with it. I went to a Catholic High
School, which is clear downtown in Sacramento. At that time, it seemed like that was a great
distance; it was like 16 miles away, but going from the outer area into town was a trip, so I did that.
I did that until my father died; it actually was my end of my junior year, so I did my senior year out
at the local high school out in Citrus Heights. I had enough credits, so I graduated at half year. It
was kind of a traumatic thing and I just wanted to be closer to town [home]. Things started
happening after that, so that’s when we decided to get close to the family because we were up
there [in Sacramento] all by ourselves. My mother had never worked. My mother had never
driven; she had never done anything and still had three young kids at home. We decided we’d be
better off to come back where there’s some support.

RT: What happened after that? Did you go on to college?
SK: Yes I did. I came down and I started at the junior college and I got a job again at a
grocery store doing some clerking. I don’t know if I told you, I actually got drafted. I had really no
intentions of going into the military. I was aware of what was going on around and I knew that
everybody’s draft numbers were coming up and that things were happening, but it just didn’t dawn
on me. I was in school; I had the original diploma that you had. It was two days before Christmas,
actually my mother went to the mailbox, came walking up and handed me this note. It was about
10:00 in the morning and it said I’d been drafted in the Army and I literally panicked. I jumped in
the car and I drove to downtown Pomona to the Navy Recruiting Office, where the library and the
City Office and the recruiter and all that was and I actually caught the Navy recruiter who was
locking his front door to take the Christmas break. He was literally – I told him, ‘Hey, I got drafted.’
I had all the intentions in the world to come down and enlist and all this kind of stuff because if I
had to be in any branch, I’d have to be in the Navy. Being in the Army before what’s going on in
Vietnam was like, ‘Hey, I don’t want to put myself in that position.’ The guy was really nice. He
goes, ‘Well, here’s what I can do. I can put this card in the mail that says that you had come in on
this day to enlist,’ which is true, and he said, ‘But what you have to tell me is you guarantee that
you will be here on January the 4th when I open; you have to be here.’ I said, ‘I will.’ When I came
in on the 4th of January, he said, ‘Okay, we’ll get you signed up. How would you like to go on one
of the 120 day deferred programs?’ Which was even better that I could finish out my school
[semester] you know, the semester of college, so that’s what I did.

RT: Did you have any relatives who had been in the military?
SK: My brother, my older brother had been. He had gotten out in 1962; he was drafted
into the Army.

RT: Did he tell you anything about what it was like being in the army?
SK: He drove an ambulance and he was in Germany and Ft. Hood [Texas]. His battle
was in the bars in Germany; that was the extent of his battle. I knew pretty much then; I mean
anybody going into the Army was going to go to Vietnam.

RT: And you’re actually into Vietnam.
SK: You bet.

RT: As opposed to being in the Navy, you would more than likely be off the coast [of
Vietnam].
SK: Yes, right. I knew that it would be pretty well with call to pay for adventure.

RT: What kind of things do you do now?
SK: Right now I’m a consultant. I worked 27 years for the Electric Utility out here at
Southern California Edison and I actually retired as the, what we called a Procurement Manager,
who does all the purchasing. Actually, it was kind of a surprise. I’ve had a lot of surprises in my
life, but they all of a sudden announced it; this early retirement thing that was unbelievable. I mean
that I wasn’t even thinking about it, and I’m just getting ready to turn 50 and so I retired at that age
and decided I wanted to work for myself. That’s what I do today. I do small business consulting.

RT: So, you finished your education after your time in the Navy?
SK: Yes I did. I went back, finished, got my AA, went back and got my BA, and then
through Southern California Edison, I picked up a couple of [Certificate Leadership Programs],
they’re not MBAs, but they’re programs. I went through a couple of programs that are real close to
that. I mean they give you a certificate, but they’re kind of like if it’s through Pepperdine University,
those type of things. So I got a lot of executive leadership training. That’s when I said, ‘Gee, I
could use this stuff outside the area.’ [Edison] (Laughing)

RT: See, it was a win-win.
SK: Oh yes.

RT: Are you currently married?
SK: Yes.

RT: Do you have any children?
SK: Yes, I have two boys.

RT: How old are they?
SK: One is 34 and the other one is 29.

RT: That’s pretty good spacing.
SK: The first one, you know if you do the math, was pregnant when the collision occurred;
my wife was pregnant when the collision occurred.

RT: That must have been incredible news for her.
SK: Yes. Communication then was not [very fast]. You tell a story today and people can’t
believe it because they’re so used to everything being instantaneous. Literally, she didn’t know for
three days where I was until the actual telegram came. My brother-in-law had heard on the news
on his way home from work and he came home to my sister and said, ‘Edyth, isn’t Steve on this
ship?’ She said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Oh my god, turn on the TV.’ My wife had just come home from
work and hadn’t [seen anything]. They called her and said, ‘Come on over, we need to talk to you.’
That’s how she found out about it.

RT: Where were y’all living at that time?
SK: In Pomona

RT: Pomona is where you enlisted, correct?
SK: Yes.

RT: How old were you at that time?

SK: When I enlisted, I was 20.

RT: Where did you go for your boot camp?

SK: San Diego.

RT: Okay, that’s not too far away for you.

SK: Right.

RT: You stayed in state.

SK: Yes. Now it’s not a training center anymore; they closed it. I go by it all the time and I go, ‘Oh, my gosh. What a major change in that short period of time.’

RT: Is there anything left of it?

SK: There’s resemblances of it. What they’ve done is give some part to the port authority gave some of it and their doing some development. Of course, the Navy’s still holding on to certain parts. The chapel’s still up and I think one of the communication centers is still up because it was so relatively new, but for the most part, in another couple of years, you will hardly know that it ever was a base. It was big; it was huge. San Diego is just a wonderful area. It wasn’t that hard for boot camp from boot camp relations.

RT: So, you finished out that semester and then you climbed onto a bus and went to San Diego?

SK: Yes, went to LA, LA to San Diego. They signed us in LA; everything was done downtown.

RT: Did you take a bus the whole way?

SK: Yes.

RT: That must’ve been an interesting trip.

SK: Yes. If I remember right, it started like at 8:00 in the morning. I think we got there at like 2:00 am and I think it was the first indication of things to be. (Laughing).

RT: You leave at 8:00 in the morning?

SK: Go to LA, show up in LA, and finally we get there. Everybody gets together at about 2:00 because they had this swearing in with like four or five and then they had to get everybody out at 6:00. Then you had to drive down and then you had to go wait in a certain place and then had to go to the airport and wait and pick up all your stuff. From the airport, which is just about 3 or 4
miles away; you got there, got there, got checked in; that was an all day thing. I understand from
most everybody, they all seemed to occur almost that same way.

RT: Then at 2:00 in the morning, they showed you where the barracks were?
SK: Yes, and they got you up at 5:00.
RT: Then your thinking to yourself, 'I just went to sleep.'
SK: Yes.
RT: What kind of living quarters did you have? Were these just wooden barracks?
SK: Yes, they were wooden barracks with bunk beds all they way and the whole company
was in one barracks.
RT: Were they kind of drafty?
SK: Yes, they were kind of. Luckily here, we’re talking about; this is May in San Diego.
Let’s put it this way, it wasn’t a drastic weather, weather change. So, they were okay.
RT: Your weather report was warm?
SK: Yes, 60’s and 70’s all the way through.
RT: So, your first full day must’ve been pretty tiring because as you said, you didn’t get
there until 2:00 in the morning and then they have you muster out at 5:00 in the morning.
SK: Your first day is all about getting your stuff and figuring out how to get the evac and
getting in a group, that type of thing.
RT: Learning the important things like where the chow hall is located.
SK: Yes.
RT: What did your family think whenever you told them that you were going into the Navy?
SK: My mother was really surprised. She was driving and everything by then and she had
settled in and the younger kids were in school and everything. The timing was the real issue. Had
it been another time, I thought, ‘Well, maybe she’ll find out and say ‘Hey look, I’m the oldest at
home; this is the situation.’” But, at the same time, I already had a sense of serving; is a pleasure
versus you know, call it a negative thing. I would’ve never thought conscientiously saying, ‘I’m
skipping [out of the country]; I don’t want to serve.’” So, when it came, I said, ‘Look, this is what I’ve
done and we’ll make the best and hopefully, maybe I’ll be...can get on the west coast and then I’m
close by.’ That was pretty much the decision. There was a huge void, but luckily my first stationing
out of boot camp was right in Long Beach, so that was relatively close.
RT: Absolutely. So, what were first thoughts when you had your first full day at boot camp?

SK: I think it was that, ‘Things are going to have to get better than this.’ I think there was a couple of us into that time I remember and that was I guess, we’ll call it for the lack of the term wasn’t them, but it was the diversity of the people. Here’s these people from places in Alabama and Georgia that I’ve never even heard of and then they’re in awe over seeing things that they’ve never seen. It was so different; they’ve come from a different topography in the United States. That was kind of interesting; all of the dialect languages. I’ve been aware of it, but I haven’t never been, let’s call it, engrossed or exposed to it.

RT: What did you think about the training overall? Did you think it was good, bad, adequate, indifferent?

SK: In retrospect, it was really good. At the time, I kind of liked to always know why I’m doing something, and then it helps me to understand and learn what’s the reasoning behind it. Of course, they didn’t provide you any; just strictly do this, do that. Stupid things like all door entries; you have to step up a foot and over. If you’re ever seen not doing that, going in the chow hall; those kind of things, somebody would stand up and say, ‘Hey look, do this,’ and every single time you do any kind of entrance, you do that because when you’re on a ship because you’re going through a hatch. Those are the types of things I think I couldn’t figure out; ‘This seems so stupid.’ But then after you’re in, then you realize, ‘Oh, this is why we did this, this is why we did that, this is why we did this, this is why we did that.’ You know, who’d ever thought using your pants as a flotation device. You know, ‘What? Are you kidding me? When in the hell would you ever need to do that?’ Well, believe me, I thought about that [a lot].

