Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University initiating an oral history interview with Mr. Claude Crowley who served in the U.S. Navy during and after World War II. Today is the 10th of February 2006; I am in the Special Collections Building on the campus of Texas Tech in Lubbock and Mr. Crowley is speaking from his home in the Ft. Worth area. Good morning sir.

Claude Crowley: Good morning, Laura.

LC: Thank you very much for your time this morning. And Claude, the first thing I want to ask is whether the Vietnam Archive might have your permission to make the recording of the transcript that we'll produce of this interview available to researchers?

CC: Certainly.

LC: I appreciate your cooperation and I'm hopeful that we'll have a good time doing this interview. First thing I'd like to know, Claude, is where were you born and when?

CC: In Putnam County, Tennessee, July 6th, 1927.

LC: In Putnam County?

CC: Putnam, P-u-t-n-a-m.

LC: What part of the state is that?

CC: Middle Tennessee or a little toward the east.

LC: Now is it hill country up there?

CC: Yes it is.

LC: Tell me about your parents if you would.

CC: Well, they were what you would call rural people I suppose. My father was from Jamestown, Tennessee. That's in a very rural mountainous section and mother was also from the
hill section there in western Putnam County. So they have real rural roots, but they lived in
Cookeville, dad worked as a house painter and had a small farm where we raised our own food.

LC: What kind of things did you grow?
CC: The big thing, the big garden. We also grew corn and hay and kept cows and pigs.
LC: And so some of that would be for sale, right?
CC: No.
LC: No, all for yourselves?
CC: It was all for home consumption.
LC: Wow.
CC: That's not to say we didn't sell some, but that was very insignificant, it was for home
consumption.
LC: So my guess would be that that kept your mother very busy running all of that?
CC: She was a pioneer type of person; she could do anything. She could make sausage, souse, apples, sew clothes. Expertly, she could do anything; she was a pioneer type.
LC: Now she learned all of those skills I would think from her family, is that right?
CC: Correct, they lived down the hills in Putnam County. I mean, you read stories about
Tennessee mountain people; that's what it was, she was down there where they were totally self-
sufficient, you know, they raised their own cabbage and kept it underground for winter use, you
know, that sort of thing.
LC: Sure. Now what kind of a family did the two of them have, you and other children?
CC: Yes, I had two brothers and twin sisters.
LC: Twin sisters, wow. Now were they younger than you?
CC: No, I was the youngest in the family.
LC: You're the baby.
CC: Yes.
LC: Oh okay. And your sisters, how much older were they than you?
CC: They were born in 1919.
LC: Okay, so they had a good many years on you.
CC: Yes, about seven years.
LC: Did they, as you were growing up, kind of dote on you?
CC: And dominated me.
LC: (Laughing) Is that right?
CC: Well, they were bossy.
LC: They were both bossy?
CC: (Laughing) Well, I thought they were.
LC: (Laughing)
CC: Rather not anymore than they needed to be.
LC: (Laughing) Well, I’m a baby in the family too, so I kind of have a feel for what you’re saying. But did you feel impacted, I guess I’ll ask it that way by the Depression or did things not change so much for you in the mid to late ’30s?
CC: I wasn’t all that aware of it, Laura. Although there were times when there wasn’t any money on the place, but I wasn’t all that aware of it, I was too young you see.
LC: So things just seemed normal to you.
CC: Well yeah, we had plenty to eat and everything. All the money worries, which must’ve been terrific for my parents, I didn’t know anything about.
LC: And they got along well, your parents?
CC: Yes.
LC: Okay. So it sounds actually quite idyllic, would you say it was a happy…?
CC: Well, for children, not for the parents perhaps, but for the children.
LC: No, sure.
CC: We had the place and there was some rural lands close around it. In fact, there was a little scope of woods across the street and we didn’t need permission to play over there, we’d go into the woods and climb trees and do all the things you do in the woods.
LC: Go ahead sir.
CC: And so on.
LC: What about going to school?
CC: Went to the town school in town.
LC: How was that organized, was it…?
CC: It was a large elementary school. And later went to high school in the same town there at Cookeville.
LC: And was it called Cookeville High School?
CC: It was called Putnam County Central High School.
LC: Oh okay, so it was like a consolidated…?
CC: Well, it wasn’t consolidated, but that’s what the county high school was at Cookeville.
LC: I see, I see. What year did you graduate from high school?
CC: I did not graduate.
LC: Oh, I remember now, that you left after your junior year, is that right?
CC: That’s right.
LC: Now before we get to that, maybe I could ask a little bit about your own education and how you felt about it. Were there particular subjects you enjoyed most or what kind of student were you?
CC: Poor.
LC: A poor student.
CC: But I did enjoy things like history and reading, geography very much, and anything that had to do with biology or general science. I hated the details of English and mathematics.
LC: Did you not have patience for it or did you not see the point?
CC: No, I was too dumb.
LC: (Laughing)
CC: I just didn’t get it, the arithmetic. And you know, it’s ironic, I have made my living writing for the last several years and I probably couldn’t outline a sentence, diagram a sentence.
LC: But it doesn’t seem to have hurt you that much.
CC: Well, no.
LC: Yeah.
CC: I don’t think it’s made a lot of difference.
LC: (Laughing)
CC: I have not once needed to use algebra, have you?
LC: No, not ever.
CC: Never.
LC: I turned my back on that early as it seems did you and I haven’t felt any need for it, I haven’t missed it.
CC: Not once in my life have I needed to work something out with algebra.
LC: (Laughing) Were there teachers there at the school that you were particularly drawn to or…?
CC: Oh yes.

LC: Can you remember some of those folks?

CC: Well the elementary schools, almost all of them, I liked them. There was one, I didn’t do good in school, but in the fifth grade, I did outstanding work and I say that represents the quality of that teacher. Her name was Susan Barnes and she was known to be a hard teacher but I loved her and did well. I think that may be part of my problem, lack of challenge, I don’t know, but she was known as a tough teacher, but I didn’t see her that way.

LC: Interesting.

CC: She was an older lady.

LC: ‘Old school,’ as they say.

CC: Hmm?

LC: Old school?

CC: Oh, I’d say so, yes.

LC: Yeah. But she had expectations, it sounds like.

CC: Well yes, she had a spark that some of those didn’t have.

LC: Yeah, yeah. I think all of us remember people like that who kind of drove us or pushed us on, one of the two. So you responded quite well to her.

CC: Yes.

LC: What about religion, was that an important part of your life?

CC: We were just nominal Methodists, not a big deal.

LC: Okay.

CC: We attended, but we also went fishing on Sunday.

LC: Understood. Let me ask about your employment, at what point did you come to terms with the fact that you should probably have a job or did your parents help you along on that path.

CC: Well, I never did really come to it I don’t think. I carried newspapers when I was about fourteen for a while and then when I was about sixteen, I guess I was sixteen, a man was walking by on the street one day of somebody I knew whose name was Earl Farris, spelled with an F, stopped and asked me if I would like a job as a relief projectionist at the movies. And of course, I was, you can imagine, how elated I was.

LC: To get into the movies for free, yeah.

CC: Yeah.
LC: And to be paid to be there, oh yeah.
CC: Yeah, yeah. They paid me I think it was three dollars or three dollars and fifty cents a week to relieve him for rest periods and supper on the long matinees on Friday and Saturday.
LC: Now this of course is an era that’s passed having a projectionist, but what exactly did you do for people who really wouldn’t know what that meant?
CC: Well, you had a projection room, a fireproof projection room where you had two projectors and the movies came in big reels and the projectionist put those things on in the correct order and switched each reel around about twenty minutes. And when the time come, there was a silent signal the audience never knew about it and you’d switch one machine to the other to the next reel and then you would prepare the empty machine with the next reel and then switch back when the time came.
LC: About how long would one reel run?
CC: Twenty minutes.
LC: Okay, and would it…
CC: The audience never knew there’s this silent signal to project those and he knew how to switch those without the audience knowing.
LC: Now the silent signal, is it something that’s actually up on the screen, projected on the screen?
CC: Well, there is, there’s a little visual mark. In fact, there’s two, a few seconds apart and we thread the new film in such a way that it’s perfectly synchronized.
LC: So it would be seamless as you transitioned?
CC: When you see the first visual mark, you start the dead machine and when you see the second visual mark, you push a button that throws an electric shutter and lets the new machine project and shuts off the empty machine. And if it’s done right, the persons watching the movies never know, it’s synchronized.
LC: And how long did it take you to get it right?
CC: Oh, not long.
LC: Not long.
CC: No, I’m kind of mechanically apt, I think.
LC: I see.
CC: It didn’t take long.
LC: And how long did you have this job?
CC: Until I went into the Navy, which was March of '45, and then I resumed the work when I came back and kept it while I went to college.
LC: Good job.
CC: I worked part time, I had no money, but it’s fun, you know.
LC: Oh absolutely.
CC: You’re in the middle of things.
LC: Yeah, sure enough. Well Claude, do you remember hearing about the war in Europe?
CC: Oh yes. We were a literate family and read the papers and listened to the radio, and I was well aware of all the things that the Germans were doing, the Fall of Czechoslovakia and all that stuff.
LC: You were?
CC: Yes.
LC: What did you think about it, what did your parents say in response, do you remember conversations they might’ve had or…?
CC: Excuse me; I’ve got to clear my throat.
LC: Sure.
CC: (Clearing throat) Okay.
LC: Do you remember the feeling in the house about…?
CC: Well, the consensus was that the Germans were very evil and the stories that were carried in the papers, there was a lot of them about cruelty in Czechoslovakia and Poland and places. And even before the war started, there was a lot of stuff about German cruelty. And so we believed it, you know, we wanted somebody to be against, I guess. And the only people that didn’t feel that way I know of, there was a family that lived in our neighborhood that felt like that President Roosevelt was trying to get us in the war and they felt like that there was a lot of propaganda to make us want to get in the war and that Franklin Roosevelt was doing it, you know, they were blaming it all on him, they were definitely real strong on the other side. But I’d say ninety percent of the people felt just as I did.
LC: Well what was your feeling about the president and you’re a young man growing up and how did you feel about Roosevelt?
CC: We thought he was the only president there ever was.