RT: What did you think of the discipline? Would you say it’s fairly strict or not?

SK: I thought it was pretty strict, but I think it’s a necessity. The military teaches you discipline and that’s obvious. I’m a believer that I almost think that we should make it a requirement and in my time and because of my age, I would say every male; when they step off of the high school platform should step onto and do some kind of time just for a reality check. Those that want to go on to professional will have that kind of a background and those that don’t do not see a future for them. That’s my own personal opinion.

RT: Well, it definitely teaches you to keep your priorities in order and teaches you a bit of a different perspective on things.
SK: You bet it does. Even though when I was in, I pretty well knew that I wasn’t going to stay in even after your first year; it’s everybody is saying that they hate it and this and that. But even later as I got ranking, I said, ‘Nah, this wasn’t going to be my long term career, I wouldn’t want to do this.’ Being away wasn’t really what I wanted to do. I thought the discipline was absolutely necessary. You can hear all those stories. Yes, there’s going to be somebody that oversteps their boundary and somebody gets hurt or killed or injured because of that. It’s really required; being on time means being on time. I saw it in the work place as a manager. You can almost pick out people that have never been in the military after awhile. You can see that the discipline is lacking on certain things; they were very lackadasical. Just simple things like being on time; ‘Ah, who cares.’ [In the] military, boy, you’re late; you’re in deep trouble. There’s no reason for it. There’s no excuses, even if there is a really legitimate excuse, there’s no excuse. You come back from liberty and you’re late, you fall immediately into discipline; there’s no question about it.

RT: What kind of instructors did you have?

SK: Our company leader was a first class. I can’t even remember; I think he was a radar man. Of course, he had stories of being at sea and all that. Then, our platoon; the guy that was in charge, was a lieutenant JG and you never knew what he did. Most of them [company leaders] were chiefs or first class and if you were having a class on one certain thing, it was the expert in that area and they were talking about that. Whenever they had any of the classes that was talking about why Vietnam and all that, it was usually always an officer, and the officer was giving why we’re there and those type of things. I remember those as being very specific that there always seems to be a distinct difference between the officers and teaching and what the enlisted men. The enlisted men; I could call it tactical type knowledge and officers were all done on the strategic side; okay [as an example], we got to make sure that these people all know why we’re here and all that kind of stuff; the democracy and the Communist aggressors, that [information] type of stuff where the technical part was ‘This is how you tie knots.’

RT: Sure. In retrospect, how would you rate or how would you classify your instructors? Did you view the professionalism fairly positively or did you think they were particularly well equipped?

SK: I thought they were well equipped. At that part as somebody coming in, they appeared to know what they were doing and there wasn’t anybody that said, ‘Gosh, I know more than this guy.’ Sometimes, you can attest to that going through college. Sometimes you look at
the professor and you go, ‘What field this guy come in from?’ But at that time, I was pretty much, ‘Hey, it seems what he’s got to say is what I got to learn.’ I thought they were good.

RT: What was a daily routine in boot camp? What was a typical day for you?

SK: I think the typical day was that you got up, you got cleaned up, you got dressed, you fell in, you would march to chow. Sometimes you would do an exercise before chow. They seemed to have it very timed well in certain companies and afterwards, you would come back; you would do your major clean up, cleaning the barracks, those type of things. Then you would start with drill exercises, then clap, and drill exercises, [marching], class, chow. It pretty much did the same thing and then your afternoon time might have a little bit of free time, but if your clothes weren’t [right] then you had to tend to that, plus you had to shine your shoes and all that kind of stuff. It was a pretty good pattern all the way through. It didn’t take too long before I think you were regimented with the routines of the day went. If I remember correctly, lights out were at 9:00. 9:00 to 5:00 type lights out. It could’ve been 10:00. Nobody had watches, so it didn’t make any difference.

RT: You didn’t need a watch because you had the chiefs telling you what to do and where to go.

SK: That’s right.

RT: So, you had different classes each day?

SK: Yes, usually at the first. You could see how they were very general at the beginning and they got specific toward the end of boot camp. At the end of boot camp, then they were talking and they’d take me to the fire range and they were teaching some people that never [even] seen a rifle before. Some people had done hunting before and so were real familiar. So at the end, I mean, it was real specific how to tear down a rifle [M-16], how to do this, how to do that. What you’re thinking and you’re always going, ‘I’m in the Navy, but why do I have to know how to shoot this rifle?’ that type of stuff. They went through navigation classes and they were the general type things. They did a battery of testing which did, to determine what your expertise was and knowledge base was. I remember them being very vague at the beginning, but more specific in certain areas of the end.

RT: When did it occur that you were going to become a signalman? Did they tell you that you had some aptitude or did you take a test?
SK: Actually, yes. They said during the thing right toward; gosh, I can’t remember what it was, but I’m going to say it was [toward] the last. It was the last third of boot camp. They said, ‘Well, you have an aptitude for to be a corpsman.’ I said, ‘Oh.’ Then I’m going one way or another, I’m going to be on the ground. I’m starting to figure this out that somehow I’m destined to be. Now, I’m going to be a corpsman, dispatched to the Marines and I said, ‘Oh Jeez.’ They said, in fact, they even told me, they said, ‘Look, you’ll go from here, you’ll go to Corpsman School and you’ll go on.’ By that time, I was like; I know now not to argue anything. I just take whatever comes up. That’s what I was planning on. It was almost the same thing through our whole company. They told people, ‘You’re going to go to the Fleet; you’re going to go to Radar School. Then of course when the orders came out; there was like out of our whole company, whatever there was, 70 guys or something; they were only two or three that were even close to what they even said. It was like everybody goes over this. This has to be incorrect and they had a standard thing, ‘Oh, this must be a mistake. Once you get to the ship, they’ll get it straightened it out for you.’ Oh, and everybody would go, ‘Oh, sure, okay.’ Through that, I’m figuring, ‘Well okay, at least I get a lot of training,’ because that was a long length. When I got it, [my orders] it was report to the Fleet, to the *Henry W. Tucker*; which was a destroyer. So I go on there just like anybody and say, ‘Well, hey, they told me there was this mistake’ and they say, ‘Yes, okay. Grab that chipping gun and start chipping paint.’ That’s when I decided, ‘Hmm, okay.’ So, I have a unique story of why I became a signalman. As I’m down there on the deck chipping paint and all that, I notice these guys that are leaving early [every day]. Because you’re down there and you see them, ‘Hey,’ after you had lunch and stuff like that and pretty soon you see the chief leaving and pretty soon you see the first class leaving, then the second class and pretty soon before everybody else left, you see the strikers leaving and I go, ‘I ought to look into this [being a signalman].’ So, I did. I said, ‘Hey, how is it up there?’ ‘Aww, it’s nice, it’s out. You’re in the fresh air, you’re up on the top of everybody, you don’t have to deal with all this stuff down here.’ I said, ‘Hey, how do I get on?’ I said, ‘Do you have any openings?’ He said, ‘Yes, I think we do.’ First they said, ‘Oh, you got to be a seaman.’ I said, ‘Okay, well, I went to our [first class] boatsman. ‘If I need to be a seaman, what do I have to do?’ He says, ‘You got to take the test.’ I said, ‘Sign me up.’ He says, ‘Yes, but you got to know this.’ I said, ‘Give me the book, whatever it is.’ And, he [was reluctant] did that because the ship was just coming out of the yard for an overhaul and it was just getting ready to come out; they needed [all the deckhands they could get but I did get to take the test] to start all
the training. He said, ‘Okay, yes, you can go up to the signal bridge.’ So, of course, I went up there and chipped paint for a while.

RT: Then you took the test and you became a seaman.

SK: Became a seaman and then they moved me up to the signal bridge. They call them strikers then. You used to strike for your rate.

RT: Did you have to go through to get another test in order to become a signalman?

SK: No. Only when I became third class. From boot camp, I mean if you’re finished with boot camp. When I got to the Tucker and then I got up onto the signal bridge, I asked, ‘How do you get ranked?’ They said, ‘Well, you got to learn the flags and the signals and the Morse code and all this kind of stuff.’ I said, ‘Well, let’s start practicing.’ So, every time; they used to test twice a year for your rate increases. So, the first time; I said, ‘I’d like to go ahead.’ I’d only been up there a few months and they said, ‘Well, you know, you’re really –’ We had a first class and he said, ‘You really need probably more time –’ And we’d been training off, and...He’d been in like 16 years and was first class. With him I guess, you had to be 3 or 4 years in the terrain before you moved up and I said, ‘No, I’d like to take the test.’ I said, ‘Even if I don’t pass it, it’s a good experience and all this kind of stuff.’ He had to sign off and I knew so much code in flight and all that kind of stuff, but you did and I passed it in the first increment, which meant I got the third class. We were already over off Vietnam then so we were already redeployed and over there. That’s when I moved to seaman to third class.

RT: You were first on the U.S.S. Henry Tucker?

SK: Yes, Henry W. Tucker. It was a DD875.

RT: That’s where you became the signalman striker?

SK: Yes.

RT: How long were you there on the Tucker?

SK: I was on the Tucker for about a year and two months, I think it was. Six months of that was over in Vietnam.

RT: Oh, okay; so you had some time near Vietnam anyway?

SK: Yes, I had six months in there [on board Tucker]. Just before we came back, when I made third class; there was two of us that made third class. I got orders off of that ship. So, instead of coming back from Vietnam, I flew back instead, [ahead] of them. I flew back and I picked up the next ship was called the Sterett; it was a DLG. It’s classified as a cruiser now, but it
was a guided missile destroyer; it was brand new. It just came from Bremerton, Washington, where it was built and it was sitting in San Diego getting ready to go through its refresher training class; it’s actually first class training.