LC: (Laughing) Just about right for you.

CC: I got to tell you, we had some financial problems. Now this came out, I have learned more about this just lately and I have the papers on it about...you asked about the Depression, I have the papers on it. But dad borrowed eight hundred dollars back oh, in the early ‘30s when his mother-in-law died and there was no money to pay that back, that was it, he didn’t earn enough for the amenities at all. I mean, the necessities, much less amenities.

LC: Sure, yes.

CC: So the person holding the note was going to foreclose on us and...

LC: And that would’ve been the house?

CC: The house and farm, yeah.

LC: I see.

CC: Eight hundred dollars, yeah. And there was a program called Homeowners Loan Program, a New Deal Program that was set up under the Roosevelt Administration for the purpose of bailing out homeowners that were in a lot of trouble and couldn’t pay back loans. And dad and mom applied for that loan and it came through, my brother says the day before the note was due. Now I don’t know if he was exaggerating or not, but that loan came through.

LC: Wow.

CC: And saved the place. And it was repaid at the rate I think of twelve dollars a month. And of course, work, dad’s work improved and then Jim sent money home from the Army when he went in in the early ‘40s, and it was paid off at that time. But they not only saved the place, but they insisted that they add money to upgrade the living conditions, to fix the house up and repair it. And so if something like that happens, can you imagine anybody being against Roosevelt?

LC: Not at all.

CC: Not that family.

LC: There were very, very many people as you know affected similarly by New Deal Programs.

CC: Yeah, we were stamped for life.

LC: What about Mrs. Roosevelt, did you have any feelings about her?

CC: We liked her, we were liberal minded people, we liked her, yeah.
LC: Well, you mentioned that your older brother Jim went into the Army. Did that have an influence on you?
CC: Oh definitely.
LC: Did he write back much?
CC: Oh yeah.
LC: Where was he sent?
CC: Well he was, let me think, he took civilian flight training before the war.
LC: I see.
CC: And then when Pearl Harbor happened, that month, he went and joined the Army Air Corps and went in either late December or early January, I've forgotten which. And after some training, he wound up in the ferry command flying the big planes overseas and he was all over the world, and yeah, he was a great hero, you know.
LC: Was he piloting, was he crew?
CC: Oh yeah, he was a first pilot.
LC: He was a pilot?
CC: Yeah.
LC: Wow.
CC: Yeah, he flew all types of aircraft that you can imagine, everything from biplanes to C54s, B17s, B24s, all that stuff.
LC: And did he survive the war?
CC: Oh yeah.
LC: I can only imagine what impact that must've had on you.
CC: Oh, tremendous.
LC: Yes, I would think so; I would think so. Tell me about...go ahead, Claude.
CC: Something that had a big impact that you wouldn't know about unless I told you, and that is that sometime in the mid forties, the U.S. Army decided to conduct maneuvers in middle Tennessee and they came in around our town of Cookeville in that area by the thousands and thousands, I don't know, hundred thousands probably. And they bivouacked in the woods and had tanks and things. I was carrying newspapers at the time and I'd go right into the bivouacs selling newspapers.
LC: Oh really?
CC: Yeah.

LC: And talk to the guys?

CC: Yeah, yeah. And about the same time, I joined the State Guard and learned how to march and carry guns and things like that.

LC: Now you would’ve been quite young.

CC: You could join at sixteen.

LC: Okay. And it sounds like that’s exactly what you did.

CC: That’s what I did.

LC: As soon as you turned sixteen?

CC: Yeah.

LC: Did you feel at all Claude like the war was going by and you weren’t part of it?

CC: You bet. That’s why I made such poor grades in school, I was thinking the whole time about getting out of it, you know.

LC: Figuring out what you could do to contribute?

CC: Yeah, and got to get in, get in on the excitement.

LC: And how did you make that happen, how did it come to be that you joined the Navy?

CC: Well, I wasn’t doing any good in school; I just defaulted in school. And the Navy was the only branch, they would take somebody at seventeen years old, so I made that my goal and finally broke my parents down, that’s all.

LC: And how long did that take?

CC: I was seventeen in July of ’44 and I joined in March ’45, so that’s how long it took.

LC: Tell me about those talks with your parents, who was the more resistant, your mom or your dad?

CC: Oh mother.

LC: Yeah. And she was worried for you of course.

CC: Yeah, yeah, no mother’s going to approve of her son going into the service.

LC: What about the influence of having Jim being in the Army, what role did that play, in the Army Air Corps, I’m sorry?

CC: Oh, I can’t say exactly.

LC: Yeah. They must’ve been proud of him on some level.

CC: Oh yeah, unbelievably.
LC: Yeah.
CC: When he came home in uniform, walked to town, going out, you know.
LC: He was probably a big deal.
CC: Oh yeah.
LC: Yeah.
CC: And he flew over to the place a time or two in big planes. He was stationed in Nashville for a time.
LC: So he could come home on furloughs.
CC: Once in a great while, yeah.
LC: Did you have a Navy recruiter that you went to see or how did that happen?
CC: I was trying to find a gimmick so that they would let me go, you know. And I went and talked to a recruiter, they had signs up that they needed people to get into radar work.
LC: Did you know what that was?
CC: Yes.
LC: Okay.
CC: And I talked to the recruiter in a lobby of a service station. And he said he would arrange it that I could take something called the Eddy Test to get into radar work when I got in the Navy if I would join. Well I used that and sure enough when I signed up, he wrote on the form, ‘This young man wants to take the Eddy Test,’ and he told me I should conscientiously study math and that’s the biggest joke that was ever told. (Laughing)
LC: (Laughing)
CC: But somewhere, after I went in, I did take the Eddy Test and it was, needless to say, I didn’t pass. It was pages of calculations and formulas and stuff, you know, I didn’t even understand it.
LC: Right. But you were already in the service at that point.
CC: Oh yeah, yeah.
LC: Now when first you were brought into the service, where were you sworn in, do you remember?
CC: Nashville, Tennessee. in the Custom House on the corner of 8th and Broad.
LC: Do you remember the ceremony, how many other people, men joined you?
CC: I’m going to say a half a dozen; no, a dozen, I’ll say a dozen.
LC: Okay.

CC: I'm just guessing because there was a line outside that took physicals. I was sworn in, it was March 11 of 1945 I believe.

LC: And from there, what happened, where were you sent?

CC: Well the boot camps were full and they sent me home.

LC: No kidding.

CC: They said, ‘We will let you know.’ And I went home and waited a few weeks, I don’t know how long, but it about killed me.

LC: I was going to say, that must’ve been hugely frustrating.

CC: Oh yeah, oh yeah. But it finally came and away I went.

LC: Somewhere in there was VE Day; do you remember that?

CC: No, that was after I went, I was in boot camp.

LC: So you were already in training?

CC: I was in boot camp at that time, yeah.

LC: And where were you trained?

CC: Great Lakes Naval Training Center, which is between Chicago and Milwaukee.

LC: And it’s enormous.

CC: Yes.

LC: How did you get up there, on a train?

CC: Oh yes. We went back to the Navy recruiter in Nashville and there was a group of us to go and recruit, the man in charge there asked had any of us ever traveled before. Well that let me out, but there was a man there that had and he gave him an envelope with all our papers in it and told him that we had to transfer in Chicago to two different rail stations. And [in Chicago] he herded us from, I forgot, I do remember we went to Dearborn Station, which is one of the stations and then we took the train out to Great Lakes Naval Training Center.

LC: Can you tell me about boot camp and about what you remember, first arriving there, what were your initial impressions?

CC: Well, I wondered what’s going to happen next, it sticks in my mind pretty good about what happened when I got there. They fed us and it was at night and they called us in and to my utter surprise, my name was called and I step out and along with some others and we were put on guard duty. We were given a clipboard with general orders on it and a billy club and placed around...
in empty buildings on guard duty and wearing civilian clothes; I’m wearing an old pair of brown pants, you know. And so I was in there in the middle of the night, I’ve forgotten whether it was 8:00 to 12:00 or 12:00 to 4:00 or when it was, it was four hours in this empty barracks building. But that was my initiation; they didn’t wait to put you to work.

LC: They started right away.
CC: And then the next day of course, I spent the entire day going through physicals and various tests.

LC: And again, these are paper tests that you’re taking, paper and pencil?
CC: Well some of them, but mostly it was physicals that day and issuing us our clothes.

They took our clothes off; we went into place, took all our clothes off, I mean all, and put them in a box and wrote our home address on it.

LC: Really?
CC: Yeah. So we walked away from our clothes. And then we went through a physical, so you had these hundreds of naked men all day long being examined and it was a production line, huge operation. And at the end of the physical, the ones that go through went into a huge store-like facility with long counters where they measured your feet and your height and everything and prepared your uniforms. And they had cut stencils and actually stenciled your name and your serial number on all the uniforms as you got them.

LC: Wow.
CC: And put them in a bag. So, when it popped you out at the end of the day, you had a huge bag of new clothing and sheets and everything you needed.