RT: You were on a ship where you could probably still smell the paint.
SK: It was; and jeez, it had air-conditioning. Now, take the [DD] 875; was no air, no nothing. It looked exactly like the other ones do. A little bit earlier, because it was 100 members later, but it was built almost to the same specification.

RT: So, you were signalman on Sterett as well?
SK: Right.
RT: What was your time on the Sterett like?
SK: The Sterett; we did a ton of training; all kinds. We must have run up and down the west coast. I can’t tell you how many times we Bremerton clear down Mexico and back. Missile transfers, shooting, breaking in all the systems; and they did that for about four months. We’d come in for the weekend and we’d be out. We spent a ton of time at sea doing that. Then they went and decided…that’s when my wife and I were dating and we decided we wanted to get married. We decided to go ahead and get married in that December and then they told us right… I got married, I came back from leave and they said, ‘We’re going to take the ship and we’re going to go to Bremerton to take it back into the yard and then there’s a lot of modifications that need to be made. Things that didn’t work right, that kind of stuff. I thought, ‘Oh, how long are we going to be up there?’ They said, ‘Well, it’s about six months.’ I told my wife, ‘Hey, quit work; let’s move up there. It’ll be long time; it’s a whole different area.’ So, we did that. Of course, as soon as I got her up there, the six months became like two and a half months and they said, ‘Oh, we’re done,’ and then ‘Oh, by the way, we’re going to be home ported out of Yokosuka, Japan.

RT: Oh no.
SK: Yes.
RT: So, what kinds of things did you do as a signalman other than working with the flags?
SK: As a third class and usually you were signalman on the watch, you would have a recorder that recorded the message as routed them and those kinds of things. We did a lot of publications and stuff for shipping identification, code identifications of different ships and types of things like that; some navigation stuff. A signalman could always take over down on the pilothouse
if he had to; helmsman or leehelmsman; those type of things. There was always the maintenance
type of stuff. There was the semaphore and then there was knowing when you were doing your
refuels and your stores and stuff like that. The transfer of what was taken on through the stores
and all that kind of stuff. It becomes pretty routine. Then you’re another set of eyes; when you’re
on watch, always looking for ships that are trying to communicate.

RT: So, did you have any signal lamps or anything like that on the Tucker?

SK: Yes. All of them were pretty standard. They all had four; two on one side, forward
coming out.

RT: After you reached Yokosuka, then what?

SK: Once I was over there – and out of Yokosuka, what we would do is we’d go…it was a
pattern; Yokosuka, Subic, Subic, Vietnam. Then you’d either go back to Subic, back to Vietnam;
Hong Kong, back to Vietnam. You were other home ported and some of the people that the chiefs
and stuff had they’re family in Yokosuka; we’d always try to vote, ‘Where would you like to go?’
That kind of thing. They’d always want to go to Yokosuka. The majority of the crew says, ‘Well,
we want to go to Taiwan, we want to go to Hong Kong, we want to go to Singapore. We want to
see some things.’ That was one of the things that was always kind of an argument among the
people. The guys with crews in Yokuosuka wanted to go back to Japan. So, we did a Hong Kong,
we did a Taiwan. Then, I can’t remember, but somebody told me that they knew somebody that
was on another ship that was going back to Long Beach and that he was a second class signalman
and he wanted to stay in Yokosuka. I can’t remember, we passed some place, it might have been
in Subic or something and I signaled to him and talked to him and said, ‘Hey, I’m interested in
transferring. Are you interested?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ I said, ‘Then, we need to put in our transfer
request [and note] that we have an agreed on transfer.’ He said, ‘Sure, I’ll do it today.’ I said, ‘I’ll
do it today.’ So, we used to put in chits, they called them chits and said, ‘Hey, I want to transfer.
This is the guy; he’s on this ship.’ So, I put it in and never heard anything, never heard anything
until all of a sudden, ‘boom’, ‘Hey, you got orders to transfer to this ship.’ I said, ‘Whoa, hey, great.’
So, I said, ‘Where are they?’ They said, ‘You know, right now they’re getting ready and they’re
going to be leaving Subic and then they’re going to head and they’re going to Australia and then
they’re going back,’ because the ship had been over here for a couple of years and they were
transferring it back to Long Beach and the Sterett stuck in its place. I did that. I got the transfer,
but I missed the ship in Subic by like a day. Instead of sending me to Australia immediately, they
sent me to Hawaii, and I sat there for like two to three weeks waiting for the ship to come in.

RT: Were you a signalman second class at this time?

SK: No, I was a third. As soon as that ship came into Hawaii, guess what; it was testing
time for second class. I had just had enough time over two years to get that. When I came on
board, this was the Reeves, it was DLG24; when I came on board there, I asked the chief, ‘Can I
take the second class test?’ Of course, he didn’t know me from Adam. He goes, ‘Well, jeez,’ he
went through the same thing, ‘but I guess it’ll be a good opportunity.’ So, I took the test and I
passed that; so I got second-class when I was on the Reeves right away. So, I picked up that ship
and we came back to Long Beach and lo, and guess what they say? ‘We’re sending this ship and
going to Bath, Maine.’ You can’t win. I’m not home ported in Long Beach. So, we took the ship
around to Bath, Maine, and decided to decommission it for a year because they wanted to do all
the massive electronic upgrades to the ship; all kinds of stuff. So, I got to Maine and now I’m in my
third year in the Navy and that’s when I get the orders to the [Frank E.] Evans; when they took
everybody off the ship.

RT: So, on the Sterett, you spent some time in Vietnam as well?

SK: Yes.

RT: Then, it must have been interesting to go from a ship like Sterett and Reeves to

Evans?

SK: Yes. I knew by the numbers [DD754] what I was in for.

RT: A much older vessel.

SK: Yes, real old vessel. I knew that. A lot of maintenance; no air conditioning.

RT: What was your first impression of the ship when you saw it?

SK: I think I’d seen it before; I think in passing. When you take a look at the destroyer
squadron that was in, don’t quote me on this, I think it was on DESRON 3. It was one of the
DESRON 3 destroyers. The Tucker was in DESRON 3, Sterett. The Reeves wasn’t, but when
they switched, they moved into it. I’ve seen so many ships, but it’s hard to say what occurred or
what really happened in what times, but I’m sure Reeves steamed with them and passed them to
something like that before. All of those destroyers; I called them 2250 Fram Destroyers, they were
all the same; literally almost cookie cut when they were built.

RT: Where did you pick up Evans?
Here’s what occurred, and this is kind of unique from the last association meeting that we had. Before I left Bath, I came home. It seemed like it was right around Easter time. I came home, I spent days here, then I went up to Travis and they flew me from Travis Air Force Base to Clark and then down to Subic Bay. The ship was out. So, they decided to put me on an oiler to go out to meet the ship. Now, I can’t remember what oiler it was. I think it was the Hassayampa. But I can’t remember. That’s when there was a couple of other guys that we all met on the dock and one of them was the Kerr [son]. You met the Kerr family, right?

RT: Yes.

SK: It was his son. I remember because he was just like right came from boot camp to there and they didn’t even know it. Uniform is all still nice and new all that kind of stuff, a full seabag. They didn’t have a clue what to expect. I’d been in as my third year.

RT: He hadn’t had enough time for the laundry and lose any of the socks?

SK: Oh, yes, right. My seabag was half full now. Just a period of losing stuff and I’m not replenishing anything because I’m getting out. I’m now heading on the short time list. So, we rode out and some how we didn’t replenish with the Evans, so they transferred us to an LST and I can’t remember the name of that. The LST was then assigned to go right where the Evans was and so they put us in a boat and floated us from the LST to the Evans, and I remember that day because I’d never been in one of those. It was kind of unique. So, that’s how I arrived at the Evans. They were doing gunfire support and got on and they said, ‘Okay, here’s your rack.’ Put my stuff away and then went to the signal bridge and then just started like I’d never skipped a beat. ‘Okay, you’re going to have this watch.’ We shot for a couple of days and then left and went to Subic, then from Subic we went around to Manila and then they did the pre-exercise and we went on the exercise and that was it. I hardly had a time to meet anybody because times at sea, you stood port and starboard watches. You were either on watch or you’re off watch.

RT: So, as a signal one-second class, what sort of things did you do whenever they were firing the main battery?

SK: Just watched. Just looked for with their any kind of signaling. Usually there wasn’t because on the Tucker, we had shot, shot. We sat there and we shot; even though the DLGs did a lot of what they called it the Sea Air Rescue, SAR; where’d you go up north into the north [area of Vietnam] part and you just kind of were a radar check in and out of the flights on the carriers and looking for any rescues, [rescue pilots if required]. So, you did less shooting there. It gets pretty
routine. You almost know the pattern. You usually listen to the spotter’s talk and that kind of stuff, but there was other ships around that you could see another destroyer down a ways, so you had the alert to see what was going on. It was pretty routine and pretty boring.

RT: So, where was *Evans* at this time when it was doing the gunfire support?

SK: You know, I don’t know exact location, but that whole coast looks the same. To me, it always looked the same. A little bit different when you got further south and the topography changed a little bit, but it was just almost, you can’t even call it a Bay, we were just sitting there. We were sitting anchored shooting and then at night you shoot star shells for lighting.

RT: So, were you transferred to another ship after the collision?

SK: Yes, went to the *John Paul Jones*.

RT: So, you went back to a new ship or a newer ship?

SK: Well, it was a DDG and what it was if you do any history; the *John Paul Jones* had a bad accident where they lost most of the super structure, so they decided to convert it from a DD to a DDG. So, it wasn’t a new ship; it was an old hole [ship] converted to guided missile. The called it a DDG that did have missiles. I don’t think it shot the terriers; I can’t remember what it shot.