LC: All of it marked with your name.
CC: All with your name on it.
LC: Wow.
CC: That’s right.

LC: How did you feel getting that uniform? Well, I’m sure you probably were glad to get some clothes, but…
CC: Oh, I don’t remember that part. (Laughing)
LC: Well, it sounds like quite a production.
CC: I was glad to have it, glad to have it.
LC: Yeah. Well, what did training look like, can you tell me a little bit about that routine?
CC: Well, they carried us over to a barracks building, which is basically a plywood building and there was about a hundred and twenty men in our company, it was company number 589. And you know, in the Army, company commanders are officers.

LC: Yes.

CC: And to my utter surprise, the company commander for that company or boots was an enlisted man, a sailor, his name was Stromski and he’s the most profane man I ever ran into in my life.

LC: Oh dear.

CC: He got up and cussed a blue streak and said that he could whip anybody in there and if anybody felt any different, for them to step out now, you know. (Laughing)

LC: Oh boy.

CC: And he let it be known that we were going to do what he said and then he assigned us bunks and got us started. The training was really basic, a lot of it was like you did in the Army I suppose, it was marching and stuff like that. And my work in the State Guard made it real easy for me, I knew all that already, I had been eventually a buck sergeant in the State Guard and had drilled men, so where a lot of men were learning to drill and march, I knew, I didn’t have any trouble. So that was good. Of course, they gave us basic training and what you do on a ship…

LC: Meaning like protocol and things?

CC: Well that, yeah, that. Also what to do in general quarters, we practiced it in different situations. And at Great Lakes, they had a couple of ships built on the ground there, though they weren't really ships, they were big dummy ships, full sized dummy ships and we'd go on there and practice different things. Also, a great emphasis was put on how to be a lookout. Now you didn’t need lookouts all that bad, radar had been invented and nevertheless, the training was there and we learned how to see at night, how to be a lookout at night and practiced in dark rooms and things like that. We also practiced in big dummy facilities on how to shoot guns, how to use the gun sights.

LC: What kind of guns were you using?

CC: They were antiaircraft, antiaircraft.

LC: Right.

CC: And they had a big movie screen, like a panoramic movie like omnitheatres have them.
LC: Sure.
CC: It would show the planes going and you shot a light dot at the plane and you had to lead it just like it was real ammunition.
LC: So it was like a simulator?
CC: Correct.
LC: Wow, that’s quite advanced actually.
CC: Yeah. Well, something happened along about then that you should know about I guess.
LC: Yeah.
CC: Somebody came in and asked was anyone in our company that was a qualified projectionist. And I held up my hand and to cut a long story short, I was given a job at the audiovisual center as a projectionist and I was to be there except for what they called musts, that was getting your shots is a must, you must get shots.
LC: Oh okay.
CC: But a lot of the physical training wasn’t a must, so I was over there running movies when a lot of the training was going on, so I missed a good deal of the physical training. And somewhere toward the last of the eight weeks, we changed companies and I was taken out of that situation and when I went to the new company, somebody came in and said is there any qualified projectionists in here. And I kept my mouth shut. (Laughing)
LC: (Laughing) Yes sir.
CC: Because I wanted some of the training with my shipmates, you know. And I felt I’d…
LC: You’d done that?
CC: I’d been there, done that, I didn’t want to spend the rest of the time running sixteen millimeter movies, training movies for people. And so I got out of that.
LC: (Laughing)
CC: But I got to say, it helped me, I used all sorts of AV equipment and eventually I got into public information work and I was comfortable with it and that probably was a step in the right direction with that experience.
LC: Yeah, yeah, I understand. Having something behind you does help, you feel more confident when you are moving into new things, in the same area. Claude, how long were you at Great Lakes Training Center?
CC: About eight weeks, I believe.

LC: And then what happened to you?

CC: They gave us leave long enough to go home for a while, I suppose a week, I don’t remember. But we went back there and were put on the train to San Francisco and I was sent to Treasure Island. And that’s a staging area for men who were assigned to ships for one thing, it was several things, but for one thing, that’s what they did. And I was put in as what’s known as a destroyer pool.

LC: Okay.

CC: Waiting for new destroyers. And eventually was assigned to the Anderson.

LC: Now did you know the difference between a destroyer and other types of ships at this point, had you at least gotten that much?

CC: Oh yeah, I knew all about it, I was leery.

LC: Yes, yes, and you had gotten at least some of that when you were at Great Lakes too?

CC: Oh sure, sure. We had recognition courses and such.

LC: Okay. Well tell me about being actually assigned to the Anderson, how did it come about that you joined the ship?

CC: Well, we stayed at Treasure Island a long time, all summer in fact and trained together there.

LC: As a group?