RT: That must’ve been interesting. You go from a ship; you survive a collision, then you go to another ship that had super structure damage at one point.

SK: Yes and they rebuilt it. There’s a *John Paul Jones* now. I forgot what it is. I think it’s a new class destroyer or something. I got to that ship; the collision of course, I stayed in Subic for a long time [after the collision]. I think it was like 45 days from the time the collision till after the court of inquiry; then I came home, went on leave, then I reported to the *Jones* and I was only there for a while. It couldn’t have been anymore than a month. They were in Long Beach. Then I got orders to go back for the court-martial. So, they flew me back to the court-martial and of course when I got over there, they [the officers] all pleaded guilty, so there wasn’t really any testimony that needed to be done. Then I was kind of stuck there because I had a low priority return.

RT: So, you were stuck in Subic?

SK: Yes, just kind of there. So, some Subic; what they said, ‘What we’ll do is we’ll send you up to Clark Air Force Base and then you can wait and you’ll go on return as available.’ I was up there for a long time. It was two or three weeks. Sometimes I tell people I’d probably still be there if it wasn’t for one of the officers came through there that had been on the *Evans*, had stayed in the States, and now was being transferred to Subic and was coming back through and I
happened to notice him and if for some reason, I think he noticed me because my uniform still had 
*Frank E. Evans* on the side. He said, ‘What’re you doing here?’ I said, ‘Man, I’m screwed because 
I have no priority orders,’ and he got me on a plane back to Long Beach.

RT: What officer was this?

SK: You know, I don’t remember. He was a lieutenant JG, so I can’t even tell you. I don’t 
think I would ever recognize him except for I think he recognized I still hadn’t even changed the 
names on the ship. At that point, I was kind of, I could have cared less. Why should I go on this?
I’d just have to do it again. Who knows what’s going on? I’m now on my last, well into my last 
year.

RT: When you aboard the *Evans*, how was she armed at that time when you were 
onboard?

SK: It was armed mostly with the guns. They had an anti-submarine type stuff. There 
was no missiles. There were torpedoes and we shot torpedoes; the 5 inch kind. It had 2-ounce 
hole.

RT: Did she have the dash unit at that time?

SK: I think so, but I don’t think we ever operated it, but I think that it did. I don’t remember 
even in the exercise us using that, but they might have. Usually if it didn’t involve you, you kind of 
didn’t paid attention to everything what’s going on.

RT: During the time that you were serving in Vietnam, were they any particularly brave 
actions that you had witnessed?

SK: In my estimate that I sent you, when I was on the *Tucker*, that’s when the *Forrestal* 
[aircraft carrier] had that fire. Now, are you familiar with that?

RT: I am familiar with it, yes.

SK: We were the plane guard ship for that. There’s a little story that goes with it. During 
the night before the fire, don’t ask me what we were doing, but actually, I was on watch and they 
indicated that they thought they had lost a man overboard. We started doing a search to look for 
the man overboard and that was probably, I’m going to call it 1:00 in the morning or something like 
that. When we did that, the man overboard thing, they [the *Forrestal*] finally said, ‘Hey look, we 
have to meet our commitment; get on Yankee Station.’ So, they left and we continued to look.

Just before dawn, I don’t know if they confirmed that, no, they hadn’t lost somebody or we couldn’t 
find anybody, but they had to launch, so they said, ‘Once you’re in sight of the ship, they would go
ahead and do their launch.’ So, we were steaming forward when that fire broke out. I was actually
up on watch and was watching and you didn’t notice the flames, but all of a sudden the smoke and
stuff like that and they said that they had a huge fire. They were turning into the wind to keep the
fire on the outside [backside], so we watched the whole thing go on. It wasn’t until later, I mean,
this had been years ago that someone told me someplace that they thought John McCain was on
that ship, was a pilot off of that ship. I don’t know if that’s true or not.

RT: So, you were able to watch the fire crews?

SK: Oh yes, we watched it all day [and] into the night. The other ships joined us. We
picked up some things that had gone over the side, some rubber boats and debris and stuff like
that that had come off. I think they shoved some planes, but they went down. It was a massive
thing. That was on the Tucker. I had just made third class or something. Of course, we heard all
the stories of all the people that…heroism that took place on that, keeping the fire contained and all
that. Like I said, I think I have the Life Magazine. In the pictures, there’s one picture that shows
Tucker off to the side or the back or something like that.

RT: When you were watching the efforts aboard Forrestal, that’s when you remembered
things back in boot camp, like how to make a life preserver out of your trousers.

SK: Right.

RT: When you were serving aboard Evans at that time, what kind of interaction did you
have with any of the Costal Surveillance Centers?

SK: None.

RT: None. So, at that time that you spent in Vietnam aboard ship, what is your evaluation
of the Allied Naval coordination?

SK: You know, I’d only seen a couple of other Allied Naval ships and all of them were in
port. So, I’d never seen one at sea. So, I don’t know, to be honest, what their involvement was. I
think I saw one in Hong Kong and the other in Subic I think it was. I think I always, like in Subic,
always wondered why they got next to the pier. We always had to anchor out. (Laughing). As a
signalman, you always knew, you could figure out where you were going to go. If you’re going into
port and ships were there, you knew what kind of position you’re going to get. Captains have their
lineal numbers and so rank means everything. If you’re a senior to somebody else, you can make
them move, that kind of stuff. Usually, coming into ports, especially on the Sterret, we had a
senior, senior captain. He was real senior. He had two lineal numbers higher than the captain of
the New Jersey when they put in commission. That's how senior he was. So, when we came into
Long Beach, he made him move on Pier E, which was Pier Echo, which was the main pier. He
said, 'Move' and then he finally said, 'Well look, move down and then we'll tack onto the end,' so
we'd have the best spot in Long Beach.
RT: When you're aboard ship, what was your daily routine?
SK: On watch; sleep, on watch; sleep. We stood port and starboard watches at sea.
RT: How long were your watches?
SK: The first watch would take; you would relieve the midnight shift in the morning, so it
would be after breakfast and then you would be on all day until after dinner. Then you would sleep,
then you would come on and you would be on from the midnight watch, which is recorded till 12 till
after breakfast. That's port/starboard watches; on, off. Then when you're off; then you'd sleep the
whole day and you'd come on for the evening one. That was kind of a standard signalman's
watch. Almost all the ships did that. You literally didn't have enough people for much more than
that.
RT: So, what did you normally do during your watch?
SK: Watch. Other ships, you might make new publication updates. They were always
making sure your publications were up [to date] and those type of things. But you know, you were
just kind of on watch and any time there's messages, then your recorder had to route them and you
had to log them and all that kind of stuff. That's why the night of the collision; it was because it was
a [full] darken ship, then you knew, 'Jeez, there's not going to be any communication. It's kind of
like free time, but you still have to be on watch.'
RT: When you weren't at sea, when you were in port, what sort of things did you do then?
SK: Maintenance. You'd do maintenance on the signal bridge, maintenance to the lights,
update your supplies, and [fix] flags, either we replenished, replaced; those types of things.
Signalmen were often, you had the master at arms, the mess deck master at arms, import. If
you're going to be in for a long time, usually one of the signalman would have to be mess deck
master at arms or he stood watch on deck watch, on the ship deck and did that. At sea, you stand
so much watch; in port, you probably...like if the normal shift was on three days, maybe there was
three sections and the signalman; let's say we had maybe four petty officers and a couple of
recorders, then maybe we would be on four section instead of three, which means you didn't have
to stand in four watches duty as much. It kind of made up for when we were at sea when you’re on
all the time.

RT: How much difference was there between the signal bridge and the Evans and some
of the other destroyers, some which you served?
SK: What do you mean?
RT: Well, I mean, was it substantially different or were they all pretty much the same?
SK: This one was a little bit different because it was a lot smaller. On the DLG, the signal
bridge actually sits at the same level as the pilothouse that it sits behind in combat is in between.
The super structure is pretty long there and so from a lookout standpoint, you stand out on the
wings more for forward, where the DDs, you were up on the deck up above the pilothouse. So,
that was a significant difference there. Space was always limited. There wasn’t any. Nobody
had...just how I have so much space and I don’t know what to do with it.
RT: Just enough room to turn around?
SK: Right. The signal shack was exactly what it is, is a shack. I couldn’t even tell you
what the size was. 4 by 6 maybe, something like that.
RT: So, was it enclosed?
SK: Yes.
RT: Okay. So, that gave you a little bit of shelter from foul weather, just a little bit.
SK: Oh yes. When you were going through weather and the waves were breaking up in
that area, you’d literally sometimes be in the shack and if you were behind a carrier and they were
signaling, you have to run out, acknowledge, run back in so you didn’t get hit with the next wave
because they break over the pilot house. Lots of time, you saw green water.
RT: That must have been quite an experience for you.
SK: Yes.
RT: Is that the first time you ever saw it?
SK: Well, the first time yes, I was on the Tucker.
RT: You probably didn’t see anything quite like that until that first time.
SK: Oh, right. I’d seen it breaking over the bow and all that kind of stuff which doesn’t
take a whole lot for a destroyer, but when it starts breaking up at the pilothouse, that’s a pretty
good swell.
RT: Those are the kind that makes bit of your life kind of flash before your eyes a little.
SK: Yes.

RT: How comfortable was it up there? Did you have any access to coffee or anything like that?

SK: Yes, we usually had our own coffee thing because it was so far down to get it. We’d have that, and I think most of them always had a popcorn maker or something like that. I remember having a popcorn maker.

RT: So, you had a little bit of a snack while you were up there.

SK: Yes. We had something unique that nobody else usually had; we had a sewing machine.

RT: Oh okay, for the flags.

SK: Right, you were constantly sewing up the frayed parts of the flags and that kind of stuff. We had that; yeah, pretty standard, all your publications and stuff like that. Like I said, there was never any extra space; we had our sail locker was...Every ship I was on was unique. The sail locker was always in the forward part of the bow; I mean right at the point and then we’d have our extra supplies. For me, when we went overseas, I put all my blues in the front. You knew you weren’t going to need them until you came back, so you put your blues and your peacoat and all that kind of stuff up there and put it away. That’s why when the Evans went down, all I had in my locker was a couple of pairs of whites and my dungarees. Everything else was on the forward section.

RT: Where was your bunk in the Evans?

SK: In the aft.

RT: In the aft section?

SK: Yes.

RT: When you were aboard ship, how often did you go to port?

SK: On the Evans?

RT: Yes.

SK: We only went to Subic one day and to Manila two days; two or three for the pre-op and that was it because I was only on there now 18 days and I got post.

RT: When you were on the Tucker?

SK: How often did we go to port?

RT: Sure.
SK: We’d do about 30 to 40 [days] out and we’d probably do three in and back out.

Longest I was ever at sea was on the Sterett and it was like 56 days out.

RT: You’re almost two months out.

SK: Yes, just about.

RT: What kind of things did you do for recreation?

SK: As a signalman?

RT: Sure.

SK: None, because you were either on watch or you were off watch; on watch or off watch. If you wanted to do something, you would have to ding out that long, [give up sleep] maybe out of that period of time, I maybe saw two movies. So, what you’d do is you’d give up sleeping from one of the 6:00 to midnight times. You’d say, ‘Okay, I’m going to watch the movie,’ which started at eight. So, that means you can’t go to sleep before then and you can’t go afterwards so you would’ve come off watch at, we’ll call it 6:00 in the evening, now you’re going to be awake all night and all day again because the port and the starboard pallet had all the jets. You had to get ready to do that if you wanted to do that. I did that a couple of times.

RT: When you went into port, did you do anything for recreation?

SK: I usually go see the sights. We went, of course to Yokosuka; got to go up to Tokyo to see some of the things there. In Subic, there was nothing to do and I’d go to a bar in Olongapo, that type of stuff. In Hong Kong we were restricted to like three blocks, so that wasn’t open like you could go anywhere you wanted to. You got to remember in that time, most of the places wasn’t restricted like, ‘Jeez you’re on, you’re in this country go where you want and be back.’ You couldn’t; you go only so far away and then you always had Cinderella liberty; you always had to be back by midnight. There was no overnight stuff; none of that.

RT: So, y’all didn’t have time or at least you didn’t have time to do anything like play a football game or something when you were in Subic?

SK: Well, we did. Usually the ship; it just depended. I remember the Tucker did it and the Sterett did it where we went out to one of the little recreational area; we had the whole thing. We played baseball and they had picnic and all that kind of stuff. We did those kinds of things as a ship; the ship’s company would do it [promote specific events], and they would do it and they would take some moneys out of funds and stuff like that to do that. (Phone ringing) It’s my business
phone ringing. I hope they pick it up. So, we’d do those kinds of things. There wasn’t a whole lot; there wasn’t a lot of time or money to do much.

RT: When you’re aboard ship, what were your living conditions?

SK: They were three-rack high type. The Sterett was nice because it had storage under your rack instead of the footlocker type thing. It was air conditioned and the lighting for each one of the bunks, but when you get on the Evans, the Tucker, and that kind of stuff, they were stretch canvas [racks] with the pads, that type.

RT: I recall in the questionnaire that you had completed that you had made mention that the latrines were not close to any living area. That was one of the things that you had remarked on.

SK: Yes, they were usually centrally located. It wasn’t like you had one in your own living area. I can’t remember on the Evans but the Tucker, they were so close that it was actually, for us, we had to go out and up forward and it was between that and the next living one [quarters] was a shared one, that type of thing. Then the forward one was right off the mess decks; they covered the front section. It wasn’t like every one had its own latrine area.

RT: Was space tighter on the Evans than the some of the other destroyers that you served?

SK: Oh yes, definitely tighter than the DLGs.

RT: On the time that you spend aboard ship on all of the various destroyers, were there any particularly humorous experiences that you remember?

SK: I think I made reference to the one that I was on and that was on the Sterett. We had just gotten overseas; I think it was on our first exercise going out from, I think we either went from Subic and we were in the Gulf and we went to refuel or we were on our way from Subic to the Gulf and I think we refueled. We had picked up some new people in Subic and you always can tell because they were out of boot camp, their dungarees were new; they were standouts. There was no scuffs on their shoes, nothing of that kind of stuff. As a signalman, we used to always; once the oiler was in sight, then we would signal to them, they would signal back. Our course in position is going to be this, and set forward and aft. There was standard things for refuel. They [the oiler] would all be set for this type of shift; they’re rigged and ready and then they would go head and then they would use flags when they close the flags we would close in and they would hook up and you did all the stuff. It was pretty routine, but I was watching and happened to see; we’re getting
ready to close up and we’re coming in within a thousand yards to the ship and there’s a bunch of
guys, they’re kind of standing around like tourists because they had no sign. They hadn’t been
assigned, they’d know, ‘Oh man, there’s another ship and look how close we are,’ and they’re
standing on the courtside and the Captain notices that one of the fenders wasn’t over the side.
You know what a fender is, right; those big, round, rubber…?

RT: Sure.

SK: He yells to these guys to throw that f-ing fender over the side and they kind of look up
at him like, ‘Who, us?’ He yells it again and those things are heavy. I think these three or four
guys used muscle and throw the thing over because it wasn’t tied on. I can remember that; that
was a riot. So, we had to pull out, pull around, and pick up the fender. By that time, that oiler was
way out of sight, that afternoon close up. The captain, he had that bosun’s mate up there on the
bridge, just chewing his butt out for that kind of thing. It was kind of funny.

RT: Especially since it wasn’t you.

SK: Right, oh yes. Usually, as a signalman, you got to know the captain pretty well. It
was still no relationship, but where some people never talk to the captain, you probably talk to him
almost every day in a form or fashion; ‘Message for you, Captain,’ this and that, that type of stuff.
You saw the Captain a lot where I think you know the boiler techs rarely; that type of thing.

RT: The time that you spent waiting in Hawaii and the time that you spent waiting in Subic,
did you make any use of R&R Facilities?

SK: I couldn’t go off base in Subic because of the collision. They didn’t want any
communications off the base, so I was restricted to the base during all that period of time. I had a
routine; I used the library and the pool and the club. In the morning, in the library, then you go to
the pool, then in the evening… I stood watch on the Evans until I was decommissioned. I was
taken off, but it was still a commission ship and we had a rotation that we had to do. They had
people from base to do some of the watches too to make up the difference and all that so it wasn’t
that often, but I would stand much on that. There was nothing to do.

RT: So, when you were aboard ship, did you correspond with any friends or relatives in
the States?

SK: Well, my wife.

RT: Okay.

SK: About all the time, my mother; brothers and sisters occasionally, that type of stuff.
RT: I noticed in your questionnaire that you made mention that sending taped messages as well.

SK: Right. I did that. We had a little tape recorder and sometimes it was just easier to send a tape back and forth and so we would do that.

RT: For your time in the service, did you receive any kind of awards or citations or commendations?

SK: I can't remember exactly, but I have a Navy Unit Citation and a Meritorious Unit Citation. Those are two of the citations that we got. I can't remember; I think one was for the Tucker and one was for the Sterett. I think that was the two. They were issued ship citations and everybody normally got it, those type of things.

RT: When you were sent to Evans, you said you were only on there 18 days before the collision?

SK: I think it was 18 days, yeah.

RT: So, what were those 18 days, if you wouldn't mind taking us through that?

SK: The first two or three was gunfire support and then we went to Subic. Then we stayed one or two days in Subic. Then we went to Manila to join up for the SEATO Operation. I didn't hear about that I think until we were in Subic, that we were going on the SEATO operation. I don't think it was top secret, I just don't think I was paying any attention to it. From there, we go to Manila and spent time and went downtown Manila and that kind of stuff. We had one day, I know, that we did some communication drills in the Bay with the other ships. They did flags, those type of things and we participated in that. So, I can't remember how many days we stayed there; probably was two before we went out on the ten-day exercise.

RT: So, you were getting some practice working with the other ships?

SK: Right, right. We were real familiar then, okay, then they would tell us, 'Okay, in the operation, these are the ships that are 'on our side', these are the other ships on that.' It's amazing, but I don't remember seeing where the Melbourne was then. I remember where the Kearsarge was. In reminiscing and trying to think, 'Wait a second, I don't even remember seeing the Melbourne in Manila.'

RT: Who was supposed to be wearing the white hat? Was it your group?

SK: I don't remember. Of course, somebody else was always the enemy; we were always the good guys.
RT: At the time of the collision, where were you?
SK: I was the signalman of the watch.
RT: You were right there at the prime location above the pilothouse?
SK: Yes.
RT: What kind of conditions were there that night? What were the conditions?
SK: It was clear and dark, smooth.
RT: Had you just come on watch beforehand?
SK: Came on at midnight, a quarter till eleven.
RT: You were able to see the other ships?
SK: Yes. I mean, you got conditioned; you can see that it was a darker spot on the horizon.
RT: So, you could at least see a silhouette? [?]
SK: Yes.
RT: Since it was darken ship, was there any signaling or was there not?
SK: None, there was none. I used to always read the night orders when I came up to the pilothouse. I'd either get there early or I'd wait until after the OD [and read them] and all that; did their exchange and I kind of read it because the night orders would be fitting; usually over where the quartermaster's desk, where the little thing was. That's another thing, you just kind of get used to it. Night orders will tell you; they normally tell you nothing. If you go in squares or you're going to be supporting this kind of thing, they were the night orders. I read the night orders and what I saw that it would be darken ship; exercise and I thought it said till dawn, and I knew right then there, 'Oh Jeez, darken ship. We won't be doing anything.'
RT: Who would usually draft the night orders?
SK: The night orders, I think, it would either come from the captain or it would come from the navigation officer. I can't remember. I think the captain usually would say, they would pass the night orders and then of course, each OOD would add to the log as it went on; any significant things were logged.
RT: During the course of that night, you didn't receive any kind of signals then?
SK: None, zero.
RT: You could tell that the ship was changing position at one point during the night?
SK: Oh yes. Well, in our sector, we were always changing. You were turning, but you
never [left your sector]; they’re not what you call turns. They’re standard things you knew, okay, as
a screen, very seldom are you on a set course where you’re just constantly going straight; you’ll be
changing. We did that, but I knew where we were in comparison to the other ships. Of course, you
keep on eye on the carrier because you know that everything is going to be functioning around it.