CC: As a crew, yeah. And there were two ships identical to the Anderson, which were in commission, that is they were war veteran ships that were tied up there at Treasure Island, at the north end of Treasure Island. And we went out on cruises, on them, I went out twice on those ships. Once on the U.S.S. Norris and once on the U.S.S. Haynesworth, and we did training and practiced general quarters and gunnery and everything you need to do on the ship so we’d be familiar when we went to our own ship.

LC: Did you have a particular specialty or job that you were meant to do?

CC: I was a deckhand.

LC: Okay, and what all did that entail?

CC: Getting up early. (Laughing)

LC: (Laughing)
CC: Doing anything they asked you to do.

LC: Okay.

CC: But the deckhand takes care of the sea going equipment and I’m real glad I went
through that experience because a lot of those specialists didn’t get the same experience. In other
words, we run the ship, people who tied up and raised the anchor and lowered the boat and run the
boat, learned how to tie knots and coil down cables and all the things sailors do, scrub the decks.
And so that was my job.

LC: It sounds like there is a lot to do, especially when you’re at sea on a cruise.

CC: Oh yes.

LC: I mean, there’s never a time when there’s nothing to do, right?

CC: That’s right.

LC: Well not for a deckhand anyway.

CC: No.

LC: I’m sure that’s right.

CC: Well anyway, we went by train from Treasure Island to the Todd Pacific Shipyard on
Puget Sound, that’s near Seattle, went to Seattle and then went by ferry to the Todd Pacific
Shipyard. And the new ship was there and it wasn’t quite complete yet, we got there, I can’t say
when we got there, I would say probably early October, but I’m not sure.

LC: Okay.

CC: And so we lived in barracks and went during the day, went over to the ship and
worked, they were loading stores and fixing beds and putting in mattresses, you know, it’s sort of
like moving into an awful big house or something.

LC: I see, yes.

CC: And so we worked every day and helped them get the ship ready. And of course, it
was full of civilians making final repairs and fine-tuning and everything. And you know, in October,
we finally got it all ready, you know, October 26th; we had the commissioning ceremony.

LC: That must’ve been a big deal.

CC: It was.

LC: Can you tell me about it?

CC: Well, they gave us invitations to send home to our families, which I did; they were
engraved invitations.
LC: Wow.

CC: But on that day, they printed an order of the day, which I think I sent you a copy of.

LC: I believe we do have that, yes sir.

CC: Yes, which tells exactly what each division is supposed to do and be lined up and did it. There was a band and the family of the person the ship was named after was there. And there was a speech by the captain and the boy’s mother, Richard B. Anderson’s mother spoke and of course, a chaplain offered prayers for the ship.

LC: Now did you young men know what Richard B. Anderson had done and who he was?

CC: Yes, yes. That was, I’ve forgotten just how we knew, it was probably put out on a mimeograph sheet of paper or something.

LC: Just for those who are listening who don’t know, can you just sketch in his contribution?

CC: He was a Marine; Richard B. Anderson was a Marine. In a fight, he gave his life for some other people; I think he threw himself on a grenade or something, I don’t remember that detail.

LC: Yes.

CC: But he sacrificed himself to save some other people.

LC: Yes. And was a real hero in that regard.

CC: He was.

LC: And so the ship was named for him.

CC: Correct. And his family was there. And when the ship was placed in commission and turned over to Captain Murray, he set the watches, that is we put the watch on watch and started keeping the log and that was kept that way until the ship was decommissioned.

LC: Now Claude, let me ask you about the end of the war and we’ll come back to your service on the ship in a moment.

CC: Sure.

LC: If you can recall, where were you when you heard that Japan had surrendered?

CC: I can’t tell you exactly where I was, but I saw the end coming as most people did, especially after those atomic bombs were dropped. And there was a pessimist onboard named Nipper, I don’t remember Nipper’s first name, he was one of the bosun’s mates. He was a
pessimist; he said the war was going to last until 1949. I said, ‘It’ll be over in six months.’ And he bet me, I believe it was five dollars; I believe we bet five dollars. (Laughing)

LC: Wow.

CC: And in a few days, it was over and he gave me my five dollars.

LC: (Laughing) Good for you.

CC: (Laughing)

LC: What did you think about the atomic weapon as you heard about it? I mean, did you have any impressions of it?

CC: Well, I have to say, we were glad it happened and the war ended because it had been so vicious.

LC: Yes sir.

CC: And so many people killed and it looked like there was going to be more of it and we didn’t see too much wrong with it happening, at least at our age and stage in life, we didn’t.

LC: Right, well then you very well could’ve been one of the people involved in extended operations.

CC: Well, probably would’ve been, if that vicious war had continued.

LC: Yes. What did you think about it, what have you thought about it, sir, over your lifetime as…?

CC: Well, I have felt they could probably have done it better, they could’ve had a conflict in total budget, what we’re going to do if they didn’t surrender or they could’ve had a demonstration out in a rural area or something. I felt like it could’ve been handled better.