RT: Based upon what you could see that night, what were the events leading up to the
collision from you vantage point?

SK: Just before 3:00, I think it was the sonar group; their watch was off from everybody
else. Their change time was different and I actually talked to some guy; it was down on the lower
wing, the same wing as the pilothouse. He was getting off watch and I was standing up on the
upper railing and I was asking if anything was going on or anything like that. He said, ‘No, nothing.
We haven’t had anything.’ He said, ‘It was anti.’ At that part, we were doing anti-submarine
[exercise]. So, nothing was going on. When we came on watch, my recorder, he was a seaman.
His name was Rodriguez. I said, ‘Well, since there’s nothing going on, I’ll take the first half of the
watch, then we’ll trade, you take the second half of the watch and you can go ahead and lay down
if you want.’ He decided, ‘Okay.’ So, he lay down on top of the signal shack; there was a little area
up there. So, he went and lay down on that. He was sound asleep, so at that point, I thought, ‘Oh,
okay. We’ll go head and we can trade for a while.’ Right after I talked to him [the sonarman], I
said, ‘Well, I’m going to spot where all the ships are.’ That’s when we started making the turn. I
said, ‘Oh, wait. Just a second, gosh, we’re starting to make a full starboard turn.’ So, knowing
where I thought the ship was, I said, ‘If I’m on the starboard side and we’re making a turn, if I start
looking starboard aft, I should be able to see the rest of the group behind us; a little bit off to
starboard.’ I looked out there and of course I didn’t see anything. I didn’t see [any ships] and I
said, ‘Jeez.’ So, I went around to the port side and I also went straight across and I looked port aft.
Well, knowing what you know and how the sequences [of turns] is, where I was looking as we’re
making the turn, I was looking where they weren’t and of course the port side, we already made the
turn so I was looking where they weren’t. I’m looking aft, so we’re starting to come around headed
toward and so obviously I’m looking the wrong direction. So, when I didn’t see; I came back
around the starboard side and said, ‘Man, I don’t see them there [either].’ That’s when I went
forward and looked. I went straightforward over the top of the pilot house and looked up and there
they were [the *Melbourne* was]. They were straight down on us. That’s when we started a hard
right turn.

RT: What could you see then at that time?

SK: The ship was [a huge shadow] in spitting distance. It was down to a few hundred feet
away. I knew we were going to get hit. There’s no doubt in my mind.

RT: Were there any lights on it or anything?

SK: No. I ran into the pilothouse [signal shack] and I hit the pilothouse button. They’re
already pre-punched. It was already down and I hit the little tab down and I said, ‘We’re going to
get hit.’ Then I looked up to the left where you can see out to the side and that’s when I saw the
lights come on. I remember seeing specifically, the aircraft warning lights; the two [red lights] at the
top that come on when you’re launching aircraft. That’s the one thing that I remember, that’s the
one thing in my testimony that they drilled me on was because they said they turned on their white
lights and running lights, but I think that they had their panel set for launch which is, they don’t have
white lights on launch; they have their colored lights and the red lights. That’s when I remember
seeing them and ‘BANG’, it hit. It was that fast.

RT: So, what happened at the moment of impact, what happened to you?

SK: Okay, I was inside the shack; I had hit that thing and said, ‘We’re going to get hit.’ I
looked and I turned out and I was just starting to go out the shack door when it hit. My thumb got
catched right in the latch part of the door, as it slammed shut because the whole ship just kind of
lifted up and went over on its side. Then of course, I was knocked down on the side of where the
door was; where the shack of the side door was. I got the picture of the whole ship laying on its
side in the water; door side down. Of course, you can’t see anything; it was so pitch black, there’s
nothing that you can see. Then I pulled my hand out and the ship kind of goes ahead and rights
itself back up and the door pops open and the water is there and out the door I go. Of course,
that’s the full open side of the ship; it goes down from that point. As I’m swimming away, you can
see it going down with the bow up.

RT: What happened to the fellow who was sleeping on the top of the pilothouse?

SK: He ended up on the flight deck of the *Melbourne*, because the flight deck is right at
that level; it’s almost a match.

RT: So, he was catapulted up to the flight deck?

SK: Yes, just threw him right up into.
RT: You were the only one in the signal shack?
SK: Right.
RT: What happened to the folks who were in the pilothouse?
SK: At that point, I don’t know. I started swimming. One of the things in the training, they always tell you ‘Just stay with the ship, just stay with the ship.’ No way. I swam as fast and as hard as I could away from the ship. I just kept swimming, swimming, swimming, swimming. I can remember looking back and getting on my back and looking back and seeing it [the Evans] go down, but I can’t see the carrier, I can’t see anything. Only the other one; only the front part of the other one; well, I don’t even know the front part at that time.
RT: So, while you were swimming, did you run into anyone else?
SK: I swam for it seemed like a while and it was pitch black and all I could hear then was voices and the voices were from where I had swam from. So, I swam back a little ways and then that’s when I met Ramsey who was floating on one of the pilot deck boards. You know, the wood deck boards that go around the pilothouse and he was held onto one of those and I grabbed a hold of it. Then, Hobson joined and then the only discussion; they kept talking about, ‘Why did they come that way?’ That’s about the only thing I could remember from that.
RT: What went through your mind at the time of the collision?
SK: I thought I probably had enough adrenaline that I could’ve swam back to San Francisco. Thoughts were, ‘What in the hell happened?’ But I knew we got hit, I knew that. I didn’t know it cut the ship in half; I thought the whole damn thing was gone, to be honest with you. I couldn’t see them; looking around, I didn’t remember seeing the Melbourne, don’t remember seeing anything else other than, ‘Boy, is it dark out here.’ I don’t know how far away they were before. Then I started seeing; one you saw lights started coming up and you could hear chopper. You can hear that kind of stuff. You could hear a lot of stuff and it sounded like it was off in the distance.
RT: When you had that realization that, ‘There’s no way we’re getting out of this, we’re going to be hit.’ What else went through your mind right at that point, especially at the point of impact?
SK: I never thought, ‘Oh, I’m going to die.’ People say, ‘Were you thinking that?’ I didn’t. I think I was thinking more, ‘How am I going to survive this thing. How do I stay afloat and all that.’ If it wasn’t for the deck board, that type of thing. I was a pretty good swimmer though. I could
probably dog paddle for a long, long, long time. But my thoughts were, ‘I still had my shoes on, should I get rid of them?’ But, I didn’t.

RT: How long were you afloat before you were rescued?

SK: I’m going to guess that it was about 45 minutes. It’s strictly a guess. It could’ve been a shorter period, it just seemed like it. From the time floating on the board, floating, then I couldn’t remember hearing people and you could hear the motor whale boat that was picking, they were obviously picking up people. I can remember hearing that and then seeing the light every once in a while. I guess the portable lights that they had. Then, you could see all of the lights on the _Melbourne_; the white lights, they all had deck lights and all the lights and stuff out. Then I remember seeing it. So, I don’t know if I just didn’t see it before or if the ship came back or what. I remember seeing one chopper, but I couldn’t tell you if there was more than that or not.

RT: From your recollection, did the rescue effort begin pretty quickly, almost immediately?

SK: Yes.

RT: How were you rescued? Did the rescue you by helicopter or by boat?

SK: Motor whale boat.

RT: They came out and picked up both you and Ramsey?

SK: Yes. In fact, the Kerrs had a picture that I’d never seen before. It’s a picture somebody took of the motor whale boat coming up to the ship and I can see myself sitting in, sitting actually next to Ramsey. As things come back to you, you remember how somebody still had their hat on after that; still had his hat on, that type of thing. Just unique things like that. There wasn’t all kinds of discussion and people talking and stuff. It was pretty quiet.

RT: I imagine everybody was in a state of shock.

SK: Shock, right.

RT: After both you and Ramsey were collected in the motor whale boat, did you then join in and rescue effort or did they take you immediately aboard…

SK: It seemed to me like we were the last ones and we went right back to the _Melbourne_ and we had to crawl up the side; the netting of the side. To me, I remember they picked us up and then took us right in there and there was probably a dozen people in it.

RT: So, where did they place the survivors? Did they have you assemble on the flight deck or did they take you somewhere below decks?
SK: They took us to the mess decks. Then they started taking information right away.

Then, the other crew; the back half crew [of Evans], they were already there. They actually
checked us out first. First, I had a cut thumb and I guess the [paint] lacquer stain that we used for
our rope; a can must have exploded because I had that all over me and they first thought, ‘Are you
burned?’ I said, ‘No. I’m not burned.’ I had this varnish type stuff on me and they thought I was
burned, but I wasn’t. They checked the thumb, wrapped it, and that and then we went to the mess
decks.

RT: What was your impression of the rescue effort? Did you think it was pretty well
coordinated?

SK: It seemed to be, yes. They couldn’t have been nicer. Of course, at that time, you’re
thinking they did it because that’s a normal instinct because they hit us.

RT: Would you mind taking us through the days of following the collision?

SK: Okay. That day now becomes morning. They took more and more; they started
sorting who was on watch, who was this and started taking on your testimony. ‘What do you
remember? Who did you see last?’ Those types of things. Then, later; it was after lunch, then
they transported by motor whale boat again over to the Kearsarge.

RT: Okay, so you were transferred from the Melbourne to the Kearsarge?

SK: Right. Then I got to Kearsarge and they gave me some new clothes. They had some
dungarees and stuff like that. Got us an assigned place to sleep; to do that and then in the evening
we had a memorial service on the flight deck. Then slept and then they were already headed in
toward Subic.

RT: What was the memorial service like?

SK: Well, it was really somber. I couldn’t believe it when we started hearing numbers;
how many people. I already knew that Rodriguez was missing. I knew that from…right away.

RT: What number did they give at that point or did they have a fairly decent idea of how
many?

SK: They said over 70 were unaccounted for.

RT: Then after you had the service and the Kearsarge, you said they were headed almost
immediately towards Subic?
SK: To Subic. They took us in and said, ‘Look, where would you like your telegram sent to?’ Those types of things. ‘You can send that in telegram once you’re in Subic Bay; then we’re going to arrange that you can make a phone call home and talk to people at home.’ They said that.

RT: How long did it take to reach Subic?

SK: That’s amazing, I don’t remember. I think we came in the next day in the evening, the later part of the day; it seemed like it was a whole 24 hours from when I got on there. It was only one night I’m pretty sure.

RT: So, when you were able to contact your wife and your family, what kind of state were they in?

SK: Well, she had just gotten the telegram. It took her [my wife] three days [to get the telegram] and we only had a certain period of time [we got to phone]. Everybody was limited to a few minutes. They had it set up, I called her, I told her, ‘I’m safe, I’m in Subic, I’m okay, I’m not hurt. Don’t worry.’ Of course, she wanted to know, ‘When are you going to be here? Why can’t they send you right now?’ I said, ‘I’ll let you know as soon as I can what’s going to go on.’ That was about the crux of the call. I remember her telling me, she said, ‘It’s on all the news and networks here.’

RT: So, it was on television as well?

SK: Yes. She said that radios were still covering and that it was on television the first day.

RT: Then what happened?

SK: Then a few days later, when the back half was towed in, they took us from the main base back out to those Cubie Point there in Subic Bay and they said, ‘You can get your personal effects off of the ship.’ So, they had it pretty well set out as who was going to go and who was going to stay then. I had been told that you get your effects, but you weren’t going. A lot of the people got their personal effects off and then they put them on buses and started sending them with orders. That was two or three days after [the collision]; the time frame is vague to me. So, majority of the people left then. Then they told us that we still had to maintain a watch on it [the Evans] and they moved the ship; they moved the half from Cubie Point over to the main part of the base and then that’s the first time I stood a watch on it at night. You had deck watch and you had to keep track of the forward bulkhead, make sure there was no leaks and stuff like that because it was still sitting; still floating at that point.

RT: How did you do a watch on half a ship?
SK: That was eerie because there was no lights other than the portable lights on the deck. You had to use flashlights and stuff like that because there was no power left to the back half. That was probably the eeriest thing was to go down there and every 15 minutes, go check and make sure the forward bulkhead was still holding and everything was alright. That's all you did on there. I remember there was some people and that time I remember some civilians coming off and on and I think they were evaluators or something like that or doing some kinds of things. There was people from the base during the day, but at night they was nothing; nobody coming off and on. So, we stood watch on there for I'm going to say, probably a week while it was still floating. Then they moved it into a dry dock and we still had to stand watch because it was still commission ship, but didn't have to stand out often; there was enough of us. People kept giving orders and people were leaving, but there was a core [group] of us that stayed for a long time and they said, 'Well, you’re going to have testify.' Then we started learning more that they were going to do one part in Subic Bay and one part in Singapore where the *Melbourne* had gone to. Of course, we were after, they’re probably going to fly us back and forth and all that, but they said, 'No, you’re going to stay. They'll do all the evaluations and then they'll do the actual inquiry in Subic Bay.' We just waited around and waited around until they called us to testify.

RT: How did that happen? Did they send someone to say, ‘It’s your turn now,’ or did they send a letter to you?

SK: No, they sent someone. They told us pretty much on this day they’ll probably be talking to this person, this person, this person; and the next day, this person. As it got closer, they tell you to be available here, then you’d sit out and wait just like court.

RT: What was the procedure there? How was the for all intents and purposes, the interrogation?

SK: Yes, it was okay; ‘Start from when you came on watch,’ almost the same thing; ‘What do you remember, where were the people, who was on watch, is there any unique things that you remember that occurred during that time, how was the communication, how it had been up to that time, had there been any problems that you noticed, mostly around communications? Anything like that?’ They’ll tell us, [they asked, ‘Do] you know, where do you remember, what was the ship’s position, what kind of turns were made?’ They went right through the same process.

RT: So, were you in a room alone with one other person or did they have a couple of people in there?
SK: No, it was in like a court; with the interrogators and a few other people that were
sitting out, no. I can’t remember exactly how many people it was, but you had to swear the truth
and all of that; it’s court of inquiry and that’s fact finding is all. Can we put these things in? When I
talked about, ‘Hey, I remember making the turns and the lights I remember seeing,’ there was a lot
of discussions around that. I was saying, ‘Hey, this is what I remember seeing.’ I said, ‘Logic told
me that if they’re getting ready to launch, which they said they were getting ready to launch and
that’s why we were re-positioning, obviously you’d have your lights set for launch. Why would you
have them set? My logic told me that when they said they thought they turned on all of the
navigation lights, I don’t think they did.’ That was my opinion, which I guess became different from
the facts.

RT: What happened after this interrogation, then what?
SK: Well, I did it one day and then I think they called me back for a couple of other
questions and then they just said wait. You got to wait, you got to wait, you got to wait. Then when
the court of inquiry was done, they said, ‘Okay’ and there was only a handful of us left at that time.
They said, ‘You can go ahead and here’s your orders.’ That’s when we got our orders to the next
ship. ‘You can go home on leave. This is when you report.’ We went from normal transition, then
we went up to Clark Air Force Base and then flew home. Then I reported to the John Paul Jones.

RT: Then you said that you had been asked to go to the actual trial?
SK: Yes, then I was on the John Paul Jones and all of a sudden, ‘Boom’, they come and
our officer in charge says, ‘You got orders to go to Subic Bay for the court-martial. You have to be
there by this particular date and they’re cutting your travel voucher and all that kind of stuff now.
Pack your bag to go.’ I asked, ‘Do I take my whole seabag?’ They said, ‘No.’ So, just a travel bag
with numbers of clothes and stuff like that and uniform and went up to Travis and flew over for that.
Then, once again, take the bus trip down to Subic, check in there, and then they just said wait.
You wait and I found a couple of other guys that had come back and of course, we’re pretty much
in the dark [as to what is going on]. We don’t have a clue what’s going on, what occurred, what
has been punished or anything. We’re just waiting, and waiting, and waiting. A day goes by and a
day goes by and a day goes by and pretty soon one of the officers comes and tell us, ‘Okay, you’re
dismissed. You can go back.’ Of course, we wanted to know, what’s going on. He said, ‘All I can
tell you is they pleaded guilty and there isn’t going to be any need for your testimony.’

RT: When he said, ‘They,’ who did you mean?
SK: I don’t know. He meant the three; Hobson, Ramsey, McLemore. It was kind of obvious. We knew they were the ones. The newspapers had their names in and out of it every day.

RT: So, these other guys who you had met while you were waiting to report for the court-martial, did you know any of them?

SK: Not really.

RT: Did you know any of the men who were lost in the core section?

SK: No.

RT: What were your thoughts whenever you were told, ‘Oh well, they don’t need your testimony. They pleaded guilty.’

SK: Well, my thoughts was, ‘To what?’ At that point, I still thought it was the Australian’s fault. I said, ‘Wait a second, the charges were hazarding, is that so improper?’ Those types of things. But, we didn’t have any idea what all the other charges and things like that work out. We just didn’t know. We said, ‘Okay, what’s going to happen to them?’ They said, ‘Oh, we don’t know because they haven’t passed the sentence, they just pleaded guilty.’ So, I don’t know when they passed the sentence. They must have done it at the same time. I just never knew, but we knew that, we said, ‘What’s Ramsey?’ He said, ‘Well, he maybe an ensign now. We don’t know. The captain probably won’t get a command again and he’ll be held in rank.’ It was all hearsay stuff.

RT: What kind of thoughts did you have about it as the years went on and you learned more about what happened?

SK: Years and a lot of time went by before I started hearing more and more about it. I tried to pick up; I had newspaper articles and stuff like that and it wasn’t until the association really started that I started piecing together all the parts of this and from what I remember, I said, ‘I guess some of this does make sense because I knew what kind of turns we made and things like that.’

Up until the first association meeting, the Australians were at fault and these guys probably got killed and it could have been avoided and all that kind of stuff. I really never really addressed it. Now, when any military people got together and they try to talk about their events. I usually always had the winner [the winning story]. This was a unique thing, even the Vietnam Vets and their fire fights and stuff like that, they said, something like a collision like that is very unique and different. It wasn’t until association [meetings] when some of the pieces started getting put together and then talk with some people and figure it out; the majority of the events that led up to and the after
[discussions]. Because I was on there such a short period of time, there wasn’t any real connection. That’s unfortunate in a way, but it is what it is.

RT: Whatever became of the fellow who was on the pilothouse? I meant on top of the signal shack.