LC: Rather than just doing it out of the blue with no warning.

CC: But that’s hindsight and granted that Truman never felt that he did the wrong thing.

LC: Yes that’s true, that’s true. Well did you feel like you had missed things or did you feel still like there was work to be done?

CC: Oh, I didn’t worry about that, I don’t remember. We were offered the chance to go to Bikini with the ship that was going to be used in the test at Bikini and they were offering incentives, bonuses of some kind for men who would go. And I chose not to go; I decided I didn’t want to do that.

LC: Why not?

CC: Well, I was probably getting tired of being bossed around on the ship. (Laughing)
CC: But you know, I probably felt like I’d had enough, you know, it’s hard work.
LC: Yes sir, yes it is.
CC: But we did operate for a few days with German ships that they were going to take to Bikini. And one of them was the *Prinz Eugen*, which is a beautiful ship, it was taken down there and blown up, but we operated with the *Prinz Eugen* off San Diego.
LC: You said it was a beautiful ship, what do you remember about it?
CC: Well it’s just a beautiful ship. A long, low ship and I remember seeing the boats…now the U.S. Navy used the standard boat that was hoisted on the ship, on the deck was a wooden whaleboat.
LC: Right.
CC: Which probably, the design’s probably a couple hundred years old or older, I don’t know.
LC: Yes, I think you’re right, there’s not much that’s been improved about it.
CC: I know the Germans had speedboats on there; the best-looking things on that ship and that impressed me.
LC: When you say speedboats, do you mean they had inboard or outboard motors on them?
CC: Well yeah, yeah, inboard probably.
LC: Probably, yes.
CC: Yeah, real streamlined-looking boats, made the whaleboats look pretty archaic.
LC: That’s interesting. You decided though that you didn’t want to go out on the tour out there.
CC: Yeah, that didn’t appeal to me.
LC: Okay. How long were you attached to the *Anderson*?
CC: From commissioning until about July 6th, that was about my birthday of 1946, so it wasn’t very long. I basically spent my eighteenth year on it.
LC: Did you think about or think about extending your service or…?
CC: I sure did.
LC: What was the situation, were you…?
CC: Well, I dreaded going back to school, I'd done so poorly in school and despite saying
it, I was kind of tired of it. I'd gotten kind of proficient at being a seaman and some of the bosun's
mates had been discharged and I had by default been given the job as a leading seaman. What
that means is, it's they let me give some of the orders and some of the orders over the public
address system and so on, and so I learned to use the bosun's pipe and pipe down jobs over the
public address system and stuff like that. Well, that's pretty heavy stuff, you know.

LC: Sure.

CC: And I've always had told my family that if the right officer had come and talked to me
about opportunities in the Navy, I would've signed up, but nobody did. And I came home not
knowing whether I would go to school or not, but I didn't have an alternative and so I wound up
going back to school.

LC: In Tennessee?

CC: Yes.

LC: And to finish high school or what did you do?

CC: No, I went and talked to the dean of students at Tennessee Tech and he said, 'Take
the General Intelligence Development Test and see how you come out on it.' And I took it and I
never did know the score, but he told me, 'You passed with no trouble' and so I went right into
college. And by missing a senior year in high school, I really didn't miss all that much.

LC: (Laughing)

CC: I had the experience in the Navy for a year and I went right back into college.

LC: And were you able to finance that because of having served in the military?

CC: Well the GI Bill gave me three years of assistance; see, it gave you three years for
each one year you're in.

LC: I see.

CC: So I had over three years of assistance, yeah. I couldn't have done it without it.

LC: Yeah. Did you miss the Navy?

CC: It left a stamp, there's no question about it. I felt for years that I could go back on that
ship and just take the duties right back up with no trouble. You know, I was at an impressible age.

LC: Yes sir, yes.

CC: And yeah, yeah I did, yeah.
LC: Claude, let me ask you a couple of more contemporary questions. Do you feel like perhaps we should as a country have more young people having military experience than do now under the volunteer Army system?

CC: Yes.

LC: Do you think we ought to have some kind of universal service requirement?

CC: Yes.

LC: Why do you think so?

CC: I think a lot of people that at the age that you would go into military or a draft, and see, it teaches you basic stuff like discipline, like getting up in the morning and keeping your underwear clean and how to care for your own clothes, keep your...I don't know, it disciplines a person, teaches them skill and matures you. I was a different person at the end of that year than I was at the beginning of it. See, when I went back to school, to my surprise, I did all right, I'm not bragging, I didn't make any great grades, but I did all right, I didn't know. But the reason was, I was more mature and I think it would be a maturing process. I'm not saying they ought to be taking into fight necessarily, but...

LC: But some kind of service requirement, whether it be military service or something else will probably be a good thing.

CC: That's right, public service. You know, the CCC's a great example, you know, the conservatives raise hell about what was done under the New Deal and so forth, but you go to almost any state park and the improvements in buildings that are still in use were built by the WPA and the CCC.

LC: Yes, those projects have...and many federal and state buildings, if you go around, it's also the case that they were built in the '30s.

CC: Correct.

LC: With support from the federal government.

CC: I can't see anything but good out of those programs. You know, I was telling you about our home being saved. Well, people are talking about bailing people out and how bad it was and all, but I mean, studying up on that thing later and looking at the papers, I found that the homeowner's loan corporation made money, it didn't lose, it made money for the government.

LC: So it wasn't a loss-maker.

CC: No, no, it wasn't given away, it came out ahead.
LC: Well, it certainly sounds like it showed up for your parents at exactly the right time.
CC: You bet.
LC: Yeah, yeah, and I’m sure it probably makes you shudder to think what might have happened.
CC: Well yeah, I have no idea.
LC: Yeah, and I can imagine the stress on your parents having to worry about that.
CC: Yeah, the government got its money back and they lived there until they died and the family lived there as long as needed to.
LC: Now at what point did you come out to Texas?
CC: I went to work after college with the U.S. Soil Conservation Service in Tennessee and I was there several years and I’m trying to think how many. But anyway, in 1967 I believe it was, I had a job opportunity here and that’s why I came. I had moved from fieldwork as a field technician with the Soil Conservation Service to Public Affairs. I was a Public Affairs leader for Tennessee.
LC: I see.
CC: And they have a regional office here and there was an opening and I came here as a regional Public Affairs person.
LC: You like Texas well enough to stay here after retirement?
CC: Well after you raise a family and pay for your house, you know, you don't just move.
LC: Yes sir.
CC: This is home.
LC: This is home now?
CC: Yeah.
LC: Can you offer any observations on the American military now and how well you think it’s functioning? I mean, as a veteran, you have a very particular perspective and it’s something of interest, do you think that our military has to be larger than it is or are we well placed right now?
CC: I really haven't given it any thought and anything I say would just be off the top of my head.
LC: I understand.
CC: Probably and off the top of my head, I think probably it’s large enough if we weren’t doing something we shouldn’t be doing. I’m very prejudiced about the situation in Iraq, I wake up
every morning wondering what in the world are we doing over there, why are we so mixed up over
there. I don't see any reason and we're implicated and now can't just quit and it's just terrible.

LC: Did you feel more or less the same way about Vietnam or did you see a distinction
there?

CC: Felt kind of like it, yeah, yeah, sure did. I couldn't see why we were there and
General Westmoreland was just having to get more troops, more troops. 'We see the light at the
end of the tunnel, we see a light at the end of the tunnel.' Well, he didn't.

LC: You're right. (Laughing) As it happens, he didn't.

CC: But how many times do you remember it, how many times…?

LC: Many times, in fact, right before the Tet Offensive of course, which was the end of
really his public credibility I suppose and he was brought back to Washington.

CC: Right.

LC: Your feeling is that this current conflict maybe isn't as well thought out like…?

CC: No, I don't think so, I don't think it was necessary to the survival of our country or its
safety probably. I mean, had those inspectors over there and they could've stayed and we could
put more pressure on the inspectors and not had a war at all, you know.

LC: The weapons inspectors?

CC: Yeah.

LC: Yeah.

CC: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Well I appreciate your thoughts on that and I wonder what you think the treatment of
American veterans has been, veterans of World War II and subsequently, I mean, do you think
you've been treated fairly and has the government…?

CC: More than fairly myself.

LC: Is that right?

CC: Yeah.

LC: Okay. So the government has funded the appropriate programs to reward you in the
sense for having served?

CC: I haven't needed anything. I do know some veterans that had to go into veterans
medical facilities and they always seemed to be very caring people, I didn't see anything otherwise.
LC: Good, well that’s very good to hear. Well sir, is there anything else that you’d like to contribute to the oral history interview, your reflections on World War II and your experience there?

CC: Well I think it was extremely valuable to me and I think a similar experience would be valuable to a young man or a woman at any time.

LC: So you would recommend that young people give active consideration to at least spending some time in the military?

CC: Well I don’t know, well I don’t want to go that far because military isn’t for everyone, but some sort of public service, you know.

LC: Some sort of public service.

CC: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Okay.

CC: A lot of people going to Peace Corps and various ways, serving in various ways.

LC: Yes, yes.

CC: Maybe there should be more ways to serve, there’s plenty to do.

LC: Yes, many problems, we have lots of problems.

CC: Yeah.

LC: Well I think I would probably come in right behind you and agree with you there sir. Well, I want to thank you for your time this morning and for participating in the oral history project. It’s important that we talk to as many people from the Richard B. Anderson as possible, so I’m glad to have on record now your statement of actually having been at the commissioning ceremony, it’s very exciting to hear about it.

CC: Well thank you.

LC: Thank you, Claude.