SK: I never was in communication with him again and from what I understand, nobody else has and nobody else has been able to find him. I tried numbers of years ago through, I figured, ‘Okay, he had such serious injuries, that he’s got to probably be getting medical benefits,’ and I knew he was from Fresno, [CA]. I talked with the VA and said, ‘How do you find a person that is probably getting benefits?” I gave them the name and everything like that, but they wouldn’t divulge anything. They wouldn’t say, ‘Oh yes, here he is. His checks are mailed to or anything like that.’ They said, ‘We can’t tell you anything. You just need to try searches. Maybe you should go and try phone books.’ That’s before Internet and all that; and the phonebook and all that kind of stuff. When I went to the first association meeting that we went to was in Vegas and asked, ‘Has anybody ever seen, heard?’ They said, ‘It was like he disappeared.’ But, they knew he was alive and I don’t know how they knew that. Nope, never seen or heard of him again.

RT: As the years passed, have you formed any kind of an opinion or judgment regarding the collision?

SK: I think that my opinion is, is I guess we initiated it. It was unfortunate. When you look at all of the series of things that could have occurred to avoid it, you really have to classify it as an accident. Life has to go on; you can’t live in the past. I think it’s a great thing that the association’s taking an active part. The memorial is going to be done on November the 12th up here on Long Beach and we’ll definitely be there. We get the people that lost their lives have a remembrance that will go on. It irritates me that the government has been so closed as to defining participants in the Vietnam War, not including them [the 74] or including pilots that have died because they were flying back to Japan and their planes crashed and because they weren’t in the zone, they’re not entitled to be on the Wall. I think it’s unfortunate that they were that closed.

RT: Especially since the Evans only a few days beforehand was participating in fire support.

SK: Right. It’s not like they were sitting in San Francisco Bay and never been over there and got ran over by a tank or something, something that is so unique. The reality is that we make it so fine night that this is where you qualify and this is where you not. There’s never any gray area
that says, ‘Hey, really respect to the people that fought in Vietnam. I’m sorry, you don’t get any.’

So, what is it? So, the numbers go up by a couple more thousand, I mean, have some respect for
the people. That to me is a nonsense thing. That’s why we continue to fight for that; one step at a
time. It will be unfortunate that maybe a 100 years from now, somebody will say, ‘Yes, let’s just do
that.’ Well, it’s too bad that we missed this time frame. It irritates me, but we do that, this country
does that with everything. We’re always a little bit late.

RT: After the collision, what kind of thoughts or feelings did you have about your time
aboard Evans?

SK: It was so short that I guess I wished I’d known some of the people, that type of thing.
At the time, it was what it was. I didn’t really have the time to get to know the people or anything.
That was unfortunate.

RT: Have any of your feelings about the Evans changed?

SK: Oh, I’m tied closer to…that’s the only association I belong to. I was on five ships. I
never even made any contact with any other ships. They probably all have their associations of
one fashion or another; I never even researched it.

RT: From your time aboard Evans or any of the ships, did you collect any kind of
souvenirs or photographs or anything that you brought back with you?

SK: Well, I have the crews’ books from a couple of the ships and I’ve got from the Evans; I
got an ashtray and a lighter that was given to me. Our first class petty officer that was in charge of
us; I met his brother; let me think, fifteen years later. He worked for some California Edison and
worked out of the same facility I did and he actually was talking to a guy I worked with one time and
was talking about, you know, ‘My brother was on the ship that got cut in half by a carrier.’ He goes,
‘Oh, hey, Steve was on this ship.’ It ended up being his brother. When his brother died, he gave
me the ashtray and his lighter. He said, ‘This was his lighter and it’s off the Evans.’ I’ve got all of
the newspaper stuff and I have some of the newspaper stuff framed and those types of things. Of
course, I still have my uniform, that kind of stuff. I got, I think, three or four pictures that was taken
of the back half of the Evans that when it was sitting at Cubie Point; I’ve got those. I don’t even
know how in the hell I got those now. I think somebody else took them and gave them to me
because it wasn’t my camera; I didn’t have one. I can’t remember how I even got those pictures.

RT: They must have been sad that standing watch over the aft end of Evans for that
period of time?
SK: Oh yes. You're wondering how in the hell something like this can happen. Again, the logic of why are we still standing watch here, but finally somebody said, 'Hey, look, as long as it's a commissioned ship in the Navy…' It was commissioned; until the day it's de-commissioned, there's a watch on it.

RT: The fact that the surviving section was still afloat is something of a testament to the people who designed and built it.

SK: Right, oh yes. It was unique that it was made with two specific parts that kept it alive. That's how it was unique. They couldn't have hit at a [more strategic spot]. They hit at the expansion joint, that's unusual, 'Bam'; it couldn't have been a foot off of the expansion joint, it's amazing.

RT: If ever you were to have a collision, it would've been…?

SK: That's the place.

RT: Yes.

SK: Yes.

RT: Ideal, if you could use that word.

SK: Yes, right; and at the angle that it hit. Had it hit at even in another angle, it would've taken both parts. If there's ever any good that comes out of something like that, it was at the right angle and the right spot at the right time. At least to say because we could've had a disaster of 250-plus [sailors].

RT: So, when your time in the Navy was finished, what did you do then?

SK: I knew I was getting our even before then, but after when that happened, it couldn't have been soon enough. On the John Paul Jones, I only went to sea on it two times. I took leave one time when they were going somewhere and they were getting ready to go overseas and we were doing a missile shoot off of a Point Magoo out here and we had a bad missile shoot; one of these where they lost the targets so it did a straight shot, straight up. I guess the sequence was, it was shooting and the missile just went straight up. Of course, they had to explode it in the air. The captain had already talked to me a few days before about, 'Have you thought about a career, staying in the Navy? I know that you've talked about your incident and jeez; the chances of that happening ever again are so slim that it was just unfortunate. If you wanted to stay in and you talked about your education; have you considered Officer's Candidate School?' those types of things. I told him, 'I just want to get out.' Then of course when we had that lost missile shot, that
was it. In fact, we even laughed about it because they went off of general quarters and I went
down through the pilothouse, he looked at me, just kind of smiled like, ‘You ought to get out,’
because I was close to jumping over the side. So, they were going to go back overseas in like the
very first part of February and I wasn’t going to get out until May, so I asked about getting out early
and they said, ‘No, no, no,’ until all of a sudden, the very last week, they said, ‘They’ll let you out on
January the 20th, which is going to be less than your full four years. But you have to go back to
school and all that.’ I said, ‘Hey, I’ll run down and register right now.’ We were in Long Beach so I
came back to Pomona to register and I went back to school and went and got a job.

RT: So, where did you end up getting your degree?
SK: In Business Administration.

RT: Your wife was pregnant with your first child at the time of the collision?
SK: Correct, right.

RT: Then the second boy came along.
SK: He came along 5 years later.

RT: Whatever happened to the Plymouth that you had?
SK: I ran into the back of another car.

RT: Uh oh.
SK: So, I got rid of that thing.

RT: So, is there anything else that you’d like to comment about or discuss?
SK: No, I can’t think of anything other than that. Whatever I can do to help you out; quite
an endeavor on your part. When do you think you’ll defend your dissertation?

RT: It’ll probably be about another year or so.
SK: Okay. That’d be interesting. Are you going to bring all of your stuff to the Lubbock
meeting and all that?

RT: Well, especially since it will be right here where I’m living. As far as equipment or
anything or taking further interviews, it’ll all be right here in the Vietnam Center or the Vietnam
Archive.

SK: Do you have the testimony of all the court of inquiry? Is all that stuff public?

RT: What I have is material from the findings of fact. I don’t have any of the transcripts
from the court marshal unit.

SK: It is public knowledge? It should be, shouldn’t it?
RT: I think by now that it is.
SK: I'd like to read all that. That would be interesting to see all of that stuff. If it's in electronic version, which probably isn't.
RT: I can certainly send a photocopy of the findings of fact.
SK: Yes, that would be interesting. I would be interested to see more of that kind of stuff because my kids now are at the age of interest. They're really interested to know more; the teenagers and all that kind of stuff, they could care less. But now that they're getting older, they want to know more because at some point of time, they're going to have to take all this stuff. So, they'd like to know more and more about it. They'd be interested to see that kind of stuff and read about it. Did you ever get to talk with; you probably never talked with Captain McLemore did you?
RT: Captain McLemore, I don't believe that I did. There were so many people there.
SK: He died about two years ago. He was the captain at the time of the collision. The association never could get him to participate. He would've loved to, but he just felt so guilty. I guess he told the Campbell JC, 'I could never face those people. I'm sorry, I can't do it.' We have no idea where Ramsey is or whatever happened with him. It would be interesting to know where these people went, if they could understand that, 'Hey, we are a forgiving society. You went through the same thing we went through, whether whose fault or not.' It would be interesting to know where these people are.
RT: That would be. The nice thing is, is that we are in the information age, so it does make it a little bit easier.
SK: Yes, because I would think that maybe Ramsey might talk to you before he would talk to other people. You can tell him, 'I'm an unbiased, neutral person. I'm doing one heck of a study; this has nothing to do with responsibility and accountability; have to do with facts and stuff like that.' He would probably be the most interesting person because he'd be able to tell you what occurred.
RT: Sure.
SK: Anyhow. Anything else?
RT: No, I can't think of anything else either, but I do want to thank you for taking time out of your day to go through this and to relive some of these things which is not an easy thing to do. I'm very grateful for that.
SK: It's my pleasure for sure.
RT: Well, I thank you very much for your time and if I can think of anything else further down the road, I'll let you know. The next few days, I'll make a photocopy of the findings of fact for you and send that to you.

SK: Yes, I would appreciate that. That would be good. Okay.

RT: All right, well thank you very much.

SK: Okay Robert.

RT: Have a good day.

SK: Okay, you too.

RT: Bye.

SK: Bye.